

Exploring the Role of Food Insecurity for Self-Reported Crime

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 crimes (Carr and Packam, 2019).

Hypotheses

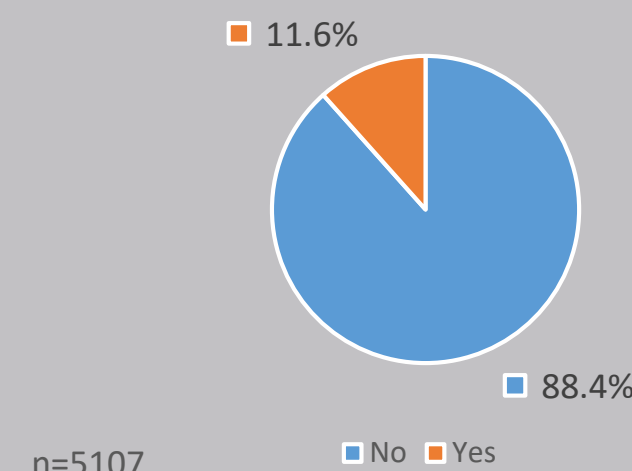
- Strain theory suggests people who are food insecure will be more likely to commit crime (Agnew, 1992).
- People who report food insecurity will be more likely to engage in economic and/or physical crime.

Data and Sample

- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), Wave IV (2008).
- 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?"

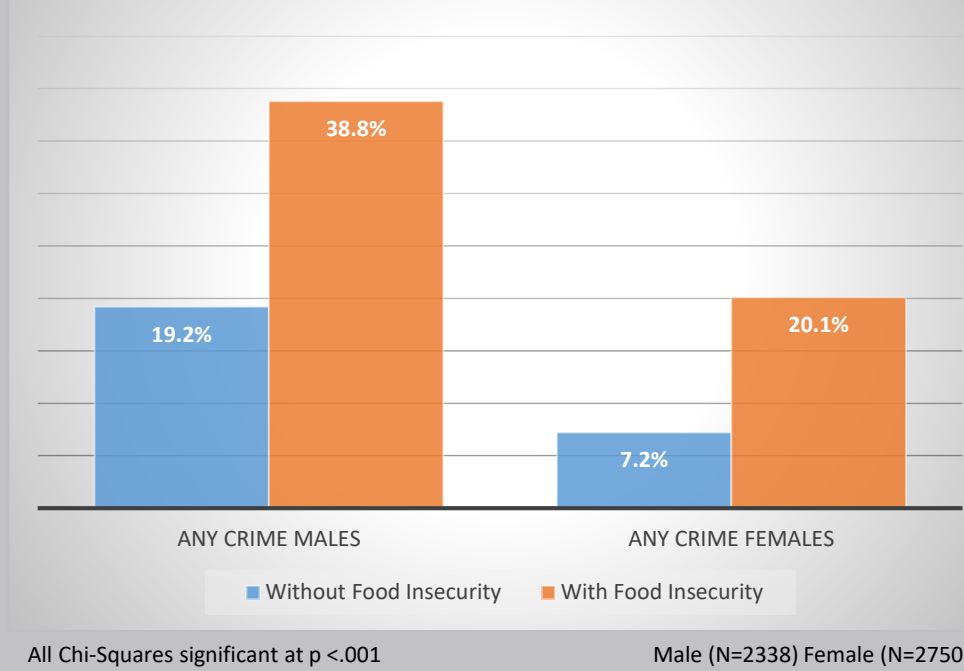


Dependent Measures

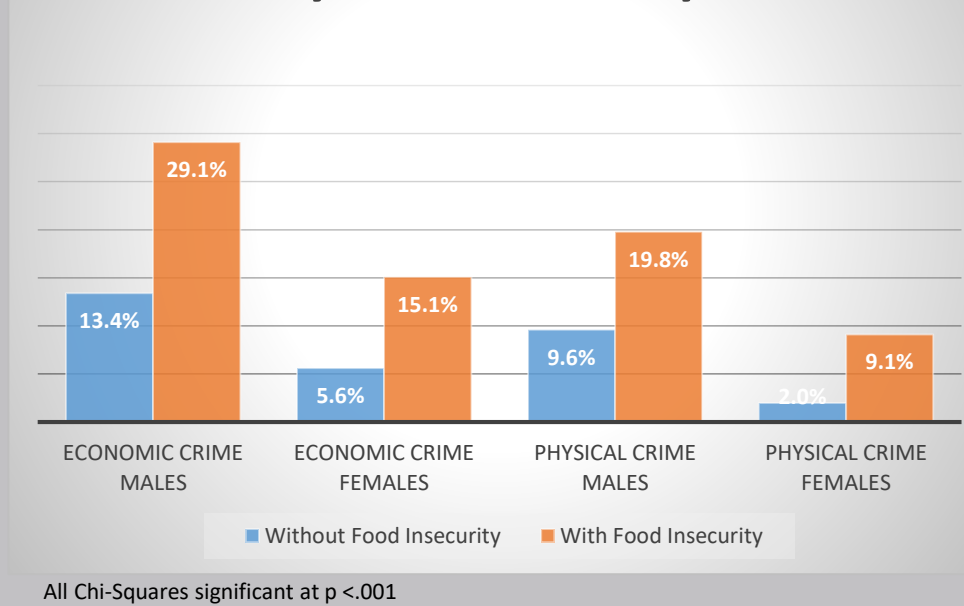
- **Economic crime** was measured by a count of seven variables that asked: "In the past 12 months, how often did you:"
 - Steal something worth more than \$50
 - Sell drugs or stolen property
 - Use stolen credit or bank card
 - Write bad check
- **Physical crime** was measured by a count of three variables that asked: "In the past 12 months, how often did you:"
 - Use weapon
 - Fight (2)

Results

Crime by Food Insecurity



Economic & Physical Crime by Food Insecurity



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

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