



UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
CENTER FOR POVERTY RESEARCH

Food Insecurity, Child Health, Food Assistance in the U.S.

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- ▶ Views and opinions are my own



What is Food Insecurity?

- ▶ Food insecurity “exists whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain.”
- ▶ U.S. Department of Agriculture defines it as “a household-level economic and social condition of limited access to food.”



Measuring Food Insecurity

- ▶ A household is placed into categories based on responses to 18 questions (10 if no child present) on the Core Food Security Module in the December Current Population Survey
 - A household is food insecure if they answer yes to at least 3 questions
 - A child is further deemed food insecure if the household answers yes to at least 2 child-focused questions

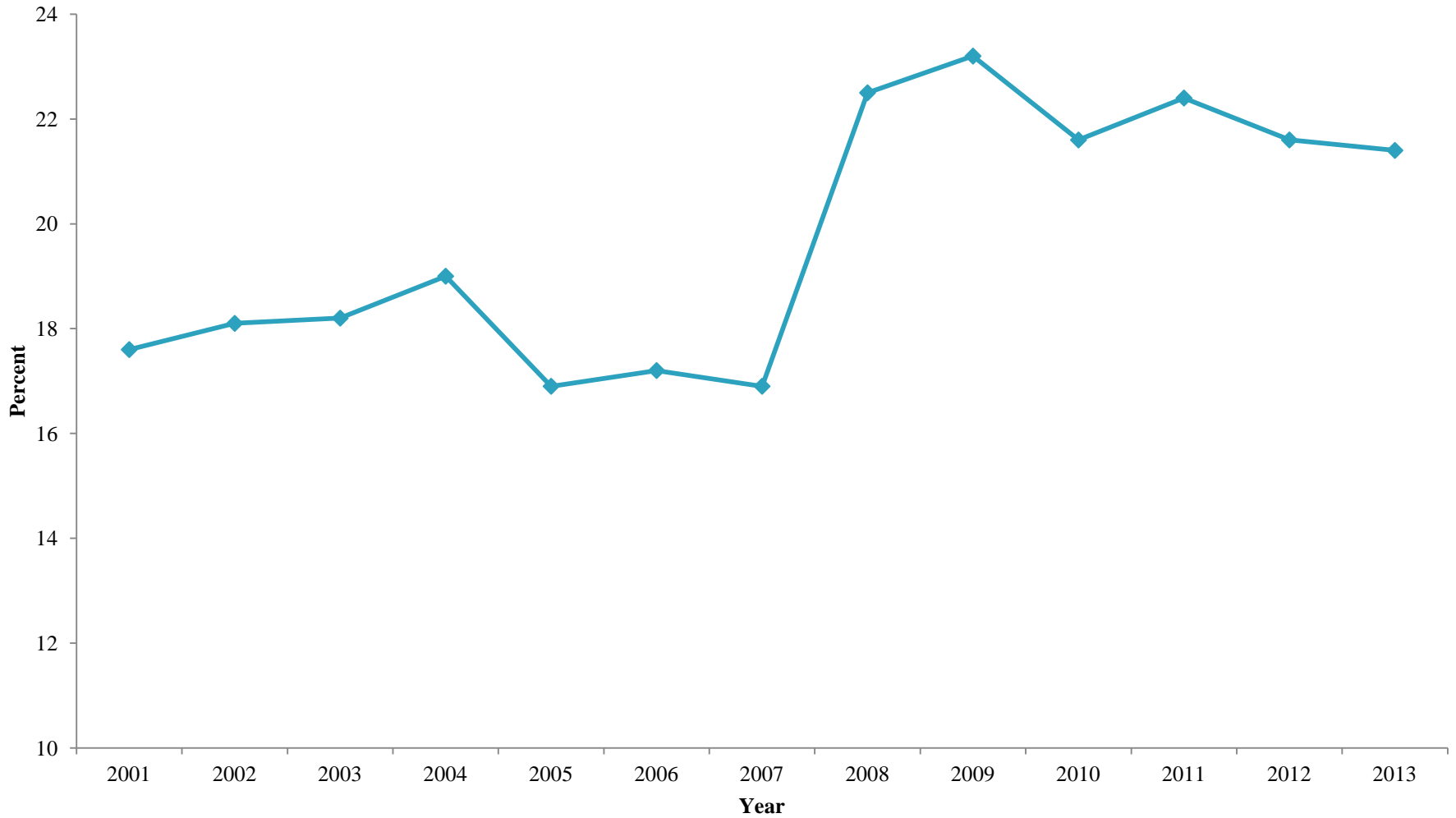


Measuring Food Insecurity

- ▶ Examples of questions
 - “I worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more”
 - “Did you or the other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food”
 - “Did you ever cut the size of any of the children’s meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?”
 - “Did any of the children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food?”

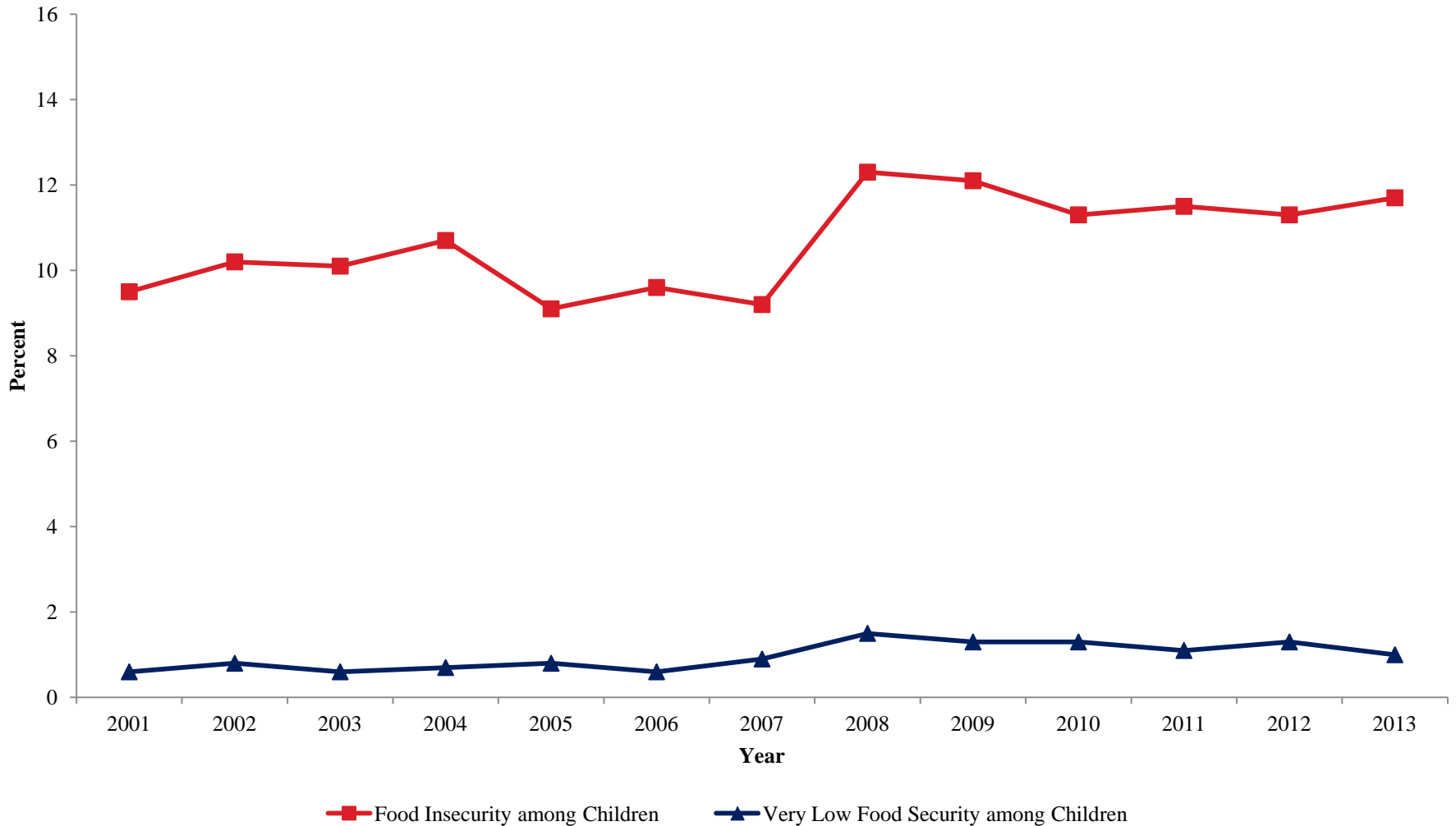
More than 1 in 5 Children Live in Food Insecure Households

Figure 1. Trends in Food Insecurity among Children



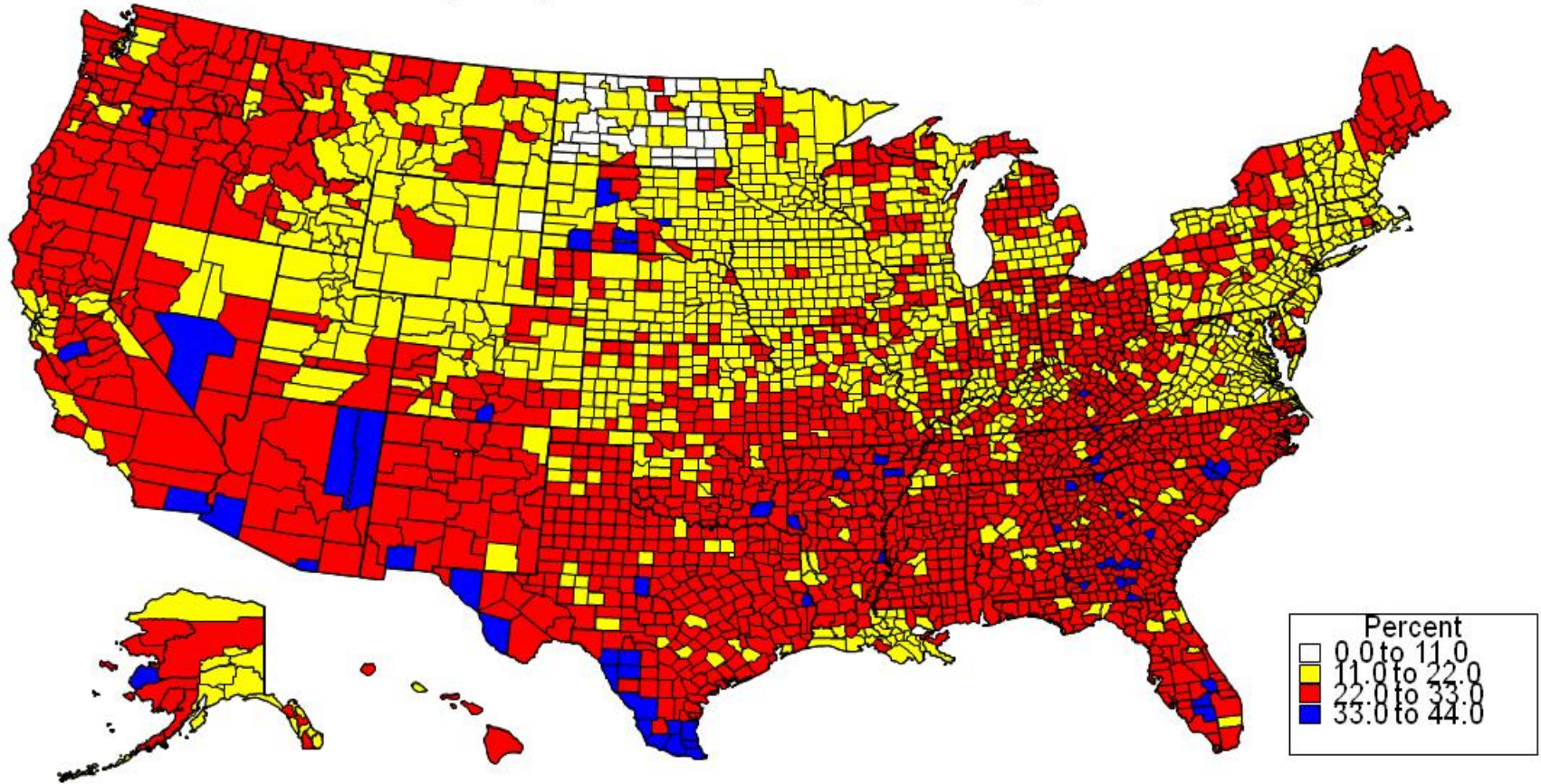
And more than 1 in 9 Children are Food Insecure

Figure 1. Trends in Food Insecurity among Children



Children in Food Insecure Households are Widespread across the U.S.

Figure 2. County Map of Child Food Insecurity Rates in 2012

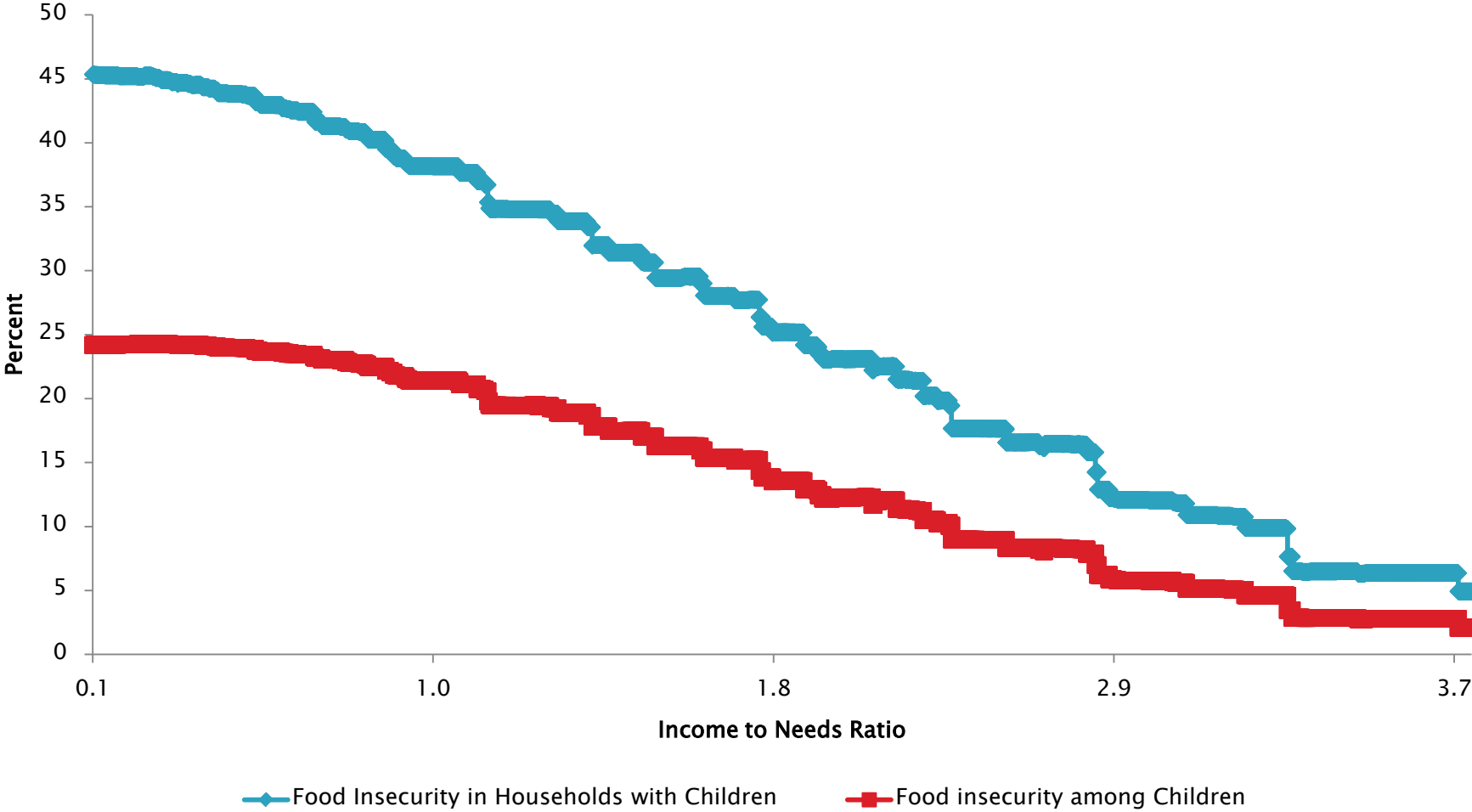




WHY?

Low Incomes are a Leading Factor

Figure 3. Relationship Between Food Insecurity among Children and Income, 2012





But Income is Only Part of the Story

- ▶ Mother's mental health
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Immigrant status
- ▶ Complex families
- ▶ Inconsistent/Non-existent child support
- ▶ Housing instability
- ▶ Social isolation
- ▶ Summertime



Implications of Food Insecurity for Child Health

- ▶ anemia
- ▶ lower nutrient intake
- ▶ cognitive problems
- ▶ higher levels of aggression and anxiety
- ▶ poorer general health and oral health
- ▶ higher risk of being hospitalized and birth defects
- ▶ asthma



Policy Response

- ▶ Federal Food Assistance Programs
 - SNAP
 - National School Lunch Program
 - School Breakfast Program
 - WIC
 - Child and Adult Care Food Program

- ▶ Emergency Food Network



Effectiveness of the Food Safety Net

- ▶ Most research examines associations, confounding possible reverse causation
- ▶ The best research suggests that SNAP, NSLP, and WIC are all effective in reducing childhood food insecurity



Effectiveness of the Food Safety Net

- ▶ One study shows that the median package of the food and cash welfare safety net (\approx \$3,400 annually) reduces child food insecurity by 16%
- ▶ Another study shows that WIC lowers child food insecurity by upwards of 1/3rd



Effectiveness of the Food Safety Net

- ▶ Summer EBT Demonstration (a random assignment experiment) showed that extra SNAP over the summertime lowered child very low food security by 1/3rd
- ▶ Recent SNAP-Ed Demonstration Project in Indiana showed the program reduced household food insecurity by 20%



Policy Considerations

- ▶ Improving program take-up rates
- ▶ Expand wrap-around services
 - Integrating food security screening health and dental care
- ▶ Adequacy of benefit levels, especially SNAP



Research Considerations

- ▶ Causality
- ▶ Human capital
- ▶ Vulnerable populations, especially disabled
- ▶ Qualitative studies