



Research Week 2021

Assessing Student Food Security Status at Oregon Health & Science University during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Corrin Kalinich BS, Rebecca Rdesinski, MSW, MPH, Amber Lin, MS, Sean Gillon, PhD, Diane Stadler, PhD

kalinich@ohsu.edu
OHSU

Keywords

food security, COVID-19, student wellness, academic performance

Abstract

Background

Food insecurity is prevalent among higher-education students resulting in short and long-term academic and health consequences.

Methods

Changes in food security status and university/community food resource use was assessed using a cross-sectional survey disseminated to OHSU health professional students 12-months before and 2-3 months after the COVID-19 shelter-at-home mandate. Descriptive statistics summarized sociodemographic, educational background, and resource use. The validated USDA Household Food Security Survey Module Six-Item Short Form assessed food security status. McNemar's tests or chi-square/Fisher's exact tests determined change over time in food security and resource use and associations with sociodemographic factors, respectively. A two-sample, two-sided test of proportions assessed differences in use of coping strategies by food security status.

Results

Among 175 students who completed the survey, 27.4% were food insecure before and during the pandemic. There was no difference in change in food security status classification among those who became food insecure (3.4%) or food secure (3.4%) after the shelter-at-home mandate ($p>0.05$). Use of any University food resource ($p<0.001$), but not community resource ($p=0.0636$),

was significantly lower after the shelter-at-home mandate than before. There were significantly higher proportions of food insecure than food secure students ($p < 0.001$) reporting food-related stress, reduced quality of foods purchased, difficulty accessing non-food resources, leaving the home less often increased food needed, being likely to use a future on-campus food pantry, and reduced motivation to cook healthy ($p = 0.0398$) after the shelter-at-home mandate.

Conclusion

Student food insecurity at OHSU during the pandemic was related to limited access to resources on campus because of state-wide closures but not to community resources. Food insecurity is associated with lower use of coping strategies to enhance quality-of-life. These findings reinforce the need to support students during crisis events, such as COVID-19, to provide proper food and income-based resources to ensure academic success, health, and wellness.