



DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence
in Human Development

Individual and Society

In June 2021, the DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Human Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, conducted a snap online survey of 1,000 South Africans across the country, aged between 18 and 55 years. We explored various topical issues impacting quality of life in South Africa.

Report 2: Coping with food insecurity

Global food prices are rising at their fastest rate in a decade, with the biggest increases on basic food items (milk, oil, eggs) exacerbating the stress of the most vulnerable populations. (Source: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=14336>)

The Prevalence of Household food insecurity and of child hunger in South Africa has remained high since the Covid-19 pandemic began.

Recent evidence from the 5th National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAM) shows that South Africans who are experiencing household hunger are suffering higher levels of depression than people in homes where there's enough to eat. (Source: <https://bit.ly/3hAS3Ae>)

Survey findings

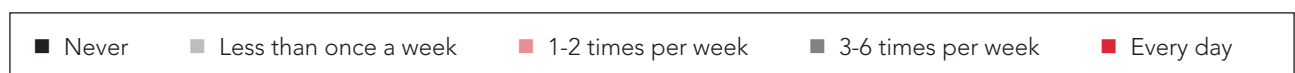
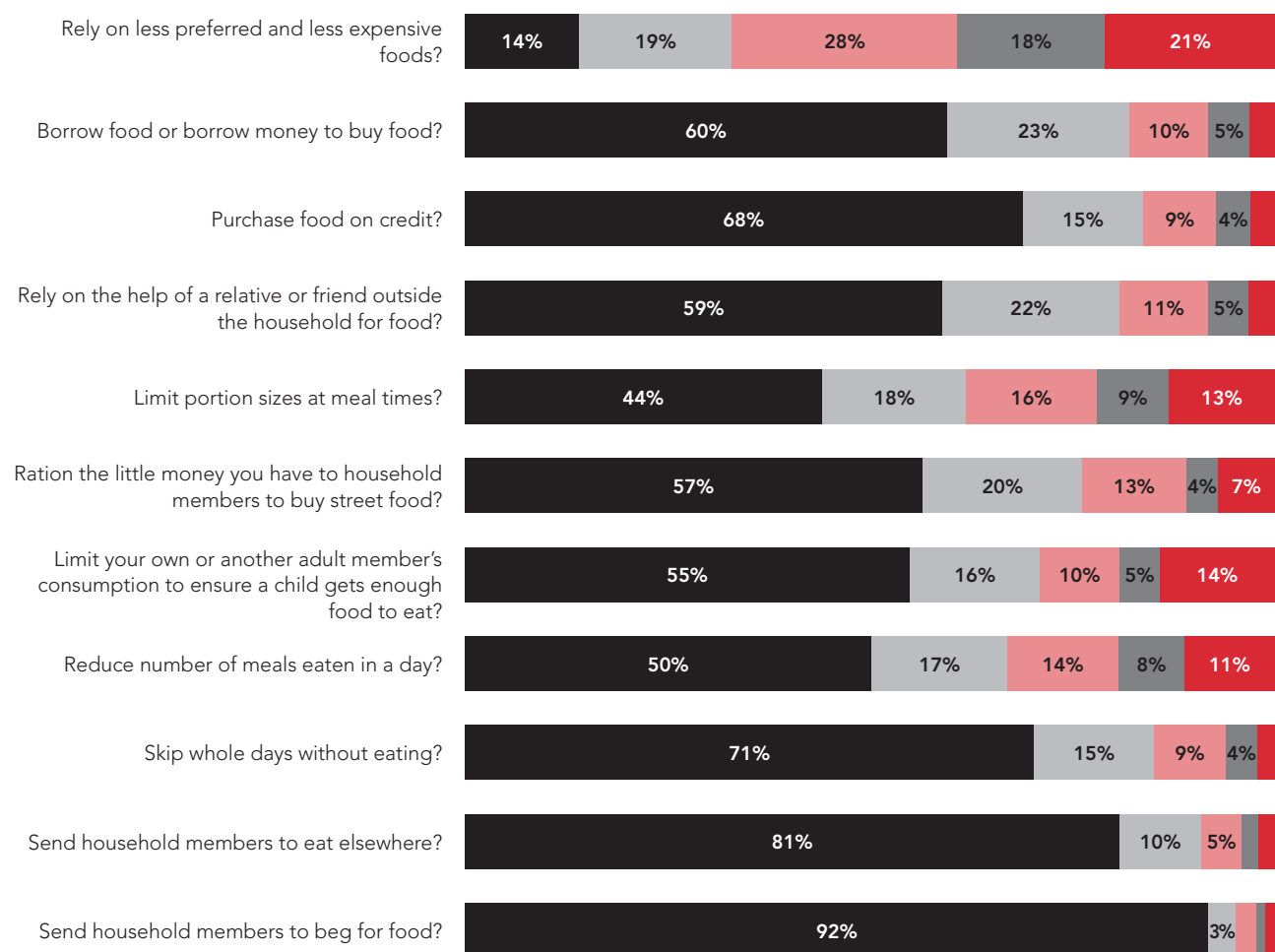
Coping with food insecurity

Almost nine out of every ten people in the survey reported that they had changed their diet to cheaper or less preferable foods. Majority of participants surveyed reported employing some type of food rationing strategy in the two weeks preceding the survey - through reducing the number of meals eaten in a day, limiting portion sizes at mealtimes, or redirecting the food available to feed working adults and/or children. Almost a third of the survey participants reported skipping meals completely on some days. Households frequently employed strategies to temporarily either increase food availability (borrowing or buying food on credit) or reduce household demand by sending household members to eat elsewhere or to go beg for food.

Overall, most participants surveyed indicated that they applied some strategy to cope with food insecurity. The two most common coping strategies were:

- Dietary change: Rely on less preferred and less expensive foods
- Rationing: Limit portion sizes at mealtimes or reduce number of meals eaten in a day

Still thinking of the last two weeks, how often have you had to:



Socio-economics matter: poorer participants hardest hit by food insecurity

- Households most vulnerable to economic stress are also those hardest hit by food insecurity. Participants living in lower socio-economic households, with more children living in the household, and worry about job security reported employing multiple strategies to manage food security – selecting less preferred or expensive food, purchasing food on credit, relying on food from relatives or friends, limiting their own food intake and skipping food for whole days.
- Begging for food was also significantly higher in the lower socio-economic group (overall 8% of participants surveyed indicated they engaged in begging for food).
- Youth surveyed are more inclined to ration funds and buy street food or eat food elsewhere outside of their home.

Conclusions

The economic pressures that South Africans are experiencing are impacting household food security. The knock-on effect is that households must utilise an array of strategies to cope, especially if there are children within the home. These strategies may mitigate some of the economic strain but place households in a more vulnerable position. This increased vulnerability can affect mental and physical health, nutrition and child development. Job creation, community food support programmes, and social grants are urgently needed to help mitigate and deal with the effects of hunger.

For more information please contact Beth Amato at the DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Human Development, based at the University of the Witwatersrand: coe.human@wits.ac.za