Exploring the Role of Food Insecurity for Self-Reported Crime

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Research Questions
- Is food insecurity associated with self-reported criminal behavior?
- Does the relationship between food insecurity and crime differ between physical and economic crime?
- Do these relationships vary by gender?

Significance
- According to the USDA, 37.2 million people were food insecure in 2018.
- New, proposed rules would limit Americans’ access to food stamps, impacting 3.1 million people, possibly increasing food insecurity.

Background
- Food assistance recipients often run out of food by the end of the month (Goldin et al. 2016).
- Food insecurity is associated with low self-control and early delinquency in adolescents (Jackson et al. 2018).
- Few studies have looked at the relationship between food insecurity and adult crime.
- Research shows a relationship between staggering food assistance bi-monthly and lower economic crime (Carr 
  et al., 2019).

Hypotheses
- Strain theory suggests people who are food insecure will be more likely to commit crime (Agnew, 1992).
- People who report food insecurity will be more likely to engage in economic and/or physical crime.

Data and Sample
- Age of Wave IV Respondents (25-32)

Independent Measure
- Food insecurity
  - “In the past 12 months, was there a time when you were worried whether food would run out before you would get money to buy more?”

Dependent Measures
- Economic crime was measured by a count of seven variables that asked: “In the past 12 months, how often did you:”
  - Steal something worth more than $50
  - Sell drugs or stolen property
  - Use stolen credit or bank card
  - Write bad check

Physical crime was measured by a count of three variables that asked: “In the past 12 months, how often did you:”
  - Use weapon
  - Fight (2)

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Without Food Insecurity</th>
<th>With Food Insecurity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any Crime Males</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Crime Females</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Crime Males</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Crime Females</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Results
- There is a strong positive relationship between food insecurity and crime.
  - The relationship between food insecurity and both types of crime was significant for both males and females.
  - Males are more likely to commit crimes in general.

Limitations
- The measure of self-reported crime could have been a limitation of the study, due to underreporting and social desirability bias.
- ADD Health is a school-based sample that may not adequately represent the most disadvantaged in society.

Future Research
- Future research could examine racial and ethnic inequalities in food insecurity.
- Future research could also examine the possibility of reverse causality, as past crime could affect food insecurity.

References
Food Security and Nutrition Assistance