



Multiple Hardships Among Philadelphia Families with Young Children: 2008-2011

Often times, low-income families with young children under the age of 4 experience a continuous cycle of hardships (i.e., food insecurity, energy insecurity, and housing insecurity). These experiences have negative consequences on the developing bodies and brains of young children.

Food insecurity is the lack of consistent access to sufficient healthy food for all family members to enjoy active, healthy lives. In 2010, 48.8 million people, including 16.2 million children lived in U.S. households that were food insecure. Approximately 24% (or 9 million) of very young children (under age 6) lived in households experiencing food insecurity in 2010. **Children's HealthWatch** research in Philadelphia found that nearly 24% of families with young children were food insecure in 2011. This research has shown that young children who live in households experiencing food insecurity are more likely to:

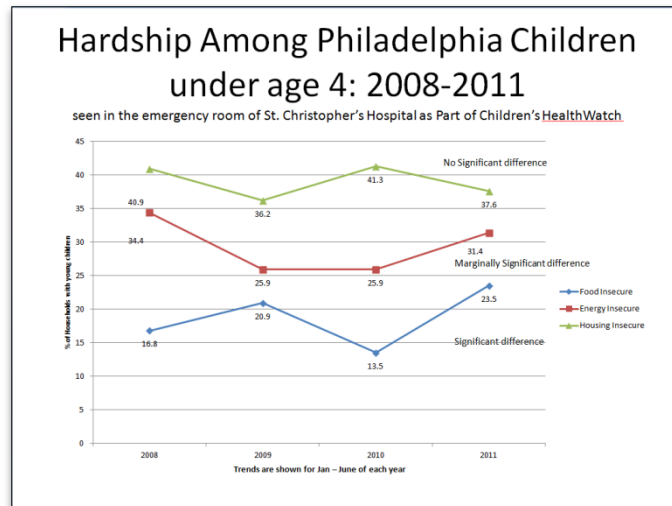
- Be in poor or fair health
- Experience problems with cognitive development
- Exhibit behavioral and emotional problems

Energy insecurity occurs when families lack consistent access to sufficient home heating or electricity to ensure healthy and safe conditions in the home. Households were classified as being energy insecure if the utility company sent a letter threatening to shut off services or had shut off services in the past year or if they had relied on a cooking stove to heat their house. Young children who live in households experiencing energy insecurity are more likely to:

- Be in poor or fair health
- Have higher hospitalization rates
- Be at risk for developmental delays

Housing insecurity occurs when families move frequently, crowd into living spaces that are too small, or double up with another family for financial reasons. Nearly 40% of families that the Children's HealthWatch team interviewed in North Philadelphia experienced some form of housing insecurity in 2011. Children living in families who have moved multiple times in the past year are more likely to:

- Be in poor or fair health
- Be at risk for developmental delay
- Have lower weight-for-age



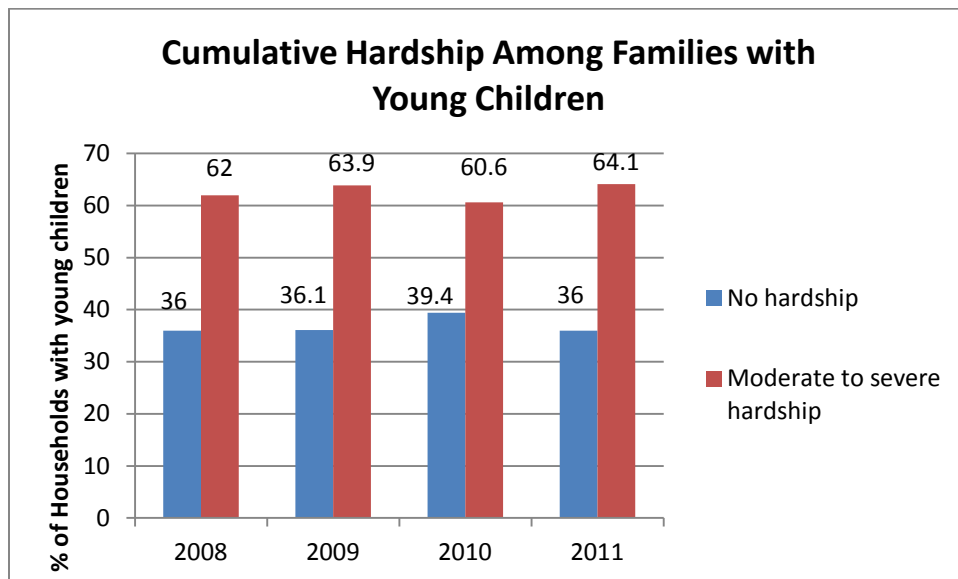
For many low-income families, hardships are rarely experienced in isolation.

Cumulative hardship is comprised of three components:

1. Food insecurity
2. Energy insecurity
3. Housing insecurity

Providing basic necessities like enough healthy food, heat, lighting and stable housing can be extremely difficult and result in the need to make tough choices about which bills to pay. Families constantly need to make trade-offs to stay within their budget. As a result, child health and wellbeing suffer. In 2011, approximately two thirds of Philadelphia families interviewed by Children's HealthWatch experienced some form of hardship. Children's Health Watch research has found that children living in families who experience multiple hardships are:

- More likely to be at risk for developmental delay
- Less likely to be classified as well



Children's HealthWatch is a surveillance study monitoring the health and wellbeing of young children under the age of four. Since 1998, over 43,000 caregivers at sites in Baltimore, Boston, Little Rock, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia have been interviewed.

Children's HealthWatch Philadelphia is conducted in the Emergency Department at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Pennsylvania's 1st Congressional District. Since 2005, more than 5,500 caregivers of young children have been interviewed at this site.

For more information, contact Dr. Amanda Breen, Research Coordinator of Children's HealthWatch Philadelphia, at 215-762-7937 or abreen@drexel.edu