

Aotearoa, land of the long wide bare cupboard

Food Insecurity in New Zealand Part 3:
Children's experience of food insecurity
in New Zealand

CHiLD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP

This paper describes what it is like for children in New Zealand who grow up in food-insecure households, using data on their nutrition and health, and also quotes from research with children conducted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

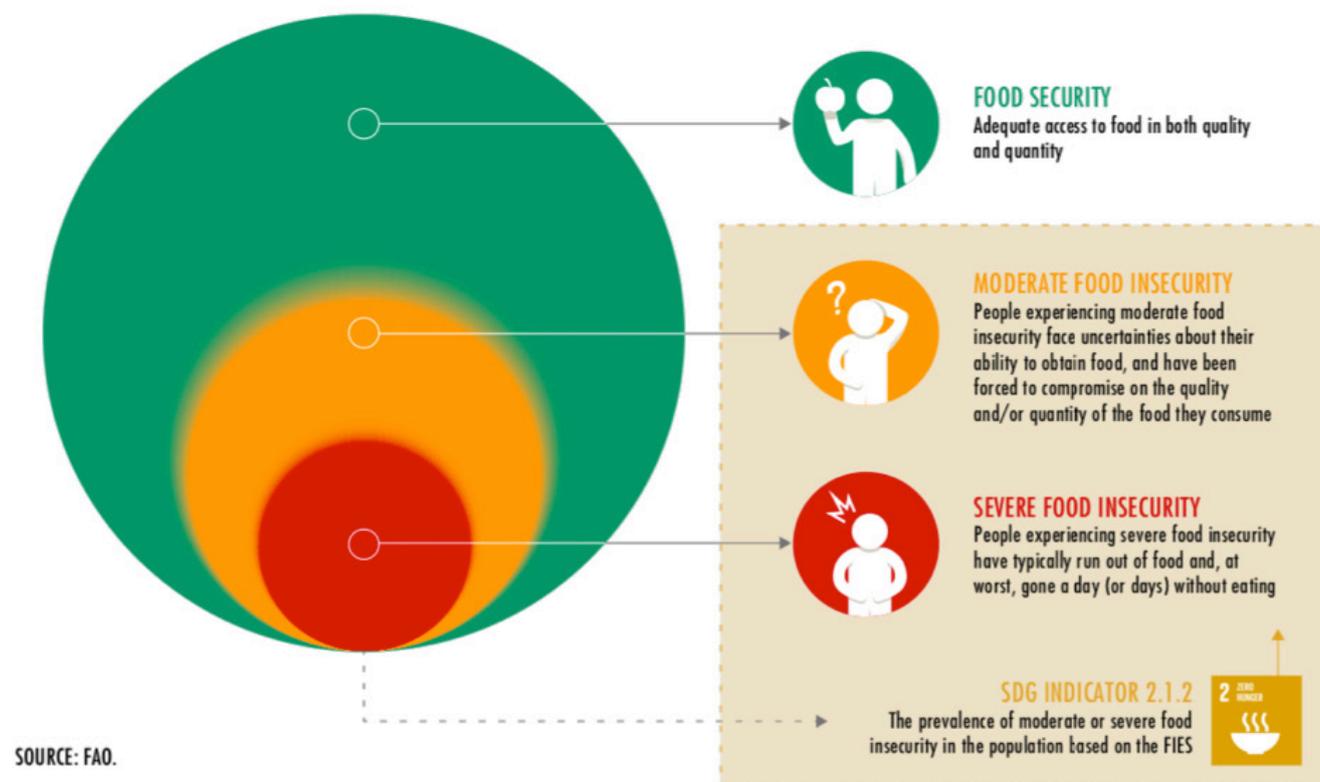
Children's experience of food insecurity in New Zealand

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The New Zealand Government has committed to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which includes Goal 2 to "end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition."¹ The Ministry of Health reports that one in five children aged 2-14 years in New Zealand (19 percent) live in households with moderate to severe food insecurity.²

Food security is defined in New Zealand² as when a household has:

- Access and availability to nutritionally adequate and safe foods.
- The ability to acquire such foods in a socially acceptable way.
- The ability to meet cultural needs with food (e.g. hosting and gifting).



SOURCE: FAO.

Figure 1: Food insecurity severity levels measured to monitor progress on SDG Goal 2

Source: 1. www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/
2. 2015/16 New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health, 2019)
3. www.occ.org.nz/listening2kids/what-children-tell-us/

Which children are food insecure?

Food insecurity is more common for New Zealand children who:

- Live in the most deprived neighbourhoods;
- Have low household income;
- Are supported on a government benefit;
- Live in a rented home, either in public or private housing (just over half of all households who were food insecure lived in a privately rented house);
- Are Pacific or Maori ethnicity (although 57 percent of children living in food-insecure households are Pakeha); or
- Live with two or more other children in the household.²

"Money may not be the key to happiness but it is the key to living and I know many people who struggle."

"We need more food, water, fruit and vegetables."

How does food insecurity affects children's nutrition?

Children living in households with moderate to severe food insecurity are less likely to receive the nutrition they need for healthy development. Compared to children in food secure households, children facing food insecurity:

- Have lower fruit and vegetable intake;
- Are less likely to eat breakfast at home before school; and
- Have more fast food and more fizzy drinks.²

Food insecurity can lead to excess weight gain because cheaper, energy-dense food is easier to access. Becoming overweight may also be the result of children overeating when food is available in response to periods without sufficient food.²

Not all research finds an association between food insecurity and being overweight or obese, but in New Zealand across all age groups, children in food-insecure households were less likely to be a healthy weight and more likely to be overweight or obese compared to children in food secure households.²

A lack of good nutrition in childhood can influence taste and food preferences, and set up poor eating behaviours that last a lifetime.

"Families have to turn to cheap food like takeaways. You can't afford to go to the doctors. Can't afford a nice house."

"Can't buy food - without food you can't focus and learn."

"It's a good idea [providing food to hungry children in schools] because it helps and makes us feel like people care."

What effect does food insecurity have on child health?

Parents in food insecure households are more concerned about their child's health and development compared to other parents (Figure 1 and 2). Two out of every five children (41 percent) in severe to moderately food insecure households had unmet need for primary care, which means they couldn't see the doctor when needed.²

'Sometimes you can't afford what you need. Can't afford experiences - camps and school trips, education, food - like if you have bad health because you can only afford the bad stuff, you're never gonna get healthy.'

'Kids get mocked, sometimes kids tease kids who don't have lunch or breakfast.'

Figure 1: Household food insecurity and concerns about child development (PEDS, 2014/15 and 2015/16 New Zealand Health Survey, Ministry of Health 2019)

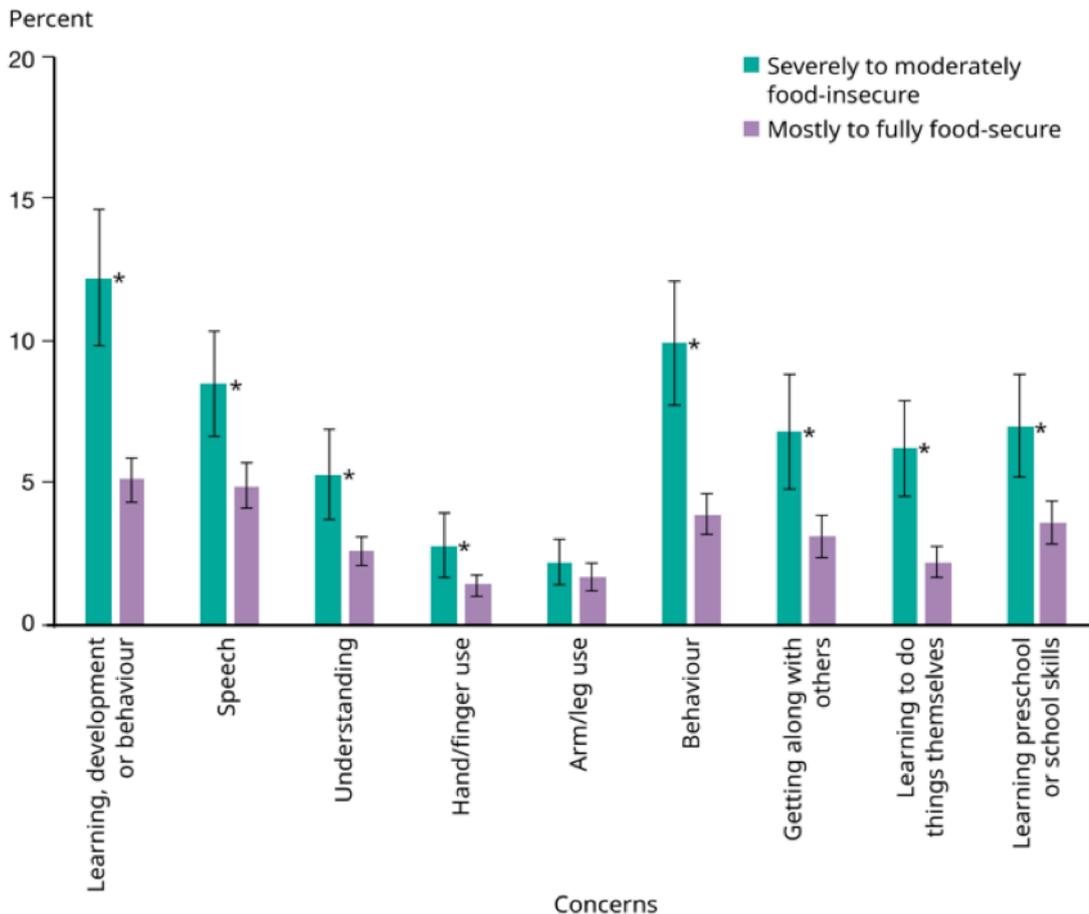
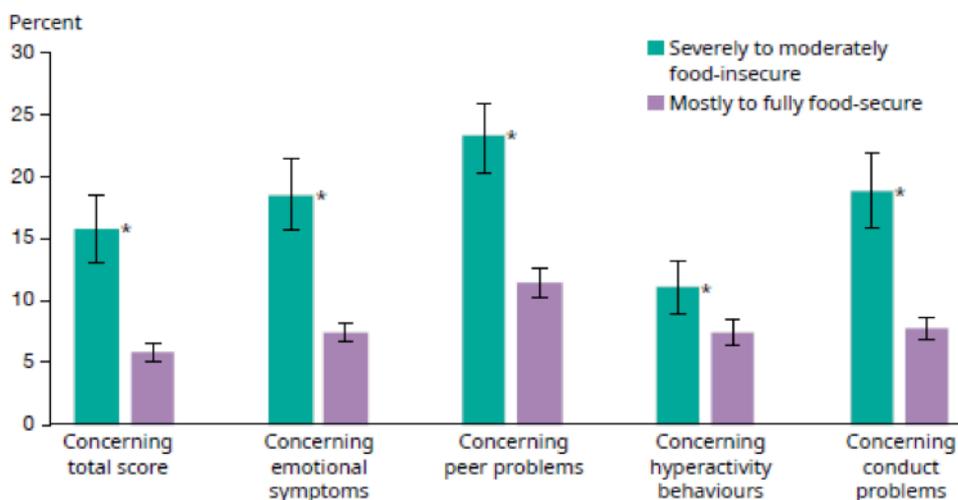


Figure 2: Household food insecurity and concerns about child development (SDQ, 2014/15 and 2015/16 New Zealand Health Survey, Ministry of Health 2019)



Footnote: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Indicator

* indicates a statistically significant difference between children in food-secure households and food-insecure households (p<0.05). Estimates are unadjusted.

Children's ideas to solve food insecurity

In 2012, the Office of the Children's Commissioner collected the views of 278 children and young people from seven high deprivation areas throughout New Zealand.

A very common theme across all of the discussion groups was of hunger and lacking nutritional food.

When asked what they thought the Government should do to help children and families who don't have much money, children asked for the Government to:

'Cut the GST on food'

-

'Subsidise food, health essentials'

-

'Lessen the price for fruit and veges'

-

'Give fruit and vegetables to people who can't afford it'

-

'Swap prices for fast food with healthy food outlets'

And a resounding overall message was that:

'Healthy food should be cheaper'

'Parents in food insecure households are more concerned about their child's health & development compared to other parents.'

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References

1. www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/
2. 2015/16 New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health, 2019)
3. www.occ.org.nz/listening2kids/what-children-tell-us/
4. Our views matter: Children and young people talk about solutions to poverty. (OCC 2012)

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What children tell us
www.occ.org.nz