



Finding Food Security in Portland, Oregon



**A Qualitative Study among
SNAP Recipients**



Why this research?

- To understand how to improve rates of food insecurity in the tri-county Portland region.
- 13.7% of Americans are food insecure
- 16.1% of Oregonians are food insecure

Key finding

Food security is:

- Influenced by diverse, multi-level factors in the social ecological model.
- Found when aspects of individuals' lives – such as housing, living in a safe neighborhood, having a social support network – are stabilized.

Research questions

- What prevents SNAP recipients from becoming food secure?
- How do SNAP recipients obtain food security?

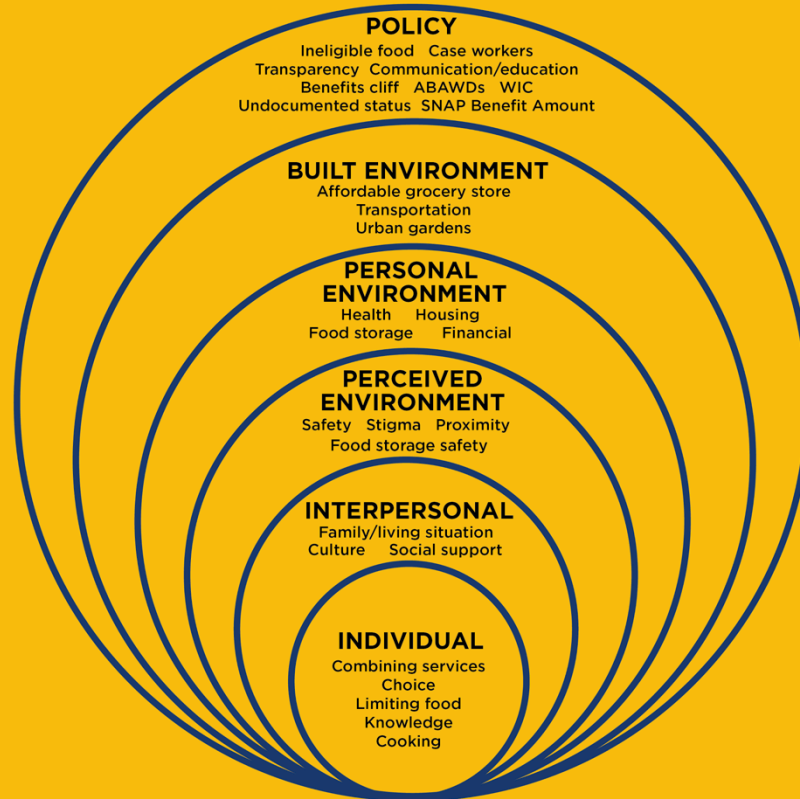
Methodology

- Eight focus groups
- 67 SNAP recipients
- Used focus group approach discussed in Krueger and Casey (2009)

Methodology

- 11-question pre-focus group survey: demographics and food insecurity screener (from Childhood Hunger Coalition)
- Two case study interviews
- Racially/ethnically diverse sample

SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF FOOD SECURITY IN THE PORTLAND, OREGON REGION



Individual level

- Personal activities of focus group participants to find food security

Individual level: Combining services

Participants described:

- Importance and flexibility of SNAP
- Running out of SNAP benefits by middle of month
- Using additional services to find food security

Individual level: Combining services

“The most helpful [food resource]...SNAP, of course. Every now and then when I need the food pantry...church is awesome. They really give us a lot. Whole turkey. Oh, and I left the school out...they have food. Even Portland Community College has a second floor of free food for the students if you show your ID.”

Interpersonal level

- People who surround focus group participants

Interpersonal level: Social support

- Participants discussed how they rely on friends, family, and community for food after SNAP benefits run out.

Interpersonal level: Social support

“Food stamps help with food. But also friends and relatives are a big help. They know we arrived recently and bring us something every time they can. This is a big help, while we still don’t know all the information and addresses. Food stamps are helping us while we get on our feet. It will take some time to get a job and learn the language.”

Interpersonal level: Social support

- Without social support, SNAP recipients may be left food insecure.

“...here I only have my husband, I’m the only one here, my family is in Mexico. In Mexico, well yes, we also struggled but if we didn’t have we could go with a relative or I would borrow, but here I’m alone, only my husband.”

Perceived environment level

- How participants assess the environment in which they are living

Perceived environment: Safety

- Participants described how the safety of their neighborhood affects where they shop for food and ultimately their food security status.

Perceived environment: Safety

“The milk at my corner store is \$5.99 for a gallon of milk. And it is three in the morning and my daughter wants a bottle, and I don't want to drive to the [grocery] store right now, but I can walk two blocks and the [corner] store is right here. So I would rather walk two blocks and spend \$6... I live in a terrible neighborhood and there are a lot of shootings in my neighborhood so I have to worry about that when I'm in the car or walking. Is someone going to get shot or stabbed? A lot of bad stuff going on in my neighborhood so we worry about that. I would rather go to the corner store. I can take different cuts to get through. But if someone pulls up next to me and starts shooting, then what? I can walk because I can run away and take back streets to get back home instead of being in a car stuck at a stop light.”

Personal environment level

- The situation in which individuals are living their everyday lives

Personal environment: Housing

- Participants described subsidized housing as essential for finding food security

Personal environment: Housing

“...if I’m paying \$1,000 on a place, I’m not going to have enough for food...I might have a couple of weeks, but that’s about it. And then I still have to pay the electric bill and all this. So after you do your rent, and then after you do your utilities, whatever is left for food is what you’ve got and you have to figure out how to implement and keep because if people are using \$1,000 or more and their job doesn’t pay enough, what is left for food?”

Built environment level

- The structure of the city, such as parks and bike lanes

Built environment: Transportation

- Focus group participants reported that reliable transportation to an affordable grocery store supports food security.

Built environment: Transportation

“And now where I live, I have a car now, but the nearest store is Safeway and it is super expensive. I would do anything to get to Winco, but when I didn’t have a car, it would have been a struggle. I would have had to walk. There’s no bus to that one. I would have to walk with my daughter and her stroller, and we can’t shop how we needed because we have nowhere to put the groceries.”

Policy level

- Policies of agencies, organizations, or programs

Policy: SNAP benefit amount

- Participants discussed running out of SNAP benefits by the middle of the month.
- They described food insecurity as a *chronic* monthly problem.

Policy: SNAP benefit amount

“They need to watch how things are getting more expensive and food stamps should be raised based on that. One thing that cost \$2 last month, costs \$2.50 this month. They never take those things into account. Next month, it will go up to \$3, yet our food stamp benefits stay the same. They really need to look at the rising cost of food every month.”

Concluding thoughts

- Food security is:
 - Influenced by diverse, multi-level factors.
 - Found when aspects of individuals' lives – such as housing, living in a safe neighborhood, having a social support network – are stabilized.
- This research broadens the conversation about what causes hunger.

Concluding thoughts

- A brief note about recommendations
- Continuing research in five locations in greater Oregon

Resources

- To see the full report and graphic summary:
oregonhunger.org/finding-food-security
- To learn how to participate in ending Hunger in Oregon:
oregonhunger.org/join-hunger-free-oregon-action-network

Questions? Contact us!

Nicole Cerra, MA, MPH, Research and Evaluation
Consultant, Central City Concern,

nicole.cerra@ccconcern.org

Chloe Eberhardt, SNAP Outreach Manager, Partners
for a Hunger-Free Oregon, chloe@oregonhunger.org