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Topic: Food and nutrition security

Title: Food security status and related factors of undergraduate students receiving financial aid at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus

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Food insecurity undermines the primary function of higher education which is to improve the socio-economic status of people and improve the social capital of the country. South African universities are experiencing an increase in student enrolments with majority coming from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive survey conducted on a sample of 268 students receiving financial aid. The measurement instrument was a self-administered questionnaire consisting of the four main sections: anthropometric status and socio-demographic information, food frequency questionnaire, household food insecurity access scale, nutrition knowledge questionnaire and combined performance index scores.

Results: The mean BMI of the study sample was 24.4 ± 4.7 kg/m². A fifth (21.4%) of the sample was overweight and a tenth (12.4%) was obese. An increase in BMI was associated with an increase in food insecurity. The most frequently consumed foods were carbohydrates, fats and coffee and tea. Just over half (53.0%) of the sample received no additional income apart from financial aid. The mean amount of monthly food expenditure was R558.40 \pm R211.12. Over a third (34.7%) of the sample was food insecure, a third (33.6 %) was at risk of food insecurity, almost a tenth (9.7%) severely food insecure and just over a fifth (22%) was food secure. The sample had average nutrition knowledge. Food insecure students had a lower mean CPI score than those who are food secure.

Conclusion: There was a high prevalence of food insecurity and obesity among the study sample with diets lacking diversity. Food insecurity seems to impact academic performance negatively