

Food Security

Food literacy and food insecurity among university students: A pilot study

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Introduction: Although food insecurity has been identified as a concern among Canadian university students, little is known about the relationship between food security and food literacy or the barriers to food literacy.

Objectives: 1) to develop and test a tool to measure food literacy and barriers to food literacy 2) to assess food insecurity, food literacy and barriers/enablers to food literacy and 3) to assess the association between food literacy, barriers to food literacy and food security in a sample of university students.

Methods: A food literacy questionnaire was developed to assess food selection, preparation, confidence in preparing food as well as barriers/enablers to food literacy. Adult food security was assessed using a validated instrument. The survey was completed online by university students who were contacted through class invitation. Ethical approval was obtained.

Results: A total of 60 students completed the survey. The three food literacy subscales were found to be internally consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.77-0.88$). Over half (56%) of students were food insecure. A higher proportion of food insecure students perceived transportation to the grocery store ($p=0.02$), insufficient food skills ($p=0.05$) and a lack of confidence in preparing food ($p=0.05$) as barriers to food preparation compared to food secure students. No other significant associations were found between food literacy and food insecurity.

Conclusions: Food insecurity is a significant concern in this sample of university students. Food insecure students reported experiencing more barriers to food literacy than other students.

Significance: The high rates of food insecurity in this sample is a concern because of the known impact of food insecurity on nutrition and health. It is important for dietitians to advocate for policy and program changes to both reduce food insecurity and barriers to food literacy among university students.