

Food insecurity in Canadian households 1998/99 [CA]^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

About 8% of Canadians, or just under 2.5 million people, had to compromise the quality or the quantity of their diet at least once in 1998/99 because of a lack of money, according to the National Population Health Survey (NPHS).

In the same period, an additional 0.5 million people worried that they would not have enough to eat because they were short on cash.

In total, the survey found that an estimated 3 million Canadians, about 10%, were considered to be living in what is known as a "food-insecure" household at some point during 1998/99. (Information is not available about the duration or possible recurrences of food insecurity.)

For purposes of the NPHS, households were considered to be food insecure if the person responding on behalf of the household acknowledged any of three circumstances stemming from a lack of money: worry that funds would be insufficient to buy food; not eating the quality or variety of food desired; or not having enough to eat.

In general, households with food insecurity have limited or uncertain access to enough food for a healthy, active life. These households have reduced quality and variety of meals, and may have irregular food intake. There may be a need for recourse to emergency food sources or to other services to meet basic food needs.

The NPHS found that about one-fifth of individuals in food-insecure households received help from food banks, soup kitchens or other charitable agencies in the year before the survey.

Children aged 0 to 17 were the age group most likely to live in a food-insecure household (14%), and seniors aged 65 or older, least likely (4%). But children in such households are not necessarily undernourished. Adult caregivers tend to sacrifice their own diet so that children will not be hungry.

Food insecurity in Canada is strongly associated with household income. More than one-third (35%) of people in low-income households reported some form of food insecurity in 1998/99. About 30% felt that their diet had been compromised. (For the purposes of the NPHS, a household of three or four people was considered low-income if it had total income of less than \$20,000.)

But the NPHS found that food insecurity is not limited to low-income households. About 14% of residents of middle-income households reported some form of food insecurity, and nearly 12% reported that their diet had been compromised. To some extent, the existence of food insecurity at higher income levels may have to do with the fact that annual income is a static measure that may not be sensitive to sudden economic changes that contribute to temporary bouts of food insecurity. For example, the impact of a job loss around the time of the NPHS interview would not be reflected in annual income, which covered the previous 12 months. As well, the possibility of some misinterpretation of the questions cannot be discounted.

Food insecurity also varied with the source of household income. About 58% of households relying on social assistance reported food insecurity. It was also relatively common in households dependent on Employment Insurance, Workers' Compensation, the Child Tax Benefit, support or alimony, or that had no income.

Many lone-parent households, particularly those headed by women, have low incomes and depend on social assistance. Not surprisingly, then, one-third (32%) of all single-mother households were food insecure to some extent, and 28% reported their diet had been compromised.

- reproduced from the The Daily, Statistics Canada.

Tags: poverty^[2]

federal programs^[3]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/01/08/food-insecurity-canadian-households-199899-ca> [2]
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/poverty> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-programs>