

### **Youth in action for health project: An assessment of food insecurity among ethnically diverse high school students**

**Hurjessica Virk, BS<sup>1</sup>**, Annette Aalborg, DrPH<sup>1</sup>, Devin Oates, BS<sup>1</sup>, Daeja Tillis, BS<sup>1</sup>, Shannon Frisinger, MA<sup>2</sup>, Matthew Ristow, BS<sup>2</sup>, Jessica Schwind, PhD, MPH, CPH<sup>3</sup>, Janis Ho, MPH, CPH<sup>4</sup>, Amy Vang, MPH, CPH<sup>1</sup> and Salina Ramachhita, BS<sup>1</sup>

(1)Touro University California, Vallejo, CA, (2)Jesse Bethel High School, Vallejo, CA, (3)Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA, (4)Kaiser Permanente, Elk Grove, CA

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**Background:** Food insecurity has been linked to poor adolescent health and negative educational outcomes. Using a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) approach, the *Youth in Action* project integrates public health inquiry with youth development and leadership in a high school Biomedical Academy program.

**Research Question:** This study assessed food insecurity among ethnically diverse youth, and examined associations between perceptions of food security, school success, and socioeconomic variables.

**Methods:** Baseline surveys were administered to 11th grade students (n =76). Survey questions were adapted from the California Healthy Kids Survey measuring food insecurity using the following proxy variables: access to healthy food at home and school, eating breakfast, and skipped meals due to finances. Other variables measured include perception of school success and primary language spoken at home. Descriptive statistics and contingency table analysis were used to characterize each variable and determine associations.

**Results:** Surveys indicated 41% of students skipped breakfast, and 43% of students sometimes to often skipped meals due to finances. Additionally, 37% and 67% reported not having access to healthy food at home and school, respectively. No significant association was found between food insecurity and school success. However, speaking a language other than English at home was negatively associated with access to healthy food at home ( $p = 0.009$ ), suggesting the healthy immigrant effect.

**Conclusion:** The results highlight a need to develop programs to improve food security at home and schools, especially among ethnically diverse youth. Utilizing a YPAR approach could assist with engaging youth in improving food insecurity.

Assessment of individual and community needs for health education Diversity and culture Implementation of health education strategies, interventions and programs Public health or related education Public health or related research

