



Brazos Food Bank, Inc.

The Junior League Center

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Hunger and Food Insecurity

Below are two important definitions that should help you realize the meaning of the statistics that follow.

Food Insecurity - Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

Hunger - The uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food. The recurrent or involuntary lack of access to food.

*Definitions from USDA website

Hunger Facts

- 33 million Americans continue to live in households that did not have an adequate supply of food. Nearly one-third of these households contain adults or children who went hungry at some point in 2000.ⁱ
- In 2000, 13 million children lived in households that did not have an adequate supply of food, and almost 3 million of these children lived in households that experienced hunger.ⁱⁱ
- The number of food insecure households with children has also risen since 2000 by 10,000 to 6.18 million.ⁱⁱⁱ
- In 2001, the number of Americans who were food insecure, or hungry or at risk of hunger, was 33.6 million, a rise over 2000, when 33.2 million Americans were food insecure. The number of individuals who are suffering from hunger rose from 8.5 million in 2000 to 9 million in 2001.^{iv}
- The 2001 median household income in the US was \$42, 228, representing a 2.2 percent decline in real income from its 2000 level of \$43,162.^v
- Average unemployment rates in the past year have risen: in 2001, the rate was 4.8%, but jumped to 5.7% in 2002.^{vi}
- In 2002, over 13 million American children resided in food insecure households, meaning they were hungry or at risk of hunger.^{vii}
- Over 12 million or approximately 16.7% of children in the U.S. live in poverty.^{viii}
- During the 2003 fiscal year, 16.4 million low-income children received free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program. Unfortunately, just over two million of these same income-eligible children participated in the Summer Food Service Program that same year.^{ix}



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- A report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities shows that food stamps can raise a low-income family above the poverty level. However, the number of people receiving food stamps has dropped by 9 million (one-third) since 1995.^x

Summary

These startling statistics show that there is indeed a problem concerning hunger, and that there are needs for charities and organizations that cater to these unfortunate victims even though most of us never see the effects of hunger in our day to day routine. In the US, hunger is primarily a problem of money, not of food. People, who can't afford food in the US, rarely face starvation, thanks to emergency food programs, food stamps, and school meals, among other responses. But shortages of food do hurt adult's ability to work, children's ability to learn, and senior's ability to stay healthy.

Recent research indicates that even mild under-nutrition experienced by young children during critical periods of growth may lead to reductions in physical growth and impaired brain function.^{xi} When families are squeezed by low incomes on one side, and by high housing and costs of living on the other, the first thing they often cut back on is food. In this way, hunger is the "early warning signal" of poverty. Poverty is a root cause of hunger. A lack of money for food can also lead to obesity and related health problems like diabetes. In some circumstances, low-income people stretch their limited food dollars by purchasing cheap, high-calorie food, rather than healthier, more expensive groceries. In these instances, hunger and obesity can be symptoms of the same problem: a lack of consistent access to adequate, healthy food.

ⁱ U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, March 2002, "Household Food Security in the United States, 2000."

ⁱⁱ U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, March 2002, "Household Food Security in the United States, 2000."

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} USDA's Economic Research Service, Household Food Security in the United States, 2001.

^v U.S. Census Bureau, Money Income in the US: 2001.

^{vi} U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

^{vii} United States Department of Agriculture, Household Food Security in the United States, 2002, October 2003.

^{viii} Poverty in the United States: 2002, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

^{ix} United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service.

^x Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

^{xi} Center on Hunger and Poverty, Brandeis University, 1998, "The Link Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children".