



Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE 2005 CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines **food security** as "having access, at all times, to enough food for an active healthy life," and **food insecurity** as the state of "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in a socially acceptable way." **Food insecurity with hunger** includes "the uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food and/or the recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food." The Healthy People 2010 Goal is to reduce food insecurity from 12 percent in 1995 to 6 percent in 2010.¹

Both the Food Stamp Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provide families with cash assistance to supplement their food budgets. Both programs have income qualifiers and other requirements.^{2,3} Non-governmental sources of supplemental food can also be found through emergency food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters, typically with few, if any, documentation requirements.

The 2005 California Women's Health Survey (CWHS) was administered to 4,539 women, using the USDA's standardized methodology for measuring food security with and without hunger.⁴ The six-item validated short form of the food security scale was used to classify women into three groups: food secure, food insecure without

hunger, and food insecure with hunger.¹ Respondents were also asked about household income and family size as well as questions about their use of federal food assistance programs and food banks during the previous 12 months. Household income and family size were used to calculate respondents' socioeconomic status using the federal poverty level as a measure.

OVERALL RATES

Among all respondents:

- Rates of **food insecurity** in 2004 were similar to those of 2005 (26.6 percent and 25.6 percent, respectively).
 - **Food insecurity without hunger** was 18.4 percent in 2004 and 16.9 percent in 2005
 - **Food insecurity with hunger** was 8.2 percent in 2004 and 8.7 percent in 2005.⁵

None of these differences were statistically significant, although the differences in food insecurity without hunger between 2004 and 2005 approached significance (chi-square test, $P < 0.06$).

WOMEN WITH LOW INCOMES

An analysis of the 1,335 women who had complete data and lived in households with a reported income that was less than or equal to 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) revealed the following:

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Public Health Message:

Food insecurity remains a pressing problem among low-income California women, including those using both regular and emergency supplemental food sources. The USDA ranks California 50th among all states for food stamp participation level. Efforts need to be directed towards increasing participation among women with low incomes and their families. These findings further highlight the importance of providing low-income women, including those not participating in the WIC or food stamp programs, with nutrition education that emphasizes ways to acquire healthy food at affordable prices. This study reinforces the need for innovative programs, such as the WIC Farmers' Market and community gardens, which serve as low-cost sources of nutritious food for women in need.

Issue 5, Summer 2008, Num. 18

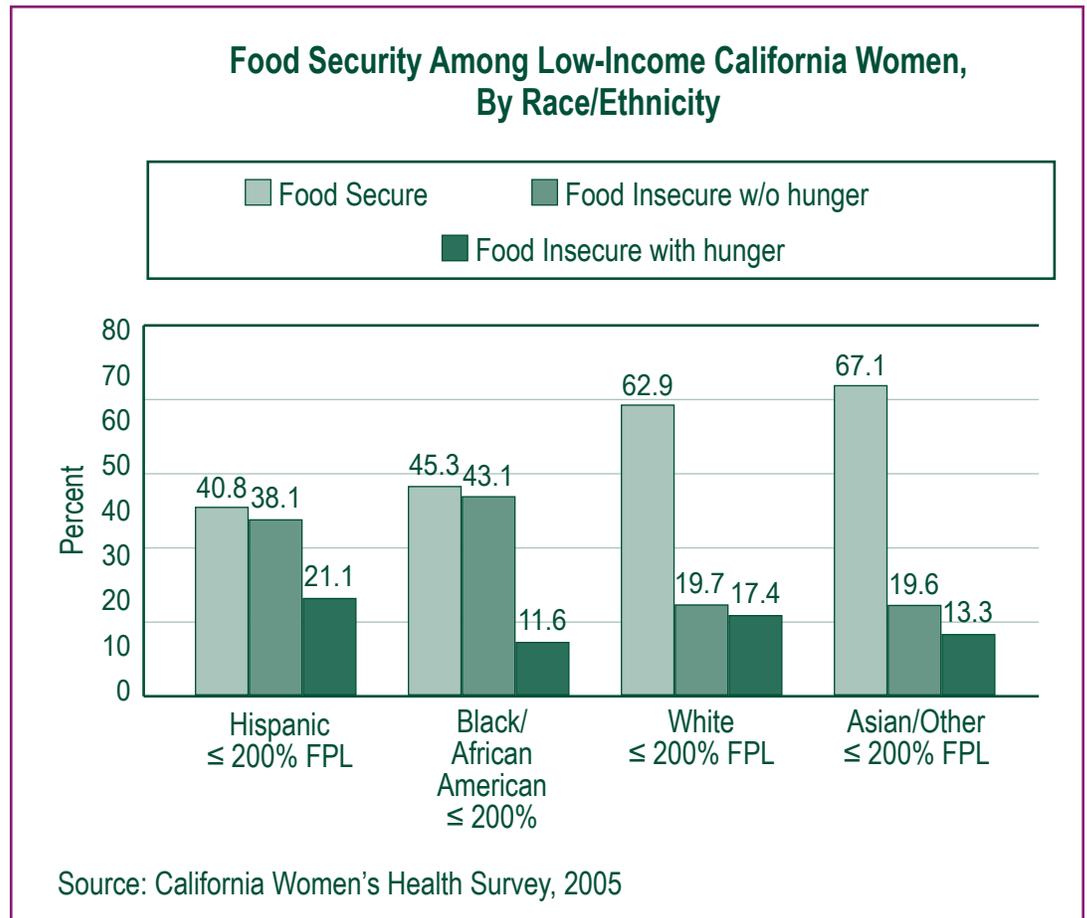
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- Over half of the women in households with low incomes reported being **food insecure** in both years
 - **Food insecurity without hunger** was found in 35.9 percent of low-income respondents in 2004 and 31.6 percent in 2005 (chi-square test, $P < .02$)
 - **Food insecurity with hunger** was found in 17.6 percent in 2004 and 19.1 percent in 2005.
- **Food security** was reported by 46.5 percent of low-income respondents in 2004 and 49.3 percent in 2005.
- Racial disparities were evident. Among low-income women, nearly 60 percent of Hispanics and 54.7 percent of Black/African-Americans reported food insecurity. Asian/Others and Whites were significantly less likely to report food insecurity (32.9 percent and 37.1 percent, respectively) (chi-square test, $P < .0001$).
- The household income threshold to qualify for the Food Stamp Program is 130 percent of the FPL and is 185 percent for WIC. Among the 1,335 California women living in households with incomes at or below 200 percent of the FPL, 839 respondents met the first criteria and 1,303 met the second, but only 15.1 percent of all low-income respondents (202 respondents) participated in the Food Stamp Program, and 21.0 percent (280) participated in the WIC Program within the previous year. (Respondents' participation in the WIC program may have included a woman's children under age 5 years as well as herself.)
- Low-income women who were not making use of supplemental food assistance programs were also at risk of food insecurity.
 - Two-thirds of the 202 low-income women who participated in the Food Stamp Program reported being food insecure (with or without hunger), while just under half (48.5 percent) of those who did not participate in the program reported being food insecure (chi-square test, $P = .0004$).
 - Almost two-thirds (64.2 percent) of the 280 low-income participants in the WIC program reported food insecurity, while just under half (46.6 percent) of non-participants reported food insecurity (chi-square test, $P < .0001$).
 - Women who made use of non-governmental food banks were at greatest risk for food insecurity. Although total participation was low (7.8 percent, or 105 women), more than three-quarters reported food insecurity, and 50.9 percent (51 women) reported food insecurity with hunger.

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- 1 US Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office; November 2000.
- 2 To participate in the Food Stamp Program, a person must live in a household at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (e.g., \$20,917.00 for a family of three in 2005), provide extensive documentation, and be re-certified 4 times each year. Any foods can be purchased.
- 3 To participate in the WIC program, a woman must be pregnant, breastfeeding, or postpartum or have children younger than age 5 who are at nutritional risk. In addition, the woman must live in a household at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level (e.g., \$29,766.50 for a family of three in 2005). Documentation is not extensive. Proof of residency is the only documentation required except income, and re-certification takes place at 6-month intervals or for the duration of a pregnancy. Only foods on the WIC approved food package list can be purchased.
- 4 Bickel G, Nord M, Price C, Hamilton W, Cook J. *Guide to Measuring Household Food Security, Revised 2000*. Alexandria VA: US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service; March 2000.
- 5 Baumrind N, Dumbauld S. *Trends in Food Security Among California Women, 1999 to 2004*. Data Points 2003-2004. Sacramento, CA: Office of Women's Health, California Department of Health Services; 2006.

Submitted by: Sharon Sugerman, M.S., R.D., and Patrick Mitchell, DrP.H., M.A., California Department of Public Health, Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section, and Seth Wayland, M.A. Survey Research Group Section, Public Health Institute, (916) 449-5406, Sharon.Sugerman@cdph.ca.gov