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Hunger: Its Impact on Children's Health and Mental Health



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"Hunger: Its Impact on
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Hunger, with its adverse consequences for children,

continues to be a problem in the United States. This study examines the independent contribution of child hunger to children's physical and mental health and academic functioning after controlling for a range of environmental, maternal, and child factors that have also been associated with poor outcomes among children. Using standardized tools, comprehensive demographic, psychosocial, and health data were collected in Worcester, MA, from homeless mothers and their children and housed, low-income mothers and their children.

For school-age children, severe hunger was a significant predictor of chronic illness after controlling for housing status, low birth weight, and stressful life events. For preschoolers, moderate hunger was a significant predictor of adverse health conditions while controlling for potential explanatory factors. For both preschoolers and school-age children, severe child hunger was associated with more behavior problems. After controlling for housing status and stressful life events, severe child hunger also was associated with higher reported anxiety/depression among school-age children.

This study underscores the importance of clinical recognition of child hunger and its outcomes. Such recognition by physicians would allow them to recommend preventive interventions and to inform patients' families about food-related resources.