INTRODUCTION

This data update provides information on the prevalence of basic needs insecurity among USC students. Three basic needs are highlighted: homelessness, food insecurity, and financial strain.

The data were derived from the Student Well-being Index Survey (SWIS), collected from April 9 - May 8, 2020. SWIS was distributed electronically to approximately 25,000 students who were enrolled in an on-campus program at USC, yielding the response rate of 21.2% or 5,300 student participants (20.7% or 2,132 for undergraduate; 21.6% or 2,958 for graduate). The survey has the following margin of errors: +/-1.3% for the total on-campus students, +/-2.0% for undergraduate students, and +/-1.6% for graduate students at 95% confidence level. To correct any imbalances between the survey sample and the census student population at USC, data were subsequently weighted through a statistical raking procedure and adjusted to match student census population by sex, race/ethnicity, school, degree level, and campus location.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- During the 30 days before taking the survey, 32.8% of USC students experienced food insecurity, defined as having marginal to very low levels of food security. Almost 10% of these students were also considered to have a very low level of food security.
- Homelessness affected 17.0% of USC students. Among students who classified as having experienced homelessness, over 7% identified a non-residential building on campus (such as university classrooms, office/lab spaces, meeting rooms, lounges, libraries, etc.) as the most popular location where students slept overnight.
- Almost 30% of USC students reported to have high financial strain (scoring 15 or more out of the financial strain index). Over 60% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt stressed about their personal finances in general.

Student with basic needs security had higher rates of positive wellbeing outcomes.

From the cross tabulation chi-square test, students with basic needs security (not experiencing any homelessness, food insecurity or high financial strain) had significantly (p<.05) higher rates of positive wellbeing outcomes than students experiencing at least one basic needs insecurity:

- 58.3% vs 41.7% on positive sense of belonging at USC
- 54.0% vs 46.0% on perception to be treated fairly and equitably in the classroom
- 53.9% vs 46.1% on perception to be treated fairly and equitably out of the classroom
- 55.9% vs 44.1% on positive mental health

PREVALENCE OF BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AMONG USC ON-CAMPUS STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>UG</th>
<th>G</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>Homelessness is defined as a person who does not have a stable place to live. Students were identified as having experienced homelessness if they responded affirmatively to have slept overnight in at least one of the 11 locations that indicated signs of homelessness in the past 12 months.</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Insecurity</td>
<td>Food insecurity is defined as limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire such food in a socially acceptable manner. The most extreme form is often accompanied by physiological sensations of hunger. Students with food insecurity had marginal to low levels of food security, assessed in the time frame of 30 days prior to taking the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey Module embedded in the survey.</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Strain</td>
<td>Financial strain is the student perception of feeling stressed or worried about finances. Participants rated their level of agreement from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) to 5 items from the Study on Collegiate Financial Wellness by Ohio State University. Students with a high level of financial strain had a composite score of 15 or more out of 20, or an average of 3 out of 4 for each item from this scale.</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>Students were identified as basic needs secure if they did not experience any of the 3 basic needs insecurity.</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have enough money to participate in most of the same activities as my peers.*

Non-residential building on campus (not meant for sleeping overnight)

Temporarily staying with a relative, friend or couch surfing

Non-residential building off campus affiliated with USC (e.g. churches, research centers, etc.)

Outdoor location (e.g. street, sidewalk, alley, campground, park, beach, or other)

Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or personal travel)

Closed area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation

In a Camper

Treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)

FINANCIAL STRAIN
Percent of students who agreed or strongly agreed that...

I have enough money to participate in most of the same activities as my peers.*

I feel stressed about my finances in general.

I worry about having enough money to pay for school

I am seriously concerned about the amount of education-related loans I will have to repay once I graduate.

References

Click the link below to visit the USC Well-being Collective website: uscwellbeingcollective.usc.edu

For additional questions, please contact:
USC Student Health, Office for Health Promotion Strategy, Backbone for USC Well-being Collective at hpstrategy@usc.edu | published in November 2020