

CWHS

Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE 2008 CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

Food insecurity is a measure of economic and nutritional vulnerability at the household level and is shown to be associated with a variety of adverse health outcomes.¹ Conversely, food security is a specific public health concept defined as all members of a household having access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life.²

In the early-mid-1990s the U.S. Food Security Measurement Project developed a survey scale that measured the severity of deprivation in basic food needs experienced by American households. A household's food security status is determined by response to a series of questions about behaviors and experiences associated with financial difficulty in meeting food needs. Since 1999, the California Women's Health Survey (CWHS) has included a six-item validated short version of the household food security standardized scale, with each question referring to the previous six months. Women responded to questions about whether they:

- Had purchased food that did not last: Respondents said the food they bought "often" or "sometimes" did not last, and they did not have money to buy more.
- Could not afford balanced meals: Respondents said that they could not afford to eat balanced meals "often" or "sometimes."
- Ever cut meal size or skipped meals: Respondents said that they had cut the

size of their meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food.

- Frequently cut meal size or skipped meals: Those who reported they had cut meal size or skipped meals, were considered to have an additional positive response if they reported this occurred "some" or "almost every month."
- Ate less than they felt they should: Respondents said they ate less than they felt they should because there sometimes was not enough money to buy food.
- Were hungry: Respondents said they had been hungry but didn't eat because they could not afford enough food.

Women with 0 to 1 positive responses, were classified as food secure, and those with two or more as food insecure.

The 2008 CWHS was administered to 4,979 adult women ages 18 and above. Responses were weighted in these analyses by age and race/ethnicity to reflect the 2000 California adult female population. Overall, 28.4 percent of the women surveyed lived in households classified as food insecure. Women experiencing food insecurity were significantly more likely to be unmarried (32.4 percent) and live in households with children (35.9 percent) than women classified as food secure (26.6 percent and 19.7 percent, respectively; $P < .001$).

California Women's Experience With Food Insecurity, 2008

California Department of Public Health
Cancer Control Branch
Network for a Healthy California
Public Health Institute

Public Health Message:
Food insecurity – behaviors associated with financial difficulty meeting food needs – continues to be a pervasive health risk experienced by almost one-third of California adult women. Public health measures to promote a healthy diet are undermined when women, cut meal size(s), skip meals, eat unbalanced meals, eat less than they think they should, or are hungry, due to a lack of money - all aspects of food insecurity.

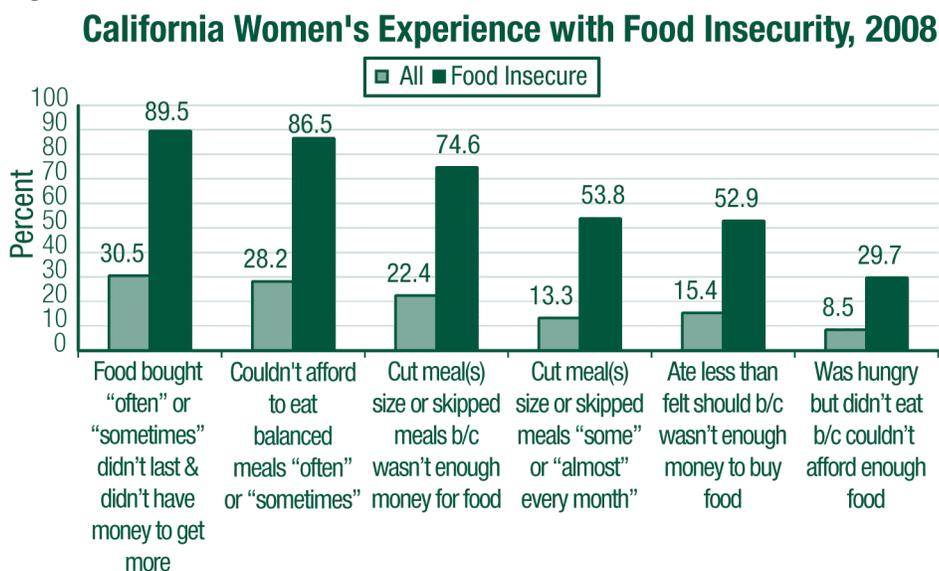
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This Data Point highlights what the food insecurity classification tangible means to the lives of California women by examining each of the six behaviors or experiences included in the abbreviated food security scale. The prevalence of each is shown for California women overall (all women) and specifically for women classified as food insecure (see Figure 1).

- Almost a third of all California women (30.5 percent) reported that the food they bought did not last, compared to 89.5 percent of food insecure women.
- Almost one in three women overall (28.2 percent) reported that they often or sometimes could not afford to eat balanced meals. This was much higher among women in food insecure households (86.5 percent).
- Just over one in five of all California women (22.4 percent) reported they had cut the size of their meals or skipped meals, compared to 74.6 percent of women in food insecure households.
- For those who had cut meal size or skipped meals, 13.3 percent of California women reported this had occurred “some” or “almost every month”, compared to 53.8 percent of food insecure women.
- About 15 percent of California women overall ate less than they felt they should because there was not enough money to buy food. The percentage was much higher, among food insecure women (52.9 percent).
- Overall, nearly one in ten of California women (8.5 percent) had been hungry, but did not eat because they could not afford enough food. This experience was reported by 29.7 percent of women in food insecure households.

Figure 1



Source: California Women’s Health Survey, 2008

*California Women's
Experience With Food
Insecurity, 2008*

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- 1 Olson C. Nutrition and health outcomes associated with food insecurity and hunger. symposium: Advances in measuring food insecurity and hunger in the U.S. *J of Nutr.* 1999;129(2S Suppl):521-52.
- 2 U.S. Department of Agriculture. Economic Research Service, Food Security in the United States: Measuring Household Food Security. <http://ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/measurement.htm>. Accessed September 19, 2009.

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