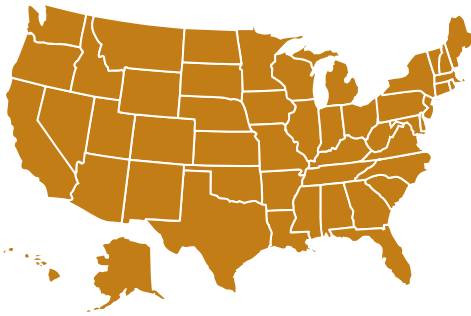


Issue Brief**FOOD SECURITY IN THE UNITED STATES**

In 2008, 17.1 million U.S. households (14.6% of all households) had experienced food insecurity at some time during the previous year.

WHAT IS SOCIETAL DISTRESS?

Societal distress describes living conditions that do not satisfy basic human needs, such as food, shelter, health, income, and education.

Visit www.humanneeds.vcu.edu for more details.

What is food security?

Food security refers to having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Americans living with **food insecurity** are uncertain of having enough food for all household members because of insufficient money or other resources for food. According to definitions established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, **very low food security** is a form of food insecurity in which access to food is severely limited. **Hunger**, a description of physical discomfort from not eating, can be experienced episodically but can also result from severe or protracted food insecurity. Hunger in this sense is not directly assessed in national-level surveys.

How many Americans are affected?

In 2008—the most current year for which data are available:

- Very low food security affected 5.7% of households at some time during the previous year.
- Altogether, 49.1 million Americans were in households that experienced food insecurity in the previous year.
- The risk of a household experiencing food insecurity in the previous *month* was 8.8%.
- The prevalence of very low food security is increasing (*see side 2*).

How many Americans lived in households that had difficulty putting enough food on the table in 2008?



49.1 million Americans—more than the population of California.

THE PROJECT ON SOCIETAL DISTRESS is an initiative of the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Human Needs, which examines the prevalence of societal distress in five domains—food security, housing, health, education, and income—and makes the information available to the public and policymakers. This research effort focuses on presenting accurate data on the number of Americans affected by these conditions and not examining the causes or proposing solutions. The Project on Societal Distress is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

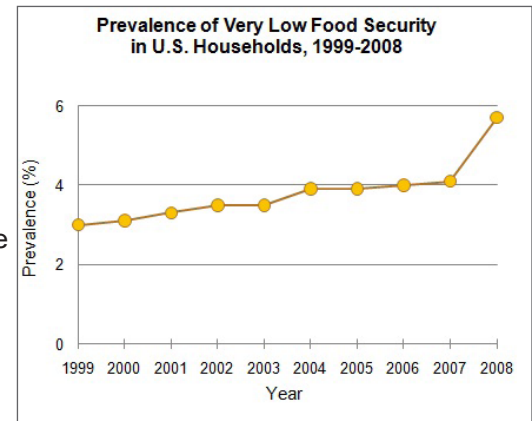
In 2008, one out of five children in the U.S. (22.5%) lived in households with food insecurity.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Food insecurity disrupts the well-being, productivity, and economic stability of individuals and families. Among children, food insecurity affects growth and development, physical health, behavior, and performance at school.

What are the trends?

The number of households experiencing very low food security increased from 3.1 million (3.0%) in 1999 to 6.7 million (5.7%) in 2008—the most current year for which data are available.



Who is affected?

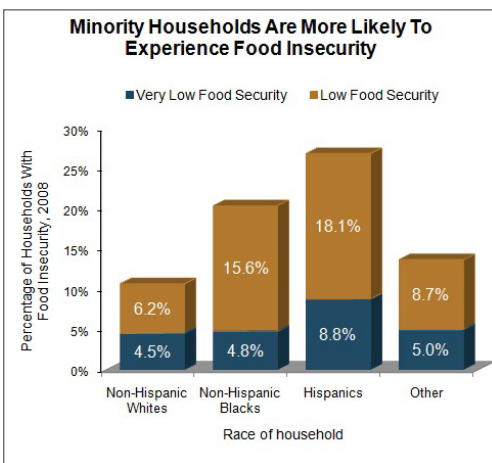
Children: In 2008, 1.1 million (1.5%) children experienced very low food security at some time in the previous year (or lived with another child who did).

Minorities: In 2008, food insecurity was experienced by 10.7% of non-Hispanic white households but by 26.9% and 25.7%, respectively, of Hispanic and non-Hispanic black households.

The Poor: In 2008, among households with an income less than the Federal poverty threshold, more than one-third (42.3%) experienced food insecurity.

Households With Less Education: Whereas food insecurity existed in 29.5% of households in which no one had completed high school or its equivalent, food insecurity affected only 5.7% of households in which a member had obtained a college degree or higher.

Single-Parent Households: In 2008, among households with children, the risk of food insecurity was lower for families with married couples (14.3%) than for homes with a male head of household but no spouse (27.6%) or a female head of household and no spouse (37.2%).



SOURCES AND METHODS

The statistics reported here were obtained from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's most recent report on food security: *Household Food Security in the United States, 2008*. The data underwent statistical analysis by the research staff of the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Human Needs. Analytic methods are detailed at www.humanneeds.vcu.edu.

THE VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY CENTER ON HUMAN NEEDS (www.humanneeds.vcu.edu) was chartered in 2007 to provide the public and policymakers with information about the prevalence of societal distress in the United States. Its mission is to document how many Americans confront food insecurity, precarious housing or homelessness, inadequate health and health care, inferior education, and inadequate income/poverty.

For more details visit www.humanneeds.vcu.edu.