



MARYLAND

FAMILY POLICY IMPACT SEMINAR

Families and Food Security

Food security is an official measure of the ability of a household to obtain adequate food to meet nutritional requirements at all times.

Yearly, food security is measured in the month of December as part of the Current Population Survey using the Food Security Core Module, an 18 item survey instrument that asks about conditions and behaviors known to characterize households having difficulty meeting basic food needs.

Several researchers in the Department of Family Studies at the University of Maryland's College of Health and Human Performance study food security for its implications both nationally and in Maryland. The findings from one analysis of national data by Dr. Sandra Hofferth, is found below. A more complete report is found at:

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EFAN04001/>

Persistence and Change in Food Security of Families

With Children--1997-1999

This study uses data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) to examine the prevalence of and persistence in food security between 1997 and 1999 among families with children under age 13. Among the key findings:

- Food stamps play "a positive role in preventing food insecurity." They reduce the chances that a family remains food insecure over a 2-year period. Conversely, leaving the Food Stamp Program (FSP) increases the chances of becoming and remaining food insecure. Families who left the FSP between 1997 and 1999 were 81 percent more likely to become food insecure by 1999 than families not participating in the FSP in either year.
- Immigrants were more likely to become food insecure than nonimmigrants between 1997 and 1999. This may result partly from "reduced access to cash and noncash transfer programs due to changes in policies".

- Food insecurity is persistent. About half of the families that were food insecure in 1997 remained food insecure in 1999, and 7 percent of the families that were food secure in 1997 became food insecure in 1999.
- Families with young children are more at risk than families with older children. The risk of food secure families becoming food insecure declines 6 percent for each year of age of the youngest child.
- Families with younger heads are more vulnerable than families with older heads. Each additional year of age of the head is associated with a 4.5-percent reduction in the chance of a food secure family becoming food insecure.
- Families with less educated heads (less than 12 years of school) were highly likely to become food insecure and to remain food insecure. Each additional year of schooling is associated with a 2.5-percent decline in entry into food insecurity.
- Large families (with three or more children) were more likely to become food insecure than smaller families. Each additional child in a food secure family in 1997 raises the chance of the family becoming food insecure by 1999 by 32 percent.
- Low-income families (below 185 percent of poverty) were likely to be and remain food insecure. Families that fell below 185 percent of poverty between 1997 and 1999 were even harder hit-they were 4.3 times as likely to remain food insecure in 1999 as those that were low income in both years.

For more information about this national study, contact:

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**A copy of this and other briefs is available at the Maryland Family Policy Impact
Seminar website: <http://www.hhp.umd.edu/FMST/fis/MDresources.htm>**