

10% of Singaporeans struggle to get sufficient, safe, nutritious food: Study

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About one in 10 Singaporeans struggled to get sufficient, safe and nutritious food at least once in the last 12 months, a study has found.

Of this 10.4 per cent, two out of five households struggled to get such food at least once a month.

The study also found that these families were more likely to be living in one- or two-room Housing Board flats.

About 1,200 homes took part in the study, which was conducted between July and December last year by researchers from the Singapore Management University (SMU) Lien Centre for Social Innovation.

The aim of the study was to find out the prevalence, causes and consequences of what is called “food insecurity”.

Commissioned by food charity Food Bank Singapore, the study was titled *The Hunger Report: An In-depth Look At Food Insecurity In Singapore*, and its findings were released yesterday.

SMU researchers conducted a similar study in 2018 but on a smaller scale, with 236 low-income families taking part.

The latest study – helmed by Dr

Tania Nagpaul, Dr Dalvin Sidhu and Ms Jinwen Chen – found that the heads of food-insecure families tended to have lower educational qualifications, and were much less likely to have completed university.

It said: “This report reiterates that income is a persistent factor in food insecurity, with 79 per cent of the reasons cited for food insecurity being centred on financial constraints.”

Other reasons included time constraints, restricted mobility, incarceration, spouse bereavement and family breakdown.

The study also found that only 22 per cent of food-insecure households were receiving food support at the time of the survey. About 62 per cent of food-insecure households did not seek food support.

The reasons cited included embarrassment, being unaware of available food support and the belief that others needed it more than them.

The study said: “There was significant disenchantment with food support, perhaps because food assistance cannot be a long-term solution to food insecurity if the root cause is income-related.”

Another finding was that those who were food-insecure were more likely to be in the high-risk body mass index (BMI) category, and

more likely to report negative emotions, indicating negative effects both physically and mentally.

The authors made several recommendations to address the issue because the percentage of households that are food-insecure cannot be overlooked, they said.

To boost food support, they suggested more strategic coordination in providing food support to families that need it. “Geographical mapping of areas where vulnerable households reside can aid in identifying food-insecure neighbourhoods and informing food aid organisations.”

At the national level, there can be more strategic coordination of food support involving multi-sector partnerships between the Government, non-profit and private sectors, it added.

The report also suggested that more emphasis be placed on nutritious and healthy eating, as only 40 per cent of respondents had a healthy BMI, regardless of food security status. It also called for more information and education on food insecurity in Singapore, so that there is more empathy and awareness about the issue.

The study noted that some of its recommendations have already been addressed through the ongoing

efforts of the Charity Food Workgroup, which was convened by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) last year.

The workgroup comprises food charities, businesses and government agencies, and is meant to be a platform for the exchange of ideas and practices, and a means to forge partnerships.

An MSF spokesman, in a statement yesterday, said the ministry had worked with the researchers of the study to improve their methodology and obtain a more nationally representative survey sample.

“The report is a commendable effort that delves deeper into the state of food insecurity in Singapore, as we collectively press on to build a caring and inclusive society, and support those in our community with greater needs,” she said.

She added that the workgroup is currently working on two initiatives to enable better coordination of food support. It is developing a database of food support recipients and also testing out local food support coordinators who will oversee the needs and support distribution for residents, starting with a few towns in Singapore.

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