

# Childhood hunger policies should target neighborhoods, not families

March 22 2012

---

Policies addressing childhood hunger should target neighborhoods, not individual families, according to new research from Rice University.

Sociologists found that children living in neighborhoods with higher [poverty rates](#) and in those with high foreign-born populations and non-English speakers are more likely to experience hunger.

"Policymakers should be thinking about targeting whole communities, instead of what is done now, which is offering public aid programs for individual families," said Rice sociology professor Justin Denney.

"Public aid works on a limited basis, reaching approximately 70 percent of eligible individuals. But unfortunately, the remaining 30 percent are unaccounted for."

The study, published in the *Journal of Applied Research on Children*, was co-authored by Denney and sociology professor Rachel Tobert Kimbro, co-founders of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research's Urban Health Program at Rice, and postbaccalaureate fellow Sarita Panchang. They used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, a nationally representative dataset of more than 20,000 [kindergarteners](#) in 1998-1999, to examine individual, family and [neighborhood characteristics](#) of children who are or are not affected by hunger. In the dataset, the children were clustered according to schools and neighborhoods.

Kimbro said that many of these children facing hunger have foreign-

born parents fearful of applying for aid, despite their children's eligibility as citizens of the U.S., or parents ashamed of applying for public aid. By changing the focus of these policies away from the individual and on to the community, she said, parents might take advantage of community food programs.

"If we have policies targeted at neighborhoods rather than individuals, no one is excluded," she said.

The authors hope their findings will influence future policies addressing issues of childhood hunger.

"Families are critical for [childhood development](#), but communities and neighborhoods have significant impacts as well, as this study clearly demonstrates," Kimbro said.

**More information:** Study: Individual, Family, and Neighborhood Characteristics and Children's Food Insecurity:  
[digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu ... ntext=childrenatrisk](https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/...ntext=childrenatrisk)

Provided by Rice University

Citation: Childhood hunger policies should target neighborhoods, not families (2012, March 22)  
retrieved 19 April 2024 from  
<https://phys.org/news/2012-03-childhood-hunger-policies-neighborhoods-families.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--