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Food Insecurity at Los Abuelitos

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Abstract

Food insecurity among the senior population is a social problem that can cause malnutrition, chronic conditions, and death. CHISPA Housing Management and Community Services is a non-profit organization that builds low-income senior housing in Monterey County and provides senior hot lunches to its residents. The causes of food insecurity are a lack of income, chronic conditions, and transportation issues. The consequences of food insecurity are the deterioration of their physical and mental health. This capstone project is an assessment that consists of gathering data on the residents who reside at the Los Abuelitos Townhome housing rather than taking advantage of the food security services offered. Surveying questions would assess who participated in on-site and off-site services and who still needed assistance with food insecurity resources. The total number of respondents shows that 96.2% of the senior population at this site is taking advantage of the senior lunch program and food bank distribution. A good recommendation for CHISPA Community Services is to follow up with partner organizations to solve the transportation issue for those who need it. Establishing a sound transportation system will benefit all residents as a community and will fulfill CHISPA's mission statement of building healthy neighborhoods.

Keywords: CHISPA, food insecurity, seniors, older population

Agency & Communities Served

Community Housing Improvement Systems and Planning Association's (CHISPA) mission is to, "Improve people's lives and create healthy neighborhoods by developing, selling, owning and managing affordable homes" (CHISPA, 2014). This nonprofit organization aims to construct affordable housing for low-income families and individuals. The services provided by the Department of Community Services consist of recreational, educational, and food security programs for its residents at the rental property sites. The programs are offered by partnering with many agencies, nonprofit organizations, and individual instructors within the local communities throughout the Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito Counties tri-county areas. Some partnerships include the Council for Monterey County, Alliance on Aging, Alisal Center for the Fine Arts, YMCA, Sol Treasures, Alliance on Aging, and Meals on Wheels. Some services available are music classes, financial literacy, after school activities, computer classes, senior lunches, and a food distribution bank on-site.

The population served by CHISPA are seniors and low-income families in the tri-county area of Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties. Data shows that according to infographics gathered in 2014, percentages are for seniors 11% who are (55 and older), adults rates indicated a percentage of 44% (18-54), youth 20% (11-7), and children consist of 25% (0-10) (CHISPA, 2014). These residents' primary sources of income are employment at a 59% rate, unemployment at a 12% rate, and social security rating at 8% (CHISPA, 2014). For the senior population, sources of income are Pension 9%, Supplemental Social Security 24%, and Social Security 53%. This data indicates this population is of limited income (CHISPA, 2021).

Problem Model Background and Literature Review

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
COVID-19 Pandemic	Food insecurity among the senior population	Chronic disease
Poverty		Malnutrition
High healthcare cost		Fall Risk

Problem Statement

Food insecurity in seniors is a social problem that can cause mental deterioration, poor health, including death. According to Feeding America.org, there were more than 5.5 million seniors who were food insecure in 2021, which is 1 out of 14 seniors (Feeding America). For older adults, food insecurity is linked to disability, health nutrition, and chronic health conditions. Food insecurity has a detrimental impact on the well-being and health of seniors, which can limit their ability to execute their daily activities and live independently.

According to an article published by the Seniors Council of Santa Cruz County, senior residents sixty-five and above need more income to meet their basic needs (Bratten, 2021) with specifically, food being one of them. It has been increasingly difficult for the senior population to make ends meet. Many senior residents throughout the Central Coast are struggling with food insecurity. Nearly one out of five seniors live under the poverty level (Food Research & Action Center). According to the CEO of Community Bridges, this number has been rising in the recent

eighteen months (Bratten, 2021). It is specifically challenging for those homebound seniors to have access to food. Regina Gage, Executive Director for Meals on Wheels of the Salinas Valley, also states that the need for programs to help keep seniors fed is increasing, and the demand continues to grow for these kinds of programs (Bratten, 2021).

The pandemic aggravated previous tendencies in food insecurity that had been present before, which made food insecurity a more significant problem in the last few years. Although the demographic population in the county region has only 51,000 residents aged sixty-five and above, it accounts for 12.1% of the total population in this county. Out of that 12.1% senior population, 11.8% experience food insecurity (Monterey County, 2020).

Contributing Factors

COVID-19 Pandemic

The level of food insecurity has been hit particularly hard after the COVID-19 crisis in Monterey County. During the pandemic, economic impacts increased food insecurity in older adults, leading to critical challenges in food security and food access for this population. Seniors were affected by staying-home orders, inflation, high unemployment, and several other economic impacts. COVID-19 increased isolation in seniors because older people are more susceptible to mortality and morbidity from COVID-19, and seniors were worried about their safety while accessing grocery stores (Nicklett et al., 2023). Assistant professor Cindy Leug, ScD, MPH of nutrition and public health, in Boston, stated that, “Individuals experiencing food insecurity were at more critical levels than people experiencing food insecurity for the first time” (Frieden, 2023). The pandemic had a major impact on this population.

Poverty

Seniors need more income to meet their basic needs, including food. The cost of living continues to increase with inflation, while seniors live on fixed incomes (Bretten, 2021). Older individuals who live below the poverty line struggle financially to afford the food they need—considering how food prices have increased in the last few years. They cannot afford their rent and continue to pay for their Medicare insurance and, consequently, struggle to make ends meet (Bretten, 2021). Roughly 16.5 million or one out of three seniors' income is below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). 2.3 million elderly individuals live off Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI), averaging only \$511 monthly. *The Institute on Assets and Social Policy's Senior Financial Stability* database reveals "millions of elders struggling with their monthly expenses" (NCOA, 2023). CHISPA'S Senior Complex Los Abuelitos have a greater need because this senior population experiences additional challenges such as language barriers and culture differences.

High Healthcare Cost

Food insecurity rates appear to be higher among older seniors who are less educated, with lower incomes and lower socioeconomic status, and who live in poverty. In addition, Hispanics and Blacks who never married are separated or divorced. Individuals at a higher risk of experiencing hunger are those with limited resources and finances. Another factor is the expensive cost of healthy foods (Berkowitz, 2019). Furthermore, other contributing factors include high healthcare costs for those managing existing chronic conditions. It can be challenging for the older population struggling with medical expenses which results in food insecurity (Food Research and Action Center, 2019). Oftentimes elderly individuals are forced to choose between their medication or groceries.

Consequences

Chronic health conditions

Food insecurity and poverty, along with poor nutrition, have detrimental impacts on the well-being and health of seniors, which can limit their ability to perform their daily activities and live independently. Older individuals who are food insecure seldom experience adverse physical and mental health outcomes and conditions, such as poor health status, diabetes, lower cognitive function, depression, limitations in daily activities, congestive heart failure, hypertension, history of heart attacks, asthma, gum disease, and osteoporosis (Food Research & Action Center, 2019). In addition, the correlation between food insecurity and health is robust for diet-related diseases: Food-insecure seniors, compared to food-secure seniors, have a 19% greater chance of having high blood pressure 65% greater chance of experiencing a heart attack (Food Research & Action Center, 2019). The goal is to assist with food security at Los Abuelitos senior population to prevent any of the negative outcomes mentioned above.

Malnutrition

Malnutrition in seniors has been a challenging health issue, associated with increased morbidity and mortality, and also with physical decline, which contributes to a large range of acute implications for daily activities and a quality of life in general. Malnutrition is common in the senior population is seen by either low body mass index or involuntary weight loss, as well as hidden deficiencies micronutrient deficiencies which are more difficult to evaluate and often are overlooked in the community of older adults (Norman, Haß, & Pirlich, 2021).

One of the main contributing factors to malnutrition and well being in the senior population is access to food. Low income seniors struggle to afford basic needs and their medication for their chronic illnesses, even when they have medical or medicaid healthcare programs certain medications are not covered by their healthcare insurances forcing them to pay

out of pocket for their prescriptions. Not being able to afford nutritious foods and having accessibility to them takes a toll on their health, having to skip meals to be able to afford their medication and have less healthy nutrition choices which directly affects their health and overall well-being (Berkowitz, 2019). It is essential and a moral duty to advocate for the older population and ensure they have access to food in order for them to live a healthy life.

Fall Risk

Food insecurity tremendously increases the risk of falls, the leading cause of nonfatal and fatal injuries for seniors (Garcia, 2018). According to a study done by Medicare Advantage, members encounter a 1.69 times greater likelihood of experiencing a fall in the previous year, in contrast to their food-secure counterparts (Berkowitz, 2019). Data collected by the National Health Interview Survey/Medical Expenditure Panel indicates that healthcare costs rise by food insecurity within the senior population, causing taxpayers a burden (Garcia, 2018). It is crucial to develop and support local programs that can meet the needs of the demand. Raising awareness in the community through outreach programs promoting and advocating for seniors to end food insecurity.

Project Description

Working Title: Food Insecurity at Los Abuelitos

Project Description

This Capstone Project aims to show the need for an intervention to alleviate food insecurity among the Monterey County CHISPA Los Abuelitos residents. This residential complex is a senior housing community comprising 35 residential units, which CHISPA Housing Management fills. This research will be conducted under the supervision of the internship mentor to accurately assess the magnitude of the need for food security at this site. Residential

demographic data collected and compiled with standards and guidelines set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that 90% of its residents are extremely low-income. The other 10% are very low-income (CHISPA, 2021). The investigation will be conducted by having senior residents at Los Abuelitos fill out a questionnaire with specific questions. Data gathered will indicate the difficulties experienced regarding the affordability, accessibility, and nutritional value of the food needed for this population to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Project Justification

Poverty is a contributing factor that causes the elderly to lack food security due to their extremely low-income income situation. This investigation is intended to address this social issue. The main purpose of this project is to understand the economic challenges these populations face and the lack of food security they experience. Which exacerbated when the COVID-19 pandemic took place.

The number of older individuals experiencing food insecurity and the lack of sufficient nutritious and affordable food to enjoy a healthy and active lifestyle has doubled in recent years. In 2017, 7.9% of households in the US had at least one adult aged 65 and older encountered food insecurity; in addition, 8.6% of households made up of adults aged 65 or older residing alone were food insecure. Experts anticipate that the number of individuals 65 and older will rise from 49.2 million in 2016 to more than 73 million by 2030. The quantity of older adults living in food-insecure homes will likely progress to a dramatic increase in the absence of enhanced interventions (Pooler et al, 2019).

These demographic inclines are critical for healthcare officials because food insecurity among older individuals is associated with multiple adverse health outcomes. Food-insecure

older people are more prone to be in poor or fair health, with often associated comorbidities, including hypertension, heart disease, depression, and diabetes. Food-insecure older individuals are more likely to have impediments in activities of daily living (Pooler et al, 2019).

The agency expects to learn more about the issues and needs of Los Abuelitos residents and what can be done to assist them further with food security. What are the constraints that each resident might have based on the questionnaires that will be conducted. The issue that was addressed recently was food insecurity including those participating in the senior lunch program. The senior lunch program is being offered on site by Meals on Wheels to Los Abuelitos Senior complex residents. The organization is aware that not all residents participate in the lunch program. It is unclear as to why not all residents fully participate in the lunch program provided by CHISPA in collaboration with Meals on Wheels.

Benefits

The long-term benefit for the organization (CHISPA Community Services) is that it will be able to assist with food security for its residents when residents voice their concerns. The project will help determine how efficiently the agency will utilize grants and funds for its food assistance programs. The long-term benefits for the residents will be an improvement in healthy living.

Implementation Process

Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes

This research aims to precisely evaluate the demographics of the Monterey County CHISPA Los Abuelitos senior complex residents. This research focuses on food insecurity as to whether residents worry about food running out before they get money to buy more. It will also evaluate whether the residents take advantage of the lunch program. It will evaluate those who

participate in the lunch program and those who do not. Which group experiences the most food insecurity at the Los Abuelitos Senior site? The assessment plan measures whether the information gathered will help the CHISPA organization respond to interventions to assist this population with better food security. The measurables will include interviewing thirty-five residents during the senior lunch program. By interviewing the residents the organization will have better information about the needs of their residents.

Figure 1: Implementation Plan

Task	Timeline	Parties Involved	Materials/Services Needed	Deliverables
Discuss with mentor regarding ideas	August 26, 2023	Mentor	Pen and paper to write them down	Focused on a particular location
Email site manager to set a 1:1 meeting	October 6, 2023	Los Abuelitos site manager and mentor	Laptop	Set meeting
Meet with Mentor to discuss surveys	By October 11, 2023	Mentor, Intern, and Los Abuelitos Staff	meeting agenda, questions, authorization to access residents	Meeting with residents
Meeting with staff at site	By October 13, 2023	Mentor, director, intern and residents	Access to community room	Authorization to distribute surveys and questionnaires
Create Survey draft	By October 10, 2023	Residents, intern, Los Abuelitos Staff	Computer device	Survey
Email Professor for	October 11	Professor Capstone	Survey Draft	Plan date

feedback/suggestions		instructor		
Collaborate with senior lunch program to set date to go to site and conduct surveys	October 12, 2023	Los Abuelitos senior lunch program staff and mentor	Notebook pen and laptop	Date planned
Sent Survey questions to be approved by mentors via email	October 16, 2023	Mentors	Laptop	Approval of survey questions
Conduct survey to residents	October 18, 2023	Mentor, Los Abuelitos residents and senior lunch program staff	Laptop, notebook and pen	Complete surveys
Email Professor for assistance regarding data		Professor Capstone Instructor	Laptop	Plan date
Analyze and interpret data	October 19, 2023	Mentors	Laptop Notebook and pen	Display data or graphs or charts
Present Data to mentors	October 24, 2023	Mentor	Laptop Notebook and pen	Chart/graphs

Implementation Plan

This project came to mind after interning in September of 2022. Affinity was developed with the older population at senior CHISPA complex sites. It came to pass that interns were sent

by the organization several times to observe the lunch programs at the different sites offered. It became common knowledge that the Los Abuelitos site is the one that has an extreme poverty level. After speaking with mentors regarding possible capstone projects, it was agreed that it would be beneficial to focus on one site. Mentors at the organization conceded that evaluating the food insecurity at this site would be a good idea. A hypothesis was established that accessibility was one key factor of food insecurity, especially for those disabled or with limited mobility. This boundary has kept residents from accessing or participating in food programs provided by CHISPA and its collaborators to assist with food security.

The next step is to create a needs assessment listed in (Appendix A) above. Upon creating this assessment, appointments will be set with the Los Abuelitos Residential Manager to understand the population at this premises.

Project Results

The overall objective of this needs assessment project was to collect as many surveys as possible to determine the level of food insecurity at the Los Abuelitos site. What are the reasons why seniors at this complex cannot access sufficient food security for healthy living? Los Abuelitos is a senior housing community with 35 units filled with predominantly low-income, retired tenants. Lunch is provided daily by Meals on Wheels, and the visible attendance is low. A lunch program employee assisted with approaching residents to fill out surveys during lunch.

Collecting information will be challenging because this population includes many residents with mobility and health issues that isolate them in their living spaces. Many of the seniors have language barriers and lack writing skills. This challenge was encountered by the organization's personnel previously when filling out applications for renewal of their senior

lunch program at this complex. Additional trips were made to the Abuelitos Senior Complex to increase the respondents' potential of the survey going door to door, asking them if they would participate in the surveys.

The needs assessment result was the collection of 26 out of 35 senior lunch participants—twenty-one from the Los Abuelitos residents and the other five from the Gloria residents. The data collected showed that in addition to the lunch program, most of them also participated in the food bank distribution program at their site and in the transportation voucher. It was also concluded from the survey data that transportation significantly affects this population's mobility. Another issue found by the completion of the surveys is that many of this senior population have medical conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure, which influence their food consumption. Most residents stated that they had enough to eat but not the kinds of food they wanted. A significant concern for them was high rents and low income. The majority of the population is retired, living under social security income. The average income collected a month is \$700.00. Upon collecting the data and presenting it to mentors, the results were surprising to them.

Personnel assumed that only food security was needed and realized that transportation was a significant issue for this senior population at this site. Although some residents stated they received transportation vouchers, more is needed. The allowance of vouchers is depleted rather quickly due to their ongoing doctor visits, checkups, and pharmacy prescription pick-ups. Their priorities are to keep their doctor's appointments, their health maintenance routine checkups, and get their medicine prescribed. More than their transportation vouchers will be needed when the residents complete all their healthcare appointments. The needs assessment will be helpful to the CHISPA organization in informing them of the missing resources. The organization can follow

up to implement additional resources and find other agencies to partner with and help alleviate the transportation issue. Another issue that surfaces when looking at the data collected is that many senior tenants at Los Abuelitos Complex have health conditions requiring a healthy diet. For example, many of the residents noted having diabetes. They had issues maintaining a healthy diet due to the high cost of healthy foods.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Lack of transportation aid and chronic health conditions can significantly influence food consumption, leading to malnutrition and food insecurity. The Senior population can develop chronic diseases that can impact their overall health and way of living. This Capstone project collected data on residents residing in the Los Abuelitos Apartment Complex and participating in the senior lunch program CHISPA Community Services offered in collaboration with Meals on Wheels. The survey assessment provided data on who participated in the on-site food security program and who still needs assistance with additional resources to become food secure.

As the evaluation learned the needs and deficiencies of the community being assessed by the survey regarding food insecurity, the intention was to improve the lunch program with culture-sensitive meals this senior population is accustomed to eating. The idea was to improve the amount of food services in this community. For example, they have tailored meals to meet the needs of specific combinations of conditions or health conditions. It realized that this process must be developed by a collaboration team and implemented slowly. The process is complicated because of the budgets that the organization had to work with funding. In addition, the Los Abuelitos population is very culturally centered. It takes work to engage them in new eating options.

- **What is your conclusion about the contributing factor addressed in your project and the overall issue identified in your based on your results?**

Potential recommendations to enhance the CHISPA's Senior Lunch Program and fulfill the food insecurity needs at Los Abuelitos Senior Housing Complex are to collaborate and establish with other agencies and programs to introduce Medically-Tailored meals. The program will be developed to establish home-delivered meals tailored to fulfill specific health conditions or a combination of conditions.

Recommendations to enhance the CHISPA's Senior Lunch Program and fulfill the food insecurity needs at Los Abuelitos Senior Housing Complex include collaborating and establishing partnerships with other agencies and organizations providing food security programs to introduce Medically-Tailored meals. The program will develop and establish home-delivered meals tailored to fulfill specific health conditions or a combination of conditions. For example, they are referring to Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs for those seniors 60 and older who are below 185% of the federal poverty level. Annual vouchers can be issued for eligible food items in roadside stands, farmers' markets, and community-supported agriculture programs. Having all these resources combined with reliable transportation to access food is essential. Transportation issues could be resolved by increasing the transportation vouchers to add Uber rides and lyfts as well as creating a volunteer basis transportation center where the community can participate in donating their time and resources to transport seniors to pick up groceries or for others to pick them up for them and deliver them to their residences. Combining both ideas can help solve the food insecurity issue among the older population. Another recommendation would be to Another recommendation would be to possibly suggest future interns consider

taking this as a potential follow-up capstone project with a more in depth study or assessment to pinpoint every aspect of the issue.

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Appendix A

Need Assessment Survey

1) In the last 12 months, the food that I/we bought just did not last, and I/we did not have enough money to get more.

- Often true
- Sometimes true
- Never true
- Don't Know or Declined to answer

2) In the last 12 months, which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household?

- Enough of the kinds of food we want to eat
- Enough but not always the kinds of food we want to eat
- Sometimes not enough to eat
- Often not enough to eat
- Enough of the kinds of food we want to eat

3) In the last 12 months, did you ever run short of money and try to make your food, or your food money go further?

- Yes
- No

4. In the past year, has your household used any of the below strategies to make sure you have food? Check all that apply.

- Got help from friends/outside family
- Used the services of a community resource partner (e.g., food bank, school pantry, church food pantry, etc.)
- Watered down food/drinks to make them last longer
- Skipped or reduced the size of meals
- Sold/pawned personal property
- Purchased less expensive and/or more unhealthy foods/drinks
- Other

5. Which of the following best describes your employment status? -Homemaker

- Seasonal work
- Employed for wages
- Out of work for less than 1 year -Out of work for more than 1 year -Retired

- Retired
- Unable to work

6) During those times that the food that you bought just did not last, and you did not have enough money to get more” – which of the following made it challenging to purchase more food? Check all that apply.

- Seasonal work
- Irregular work and/or extended periods of unemployment
- Unexpected health care expenses (due to health emergencies)
- Unexpected household expenses (e.g. car repairs)
- Increases in housing/rental costs

7) If you needed food in the last 12 months, but were not able to access it, what are some of the challenges you faced in accessing food? Check all that apply.

- Did not know who to contact or where to find services and food
- Limited transportation options made it difficult to travel to community resources
- Ineligibility/too many restrictions
- Language barriers
- Hours of operation are limited
- Cannot find foods that meet my/our dietary restrictions (cultural, medical)
- Limited physical mobility
- Concerned about interactions with government authorities
- Concerned about the social stigma of seeking resources
- Other. Please list.

8) Do you (your spouse in your household) have a medical condition or religious restrictions that influence food consumption?

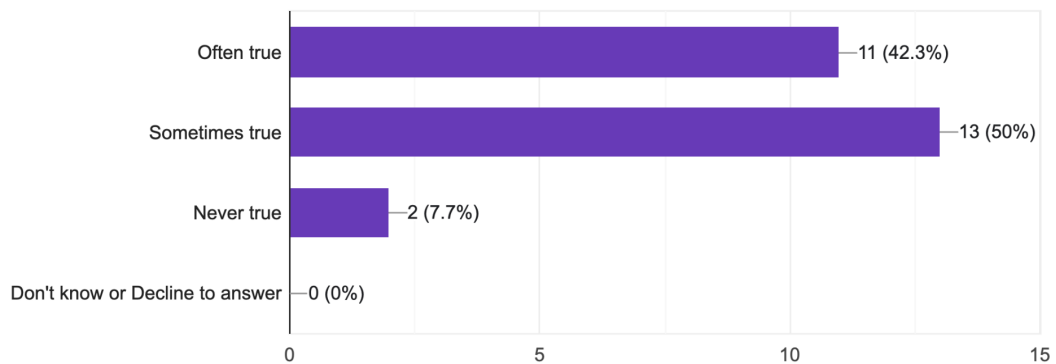
- Yes
- No

9) List Chronic Conditions

Appendix B

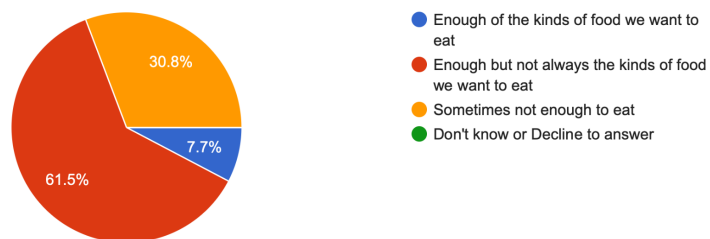
1) In the last last 2 months, the food I/we bought just did not have enough money to get more

26 responses



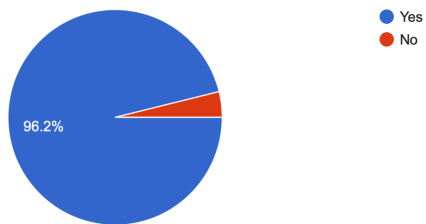
2) In the last 12 months, which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household?

26 responses



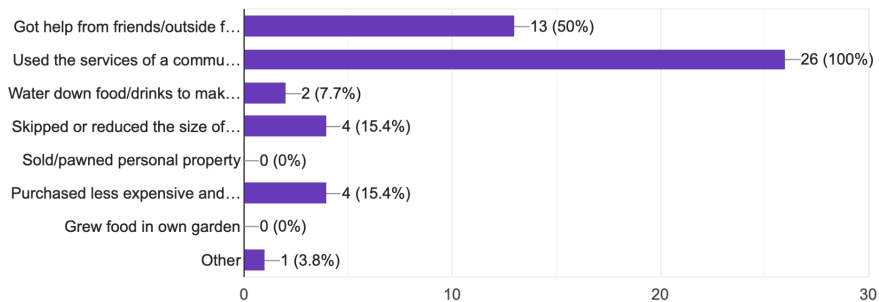
3) In the last we months, did you ever run short of money and try to make your food,, or your food money go further?

26 responses



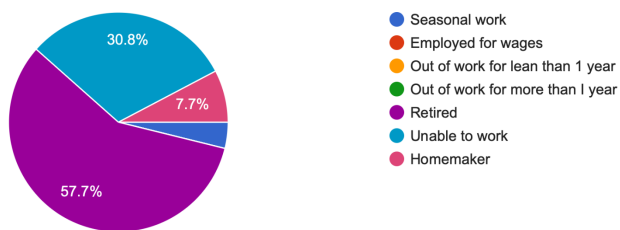
4) In the past year, has your household used any of the below strategies to make sure you have food? Check all that apply.

26 responses



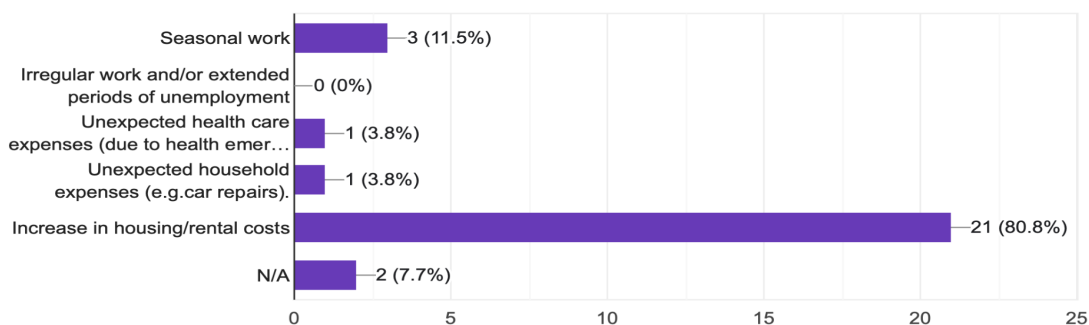
5) Which of the following best describes your employment status?

26 responses



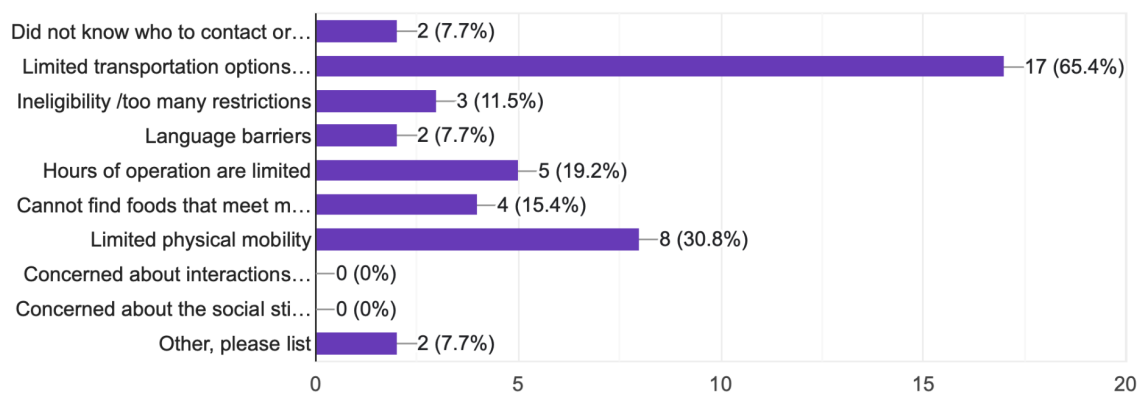
6) During those times that the food that you bought just did not last, and you did not have enough money to get more-which of the following made it challenging to purchase more food? Check all that apply.

26 responses



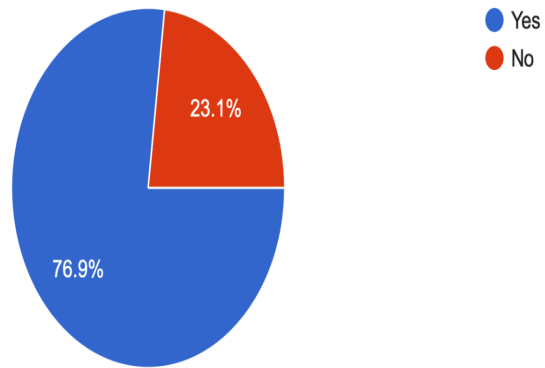
7) If you needed food in the last few months, but were not able to access it, what are some of the challenges you faced in accessing food? Check all that apply.

26 responses



8) Do you or (your spouse in your household) have a medical condition or religious restriction that influence food consumption?

26 responses



9) Chronic conditions

24 responses

