Study: â€˜Food insecureâ€™ Oregonians twice as likely to be depressed

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Oregonians struggling to put food on the table are more than twice as likely to suffer from depression than those with no such worries, according to a new report released this week by the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

In response to a statewide telephone survey, one in three adults from households facing limited or uncertain availability of food -- what the federal government calls "food insecurity" -- reported being depressed, said the Silverton-based institute. By contrast, only one in seven adults from households where access to food was not a problem reported being depressed.

"Many struggling Oregonians face what Shakespeare would have called 'double, double, toil and trouble,'" said OCPP analyst Joy Margheim, co-author of the report. "While the causal connection is complex, it is clear that food insecurity and depression are intertwined."

Suicidal thoughts are also much more common among the food insecure, according to the report Empty Cupboards, Empty Feelings. It found that among adults facing not just food insecurity but actual hunger, 23.1 percent -- nearly one in four -- reported seriously considering suicide in the previous 12 months, compared to only about one in 70 adults in households that did not have problems obtaining food.

OCPP's report analyzed data gathered primarily in 2005 by the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the Oregon Department of Human Services. The BRFSS has included questions concerning food security since 2001.

The report also found that women are especially at risk for both food insecurity and depression. One in six women lived in a food insecure household in 2005, OCPP said, compared to one in seven men. That same year, one in five women experienced depression, compared to about one in seven men.

"Although the data may seem disheartening," said Margheim, "the good news is that recognizing the overlap between food insecurity and depression may present new opportunities for addressing both." She noted, for example, that while depression may be difficult to prevent because some risk factors such as genetics and low socioeconomic status may be difficult or impossible to change, food insecurity can be addressed head on through food stamps and other programs. Improving food security may in turn alleviate depression.

The Oregon Center for Public Policy is a non-partisan research institute that does in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax, and economic issues. The Center's goal is to improve decision-making and generate more opportunities for all Oregonians.

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