



A West Texas County Food Insecurity Survey Findings

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Abstract

Despite living in the world's largest food-producing nation, children and adults face poverty and hunger in every county across America. According to Feeding America [1], more than 38 million Americans are living in poverty. More than 37 million people struggle with hunger in this country, including more than 11 million children. 1 in every 9 Americans are food insecure. The situation is even worse in the state of Texas where 1 in every 7 Texans are food insecure. This makes Texas one of just 15 states with higher food insecurity than the national average [2]. In 2018, The Tom Green County Hunger Coalition (TGCHC) conducted a Food Access Survey (FAS) to help determine areas of need regarding food assistance in the city of San Angelo, Texas. The 328 respondents were divided into two groups (Food Secure and Food Insecure) based on their responses and compared. There were significant differences found between the two groups in regards to their age, household size, housing tenure, access, and assistance.

Background

Despite living in the world's largest food-producing nation, children and adults face poverty and hunger in every county across America [1]. According to Feeding America, more than 38 million Americans are living in poverty. More than 37 million people struggle with hunger in this country, including more than 11 million children. Children are actually more likely to face food insecurity than any other group in the United States. And now the coronavirus pandemic has left millions of families without stable employment leading to estimates that more than 54 million people, including 18 million children, may experience food insecurity in 2020 [1].

Food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) introduced new language in 2006 to describe ranges of severity of food security. These labels include:

- High food security: no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations.
- Marginal food security: one or two reported indications – typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house. Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.
- Low food security: reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.
- Very low food security: reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

“Low food security” and “very low food security” are often categorized under “food insecurity”. Food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food [2]. 1 in every 9 Americans are food insecure. The situation is even worse in the state of Texas where 1 in every 7 Texans are food insecure. This makes Texas one of just 15 states with higher food insecurity than the national average.

Data

In 2018, The Tom Green County Hunger Coalition (TGCHC) conducted a Food Access Survey (FAS) to help determine areas of need regarding food assistance in the city of San Angelo, Texas. The data was collected entirely through paper questionnaires completed by the respondents. The questionnaires were distributed primarily at cooperating sites such as Meals on Wheels, Stephens Central Library, Rust Street Ministries, and Alcohol & Drug Abuse Council for the Concho Valley (ADACCV). Some questionnaires were given to nonprofit and service organization representatives at monthly meetings held by MHMR Services of Concho Valley. Those representatives would then take the surveys back to their clients to complete.

A total of 328 San Angelo residents completed the Food Access Survey (FAS). The majority of respondents of the FAS were single (57.3%), age 50 and over (60.6%), and renting their homes (53.2%). The primary area of residence for this population was in North San Angelo (29.2%) and West San Angelo (28.8%). By a large percentage, the population seems to make their shopping choices based first on location (65.2%), then cost (39.4%). The store most frequented was Walmart (66.2%), followed by HEB (41.7%), and Food King (41.2%). The majority of participants (61.8%) selected “close to home” as the reason why they regularly shopped at these stores.

The majority of respondents (75.6%) noted that their meals were primarily prepared at home instead of fast food or takeout or received at church or through community services. Even though fast food was evenly distributed and available across the city (67-76%), respondents residing in North San Angelo reported significantly lower access to low fat foods. Also, while fresh fruits and vegetables were mostly available across the city, respondents residing in North San Angelo reported significantly lower access to high quality fruits and vegetables.

Results

For this study, we divided the respondents of the FAS into two

