

Children explain their food insecurity woes

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The cruel realities of childhood food insecurity bit hard during COVID-19, when hardships magnified existing problems for families feeling economic pressure.

The impact of COVID-19 has led to widespread increases in global [food](#)

[insecurity](#). In Australia, Foodbank reports that charities have seen a significant increase in the frequency and demand for [food](#) relief, with overall demand up by an average of 47%. Foodbank says 13% of South Australians have experienced food [insecurity](#) in last 12 months.

New research led by Flinders University has focused on [children](#)'s own perspectives of their troubled situations, to better understand the full impact of food insecurity that can inform effective policy and program responses.

"Australian children are aware of, experience, and are clearly impacted by food insecurity," says Dr. Stefania Velardo, Senior Lecturer in Health Education at Flinders University.

"However, little is known about Australian children's firsthand understanding or experience of household food insecurity on their lives.

"This is despite food insecurity being associated with reduced physical, social, and psychological functioning in children."

The research—How Do Disadvantaged Children Perceive, Understand and Experience Household Food Insecurity?, by Stefania Velardo, Christina Pollard, Jessica Shipman and Sue Booth—has been published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

In their [pilot study](#), the researchers conducted in depth interviews with 11 children aged 10-to-13 years from a South Australian charity school holiday camp that targets severely disadvantaged youth.

The researchers used drawings and emoji scales as useful tools during semi-structured interviews which provided information about children's financial understanding, coping mechanisms, experiences with food

preparation, and their compassion for food insecure families.

"Listening to children's stories about their experience of economic disadvantage allows for a deeper understanding of what food insecurity means for children in different contexts. In our study, the children's stories shed light on the untenable and uncertain circumstances in which some children find themselves," says Dr. Velardo.

"Our participants described feelings of sadness and concern associated with food insecurity and described numerous coping skills adopted by those around them, including borrowing money for food from [family](#) and friends, relying on food charities, rationing food to make it last longer, and limiting food intake to cheaper more filling options."

She said some of the interviewed children lived in fear of losing their homes and felt sad to see others going without food, including their parents and school friends.

Importantly, a comprehensive understanding of childhood food insecurity can provide key stakeholders with a [knowledge base](#) from which to anchor program and policy responses that are in the best interests of children, by taking their needs and experiences into account.

"Based on the children's stories, some families are doing it really tough, despite working numerous jobs to make ends meet. COVID-19 has meant even more hardship for Australian families. Children notice that their parents are financially stressed, and they want to see a fairer world where everybody can achieve their best. We need to see more support for those families who are economically vulnerable, as it is impacting on children."

More information: Stefania Velardo et al. How Do Disadvantaged Children Perceive, Understand and Experience Household Food

Insecurity?, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph18084039](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084039)

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