

Higher prevalence of child and adolescent mental health problems in food-insecure Canadian homes

Vandad Sharifi, Gina Dimitropoulos. "Higher prevalence of child and adolescent mental health problems in food-insecure Canadian homes." *CRDCN research-policy snapshots*. Volume 3 Issue 2 July 2024

Context

The socioeconomic context significantly influences child and adolescent development and mental health. One key socioeconomic indicator is food insecurity, defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. In a nationally representative cross-sectional survey conducted in 2019, researchers observed that one in every nine Canadian children live in food-insecure households. This research found that the odds of a range of mental health problems are higher in food-insecure households, including poor general mental health, mood and anxiety disorders, developmental disorders, suicidality, and cannabis use. The associations persisted even after adjusting for the family's socioeconomic indicators.

Key finding(s) from the research

Food insecurity is associated with a range of mental health problems in Canadian children and adolescents.

Population(s) studied: Population aged 1-17-year-old living in Canada's ten provinces and three territories

Research dataset(s) used: Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth (CHSCY), collected by Statistics Canada in 2019

Policy implications for this research

Food insecurity poses a common and complex public health challenge. The researchers argue that food insecurity serves as a more direct measure of material deprivation and extends beyond low income. Therefore, they advocate for implementing public health and policy interventions that identify and address both problems among deprived households and their children. The benefits of such interventions could extend into adulthood for affected children.

Policy area(s) this research can inform: Agriculture and food; Children and youth; Families, households and marital status; Health; Population and demography

Read the full article

Sharifi, V., Dimitropoulos, G., Williams, J. V. A., Rao, S., Pedram, P., Bulloch, A. G. M., & Patten, S. B. (2024). Food Insecurity is Associated with Poor Mental Health in Canadian Children and Adolescents. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 69(4), 296–298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07067437231225938>.