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Commentary on "Exploring the Association Between Household Food Insecurity, Parental Self-Efficacy and Fruit and Vegetable Parenting Practices Among Parents of 5- to 8-Year-Old Overweight Children"

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In the past decades, while childhood obesity has become a growing public health problem in the United States,¹ there have been an increasing number of US households with children experiencing food insecurity.² Household food insecurity impacts not only the quantity of the food available in households; it also affects the quality of the foods families consume. As discussed by Hilmers, et al., several studies have documented the association between food insecurity and its adverse impacts on children's well-being, such as the experience of hunger due to inadequate consumption of energy and nutrients,³ emotional difficulties in children,⁴ and obesity.^{5,6}

The association of food insecurity and childhood obesity presents an interesting paradox, as pointed out by Hilmers and colleagues. This link has redirected research attention to consideration of the family socioeconomic and environmental factors influencing children's access to adequate food⁷. Although research on the home food environment has unequivocally demonstrated the relevant role parents play in influencing their children's dietary intake, there is limited research on the role of food insecurity on parental factors that in turn may influence children's diet. Hilmers and colleagues' pilot study is relevant because it begins to provide data on the association among food insecurity, parental self-efficacy, and parental practices related to children's fruit and vegetable consumption.

An additional strength of Hilmers and colleagues' study is its focus on Hispanic families, who are the fastest growing ethnic group and also at an increased risk for poverty⁸ and food insecurity.⁹ Although Hilmers and colleagues did not report significant associations between food insecurity, parental factors and Hispanic children's consumption of fruit and vegetables due perhaps to the small sample size, this kind of research is warranted. Future studies should involve a larger sample size of Hispanic families of varied acculturation levels. Given that a large number of Hispanic families are foreign-born, it will be of great interest to assess the association between acculturation and food insecurity and its impact on parenting practices. Some research has found that children of immigrant parents experience higher levels of food insecurity than children of U.S. citizens.¹⁰ This is especially true among Latinos and among households with low levels of maternal education.¹¹ At present we do not know what the relationship of acculturation, food insecurity, and parenting practices is. Do we expect immigrant parents with high food insecurity levels to be more likely to use overcompensation when food is available than U.S.-born parents with similarly high food insecurity levels? Addressing these questions will provide valuable insights into the parenting mechanisms by which food insecurity may lead to childhood obesity.

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