

Despite food-assistance programs, many children experience food insecurity, hunger

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ManSoo Yu found that informal assistance through churches, food pantries and soup kitchens, was related to improved child food security. Credit: US Navy, via Wikimedia Commons

Approximately 49 million people, including 17 million children, experience household food insecurity - the lack of resources required to sustain the nutritional needs of family members - according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. However, this number may be even higher when examining the specific food needs of children. In a recent University of Missouri study, researchers found that food insecurity and hunger among children still persist, even in food secure households and despite food assistance programs and efforts to increase food security.

Children are considered food insecure if, in the last year, they did not eat

enough, did not eat for a day, skipped a meal or were hungry because their family could not afford adequate food. In the study, ManSoo Yu, assistant professor in the MU School of Social Work and Master of Public Health Program, examined different factors related to food security among [households](#) and [children](#), including racial comparisons among vulnerable households, participation in the food stamp program and informal food supports.

"We found that household food security does not equate to food security for children within those households," Yu said. "Therefore, children who experience food insecurity may live in households that are defined as food secure. This is alarming considering previous research that indicates food insecure children are more at-risk for being overweight, having poor health, poor academic performance and poor psychosocial functioning."

Yu found that informal assistance through churches, food pantries and soup kitchens, was related to improved child food security. Participation in the food stamp program was related to increased food security among children in Caucasian households, but not in African-American households.

Yu suggests strengthening informal and community-based food assistance programs to be more responsive to the specific nutritional needs of children. He recommends that policy makers examine formal food assistance programs, such as the food stamp program, to improve the response to needs of families in different communities.

"This study provides a better understanding of different factors related to issues of hunger and inadequate nutrition in children," Yu said.

"National and community-level programs need to address the relationship among household food security, child [food security](#) and the health of children in vulnerable households."

More information: The study, "Food Stamp Program Participation, Informal Supports, Household Food Security and Child Food Security: A comparison of African-American and Caucasian households in poverty," was published in the May issue of Children and Youth Services Review.

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