

Family Structure and Time Allocation: Mechanisms of Food Insecurity among Children

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Over 469 thousand households in the U.S. experienced very low food security among children, a severe condition characterized by reductions in food intake due to an inability to afford enough food. But food insecurity is not simply about economic resources. There exists a paradox in which some poor households with children are food *secure* while some non-poor households with children are food *insecure*. Yet few studies have examined very low food security among children, and even fewer have tried to uncover the mechanisms behind the food security paradox. This study moves beyond a singular focus on income and considers how the family context may protect or generate risk of food insecurity for children.

American families are becoming more complex due to increases in divorce, cohabitation and re-partnering. Parents also face increasing pressure to work more and varied hours to maintain their families, putting intense strain on allocations of family time. Prior research has found that less stable families are linked to food insecurity but, these studies do not capture the full range of family experiences. Additional indicators of family context, parental work patterns and time constraints, are associated with family functioning and have consequences for household-level food insecurity. However, prior studies have not considered the ways that parental time allocations may contribute to or reduce the risk of food insecurity among children. Moreover, studies on parental work schedules have not focused on the relative importance of complex family structure (i.e., stepfamilies) in protecting versus exacerbating child food insecurity. From a policy perspective, it is important to understand the possible barriers to food security imposed by complex family structures, parental work patterns and time allocations given current governmental efforts to eliminate childhood food insecurity by 2015.

The goals of the proposed project are threefold: 1) to provide a detailed profile of an understudied group, households with children experiencing very low food security; 2) to consider the food security paradox—households that are poor but food secure, and households that are food insecure but non-poor, and 3) to examine how family context (structure and parental time allocations) is related to food security among households with children. The present study will use pooled rounds of the CPS Food Security Supplement, taking advantage of new cohabitation and parent pointers to explore more refined measures of family structure (ie. step families, three-generation, and consideration of sibship structure). In addition, the project will explore the relationship between children's food insecurity and parental work patterns and time allocations using linked FSS and American Time Use Survey data.