

## Income and Hardship

### Food Concerns and Affordability



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**M**ost Americans eat regularly, without fear of running out of food because they lack money. In some households, however, limited buying power produces uncertainty

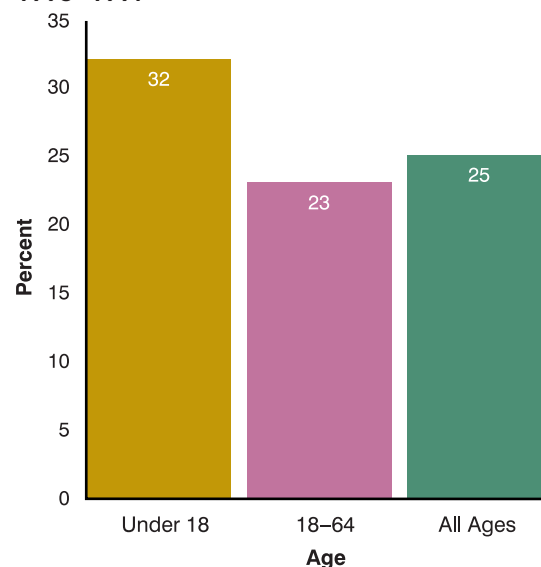
about—and interruptions in—the availability of food. These situations heighten stress and can cause hunger or even poor nutrition. The nation's largest effort to ensure that families can buy food is the Food Stamp Program, which issues vouchers to low-income families.

To determine how many families worry about or experience difficulty buying food, adults between the ages of 18 and 64 were asked whether (i) they or their families worried that food would run out before they got money to buy more, (ii) the food they bought did run out, or (iii) one or more adults ate less or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food. These questions indicate financial stresses related to food but not caloric intake or adequacy of a family's diet.

Nationally, 75 percent of adults and children lived in families that had not experienced any of these food-related problems in the previous 12 months. Twenty-five percent of people lived in families that had experienced one or more of the three problems; of these, 20 percent had encountered shortages of food, and the remaining 5 percent had worried about shortages. Nearly 50 percent of people in low-income families (below 200 percent of the poverty level) experienced some worries about or difficulty affording food, compared to 14 percent of those in families with higher incomes, a statistically significant difference.

More children than adults lived in families that worried about or had trouble affording food: 32 percent, compared to 23 percent, a statistically significant difference. This disparity does not necessarily indicate that children's food intake was more constrained than adults'. Other research has shown that, as money runs out, adults reduce their own food consumption before that of their children.

**Adults and Children in Families with One or More Food-Related Problems, by Age, 1996–1997**



Source: Urban Institute



Assessing  
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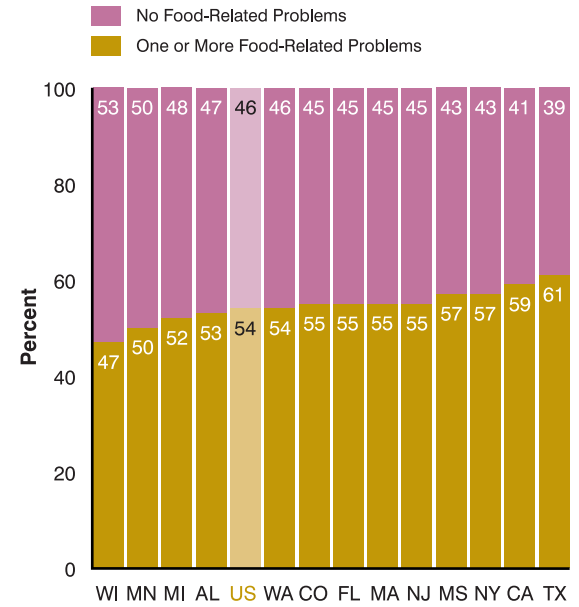
This *Snapshot* presents findings from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), a 1997 survey of 44,461 households with and without telephones that are representative of the nation as a whole and of 13 states. As in all surveys, the data are subject to sampling variability and other sources of error.

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In each of the 13 states studied, around 50 percent of low-income children lived in families that worried about or had difficulty buying food, ranging from 61 percent in Texas to 47 percent in Wisconsin. Compared to the national average, fewer low-income children in Wisconsin lived in families of this kind, whereas more low-income children in California and Texas did.

### Children in Low-Income Families with Food-Related Problems, by State, 1996–1997



Source: Urban Institute

### Children (%) Living in Families That Worried about or Experienced Difficulty Affording Food, 1996–1997

Food Problems	AL	CA	CO	FL	MA	MI	MN	MS	NJ	NY	TX	WA	WI	US
<b>Under 200% of poverty level</b>														
None	46.6	41.1	44.7	44.9	45.0	48.1	49.9	43.0	44.8	42.6	39.5	45.9	53.2	46.1
Some	53.4	58.9	55.3	55.2	55.0	51.9	50.1	57.0	55.2	57.5	60.5	54.1	46.8	53.9
<b>Over 200% of poverty level</b>														
None	85.8	84.8	83.0	82.2	84.8	86.4	86.7	87.5	86.3	81.7	84.9	82.6	87.9	84.6
Some	14.2	15.2	17.0	17.9	15.2	13.6	13.3	12.6	13.8	18.3	15.1	17.4	12.1	15.4
<b>All incomes</b>														
None	67.0	63.1	69.9	64.3	72.8	73.4	75.7	61.8	74.3	64.8	62.4	69.4	76.7	68.2
Some	33.0	36.9	30.2	35.7	27.2	26.6	24.4	38.2	25.7	35.2	37.6	30.6	23.3	31.8

Figures in color represent statistically significant differences from the national average at the .05 confidence level. Figures in black are not statistically significantly different from the national average. All figures in text, charts, and table are rounded. Source: Urban Institute