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Equity Gaps in Basic Needs Security for CSU Students during COVID-19: Preparing for future pandemics and climate crises

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Introduction

Educational success extends beyond the classroom. Basic needs security impacts priorities related to family, school, and employment. COVID-19 exacerbated vulnerable conditions, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color, increasing barriers for retention and degree completion (Lederer, et al., 2021). There is an increased need for campus basic needs supports that go beyond assisting students with education costs and academic support (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2016, 2018).

Methods

- This research adopts a mixed-methods approach to better understand basic needs insecurity and capacity of existing strengths and resources to meet students' basic needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Surveys were disseminated to students (N=1,300) utilizing basic needs services on four different CSU campuses. Interviews and focus groups were conducted at each campus and data are being analyzed. This report presents findings from the surveys.

Research Aims

Aim 1: Identify challenges meeting basic needs for university students experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., housing insecurity, food insecurity, changes in basic needs).

Aim 2: Examine whether basic needs services have helped to mitigate the negative experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aim 3: Investigate whether equity gaps exist between student groups on indicators based on race and ethnicity.

Population

- This study has a particular focus on the context of diverse needs of students and campuses.

Findings

Equity gaps based on race and ethnicity

There was an increase in proportion of students who were homeless during COVID-19 for students who identified as American Indian (nearly 6x) and White (nearly 2x).

The number of students who identify as Latinx experienced homelessness and increased risk for food insecurity nearly doubled during COVID-19

During COVID-19, students who were at risk for food insecurity and/or experienced homelessness had poorer mental health.

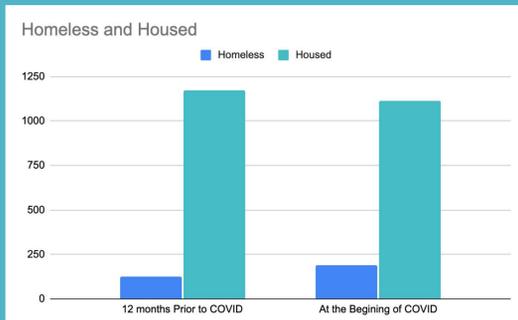
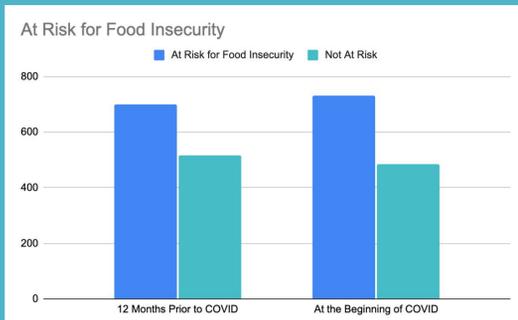
They also had on average poorer physical health.

Accessing basic needs supports on and off campus did not improve physical or mental health.

Students who identified as Latinx or American Indian reported on average poorer physical health.

Students who identified as Latinx, American Indian, or Asian reported poorer mental health.

Emerging Results: Challenges university students experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic



- Risk of food insecurity went up from 53.8% before COVID-19 to 56.2% during COVID-19.
- Homelessness went up from 9.5% before COVID-19 to 14.5% during COVID-19. This is a significant rise in the number of students who became homeless in such a short period of time.

Recommendations

- Campuses need preparedness plans to pivot in campus emergencies like a pandemic or climate crisis because with our best efforts without a plan, basic needs insecurity increased.
- Advocate for policy solutions like developing campus preparedness plans for emergency long-term campus closures.
- Continue research and evaluation to determine program impact.

Sources

Crutchfield, R. M. & Maguire, J. (2018). California State University Office of the Chancellor Study of Student Basic Needs. Retrieved from <http://www.calstate.edu/basicneeds>

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