

## Health Fact Sheets

# Household food insecurity, 2017/2018

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# Health Fact Sheets

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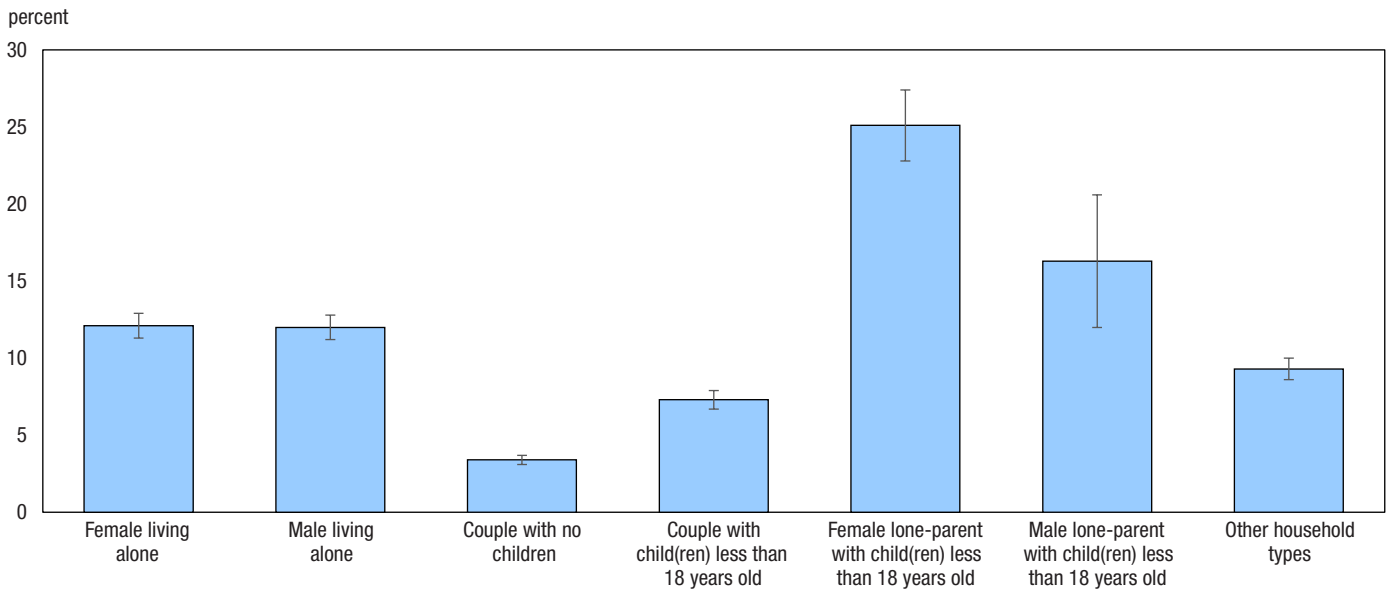
## Household food insecurity, 2017/2018

In 2017/2018, 8.8% of Canadian households - approximately 1.2 million - experienced some moderate or severe food insecurity due to financial constraints.<sup>1</sup> Food insecurity exists when household members report having issues with the quality or quantity of food consumed (moderate food insecurity) or having experienced reduced food intake or disrupted eating pattern (severe food insecurity). These kinds of household food insecurity have been associated with a range of poor physical and mental health outcomes, for example, multiple chronic conditions, distress, and depression.

Moderate and severe household food insecurity varied by family type. The proportion of households that experienced food insecurity was over twice as high for lone-parent families with children than for couples with children. Among households with children, female lone-parent families were the most likely to experience food insecurity (25.1%), followed by male lone-parent families (16.3%) and couples with children (7.3%).<sup>2</sup>

Households in Canada consisting of a couple living alone were the least likely to experience food insecurity (3.4%). Among single-person households, females and males experienced a similar rate of moderate or severe food insecurity (about 12%, chart 1).

**Chart 1** Household food insecurity (moderate or severe), by household type, Canada, 2017/2018



**Source:** Canadian Community Health Survey, 2017/2018.

Household food insecurity (moderate or severe) differs between provinces and territories. Food insecurity was highest among households in Nunavut with 49.4% experiencing food insecurity (about 25.8% moderate and 23.7% severe food insecurity). Of the 5,800 households with children in Nunavut, 62.4% reported food insecurity among the adults and 42.7% reported food insecurity among the children.

Rates of food insecurity were also higher than the national average in Nova Scotia (10.9%), Manitoba (10.2%), Yukon (12.6%), and Northwest Territories (15.9%). Quebec (7.4%) was the only province/territory with a lower proportion of households experiencing food insecurity than the average. All other provinces had rates of food insecurity similar to the national average.

Households who were renting their home had higher rates of moderate or severe food insecurity than those that owned their home. In 2017/2018, 19.1% of households who were renting experienced food insecurity compared to 4.2% of households who owned their home.

In 2017/2018, around 1.6 million out of 14.3 million households (11.9%) in Canada relied on government benefits as their main source of income.<sup>3</sup> Just over one in five (22.5%) of these households were food insecure. For households that relied on other sources of income (such as wages and salaries, job-related pensions, etc.), the rate of food insecurity was much lower, at 6.8%.

## Marginal food insecurity

While historically Statistics Canada has reported on moderate or severe food insecure households, there is evidence suggesting that households that worried about running out of food also have poorer health outcomes than those reporting full food security.<sup>4</sup> When a household indicated worrying about running out of food, this situation is referred to as marginal food insecurity. Marginal food insecurity can be thought of as a “pre-food insecurity that could become moderate or severe if the financial situation in the household does not improve. Because of this, marginal food insecurity is considered as separate from the concept of household food insecurity (being moderate or severe).

A total of 570,000 Canadian households (4.0% of all households) reported marginal food insecurity in 2017/2018. The rate of marginal food insecurity followed similar trends to moderate and severe insecurity, being higher in Nunavut (7.6%) compared to the national average. The rate was similarly highest amongst female lone-parent households (8.0%) compared to other household family types (3.8%).

## About food insecurity

In this article, ‘household food insecurity’ or ‘food insecure households’ refers to moderate or severe food insecurity as measured by the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM). More information is available from the [Health Canada portal on household food security](#). The HFSSM in the CCHS is an 18-question, standardized and validated scale of food insecurity severity that measures inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. More information is available from the Health Canada website: [Determining food security status](#).

Households are said to experience food insecurity when survey respondents indicated that either the adults or children living in that household experienced either a compromise in the quality or quantity of food consumed (moderate food insecurity) or they experienced a reduced food intake or disrupted eating pattern (severe food insecurity). Marginal food insecurity also exists when there is a single indication of worry about running out of food and/or limited food selection due to a lack of money for food. Internationally, food insecurity rates that are reported to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations include moderate or severe insecurity, based on their recommendations.

## References

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## Notes

1. The 2017/2018 reference period for the Canadian Community Health Survey represents the average population over the two-year period. Data were collected from approximately 110,000 respondents over the two years.
2. In this article, when two estimates are said to be different, this indicates that the difference was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level (p value less than 5%).
3. Government benefits include: Employment Insurance, worker's compensation benefits, benefits from the Canada or Quebec Pension Plan, Old Age Security, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, provincial/municipal social assistance or welfare, and Canada Child Benefit.
4. Tarasuk, V., T. Li, A. Mitchell, N. Dachner. 2018. [Commentary – The case for more comprehensive data on household food insecurity](#). *Health promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada*, 38(5):210-213. (accessed May 26, 2020).

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