



# FEEDING THE FAMILY: "YOU GOTTA DO WHAT YOU'VE GOTTA DO"



A PILOT RESEARCH STUDY INTO THE STRATEGIES USED BY LOW INCOME MOTHERS TO FEED THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES

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**Background:** Food security refers to the ability of an individual or community to reliably attain suitable and nutritious foods without reliance on emergency relief, theft or scavenging. While it has only recently begun to receive greater attention in Australian public health and welfare sectors, literature available suggests those who are food insecure are more likely to experience social or economic disadvantage and be from already marginalised groups including unemployed and low income families.



**Aim:** To investigate the strategies used by mothers in Goulburn who derive all of their income from government assistance, to feed themselves and their families.



**Methods:** Semi structured, anonymous interviews were held with mothers from the regional New South Wales city of Goulburn. Transcription, analysis and coding was undertaken to determine thematic consistencies among participants.



**Results:** Interviews (n=4) revealed cost as the most pressing issue for mothers when accessing food. Mothers purchased a variety of food for their families. The coping strategies employed by these mothers echo those used in published literature: mothers relied on their social networks as a first option in times of food scarcity, but could also identify other sources of support locally. Participants reported mixed experiences accessing local support agencies.

Three mothers had tried to acquire more money for food. All had previously relied on their families or friends in times of food insecurity for either food or money for food. Unexpected costs such as medical expenses often preceded times of food insecurity.



Participants described different experiences with the use of scavenging, sourcing local emergency food relief and illegal activity relating to food acquisition.



**Conclusions:** Thematic saturation was not reached due to the small number of study participants, however this study provides an insight into emerging issues which need to be considered in further research to determine how widespread the coping strategies used by this group are. Follow up community action is needed to address issues which are confirmed as more widespread.

*For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'*

Karla has worked in the health arena for almost a decade in various roles including population health, health promotion and health service planning. She has a Master of Public Health and a keen interest in health inequities, in particular, food insecurity. Karla currently works for a regional district health service.



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