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ACP Michigan Chapter Meeting 2022 - Medical Student Day

Medical Student Poster #9

Category: Research

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Evaluating Emotional Distress Among Michigan Food Insecure Communities During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background: Increasing data has shown that in order to understand the pathogenesis and widespread effects of COVID-19 fully, we must broaden the public health discussion surrounding COVID and consider how factors such as access to food have impacted the well-being of racially diverse communities. While the neuropsychological impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic have been well established, there is limited data on whether the Pandemic has influenced the prevalence of depression and emotional distress amongst food insecure communities. The purpose of this research study is to evaluate how the COVID-19 Pandemic has influenced self-reported emotional distress amongst persons experiencing food insecurity in Southeast Michigan.

Methods: Food insecure individuals living in Southeast Michigan completed a 15 multiple choice question survey evaluating emotional distress during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Food insecurity was defined as persons who self-reported that they “in the last 12 months were worried whether their household would run out of food before they were able to get more”. Participants were recruited from food banks in Southeast Michigan. Exclusion criteria included participants younger than 18 years of age and who were not living in the state of Michigan for at least one year prior to the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Categorical variables were analyzed using Fisher’s exact tests.

Results: 96% of participants reported increased anxiety about providing food for themselves and their families since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. 88% of participants reported that since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic, worrying about their food insecurity has caused them increased feelings of emotional distress and depression. Participants who self reported being food insecure during the COVID-19 Pandemic suffered from new onset or worsened depression ($P= 0.024$).

Conclusion: Racially diverse food insecure communities living in Southeast Michigan have experienced increased depression and emotional distress since the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic. These results depict an alarming trend in the severity of mental health burden amongst marginalized communities during the Covid-19 Pandemic and highlight the need for increased mental health advocacy in clinical practice. However, because study participants were recruited electronically, these results may exclude participants without access to technology.