Suburban Families' Experience With Food Insecurity Screening in Primary Care Practices

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BACKGROUND: Food insecurity (FI) remains a major public health problem. With the rise in suburban poverty, a greater understanding of parents' experiences of FI in suburban settings is needed to effectively screen and address FI in suburban practices.

METHODS: We conducted 23 semistructured interviews with parents of children <4 years of age who presented for well-child care in 6 suburban pediatric practices and screened positive for FI. In the interviews, we elicited parents' perceptions of screening for FI, how FI impacted the family, and recommendations for how practices could more effectively address FI. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. We used a modified grounded theory approach to code the interviews inductively and identified emerging themes through an iterative process. Interviews continued until thematic saturation was achieved.

RESULTS: Of the 23 parents interviewed, all were women, with 39% white and 39% African American. Three primary themes emerged: Parents expressed initial surprise at screening followed by comfort discussing their unmet food needs; parents experience shame, frustration, and helplessness regarding FI, but discussing FI with their clinician helped alleviate these feelings; parents suggested practices could help them more directly access food resources, which, depending on income, may not be available to them through government programs.

CONCLUSIONS: Although most parents were comfortable discussing FI, they felt it was important for clinicians to acknowledge their frustrations with FI and facilitate access to a range of food resources.

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