

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH

### Surviving Food Insecurity at An Institution of Higher Learning

*Mohube Elizabeth Mashabela<sup>1</sup>, Matjie Rapetsoa<sup>1</sup>, Professor Mosa Selepe<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Department of Human Nutrition and Dietetics, University of Limpopo, South Africa.

<sup>2</sup>Research Development and Administration Department, University of Limpopo, South Africa.

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author Email: [mohubee@gmail.com](mailto:mohubee@gmail.com)

#### Abstract

This presentation is a component of a larger study on “Nutrition knowledge, food insecurity and coping strategies amongst students in the institution of higher learning in the Limpopo Province”. Institutions of higher learning are struggling with food insecurity, despite the fact that eating is regarded as a fundamental human right. University students lack access to reliable, sufficient, and nourishing food as a result those who are food insecure employ various coping techniques to deal with their situation. An explanatory sequential mixed-method approach was used in the study. Food insecure students were selected from the results of the Food Insecurity Experience Scale questionnaire. Fourteen purposefully selected in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with Health Care Science food-insecure students to explore their life experiences and coping strategies for food insecurity. Students described their experiences with food insecurity, how it affected them, and how they dealt with it. Six themes emerged from the interviews; coping strategies, health triangle effects, nutritional knowledge, effects of hunger on academic performance, factors contributing to lack of money to buy food, and competing expenses. Twenty-nine subthemes surfaced detailing the impact of food insecurity on the students’ lives. These findings help to clarify what it means to be food insecure in higher education and can influence how institutions of higher learning serve students’ basic needs. Most students used a variety of coping strategies such as borrowing money, sharing food, buying cheap unhealthy meals, skipping meals, eating fewer meals per day, reducing portion size, and seeking help from families and friends. This suggests the need for compassionate university management to assist with the establishment of support systems such as food banks to alleviate food insecurity among eligible students and further raise awareness of the issue on campus.

**Keywords:** food insecurity, students, coping strategies, experiences, and interview.