

Empty Cupboards, Empty Feelings

Food insecurity, depression and suicide are intertwined

by Joy Margheim and Michael Leachman

Oregon adults in households without adequate access to food are significantly more likely to be depressed than those with secure food access.

OCPP's analysis of the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), a statewide telephone survey, shows that:

- In 2005, Oregon adults in food insecure households were more than twice as likely to suffer from depression as adults in households with adequate food.
- Suicide surfaces more often in households experiencing food insecurity.
- Women are more vulnerable than men to both food insecurity and depression.
- In 2005, depressed adults in food insecure homes were twice as likely as those with adequate access to food to say that they had *never* received treatment for depression and three times as likely to report that they had no health insurance.
- Oregon adults in food insecure households were nearly as likely as those in food secure households to be employed in 2005. Yet, among those who were employed, only 55 percent of adults in food insecure households had some form of health care coverage, while 86 percent of adults in households with secure access to food had health care coverage.

OCPP recommends that the state's Interagency Council on Hunger and Homelessness (ICHH) examine ways for Oregon to better link its anti-hunger efforts with its mental health improvement services. Specifically, the ICHH should improve coordination among hunger advocates, mental health advocates, and state agencies; seek mental health expertise to inform its activities; and use the Oregon BRFSS to measure progress.