

# Multigenerational Families and Food Insecurity in the United States, 1998-2013



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## Key Findings

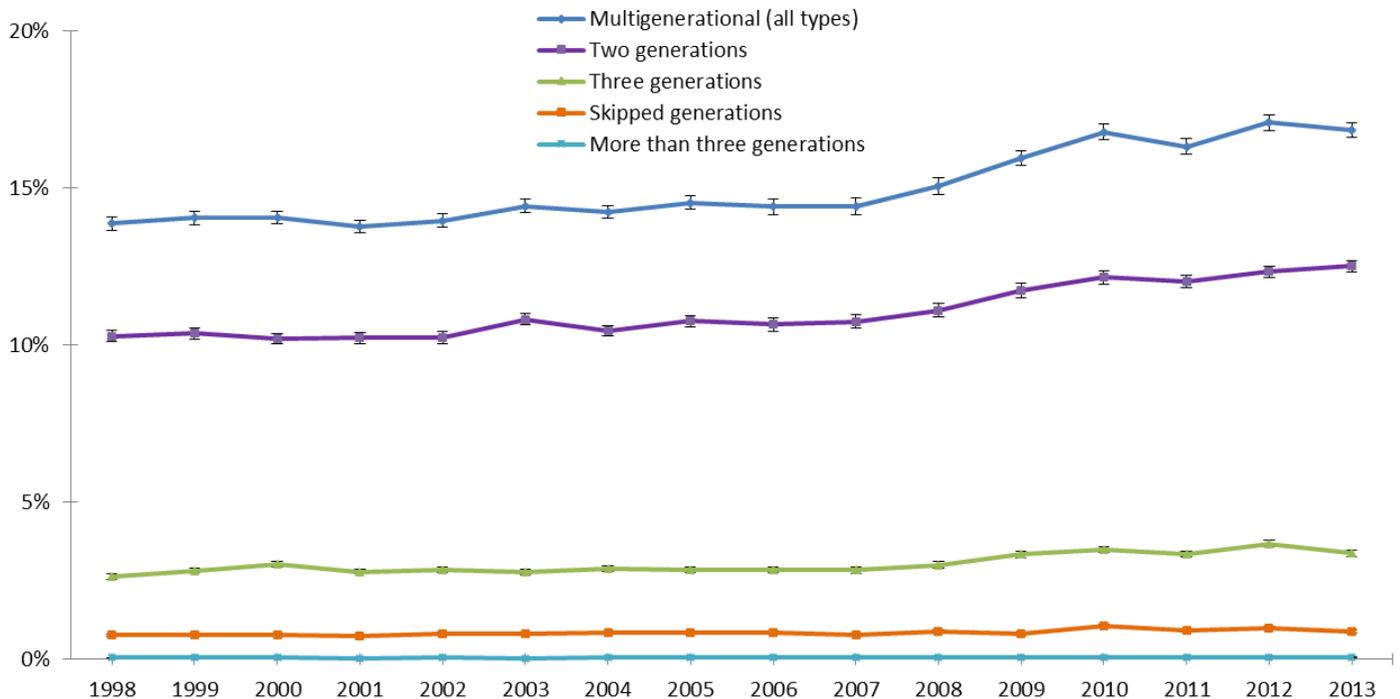
Data from the Integrated Health Interview Series, 1998-2013

- Multigenerational families increased as a share of all families over the past two decades.
- About 15% of multigenerational families were food insecure compared to 11% of single-generation families.
- 20% of children and 16% of young adults living in multigenerational families were food insecure, compared to 15% of children and 13% of young adults living in single-generation families.
- The share of families receiving SNAP benefits increased; in 2007, 7% of families received SNAP, compared to 13.3% of families in 2013. This rise was steeper for multigenerational families (9.6% in 2007, compared to 19.5% in 2013).
- Multigenerational families were more likely to receive SNAP benefits than single-generation families. There was no difference in the duration of benefit receipt by family structure.

Economic recession, an aging population, and changing norms surrounding marriage and child-rearing have affected and continue to affect family structure in the United States (1, 5). As family structure in the United States becomes more diverse, the relationship between family structure and food insecurity among families and different types of individuals will require further investigation. This brief describes the relationship between family structure and food security, focusing on multigenerational families. The detailed family relationship information in the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), along with the food security supplement fielded since 2011, provide the opportunity for such an examination. Harmonized versions of these variables are available through the Integrated Health Interview Series (IHIS) at the Minnesota Population Center.

## Multigenerational families increased as a share of all families over the past two decades.

Figure 1: Share of Families that are Multigenerational, 1998-2013 IHIS

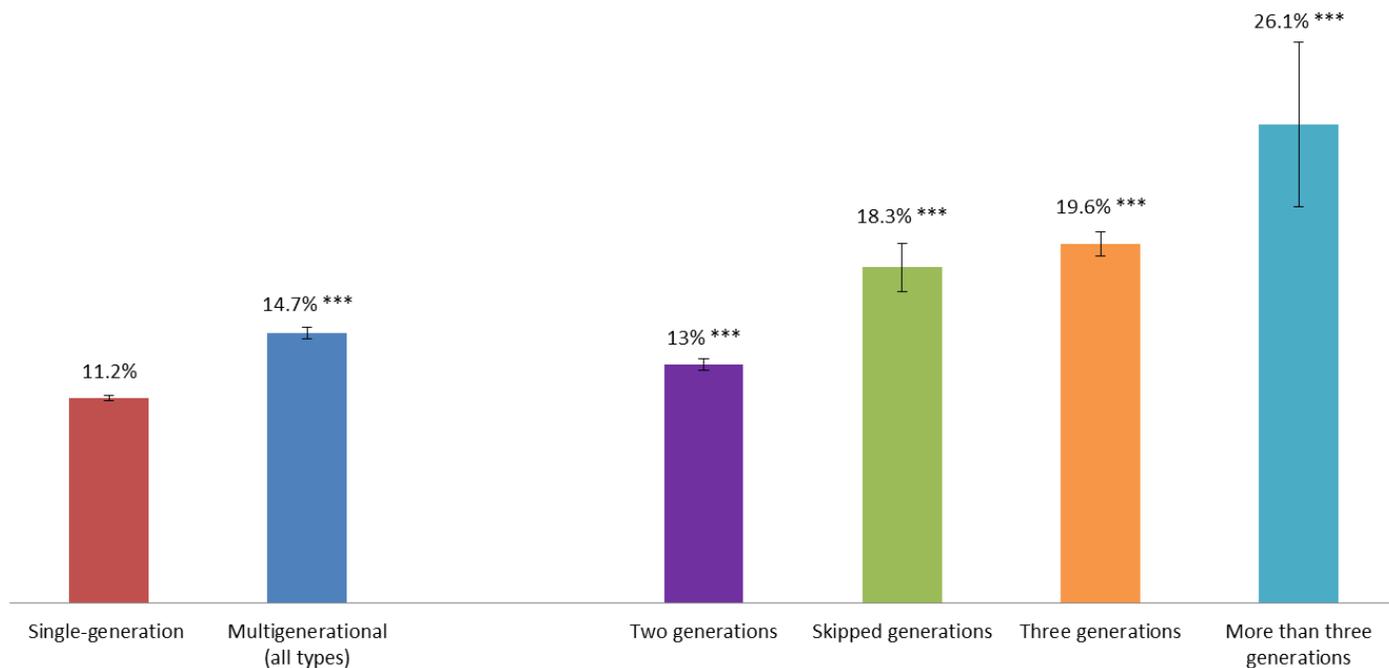


SOURCE: Integrated Health Interview Series, 1998-2013

- Prevalence of multigenerational families began to increase in 2008 and started to level off in 2012.
- Two-generation families account for the largest share of all families, compared to other specific types of multigenerational families.
- Two-generation families drive the rise in multigenerational families.
- The distribution of skipped-generation and more-than-three-generation families remains fairly constant over the studied period.

## About 15% of multigenerational families were food insecure compared to 11% of single-generation families.

Figure 2: Food Insecurity Prevalence by Family Structures, 2011-2013 IHIS Pooled Sample



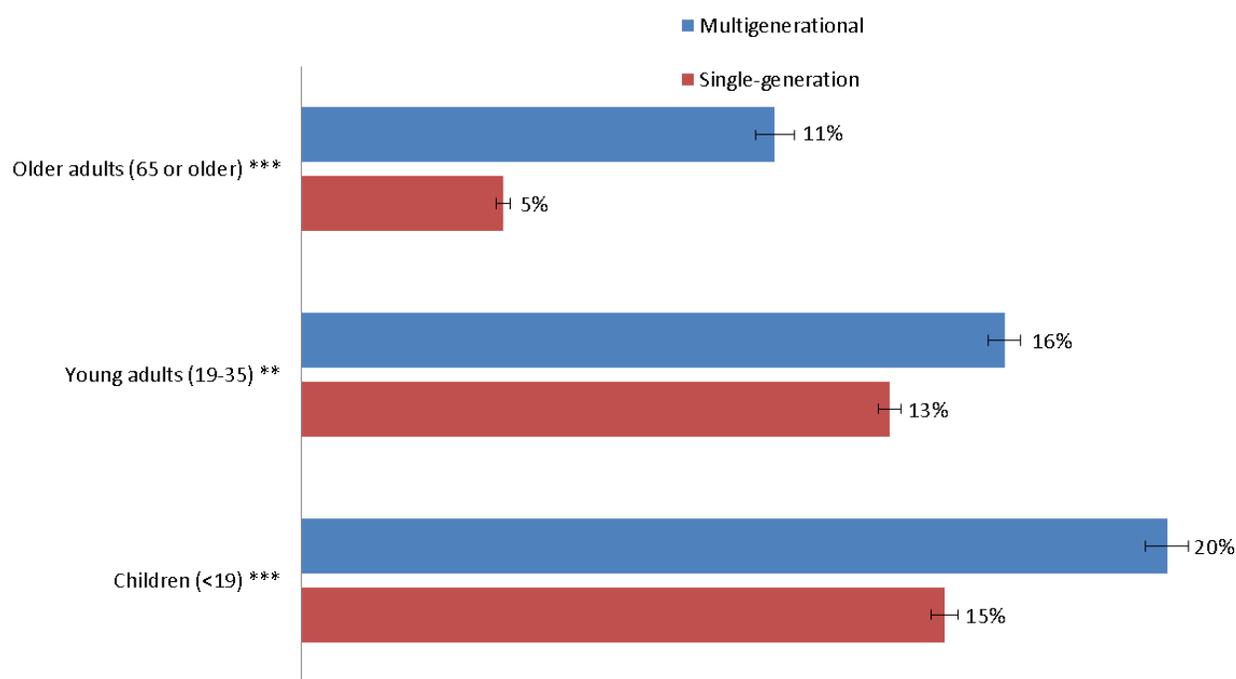
\*\*\* Significantly different from single-generation families ( $p < 0.01$ ).

SOURCE: Integrated Health Interview Series, 2011-2013.

- Multigenerational families are more likely than single-generation families to be food insecure.
- Between the years of 2011 and 2013, single-generation families have the lowest food insecurity prevalence among all family types.
- Food insecurity prevalence increases with the number of co-resident generations.

**20% of children and 16% of young adults living in multigenerational families were food insecure, compared to 15% of children and 13% of young adults living in single-generation families.**

Figure 3: Food Insecurity Prevalence among Individuals Living in Single-Generation and Multigenerational Families, 2011-2013 IHIS Pooled Sample



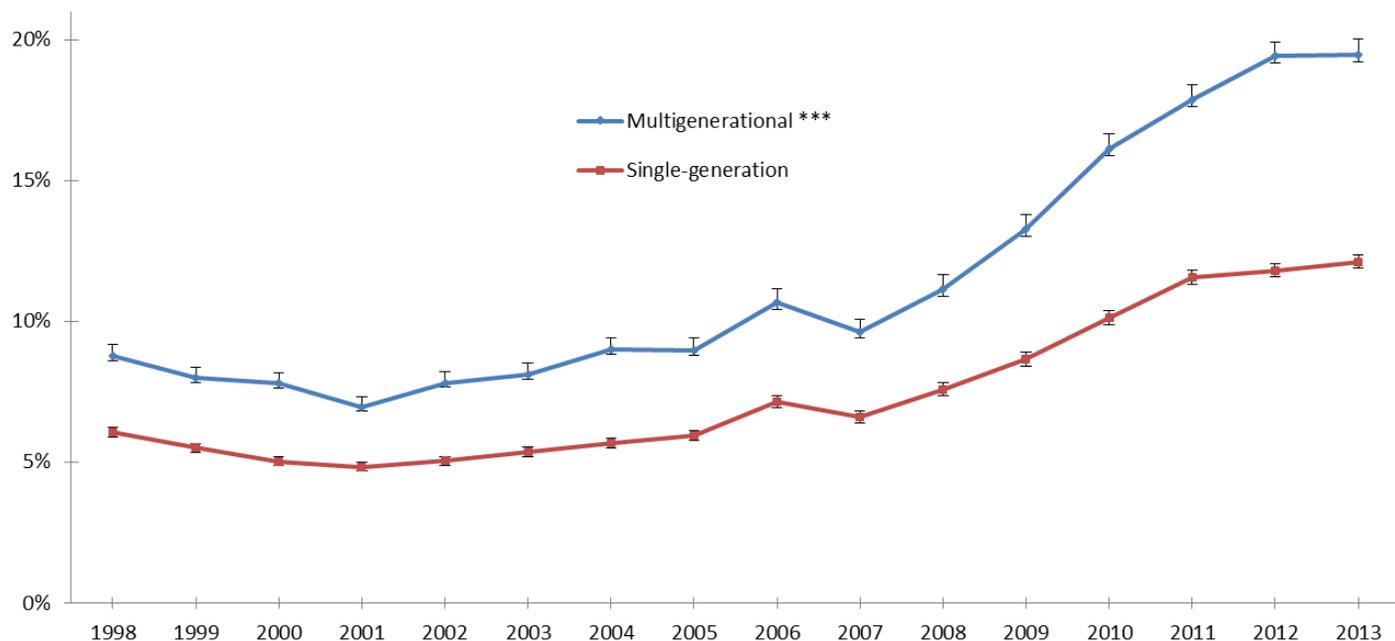
\*\*\*Significantly different from people living in single-generation families ( $p < 0.01$ ).

SOURCE: Integrated Health Interview Series, 2011-2013.

- Those living in multigenerational families are more likely to belong to a food-insecure family, regardless of age.
- Children are more likely to live in food-insecure families than adults in both types of families. Children in multigenerational families are the most likely to live in a food-insecure family (20% between 2011 and 2013).
- The proportion of older adults in multigenerational families who belong to food-insecure families (11%) is more than double that of older adults in single-generation families (5%).

**The share of families receiving SNAP benefits increased; in 2007, 7% of families received SNAP, compared to 13.3% of families in 2013. This rise was steeper for multigenerational families (9.6% in 2007, compared to 19.5% in 2013).**

Figure 4: Percentage of Families Receiving SNAP in Last Calendar Year, 1998-2013 IHIS

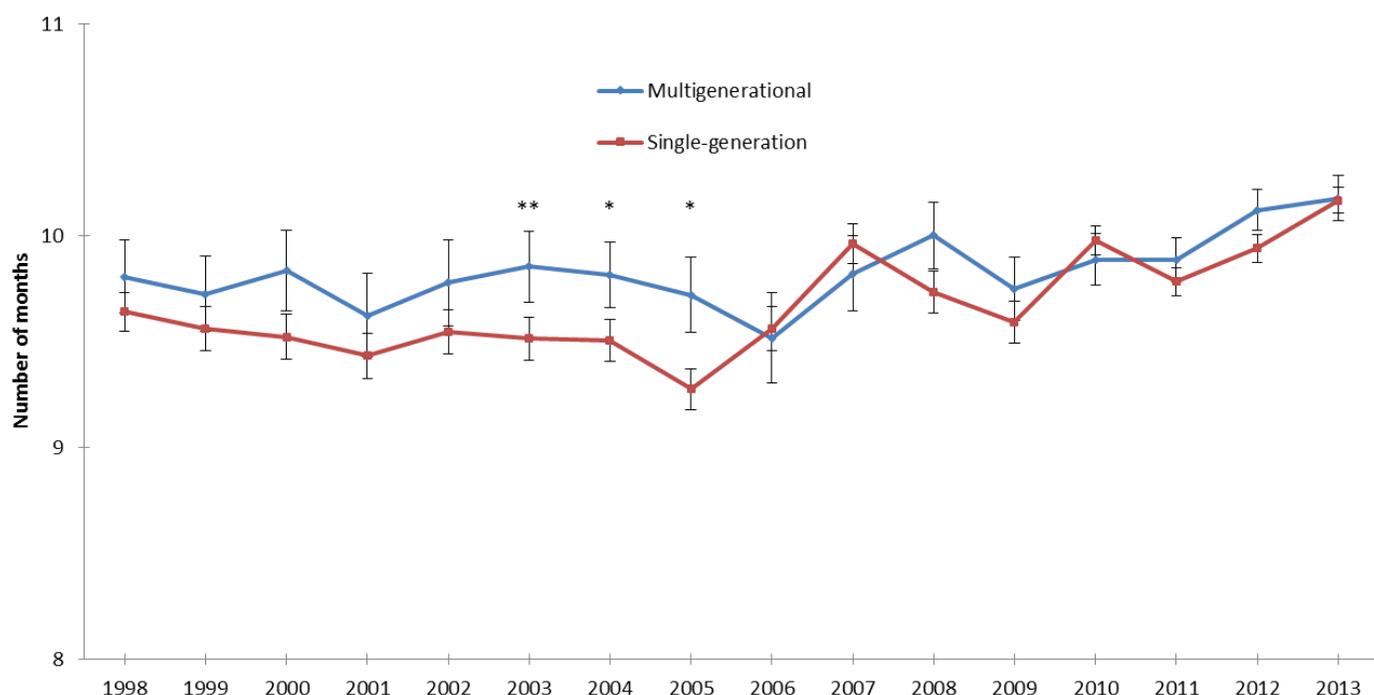


SOURCE: Integrated Health Interview Series, 1998-2013.

- A higher share of multigenerational families received snap benefits in the last calendar year compared to single-generation families in every studied year since 1998.
- Beginning in 2008, SNAP benefits increase for both family types, perhaps as a result of the recession.
- After 2008, the gap between the percentage of multigenerational families and single-generation families receiving SNAP benefits in the last calendar year widens noticeably.

**Multigenerational families receive SNAP benefits for a longer period of time, compared to single-generation families. However, there is no significant difference in the duration of benefit receipt by family structures in most studied years.**

Figure 5: Average Number of Months that Families Received SNAP Benefits in the Last Calendar year



SOURCE: Integrated Health Interview Series, 1998-2013.

- The patterns of duration of SNAP benefits are similar for both family types. However, there is no significant difference in the duration of SNAP benefits between multigenerational and single-generation families, except in 2003 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 2004 ( $p < 0.1$ ), and 2005 ( $p < 0.1$ ).
- For food-insecure families (not shown here), the 2011-2013 pooled IHIS sample shows that the average number of months receiving SNAP benefits is 10.06 months for multigenerational families and 9.96 months for food-insecure single-generation families. These two values are not significantly different from each other.

## Summary

Multigenerational families have become more common in the United States. The extent of this increase has, until recently, been underestimated due to a highly restrictive definition of multigenerational families by the Census Bureau. In this data brief, we estimated that 16.8% of families in 2010 were multigenerational families, as opposed to 4% of households reported by the Census Bureau (3).

Food insecurity is higher among multigenerational families (15%) than among single-generation families (11%). A larger number of co-resident generations increases the likelihood that the family is food insecure. Less than 15% of two-generation families are food insecure, while about 26% of more-than-three-generation families are food insecure.

Individuals living in multigenerational families are more likely to live in food-insecure families than their counterparts living in single-generation families. Children under 19 (15%) and young

adults ages 19-35 (13%) are more likely than older adults ages 65+ (5%) in single-generation families to live in food-insecure families. Children under 19 in multigenerational families are also the most likely to live in a food-insecure family (20%). They are followed by young adults ages 19-35 (16%) and older adults ages 65+ (11%) living in multigenerational families. Older adults living in multigenerational families are more than twice as likely to live in a food-insecure family than older adults in single-generation families.

A higher percentage of multigenerational families received SNAP benefits in the past year than did single-generation families from 1998 to 2013. The gap between the two family types begins to grow in 2008. However, both multigenerational and single-generation families received SNAP benefits for approximately the same amount of time between 1998 and 2013, with the exceptions of 2003, 2004, and 2005.

## Definitions

There are several definitions of multigenerational families used by major U.S. statistical agencies like the Census Bureau and private research centers like the Pew Research Center. The Census Bureau recognizes families as being multigenerational only if they contain at least three generations (3).

**Table 1. Census Bureau Definitions of Multigenerational Families**

Generations	Multi-Generational Families		
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3
Householder's Elders	x		x
Householder	x	x	x
Householder's Children	x	x	x
Householder's Grandchildren		x	x

SOURCE: Lofquist (2012)

The Pew Research Center has suggested and used a broader definition of multi-generational families that includes two-generation, three-generation, skipped-generation, and more-than-three-generation families (2).

The definition of multigenerational families in this data brief is a modified version of the definition used by the Pew Research Center. This definition is more expansive than the ones proposed by the Pew Research Center and the Census Bureau. Under our modified definition of multigenerational families, we estimated that in 2012, approximately 17% of U.S. families were multigenerational, compared to 3.8% and 11.2% of U.S. households in the Census Bureau and the Pew Research Center reports, respectively(2-3).

There are several important differences between the Pew Research Center's definition of multigenerational families and the one used in this data brief.

In this data brief, we define multigenerational families as follows:

- We define adult children as 19 years and older, while the Pew Research Center defines adult children as 25 years and older (2). Therefore, in the Pew Research Center analysis, a family consisting only of parents and their children between the ages of 18 and 24 is not considered a multigenerational family.

**Table 2. Types of Multigenerational Families Used in This Data Brief**

Generations	Two-Generation			Three-Generation			Skipped-Generation Families					More-Than-Three-Generation					
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Type 6
<b>Grandparent Generation</b>						x			x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
<b>Parent Generation</b>			x		x	x		x				x	x	x		x	x
<b>Head Generation</b>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
<b>Child Generation</b>				x	x					x		x	x	x	x	x	
Adult Child of family ref. person	x	x															
Young Child (under 19) of family ref. person		x															
<b>Grandchild Generation</b>				x			x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x

NOTE: All generations are defined in relationship to the Head (or "family reference person").

- Families that contain only adult(s) and minor child(ren) are considered single-generation families. These families are considered multigenerational only if they contain other family members such as grandparent(s), adult child(ren) ages 19 and older, or children of minor child(ren).
- We expand the definition of generations proposed by the Pew Research Center to include children of an unmarried partner and nieces or nephews of the family reference person in the child generation. We include unmarried partners in the head generation, as well as aunts, uncles, and legal guardians in the parent generation. While the Pew Research Center has applied their definition to the American Community Survey (ACS) data (2), and conducted analysis at the household level, our analysis uses IHIS data and our level of analysis is at the family level.

## Data source and methods

This data brief uses data from the Integrated Health Interview Series (IHIS). IHIS harmonizes public use National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) data across years to allow for cross-temporal comparisons. Questions used in this study come from the USDA's 30-day Core Food Security Module, first included in NHIS in 2011. Along with information on food insecurity and other health behaviors and outcomes, integrated NHIS data provided through IHIS contain rich demographic and socioeconomic information, allowing for the study of family structure and making it an excellent resource for the study of the relationship between family and health.

The individual who responded to questions on the NHIS core questionnaire about the health of everyone in the family is called the family respondent. This family respondent was asked the 10 questions regarding food security that are presented in table 3.<sup>1</sup>

A family that has no affirmative responses is classified as highly food secure. One to two affirmative responses indicates marginal food security. Low food security and very low food security families have three to five and six to ten affirmative responses, respectively. For the purposes of this data brief, we dichotomize food insecurity as follows: the group "food secure families" contains those families that are highly food secure and marginally food secure according to NHIS classifications. The group "food insecure families" contains those families that have low or very low food security.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2013, NHIS undertook a split-ballot experiment with the food security section of the survey. In this experiment, the sample was divided into two sub-samples in quarters 3 and 4. In one sub-sample, the family respondent was asked about his/her personal experience with food security in the past 30 days, while in the other sub-sample, the family respondent was asked about the food security experience during the past 30 days of any adults in the family. This split-ballot may lead to over-count of food security prevalence in 2013 compared to 2011 and 2012. Future surveys will revert to the question wording used in 2011 and 2012.

**Table 3: List of Variables Used to Measure Family Food Security**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Description</b>
<a href="#"><u>FSATELESS</u></a>	Ever ate less than felt should because not enough money, last 30 days
<a href="#"><u>FSHUNGRY</u></a>	Ever hungry but did not eat because not enough money, last 30 days
<a href="#"><u>FSWEIGHT</u></a>	Ever lost weight because not enough money for food, last 30 days
<a href="#"><u>FSBALANC</u></a>	Could not afford to eat balanced meals, last 30 days
<a href="#"><u>FSNOTEAT</u></a>	Ever not eat for a whole day because not enough money for food, last 30 days
<a href="#"><u>FSNOTEATNO</u></a>	Number of days did not eat due to lack of money, last 30 days
<a href="#"><u>FSNOTLAST</u></a>	Food did not last until family had money to get more, last 30 days
<a href="#"><u>FSRUNOUT</u></a>	Worried food would run out before got money to buy more, last 30 days
<a href="#"><u>FSSKIP</u></a>	Cut size or skipped meals because not enough money, last 30 days.
<a href="#"><u>FSSKIPNO</u></a>	Number of days cut size or skipped meals for financial reasons, last 30 days.

## About the authors

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