

Study: Food insecurity among Canadian families, 2022

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With the cost of living continuing to rise, spending more to buy less food is a reality for an increasing share of Canadian families. Released today, the study "Food insecurity among Canadian families" offers insight into families most at risk of food insecurity, looking at those below and above the poverty line. It also examines the possible role of assets and debt in food insecurity.

According to data from the Canadian Income Survey, the proportion of families who were food insecure in the 12 months preceding the survey increased from 16% in 2021 to 18% in 2022. Among those at highest risk of food insecurity were single mothers, Indigenous families, and Black families.

The majority of food insecure families had incomes above the poverty line

Income alone cannot explain food insecurity. Rather, food insecurity stems from the interplay of various factors, including the stability of income, assets and debt, access to family and social supports, and the cost of living.

Overall, 11% of families had incomes below the poverty line. While these families were most vulnerable to food insecurity, with rates being nearly twice as high as the overall average (35% versus 18%), most families experiencing food insecurity had incomes above the poverty line. In all, about 8 in 10 families that faced food insecurity were above the poverty line.

Single mothers are among the most vulnerable to food insecurity

Single mothers were one of the most vulnerable groups, whether below or above the poverty line. In 2022, almost half (48%) of single mothers below the poverty line and 40% above the poverty line struggled with food insecurity. Single mothers most at risk were those with other interrelated risk factors, such as having less than a high school diploma, being unemployed, and living in a rental unit. The rate of food insecurity was highest among Indigenous and Black single mothers.

Single mothers also had fewer assets and/or more debt, compared with other family types. Based on data from the 2019 Survey of Financial Security, the median net worth of single mothers (\$64,500) was the lowest among all family types and was almost seven times lower than other families with children (\$435,700). Single mothers were also the most likely to have zero or negative net worth.

Food insecurity higher among Indigenous and racialized families – even above the poverty line

Overall, Indigenous families were more likely than non-Indigenous families to be food insecure. At 31%, the rate of food insecurity among Indigenous families above the poverty line in 2022 was more than double the rate recorded for non-Indigenous families (15%). The rate was 34% for First Nations families living off reserve, and 28% for Métis families. The rate of food insecurity for Inuit families was not available, due to sample size limitations.

In addition, racialized families above the poverty line had a higher likelihood of reporting food insecurity (21%) compared with their non-racialized, non-Indigenous counterparts (14%). This higher rate of food insecurity was seen among Black (33%), Filipino (28%), Arab (21%), and South Asian (19%) families. Other racialized populations did not experience elevated rates of food insecurity.

Vulnerability to food insecurity lowest among seniors aged 65 years and older

Food insecurity affects all age groups, though senior-led families were the least likely to experience food insecurity. In 2022, seniors below the poverty line had a rate of food insecurity of 21%, lower than the average rate for families below the poverty line (35%). The rate of food insecurity among seniors above the poverty line stood at 9%.



One possible explanation for seniors' lower vulnerability to food insecurity relates to their overall better financial health. The median net worth of families with the major income earner aged 65 and older was \$543,200, more than double the amount among 35- to 44-year-olds (\$234,400). Compared with younger families, senior-led families also had lower proportions with a zero or negative net worth. This may reflect seniors' higher rate of homeownership relative to younger families.

Note to readers

Data from the 2021 Canadian Income Survey and 2019 Survey of Financial Security are used in this study. Excluded from the study are people living in the territories, on reserves and other Indigenous settlements in the provinces, institutionalized population, and households in extremely remote areas.

Questions on food insecurity relate to the household's experience during the 12 months preceding the survey. The survey was conducted from January 16, 2022, to July 5, 2022. During the reference period, the year-over-year inflation rate jumped from 1.0% in January 2021 to 4.8% in December 2021, and the annual rate of food inflation increased from 1.0% to 5.2% over the same time period. Prices continued to rise and in June 2022, the overall inflation rate was 8.1% and food inflation in particular was 8.8% - the largest yearly change in 40 years.

Definitions

The **poverty line** is based on the Market Based Measure of low income (MBM). The MBM develops thresholds of poverty based upon the cost of a basket of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other items for individuals and families representing a modest, basic standard of living. A family with disposable income less than the poverty threshold appropriate for their family's size and region would be living in poverty.

Economic family refers to a group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law union, adoption or a foster relationship. In this study, families include economic families and unattached individuals.

Racialized group is derived directly from the concept of **visible minority**. A **visible minority** refers to whether a person is a visible minority or not, as defined by the Employment Equity Act. This act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Indigenous peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. Measurement for population groups designated as visible minorities started in 2020.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers 2620 and 5200.

The article entitled "[Food insecurity among Canadian families](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

The infographic "[Food insecurity among Canadian families: Which families are the most vulnerable?](#)" is now available in the series *Statistics Canada—Infographics* ([11-627-M](#))

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