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Title

Latinx and Chicanx Identity and its Impact on the Food Insecurity of UC Berkeley Students

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Students

Background:

Food insecurity, as defined by the USDA, refers to limited or uncertain access to adequate food. This disproportionately affects marginalized identities like Latinx and Chicanx individuals, largely due to income disparities, limited access to affordable nutritious food, and systemic discrimination. Ethnic minority students, often from low-income immigrant households, face obstacles in affording healthy food and accessing food assistance programs. Addressing these specific barriers is crucial to developing inclusive food assistance programs for students of all ethnic backgrounds.

Literature Review

The first study, "Sociodemographic and health disparities among students screening positive for food insecurity: Findings from a large college health surveillance system," emphasizes higher education's role in health disparities, showing that many American students, particularly gender, racial, and ethnic minorities, experience food insecurity during higher education, requiring additional support for their basic needs. The second study, "Psychological distress among college students: Role of food insecurity and other social determinants of mental health," confirms that food-insecure college female students have more negative mental health outcomes than males in a high immigrant, first-generation demographic. The third study, "What Do I Eat? Where Do I Sleep?: A Concern for Men of Color in Community College," qualitatively examines food insecurity and ethnicity among male community college students.

While these studies provide quantitative data on food insecurity among gender and ethnic minorities, they lack qualitative analysis of ethnicity among college students facing food insecurity. In contrast, my study analyzes personal interviews with a small sample size of UC Berkeley students, focusing on how Latinx and Chicanx identity influences food insecurity at the university.

Study Design

This study examines food insecurity among Latinx and Chicanx UC Berkeley undergraduate students through five in-depth qualitative interviews and ten quantitative surveys. Participants range in ages from 20-25, with 10 identifying as women and 4 identifying as men. Participants' ethnic and gender identities, living situations, meal arrangements, experiences with food insecurity, coping mechanisms, and advice for students facing food insecurity were explored.

Findings

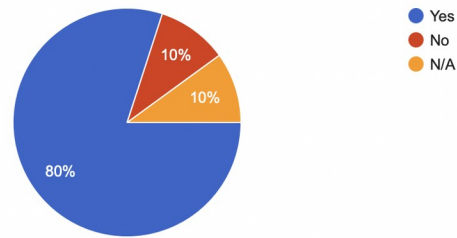
The Deterioration of Physical & Mental Health

Interviewees reported significantly negative changes to their physical appearance and mental health due to food insecurity. Interviewee Evan¹ stated, "[...] it started having mental health effects as I started gaining bad weight, my blood pressure got really bad, made me a little moody, I got pretty sassy, pretty short tempered." In a survey of ten Chicanx and Latinx UC Berkeley undergraduates, 80% reported that food insecurity impacted their mental health.

¹ All interviewee names are pseudonyms to respect the privacy of those who participated in research

Did your mental health change in your experience with food insecurity?

10 responses



Interviewee Allen² shared, "I would always be able to see my ribcage and be hungry going to sleep." In the same survey, 50% experienced appearance changes related to food insecurity, leading to unhealthy weight gain or loss.

Transportation: A Barrier towards Food Access

Transporting groceries on a bus is challenging for low-income students living off-campus, leading some to consider renting a car, though this option may be unaffordable for food-insecure students. Interviewee Evan³ reports, "Usually, I have to rent a car just to get to Safeway which is thirty dollars on its own." An extra thirty dollar transportation fee for basic needs is unfeasible, especially for low-income students already facing systemic and economic barriers. The barriers of transportation means and costs are often overlooked by UC Berkeley's resources towards basic needs.

Food Stamps

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

In my interviews, 80% of participants expressed dissatisfaction and insecurity about the amount of food stamps they received through CalFresh, with one interviewee, Karla⁴, stating, "Right now, I'm riding on \$27 left of my EBT and it's March 15th..." and adding that \$150 a month for groceries is inadequate in the current economy. Would you be able to eat adequately and healthily in Berkeley for 15 days using only \$27 dollars? In a survey of 10 Chicanx and Latinx UC Berkeley undergraduates who received CalFresh, 55% reported insufficient monthly food benefits.

Conclusion

This policy brief aims to encourage more comprehensive research on food insecurity among Latinx and Chicanx UC Berkeley students. To support struggling students, the Basic Needs Center, CalFresh application, and local church food drives are recommended. Raising awareness about the challenges of accessing basic needs and engaging policy makers and university leadership is essential to implement positive changes in: funding and support for the Basic Needs Center, transportation accessibility, and CalFresh Benefits.

⁴ Ibid.