

The effects of inadequate food, housing, and health care on student attrition

July 22 2024



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Researchers at CUNY SPH have published a study highlighting the compounded effects of unmet needs for housing, food, health care, and mental health treatment on CUNY students' academic success and

persistence to graduation. This critical research aims to guide higher education institutions in developing targeted support mechanisms to promote student health and degree attainment.

Published in the *Journal of Urban Health*, the [study](#) was conducted by doctoral student Jenna Sanborn, along with faculty Heidi Jones, Meredith Manze, and Nicholas Freudenberg, and Tara Twiste, operations director at the CUNY Office of Applied Research, Evaluation, and Data Analytics.

The team analyzed [survey data](#) from over 1,800 CUNY students attending three Bronx campuses, discovering that with every additional unmet need, the likelihood of having a low GPA, dropping out, or taking a leave of absence increased by 29%.

Students experiencing all these unmet needs had an 82% greater likelihood of facing any of these academic problems compared to those whose needs were met, even after adjusting for other variables.

The authors argue that such findings highlight the critical need for holistic interventions aimed at supporting college students with multiple unmet needs. Addressing these needs comprehensively is essential for improving student retention and graduation rates.

In recent decades, the [financial distress](#) faced by college students has intensified as the rising cost of higher education outpaces wages and diminishes the purchasing power of financial aid. This financial strain forces many students to rely on personal funds or take on debt, further contributing to their instability.

The study's objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how unmet essential needs collectively impact college persistence, particularly among urban college students.

"Most research has examined unmet essential needs in isolation, but few have explored the cumulative challenges they pose for [college students](#)," Sanborn explains. "We hope this study sheds light on the importance of comprehensive support systems for students facing multiple unmet needs."

In the coming months, the CUNY CARES research team will assess the impact of the first year (September 2023–June 2024) implementation of the intervention they have developed based on the findings reported in this study.

More information: Jenna Sanborn et al, The Cumulative Impact of Unmet Essential Needs on Indicators of Attrition: Findings from a Public University Population-Based Sample of Students in the Bronx, NY, *Journal of Urban Health* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s11524-024-00872-w](#)

Provided by The City University of New York

Citation: The effects of inadequate food, housing, and health care on student attrition (2024, July 22) retrieved 22 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-07-effects-inadequate-food-housing-health.html>

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