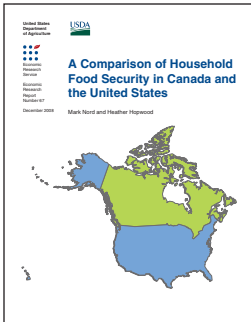


ERS *Report Summary*

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A Comparison of Household Food Security in Canada and the United States

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Both the United States (U.S.) and Canada have stated objectives to improve domestic food security, defined as access at all times to adequate food for an active, healthy life. This study examines the extent to which the basic food needs of households in the two countries are met. Using nationally representative surveys from the U.S. and Canada, the study compared rates of food insecurity in economic and demographic subgroups of the two populations. The analysis found that food insecurity was less prevalent in Canada than in the U.S., and that the difference was not well explained by differences in income, employment, education, household composition, or age.

What Is the Issue?

The extent to which the population of a country is food secure is an indication of its material well-being. Both the U.S. and Canadian Governments have policies and programs intended to promote the well-being of families and individuals by ensuring that the basic needs of the population are adequately met. The effects of such efforts are difficult to assess from surveys within a single country. However, comparisons of the food security of various economic and demographic subpopulations in the two countries may reflect the effectiveness of each country's policies. The analyses may also identify areas for future research by detailing the differences in food security between the two countries.

What Did the Study Find?

Canadians were less likely to live in food-insecure households (7.0 percent of the population) than were U.S. residents (12.6 percent). The percentage of the population living in households with very low food security (characterized by self-assessed inadequacy of food intake and disrupted eating patterns) was also lower in Canada (2.4 percent) than in the U.S. (3.6 percent).

To a great extent, the same demographic and economic characteristics were associated with food insecurity in both countries. Younger adults, single parents with children, adults unemployed and looking for work, adults out of the labor force because of disability, and people in households where no adult had completed a 2- or 4-year college degree were more likely to live in food-insecure households. Income level was also strongly associated with food security in both countries.

Canada had smaller proportions of most subpopulations vulnerable to food insecurity than the U.S. However, these differences in population composition and income could account for only about 15 to 20 percent of the overall Canada-U.S. difference in food insecurity among adults and 20 to 30 percent of the difference among children. Education and living arrangements were the only aspects of population composition that contributed substantially to the national-level

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difference in food insecurity—Canada had a higher proportion of college graduates and a lower proportion of children living with a single parent.

Most of the Canada-U.S. difference in food insecurity was due to lower rates of food insecurity in certain subgroups, including:

- Households with incomes just above the U.S. poverty line.
- Households lacking a high school graduate.
- All age groups 25 years and older.
- Children in virtually all the surveyed subpopulations that could be identified in the surveys.

These differences were partially offset by lower rates of food insecurity in the U.S. for adults in households with incomes near or below the U.S. poverty line and for men living alone and women living alone (net of associations with income, employment, age, and education).

The patterns suggest that differences in tax/tax-credit arrangements and the provision of in-kind benefits (such as food and nutrition assistance, health care, housing assistance, and energy assistance) may play important roles. Evidence from this study is only suggestive, however, and further research is needed to explore the reasons behind the differences.

How Was the Study Conducted?

Canadian food security data were provided by the nationally representative Canadian Community Health Survey Cycle 2.2. The 2004 survey included about 35,000 individuals and was conducted as a joint initiative of Statistics Canada and Health Canada. U.S. food security data were provided by the 2003, 2004, and 2005 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements. The surveys were conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau with support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and included, altogether, about 141,000 households. The Canadian and U.S. surveys used essentially the same set of questions to assess households' food security, asking about conditions and behaviors known to characterize households having difficulty meeting their food needs. Multivariate logistic regression methods were used to assess the associations of food security with country of residence and selected economic and demographic characteristics, while holding other characteristics constant.