

A Report from



DISCRIMINATION & FOOD INSECURITY IN PHILADELPHIA: SCHOOLS AND WORKPLACES

From Disparities to Discrimination: Getting at the Roots of Food Insecurity

INTRODUCTION

Discrimination in Philadelphia schools and among employers is linked to household and child food insecurity. This research is based on interviews conducted by Children's HealthWatch—Philadelphia where we interviewed 669 mothers of young children under age 4 at the emergency room at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children. During the interviews, caregivers were asked about household and child food insecurity and lifetime experiences of discrimination. The majority of the mothers interviewed were between the ages of 22-29, indicating that the possible times of experiences of discrimination reported occurred between 1990s to present.

Education

Within the US education system, there is well-documented discrimination in the way public schools are funded. When local property taxes dictate how

much the schools have to spend, lower-income and minority communities have fewer resources for their schools. There is also irrefutable evidence that school administrators and teachers disproportionately discipline boys and girls of color, which negatively affects their learning, health, and success, and puts youths on the road to prison.^{1,2}

In Philadelphia, the school system has been grossly underfunded,³ limiting access the students have to basics needed for an education including safe buildings, books, supplies, smaller class sizes, and support outside the classroom.

In 2016, African-American and Black students made up almost 53% of Philadelphia's school population, yet they received 80% of all out-of-school suspensions.⁴ According to the US Department of Education national data from 2013-2014, Black students are 2.65 times more likely to be suspended, and more than three times more likely to be suspended multiple times, than their peers.⁵



"To get a good education, my sons have to take two busses and a train through the hood to get to school. They fight all day, but here they were tired, cold, and supporting each other just to get home safe."

— Angela S., *Witnesses to Hunger: Philadelphia*

LEARN MORE: CHILDRENSHEALTHWATCH.ORG/PUBLICATION/SPOTLIGHTPADISCRIMINATION

Angela Sutton from Witnesses to Hunger, a Children’s HealthWatch partner organization, explains that because the schools in her neighborhood are so poorly supported, she sends her children to schools that are far away from her own neighborhood. Her family sacrifices time, sleep and so much energy just to get a quality education.

Employment

Discrimination in the job market and in the labor force is also widely reported. When discrimination occurs at work, it manifests in lower wages — especially for women of color — as well as lost opportunities to get hired and keep a job. Discrimination also manifests in the wage gap. In Philadelphia,



"The first time I experienced racism was when I went to a job interview. When I walked in and told them who I was, they told me I don't 'look like an Emily' and the position was filled. As I got older, I realized how wrong they were. I really do look like Emily. That's the only way I can look — like me, myself and I. That's who I was born to look like."

— Emily E., Witnesses to Hunger: Philadelphia

compared to a dollar paid to white men, employers pay Latina women 58 cents, Black women 70 cents, and white women 89 cents.⁶ Wage discrimination can have a long-term ripple effect, setting women of color up to earn lower wages throughout their lives, further compounded by gender discrimination. Tianna Gaines-Turner, a member of Witnesses to Hunger, described how she experienced gender discrimination when she was applying for a promotion at work. Her boss explained they will never promote women to positions of decision-making power. Emily Edwards, also a Witnesses to Hunger member, was discriminated against because of her skin color when applying for a job. It deeply affected her income and her ability to pay bills.

The experience of racial and ethnic discrimination is an experience of trauma that causes serious mental, emotional and physical health problems.^{7,8} When it happens in schools and in the labor force, it is obvious that the violence of racism is an explicit act of keeping people of color in poverty and struggling to meet basic needs. It also sews mistrust, distrust and resentment in teachers and supervisors, and truncates the opportunities of Philadelphia families to achieve economic security.

THE DATA ON DISCRIMINATION AND FOOD INSECURITY

Female caregivers reporting one or more experiences with discrimination in school, while applying for a job, or while at work were much more likely to have household and child food insecurity than their counterparts who reported no experiences of discrimination.

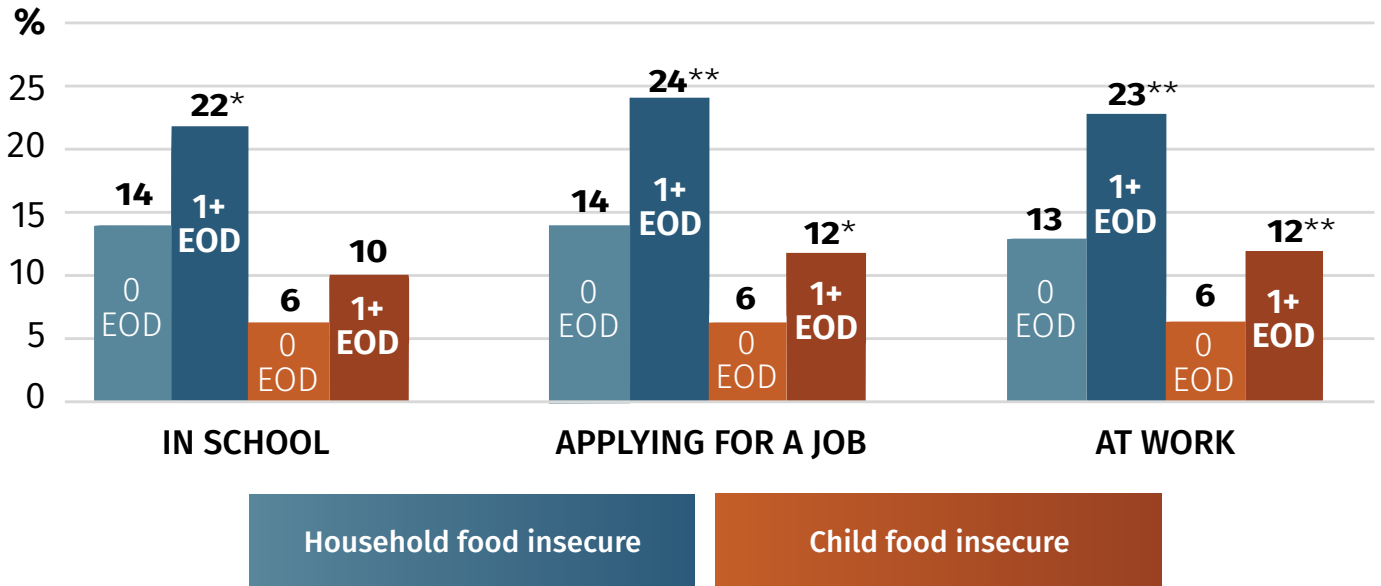
- **School** – Food security differs significantly by experience of discrimination. Women who reported discrimination at school are 60%

FIGURE 1

Household and Child Food Insecurity is higher among those with one or more Experiences of Discrimination (EOD) in school, applying for a job, or at work.

Number of participants: n=669

* Indicates statistically significant differences at alpha (p<.05)
 ** Indicates statistically significant differences (p<.01)



more likely to report household food insecurity compared to those who reported no experiences with discrimination (22.2% vs. 13.9%). For child food insecurity, the differences are similar, but not statistically significant.

- **Applying for a job** – Women who reported discrimination while applying for a job were 77% more likely to report household food insecurity compared to those who reported no discrimination experiences. There was more than a 100% increase in the percentage of caregivers reporting child food insecurity compared to their peers who did not experience discrimination while applying for work (12.3% vs. 5.9%). These data indicate that there is a significant association between food insecurity and the ability to secure employment.
- **At Work** – Women who reported discrimination in the workplace reported similar rates of food insecurity as those who reported discrimination during the employment search process.

SOLUTIONS

While these results are preliminary and the data is still being collected, it is evident that household food insecurity in Philadelphia is associated with caregivers’ experiences of discrimination in school and in the workforce.

Philadelphia lawmakers, employers, and educators can take action to reduce food insecurity through eliminating practices of discrimination in Philadelphia systems, institutions and policies, and in their every day practices in educating, hiring and employment.

Education

There are major funding and structural inequities in the state of Pennsylvania, and there are efforts underway to create fair funding formulas. Philadelphia is also considering banning out-of-school suspensions for young students, and is building out a network of community schools. These are positive endeavors, yet there is more the city can do.

- Implement a fair funding strategy for Philadelphia to have the resources needed for all children.
- Prioritize building a competent and diverse teaching force.
- Provide all school professionals proper training in recognizing their racial, ethnic and gender bias; ensure that all school personnel help students to feel physically, emotionally and academically safe.
- Consistently review gender, racial and ethnic discrimination in school discipline policies, make them easily available to the public, and create meaningful policies to prevent continued discrimination.
- Increase the number and availability of school counselors and mental health professionals, and minimize amount of school police.
- Ensure hiring practices focus on fair processes and equal pay, and that anti-discrimination policies in hiring and in workplace settings are properly enforced.
- Promote increased wages in occupations where women outnumber men such as childcare, teaching, retail, and the food service industry.
- Promote family-friendly supports such as paid family leave. Ensure workers know their right to paid sick leave.
- Expand training programs that combine education and support services, which have a track record of preparing disadvantaged workers for in-demand jobs and increasing employment and earnings.

Employment & Wages

Philadelphia has passed legislation to prohibit asking applicants about their previous wages to help prevent the continuing wage gaps in the city. While this is a positive step, there are more opportunities to improve hiring and labor practices.

An excellent education and meaningful, gainful employment help families to get out of poverty and to flourish. Yet, discrimination in these arenas keep families in a state of humiliating poverty and food insecurity, causing health problems and educational and societal harm. **Philadelphia can and must do better.**

Authors Mariana Chilton, Sherita Mouzon, and Gabriela Grimaldi

Acknowledgments The authors would like to thank the following people who contributed to this report: Molly Knowles, Kate Scully, Allison Bovell-Ammon, Richard Sheward and the invaluable teams of Children's HealthWatch and Witnesses to Hunger.

For further information please contact Mariana Chilton, PhD, MPH Mariana.Chilton@drexel.edu

References

1. Darity WA, Jr. Employment discrimination, segregation, and health. *Am J Public Health* 2003;93(2):226-31.
2. Murray LR. Sick and tired of being sick and tired: scientific evidence, methods, and research implications for racial and ethnic disparities in occupational health. *Am J Public Health* 2003;93(2):221-6.
3. Public Interest Law Center. "Cutting Through Bone:" Pa's School Funding System Deprives Students Across The State, <https://www.pubintlaw.org/cases-and-projects/cutting-through-bone-pas-school-funding-system-deprives-students-across-the-state/>, Accessed July 31, 2018. In. Philadelphia; 2018.
4. D'Onofrio M. Renewed call to ban school suspensions for young students. The Philadelphia Tribune 2018 February 14, 2018.
5. Gordon Klehr D. Letter to Superintendent William R. Hite, Jr., School District of Philadelphia to request prohibition of suspension of elementary-aged students In. <https://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Letter-Requesting-Ban-on-Suspensions-of-Elementary-Aged-Students.pdf>, accessed July 20, 2018: Education Law Center; 2017. p. 5.
6. Fromson T, Bass A. Brief of amici curiae women's law project and 27 organizations dedicated to gender wage equity in support of defendants' opposition to plaintiff's amended motion for a preliminary injunction. In: No. 2:17-cv-01548. <http://www.womenslawproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Brief-of-Amici-Curiae-WLP-and-27-Organizations.pdf> - page=22, Accessed July 20, 2018: Women's Law Project; 2017.
7. Franklin AJ, Boyd-Franklin N, Kelly S. Racism and Invisibility: Race-Related Stress, Emotional Abuse and Psychological Trauma for People of Color. *Journal of Emotional Abuse* 2016;6(2-3):9-30.
8. Wade R, Jr., Shea JA, Rubin D, Wood J. Adverse childhood experiences of low-income urban youth. *Pediatrics* 2014;134(1):e13-20.



88 East Newton Street
Vose Hall, 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02118
www.childrenshealthwatch.org
617.414.6366



DREXEL UNIVERSITY
Center for
**Hunger-Free
Communities**

3600 Market Street, 7th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19104
centerforhungerfreecommunities.org
267.359.6237

This spotlight was made possible by generous support from The JPB Foundation.