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Lizbeth Mapa

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, L.Mapa@usa.edu

Karen Park

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, kpark@usa.edu

Susan MacDermott

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, skmacdermott@gmail.com

Becki Cohill

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, bcohill@usa.edu

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Addressing Food Insecurity Among College Students: A Life Skills Program

Lizbeth Mapa, OTS; Karen Park, OTD, OTR/L; Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L; Becki Cohill, OTD, OTR/L

BACKGROUND

Food insecurity is defined as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate, safe foods, or inability to acquire personally acceptable food in socially acceptable ways (Meza et al., 2019, p.1713). College students are a vulnerable population to food insecurity. For them, food insecurity can impact academic performance, as well as their physical and mental health. Food insecurity also has psychosocial effects, such as feeling anxious or stressed. In addition, negative behaviors can arise among food-insecure students (Hagedorn et al., 2019). Occupational therapy (OT) practitioners can recognize the complexity of food insecurity and use interventions that consider an individual’s personal and environmental contexts to help address the underlying causes of food insecurity. OT practitioners can also provide training for life skills that are essential to living independently (Abaoglu et al., 2017).

PROBLEM

Food insecurity within the college student population is an established concern, as it can impact many aspects of daily life. At present, there is limited OT-based programming that addresses the multiple internal and external factors of food insecurity in college students.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this capstone project was to develop and implement an occupation-based life skills program that addresses the internal and external factors leading to food insecurity in college students.

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PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Needs assessment: A needs assessment was completed to determine the needs of college students experiencing food insecurity. A life skills program was developed with these needs in mind.

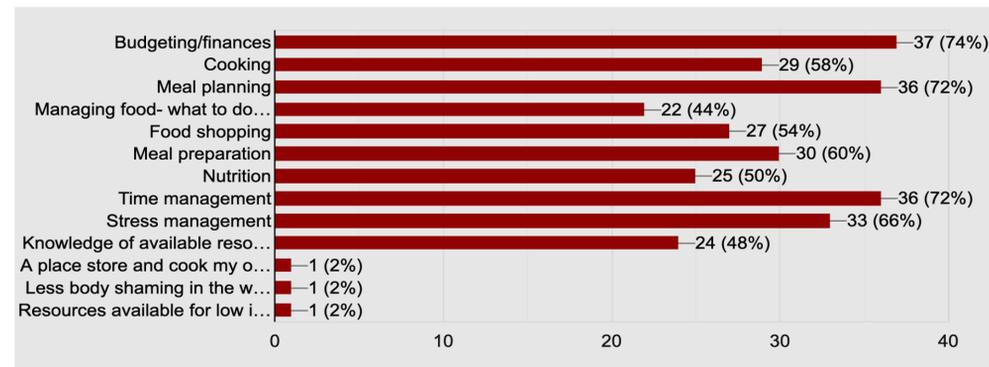
Participants: Participants were recruited using a survey that was disseminated to 898 students at CBD College in Los Angeles, CA. 50 students completed survey and then 4 students agreed to be interviewed.

Interview: Virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and were recorded to provide more information on students’ experiences. These interviews ranged from 30-60 minutes each.

Survey: A survey using a qualitative and quantitative approach was conducted. This survey consisted of 36 questions.

Needs assessment results:

What skills or resources will be beneficial to manage or improve food insecurity? Please check all that apply.



50 responses to this survey question indicated the top skills students want to address: budgeting, finances, meal planning, time management, and stress management.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE AND ACTIVITIES

Week	Topic	Activities
Week 1	Time Management	Introduce time management strategies and tips with videos, provided free planner pages
Week 2	Nutrition/Healthy Eating	Review of basic nutrition information, discuss general recommended serving sizes, complete food label activity/discussion
Week 3	Budgeting/Money Management	Introduce budgeting techniques/methods and tips, complete needs vs. wants activity, discuss SNAP and food banks/pantries
Week 4	Meal Planning/Preparation	Provide meal planning ideas/worksheets, review cooking methods, complete managing food activity, group activity of planning a meal
Week 5	Stress Management	Discuss and review stress management techniques and tips using videos

OUTCOMES

Outcomes measures included pre and post session knowledge checks, student satisfaction survey, and a post-program survey.

- 100% of students were very satisfied with the program and its resources.
- Improvement in confidence, knowledge, and ability in time management, nutrition, budgeting, meal planning and preparation, and stress management skills.

DISCUSSION

- This project helped determine and reveal the needs of students at CBD College.
- A program that addresses life skills needed to help manage food insecurity in college students may be beneficial.
- This program revealed that students felt more confident in their ability to perform life skills that would help them manage food insecurity.
- More external factors, such as access to nutritious foods and easier requirements to be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for college students, would be addressed if there was more time in the program.

OT IMPLICATIONS

- College students experiencing food insecurity is an emerging population that OT can assist.
- A program that uses life skills can help college students manage their food insecurity.
- OT practitioners can advocate for better access to nutritious foods and easier requirements for college students to be eligible for SNAP.



Deliverables



References