# Chapter 6
# Food Insecurity and Literacy Learning

**Smita Guha**
*St. John's University, USA*

## ABSTRACT

*Food insecurity occurs when there is no consistent access to enough food. There are different reasons for food shortage leading to food insecurity. As per Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, food is a basic need and must be met. Lack of availability of food develops food insecurity among adults and children. Food insecurity results in physical and mental health issues. Food insecurity is evident among some of the homeless people. To overcome food insecurity, literacy learning plays a major role. Families and children suffering from food insecurity need support and education.*

## INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

Food insecurity occurs when consistent access to enough food is lacking. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active and healthy life. (US Department of Agriculture, 2019). Food insecurity could be due to lack of available financial resources for food at the household level. Hunger and food insecurity are closely related. One who is repeatedly hungry and uncertain about access to food develops food insecurity. Contributing to food insecurity are other factors such as poverty, low wages, high medical bills, acute and chronic illness.

### Research on Different Reasons of Food Shortage Leading to Food Insecurity

High rates of population growth, drought and poverty all play a huge role in causing food shortage. Other causes of food shortage include unemployment, food waste, lack of farming lands, increases in food prices, natural disasters, climate change, forceful takeover of land by others, violence, wars and biofuels. Food insecurity is a serious problem in 2020-2021 because of the economic impact of COVID-19. As a result, physical and mental health issues put more families at risk. The crisis increased food insecurity, due to lack of reliable access to affordable, and nutritious food. Hunger relief organizations estimate that

17 million people in the United States could become food insecure because of the pandemic, bringing the total to more than 54 million people in the country. Coleman-Jensen, A., et al. (2019); US Department of Agriculture, (2019); Healthy People (2020).

## Problems Resulting From Food Insecurity

Numerous serious issues result from food insecurity. Research indicates food insecurity leads to obesity among children and adults, typically because healthier organic or whole foods are more expensive and can be more difficult to access. Further, low-income individuals may not live close to an affordable grocery store. Food insecurity is associated with preventable, life-threatening diseases including high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, and stroke. For young children food insecurity is associated with poor health, chronic illness and special needs. In addition, there is clear evidence that food insecurity also takes a toll on mental health, especially for young people. Among teenagers, food insecurity can increase anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide, exacerbate symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and substance use disorder. Other issues include hypertension, coronary heart disease (CHD), hepatitis, stroke, cancer, asthma, diabetes, arthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and kidney disease. (Gregory & Coleman-Jensen, 2017).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs emphasized the importance of basic needs. As per Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943), food is a basic need, and must be met. The research review by Wiecha, Dwyer & Dunn-Strohecker (1991) discussed nutrition and related health problems among homeless people. They stated that many homeless people eat few meals per day and are more likely to have inadequate diets and poorer nutritional status. Among homeless people, further, the risks may include malnutrition, obesity and nutrition-related health concerns.

Literacy learning is the ability to identify, understand and communicate in any context. The Knowledge, Attitude, Behavior (KAB) theory began with the premise that knowledge was a necessary and possibly sufficient condition for behavior change. However, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) suggests that it is the responsibility of nutrition educators to consider the social environment to better understand how people make food choices and to facilitate and encourage more healthy choices. Even with donated food, it is important how people prepare the food. Some research has identified the methods in working with mothers, living in shelter with their children, to become more aware and independent in taking care of themselves and their children. It is essential to pay attention to the needs of children in order to prevent future problems. This could ideally lead to a decrease in health care costs.

## Research on Food Insecurity

There are a lot of people throughout the world who suffer due to shortage of food. They do not know when and how they will get their next meal. Millions of people live in hunger every day. In some areas of the world, family members even take turns eating per day. That is how they develop food insecurity. In 2018, it was reported that 1 in 9 Americans, that is 37 million people, suffered from food insecurity.

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