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## Stigma Surrounding the Use of Food Insecurity Programs Among College Students

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# **BRIANNA KELLY** (Nursing)

## **Stigma surrounding the use of food insecurity programs among college students**

*Sponsor: Dahianna López, PhD (Nursing)*

While addressing food insecurity in college students, a multifactorial approach is crucial in understanding the prevalence of food insecurity and barriers that can further hinder a student from becoming food secure, such as stigma. In the United States, 38.3 million Americans are food insecure (Food Security in the US, 2020). Approximately 40% of college students across the nation reported past-month insecurity in a 2019 study (Frank et al., 2021). A qualitative study among students at the University of North Texas found that due to stigma, many students struggling with food insecurity often did not use federal services or turn to others for support (Henry, 2017). Another qualitative study among college students found that students often feel alone, and like they have failed due to the lack of food security and stigma present (Hattangadi, 2019). To my knowledge, there is no quantifiable research examining factors that contribute to perceived stigma for some more than others. I conducted a survey to examine the impact stigma has on food-insecure college students and its effect on the use of food insecurity programs. I also examined students who are currently food secure to gauge their biases towards those individuals struggling. My findings indicated that of the 94 responses obtained, 33% reported being food insecure. The majority reported feeling ashamed and embarrassed due to their inability to provide a consistent source of meals. Of those who reported being food secure, 45% agreed with the statement that food insecurity stems from poor financial choices and used words such as poor, unmotivated, and disadvantaged to describe those who struggle. More research is needed to understand where this stigma stems from and how to overcome this. Still, this project obtains valuable information which can be used as a catalyst for change to better help students struggling with food insecurity.