

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Prevalence of Food Insecurity Among Military Households With Children 5 Years of Age and Younger

Wax, S. G., & Stankorb, S. M. (2016). Prevalence of food insecurity among military households with children 5 years of age and younger. *Public Health Nutrition*, 19(13), 2458-2466. doi:10.1017/s1368980016000422

**SUMMARY:** Access to proper nutrition in military families is important for improved military readiness. Researchers surveyed 248 households in order to describe the presence of food insecurity (i.e., having limited availability of nutritionally adequate, affordable foods) in military families. Results revealed that one in seven military families experienced food insecurity.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Among Service member participants, 15% reported their families experienced food insecurity.
- Heads of household who were single were three and a half times more likely to report food insecurity than those who were married.
- All food-insecure households were headed by junior enlisted and non-commissioned officers. No warrant officers, company grade officers, or general officers reported experiencing food insecurity.
- Military families who were food insecure had a fewer adults and more children living in that household.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Tailor efforts toward households of junior enlisted and non-commissioned officers to reduce their elevated risk of food insecurity
- Disseminate information about current community and government supplemental food programs that provide resources to improve accessibility to food sources for military families who are food insecure
- Engage Service members and their families in cooking and budgeting classes that aim to increase food security

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support community programs that work to reduce food security among military families
- Recommend partnerships between military-based and community-based programs to improve awareness of those who may be at greatest risk for food insecurity in the military population
- Encourage professional development courses for military and community providers about unique factors that contribute to food insecurity in military families

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## METHODS

- Adult participants were recruited from child development centers located on a military installation in Texas that provide services to children five years old or younger.
- Data were collected via surveys, which included questions related to demographic variables, household characteristics, household composition, and food insecurity.
- The relationship between food insecurity, demographics of the head of household, household characteristics, and number of children in the household were analyzed.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Active Duty participants included 19 junior enlisted officers, 132 non-commissioned officers, 12 warrant officers, and 18 general officers.
- Of the Service members, 49% were White, 20% Latino, 17% were Black and 14% were other races.
- The sample had an average age of 33 years (range: 19-57 years).

## LIMITATIONS

- Only Service members from one military installation were surveyed therefore results may not extend to the whole military population.
- Service members self-reported the survey and they may underreport food insecurity.
- The study included only Active-Duty families, which could affect the generalizability of the results because National Guard and Reserve families were not included.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study with a larger sample size throughout different military branches and installations
- Study current programs to determine their efficacy with food insecurity prevention in military families
- Explore risk and resiliency factors in military families who experience food insecurity

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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