

**IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL  
NORMS WHEN  
MEASURING CHILDHOOD  
FOOD SECURITY IN  
APPALACHIA**



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# Implications of Social Norms when Measuring Childhood Food Security in Appalachia

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Our participants in Central Appalachia



## PURPOSE

The purpose of this qualitative study in rural Central Appalachia (N=13) was to explore perceptions of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Household Food Security Survey Module items of childhood food security.



## Background

Central Appalachia has disproportionately lower rates of food security than the state's non-Appalachian counties  
Average rates: 17.85% vs. 13.97%; ranges 13.3-23.9 vs. 8.0 – 21.6

Marginal food insecurity impacts behavioral, academic, and emotional development from infancy to adolescence altering educational achievement, overall health, future professional attainment, and quality of life.

## **U.S. Department of Agriculture Household Food Security Survey Module Items (Children)**

I relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed my child because I was running out of money to buy food.

I couldn't feed our children a balanced meal because I couldn't afford that.

My child was not eating enough because I just couldn't afford enough food.

Did you ever cut the size of your child's meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

Did your child ever skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

Was your child ever hungry but you just couldn't afford more food?

Did your child ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?



## Methods

Participants (N=13) in a cooking skills intervention were interviewed. Content analysis was conducted. Open and axial coding were used to identify and interconnect major themes.



## Social Expectations

**Parents should do whatever needs to be done in order to secure food for their children.**

*I think sometimes there is enough food or money to buy food for the children in the family but some of the parents would rather spend that money on other things...*

*I came from a family of ten children, never known to go hungry because ...we always depended on ourselves. There's a lot of people out there today, they draw a check, they spend it on cigarettes and stuff they don't need, where their kids go hungry...I think they just need to take care of their kids and leave them cigarettes and stuff alone...you're talking \$5 a pack and that would buy a whole lot of food*

*I know a place here whether the mother is waiting on the porch for them to come home with the backpacks so she can go through it and get out what she wants. It's the parents. How do you teach the parents?*

*Well, if you're hungry, get rid of that cigarette and buy something to eat.*

*...they prioritize getting an ATV or phone and they've got their alcohol and tobacco and there's where they money goes first then what's leftover goes to food...spending a couple thousand dollars for tobacco and cigarettes*



## Discussion

The Appalachian social norm expectation of providing for one's family can pose challenges in addressing food-insecurity issues.

Social norms necessitate sensitivity to the possibility of individuals in Appalachia being hesitant to report childhood hunger

Household food insecurity could be a surrogate for child food insecurity



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