

Food Insecurity Among Young Adults in Community College During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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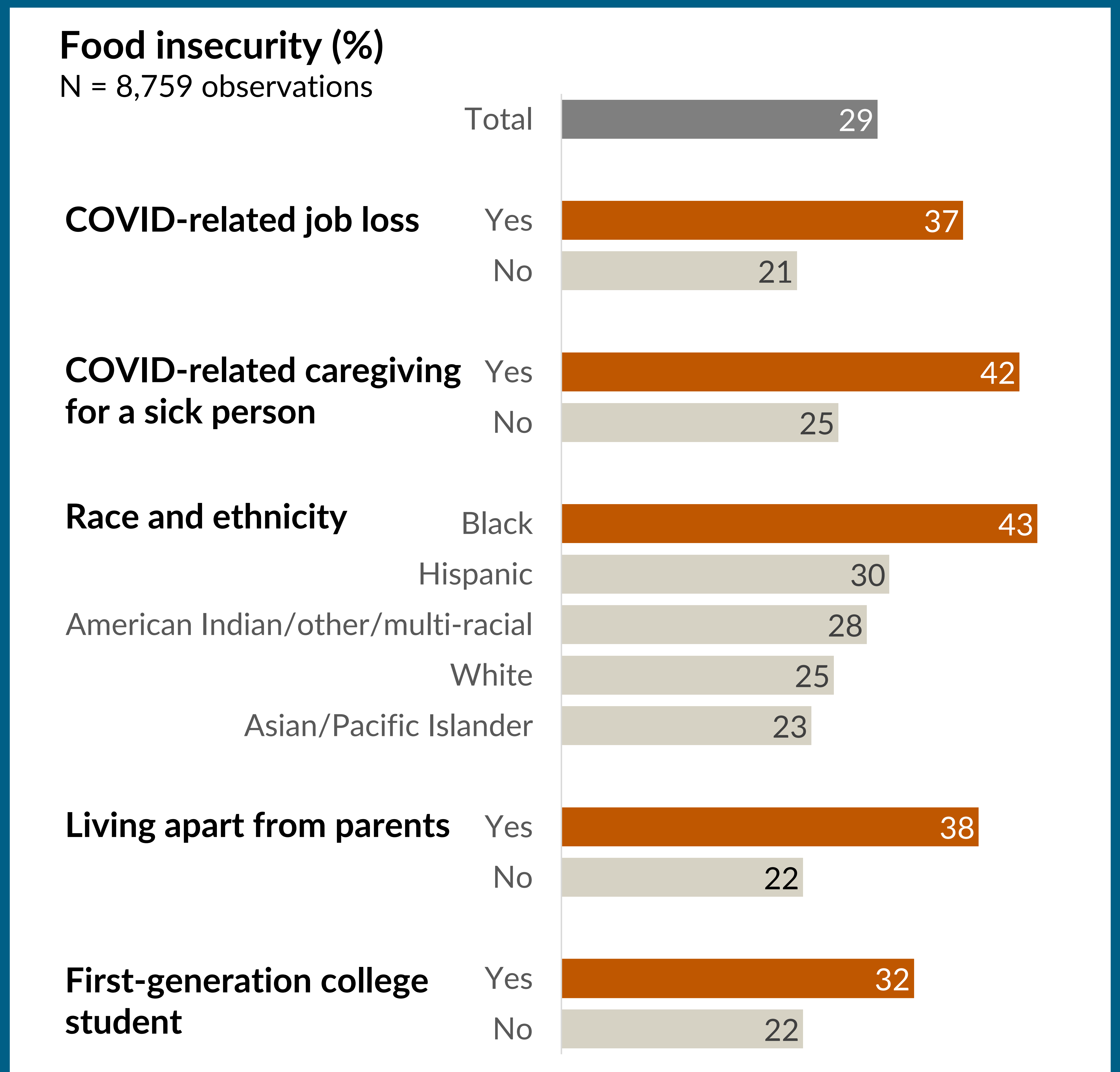
Introduction

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, community college students experienced more food insecurity than the general U.S. population¹ and were also more likely to struggle to meet other basic needs.²
- Recent studies found that food insecurity increased among college students in both two and four-year degree programs during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic levels.³
- We examined COVID-related hardship and sociodemographic factors associated with food insecurity among young adults in Texas and California.

Methods

- We used data from a supplementary study to an ongoing randomized controlled trial testing a multilevel intervention with young adults attending community college and medical providers.
- We recruited participants at 29 community colleges in California and Texas among first-year students assigned female at birth aged 18 to 25.
- Sample included 1,788 participants and 8,759 observations from May 2020 to March 2023.
- We measured food insecurity using an item adapted from the U.S. Department of Agriculture household food security module of how often their household worried if food would run out (never, sometimes/often.)
- We conducted descriptive statistics and estimated mixed-effects logistic regression models with random effects for site and individual.

Food insecurity during pandemic reflected economic & social disruptions and structural inequities



Multilevel mixed-effects logistic regression results

Experienced food insecurity
(N=8,759 observations, 1,788 participants)

Characteristic	Odds Ratio ^a
COVID-related job loss (Ref: no)	1.96***
COVID-related caregiving for a sick person (Ref: no)	1.65***
Race and ethnicity (Ref: White)	
Black	2.79**
Hispanic	1.21
American Indian/other/multi-racial	1.44
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.91
Age	1.12***
Language spoken at home (Ref: English)	0.98
Living apart from parents (Ref: no)	2.44***
First-generation college student (Ref: no)	1.94***
Health insurance (Ref: private)	
Public	1.73***
No insurance	1.83***
Don't know	1.31

^a Model included random effects for site and individual
 $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Conclusions

- Economic and social disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were highly associated with increased odds of reporting food insecurity.
- Young people who experienced COVID-related job loss or caregiving burdens also were vulnerable to food insecurity.
- Young people who are Black, first-generation college students, and living apart from their parents are more likely to experience food insecurity, suggesting a need for targeted outreach and resources for these groups.

References

- ¹ Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Ilieva et al., 2019; Maroto et al., 2015; Meier et al., 2022
- ² Broton et al., 2022; Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Gupton, 2017; Hallett & Freas, 2018
- ³ Goldrick-Rab et al., 2020

Acknowledgements

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The JPB Foundation, UT-PRC grant P2CHD042849 NICHD, Student Voices Community Engagement, Community College Advisory Board, and college sites.



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