To determine if an association exists between being food insecure (exposure) and experiencing depression (outcome) among college students in San Diego County.

**Background**

- Food insecurity is defined as the social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate (healthy) food and can be influenced by various factors such as income, employment, race/ethnicity, and disability.
- Food insecure students have a 253% higher risk of depression compared to food secure students.
- Limited studies have examined the relationship between food insecurity and depression among college students.

**Objective**

To determine if an association exists between being food insecure (exposure) and experiencing depression (outcome) among college students in San Diego County.

**Methods**

Cross-sectional anonymous online survey conducted across San Diego College students via google forms (n=69)

- Our survey was distributed through various platforms: social media (UCSD Reddit, Instagram, etc.)
- All participants provided informed consent
- Food insecurity status was measured by questions from the US Adult Food Security Model and depression status was measured by questions from the PHQ-9
- Pearson correlation coefficient conducted through SPSS was utilized to measure the strength of the association between exposure and outcome

**Sample Characteristics:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>N = 69</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Race and Ethnicity:**

- 40.6% Latino/Hispanic
- 33.3% Asian or Pacific Islander
- 15.9% White
- 8.7% Biracial or Multiracial

**College Campus:**

- 85.5% UCSD
- 5.8% SDSU
- 4.3% CSUSM
- 2.9% Miramar College
- 1.4% USD

**Results**

- Food Insecurity Score = 9.63 (4.37) -> Min: 5 Max: 25
- Depression Score = 14.95 (4.27) -> Min: 5 Max: 25
- There is a moderately positive correlation between food insecurity scores and depression scores per our pearson correlation (r = 0.513)

**Conclusions**

- The more food insecure a student is the more likely they will experience depression.
- Striving to maintain a high GPA, poor sleep due to academic distress, and lack of support to apply for food assistance programs like SNAP are why depression remains high among food insecure students.
- The findings suggest the need of a more collaborative approach amongst public and mental health professionals to endorse more mental health resources at/near on-campus food pantries.

**Policy Implications**

- Additional funding is needed to support programs like The Swipe Out Hunger initiative.
- This should be implemented to empower students to live healthy and happy lives and ensure just opportunities for accessing nutritional and mental health resources near and around campus perimeters.
- Campuses should inform students about locations that provide mental health resources and weekly on-campus events that provide affordable or free options to access food.

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