

Uncomfortable Truths About Comfort Eating: The Link Between Food Insecurity and Stress Eating

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Introduction

- Food insecurity, the inconsistent access to healthy foods, affects nearly 15 million American households.^{1,2}
- Food insecurity leads people to consume more affordable but generally, more unhealthy food.³
- “Comfort eating” is an overconsumption of foods that are high in fat and sugar to alleviate stress.^{4,5}
- Thus, I hypothesize that the diet of food insecure individuals does not reflect people choosing the cheaper food option, but, instead, reflects “comfort eating” in response to low socioeconomic stressors.

Materials and Methods

- We launched a nationally representative survey (n = 1395) on Qualtrics to test whether food insecure groups engage in stress-induced eating.
- Food insecurity status was measured using the U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form.⁶
- Stress-induced eating was measured using a 1-item question: “In the past 30 days, on how many days did you comfort eat”.

Results and Outcomes

- Food secure (n = 666) and food insecure (n = 795) participants
- Food insecure individuals engaged in significantly more days of comfort eating (M = 10.3 days, SD = 8.32) than food secure individuals (M = 8.67 days, SD = 7.93); $t(1459) = -3.75, p = 0.003$.

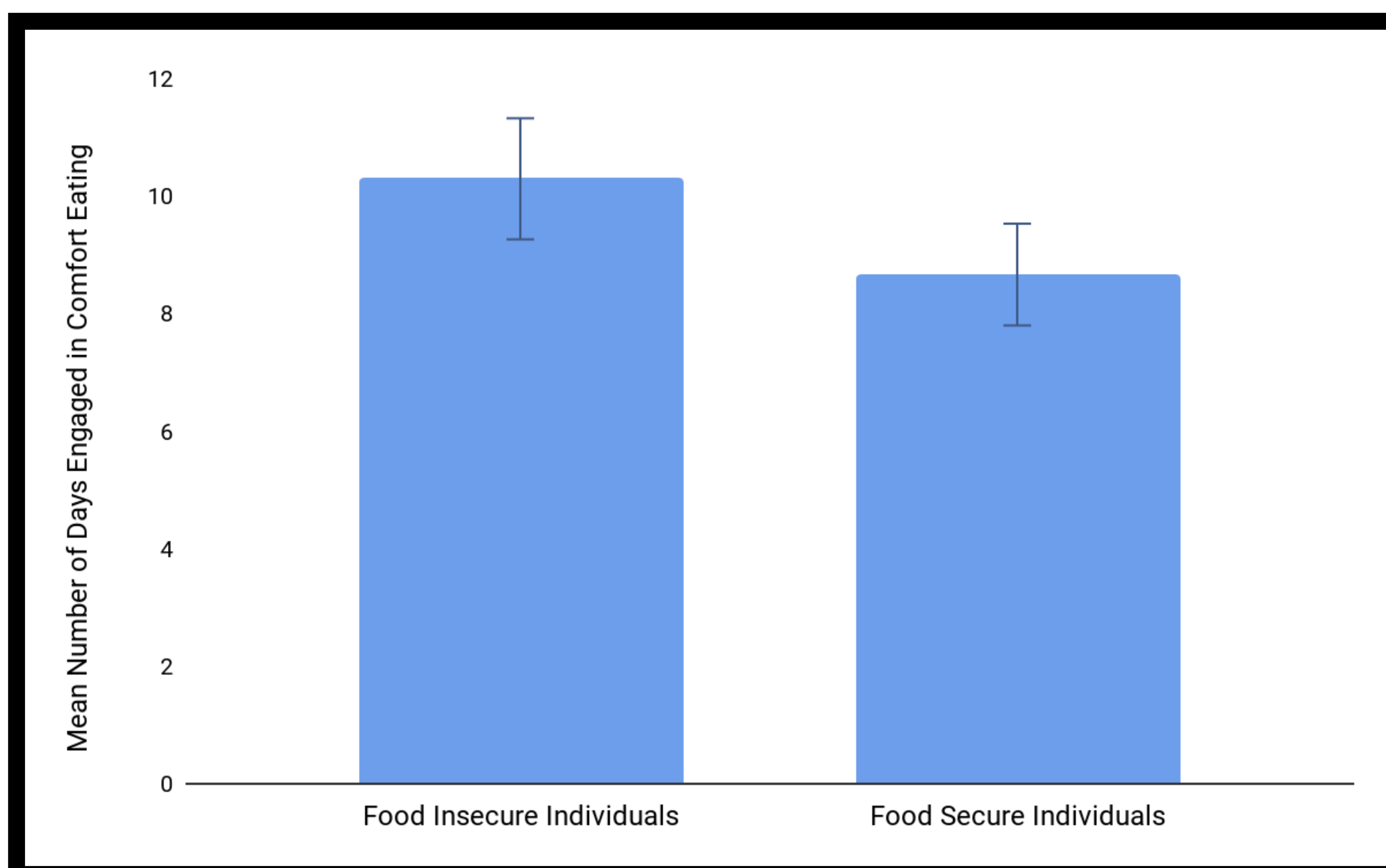
Conclusions

- The results suggest that the diet of food insecure individuals does reflect “comfort eating” in response to low socioeconomic stressors.
- As such, interventions to mitigate comfort eating would be beneficial for the health of food insecure individuals.

Literature Cited

- 1) World Food Summit (1996).
- 2) Coleman-Jensen, et al. (2018) USDA.
- 3) Ver Ploeg, et al. (2017) AEEP.
- 4) Dhurandar (2016) Physiol. Beh.
- 5) Laraia (2013) Behav.
- 6) Blumberg, et al. (1999) Am. J. Public Health.

Acknowledgements



Food-insecure individuals engaged in more days of comfort eating than food-secure individuals.

