



Purpose and Scope

Researchers at RTI International, Rutgers University, and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health examined food acquisition practices used by low-income Americans worried about having enough food for themselves and their households.

The study was published in the *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*.

Key Findings

- People reported engaging in diverse food acquisition practices that range in their level of nutritional, food safety, physical, and financial riskiness and frequency of use. Some of the more extreme practices included diluting baby formula, pawning items to have money for food, and eating roadkill.
- Eighty-one percent of the participants reported reduced diet quality, disruption of normal eating patterns, or reduction in food intake during a 12-month period.

Report Sponsor

The study was funded by awards from the National Institutes of Health, the Corporation for the Advancement of Policy Evaluation, Johnson & Johnson, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and John Hopkins Center for a Livable Future.

About RTI International

RTI International is one of the world's leading research institutes, dedicated to improving the human condition by turning knowledge into practice. Our staff of more than 2,800 provides research and technical services to governments and businesses in more than 40 countries in the areas of health and pharmaceuticals, education and training, surveys and statistics, advanced technology, international development, economic and social policy, energy and the environment, and laboratory testing and chemical analysis. For more information, visit www.rti.org.

Research & Policy Brief



Study Illuminates Desperation of Low-Income Americans' Eating Behaviors

What the Study Found

Low-income Americans are scavenging from dumpsters, selling blood, and turning to crime as means of feeding themselves in today's tough economic environment, according to a new study.

The study outlined an in-depth examination of food acquisition practices used by low-income Americans when they were worried about having enough food for themselves and their households.

The study, which collected information from almost 500 people at 50 food pantries and soup kitchens in the state of New Jersey, explored the prevalence rates and potential risks of the practices of those interviewed.

The authors say that understanding what individuals are doing to get food and the frequency with which they are doing it is critical because, in addition to the humane concerns, negative health effects pose serious consequences to the individual, household, community, and larger society.

When concerned about having an adequate food supply for themselves and their households, people reported engaging in diverse food acquisition practices that range in their level of nutritional, food safety, physical, and financial riskiness and frequency of use.

Some of the reported practices are commonly used and publically acceptable, such as using coupons, buying products when they are on sale, and buying in bulk. Others were more extreme, such as diluting baby formula, pawning items to have money for food, and eating roadkill.

The research showed that while almost half of the participants regularly receive food from many public and private assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and local food banks and pantries, 81 percent of the participants reported reduced diet quality, disruption of normal eating patterns, or reduction in food intake during the 12-month period before the survey was administered.

The research showed that low-income individuals use these practices to make up for gaps between the "safety net" and their food needs. According to the authors, this gap poses significant implications for researchers and policy makers to address.