

United States
Department of
Agriculture



Economic
Research
Service

Food Assistance
and Nutrition
Research Report
Number 25



Measuring Food Security in the United States

Measuring Children's Food Security in U.S. Households, 1995-99

Mark Nord and Gary Bickel



*Food Assistance & Nutrition
Research Program*

Measuring Children's Food Security in U.S. Households, 1995-99. By Mark Nord and Gary Bickel. Food and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. 25.

Abstract

The capacity to accurately measure the food security status of children in household surveys is an essential tool for monitoring food insecurity and hunger at the most severe levels in U.S. households and for assessing programs designed to prevent or ameliorate these conditions. USDA has developed a children's food security scale to meet this measurement need. The scale is calculated from 8 questions in the 18-item food security survey module that ask specifically about food-related experiences and conditions of children. The scale measures the severity of food insecurity among children in surveyed households and identifies—in the most severe range of the scale—households in which children have been hungry at times because of a lack of household resources for food. The reliability of the children's food security scale is assessed, and the scale is compared with the household-level food security scale. Details are provided on how to calculate the children's food security scale from the questions in the standard food security survey module. The prevalence of hunger among children in U.S. households is estimated by applying the newly developed children's food security scale to data from the nationally representative Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements for the years 1995-99. Prevalence estimates are presented for all U.S. households and for subgroups defined by household structure, race and ethnicity, income, and rural/urban residence.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Margaret Andrews, John Cook, Joda Derrickson, Mary Hama, Chris Hamilton, and Kathy Radimer for valuable comments on the paper. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the Second Food Security Measurement Conference in Alexandria, Virginia, February 23-24, 1999, co-sponsored by the Economic Research Service and the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, and the National Center for Health Statistics, DHHS.