

Researchers find association between food insecurity and developmental risk in children

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Researchers from Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) and Boston Medical Center (BMC), in collaboration with researchers from Arkansas, Maryland, Minnesota and Pennsylvania, have found that children living in households with food insecurity, are more likely to be at developmental risk during their first three years of life, compared to similar households that are not food insecure. This study appears in the January 2008 issue of the journal *Pediatrics*.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that 16.7 percent of all U.S. households with children less than six years of age had food insecurity in 2005, reporting limited or uncertain availability of enough food for an active healthy life. In children aged less than three years, food insecurity has been associated with poor infant health, and the likelihood of hospitalization.

The Children's Sentinel Nutritional Assessment Program (C-SNAP) interviewed caregivers from low-income households with children aged four to 36 months at five pediatric clinic/emergency department sites in Boston, Little Rock, Baltimore, Minneapolis and Philadelphia. The target child from each household was weighed and weight-for-age score was calculated.

In the sample of 2,010 families, the researchers found 21 percent reported food insecurity. The results of the analyses revealed that children from food-insecure households, compared with those from food-secure households, were two thirds more likely to experience developmental risks. Household food insecurity, (with or without the report of family hunger), even in the presence of appropriate weight-for age, is an important risk factor for the health, development and behavior of children less than three years of age.

According to the researchers the clinical and public policy implications of this study are striking. "Providing nutritional and developmental interventions to young children and their families is a proactive step that might decrease the need for later, more extensive interventions for developmentally or behaviorally impaired children of school age," said lead author Ruth Rose-Jacobs, ScD, an assistant professor of pediatrics at BUSM and a research scientist at BMC.

"Interventions for food insecurity and developmental risk are available and overall have been successful. Linking families to the Food Stamp Program and/or the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children is an important intervention that should be recommended if indicated by risk surveillance or developmental screening," she adds.

Source: Boston University

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