



Canadian youth living in food-insecure households are more vulnerable to mental health problems

Li, Tim "Canadian youth living in food-insecure households are more vulnerable to mental health problems"
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What the researcher(s) did

The researchers examined the relationship between household food insecurity and mental health for youth ages 12-24, including self-rated mental health status, diagnoses of mood and anxiety disorder, and clinical assessments of emotional distress, major depression, and suicidal ideation.

What the researcher(s) found

One in seven youth lived in food insecurity. Compared to food-secure youth, they faced greater risk of mental health problems. The risks increased with severity — youth in severely food-insecure households had over 6 times the risk of suicidal thoughts and over twice the risk of mood/anxiety disorders, distress, and depression.

RDC Datasets used

Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS)
2007–2008, 2011–2012 and 2017–2018

Policy areas this research can inform

- Health
- Children and youth

Policy implications of this research

This study emphasizes the importance of policies to reduce household food insecurity as part of promoting health equity, including for youth mental health. It adds to the large body of research on the strong connection between food insecurity and poor mental health in Canada.

Other studies have shown that policy interventions can reduce food insecurity by improving households' financial resources. Addressing food insecurity, especially severe food insecurity for families with youth, may help improve youth mental health outcomes and should be part of federal and provincial policy discussions around supporting mental health.

Read the full article

Men, F., Elgar, F. J., & Tarasuk, V. (2021). Food insecurity is associated with mental health problems among Canadian youth. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 75(8), 741–748. doi:10.1136/jech-2020-216149.

