

Understanding The Experiences of Low-Income Students Meeting Their Basic Needs: A Qualitative Study of Food Insecurity While Pursuing Higher Education.

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Background

Food insecurity is the lack of capacity for individuals to obtain enough food at any given time to sustain or maintain an active healthy life. What food insecurity often entails is a lack of financial ability for people to receive adequate amounts of nutritious food. The inability to obtain food is not remarkable to one select group but differs in severity throughout a variety of subgroups in the United States. Through data collected by the U.S. Census, the USDA found that households with children and single parents are more likely to suffer from food insecurity. Furthermore, they argue that, “Black and Hispanic households are more likely to be impacted by food insecurity than white and non-Hispanic families.” Correspondingly, Feeding America argues that “food insecurity does not exist in isolation”. It prevails as a wicked problem, impacting low-income individuals and groups who already face many related poverty issues, such as mental and physical health matters, affordable housing situations, and more.

Organizations like the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness, and the Student Public Interest Research Group argue, “that the lack of college students’ inability to find reliable access to sufficient qualities of food” is increasingly prevalent and works to potentially sabotage educational success and lower campus retention. With all this in mind, college campus tuition and fees continue to rise, leaving students with an exponentially shrinking budget and even greater set of uncertainties.

MOTIVATION

Countless studies on poverty exist today, all reveal and highlight an assortment of issues in economic disparity. Increases in the cost of living, mixed with continuously staggering disparities in income, and more, allot to a severity of issues. One of these symptoms of poverty, is food insecurity. Food insecurity has been researched and studied for decades. Many studies focus on the root causes of food insecurity and its impact. Very little previous research, outside of the Wisconsin Hope Lab, focuses on the narratives of food insecure students. That being said, this qualitative research aims to fill the gap on the narrative of students in higher education who are food insecure.

In-Progress/ Future Methods

The ongoing study is a qualitative sociological analysis to explore the daily lives of students who struggle to meet their basic needs. The proposed study will explore the experiences of undergraduate students who have trouble meeting basic needs such as housing, food, and transportation. Using a grounded theory approach, participants will be interviewed and responses from students will be audio recorded. The PI will transcribe and code interviews, and conduct grounded theory data analysis using ATLAS.ti. Findings will be compiled into a paper based on themes found in the research. The final product will also offer policy suggestions and program ideas for the University of Houston community to better equip low income students who struggle with a variety of poverty related issues.



Anticipated Findings

This research will uncover the experiences of students who struggle to meet their basic needs while pursuing their higher education at the University of Houston. The interviews will highlight the needs disparity between the resources available for low and middle income students. I also expect to encounter a variety of ways students use to bridge this gap. However, I anticipate to find that low-income students are unable to meet all of their basic needs (such as food and housing) while in college.

Timeline



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