



CITE THIS BRIEF AS: Kushalnagar, P. & O'Donnell, T. (2019). Communication barrier in family linked to increased risks for food insecurity among deaf people who use American Sign Language. Brief No.6, Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University.

## Communication Barrier in Family Linked to Increased Risks for Food Insecurity Among Deaf People Who Use American Sign Language<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Food insecurity is defined as the ability to access enough food that will help maintain an active, healthy lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, approximately 1 in 8 Americans were classified as food insecure in 2017 which is detrimental to health, quality of life, and can even result in higher depressive symptoms.<sup>3,4</sup>

Early life stress during childhood, including difficulties with communication at home, can lead to food insecurity and poorer mental health outcomes. Deaf individuals who experienced communication barriers during childhood felt that they missed out on important information about health<sup>5</sup> and reported greater depression symptomatology,<sup>6</sup> putting them at greater risk for possible food insecurity in adult years.

To explore the relationship between communication barriers in childhood and adult food insecurity, data from the Health Information National Trends Survey in ASL and the US Household Food Security Survey Model was used.

### Findings

Based on a national sample of 475 deaf adult signers aged 18-95 years old, **8% of deaf adults reported being able to understand little to none of what their caregiver said during formative years.<sup>1</sup> These individuals are about 5 times more likely to often experience difficulty with making food last or finding money to buy more food.<sup>1</sup>**

There is a marked risk for food insecurity and related health outcomes among deaf people when compared to hearing individuals. The fundamental issue is the caregiver-child environment, especially as clinical providers may not know how to obtain or recommend support for effective communication among families.

To tackle the issue on individual, community, and societal levels, it is essential that deaf students become more health literate about food and well-being to pass onto their peers. School classes and community centers should include lessons on managing food availability. Clinicians who regularly interact with families should facilitate healthy and comprehensible family communication and have support resources and referrals for food insecurity readily available.

### Quick Facts

- A national sample of 475 deaf adult signers 18-95 years old
- Collected between April-July 2016 and October 2016-January 2017
- Deaf participants who reported communication barriers with caregivers and who understood little to none of what their caregiver said during childhood were 5 times more likely to often experience some level of food insecurity

### About Deaf Health Communication and Quality of Life Center

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The Deaf Health Communication and Quality of Life Center's mission is to conduct research that links accessibility to health outcomes among deaf/hard of hearing individuals.

The Center's briefs provide a snapshot of noteworthy, data-driven research findings from the Center. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the NIH.

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