

MILITARY FOOD INSECURITY

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Demographic questions

The following questions will be asked of all participants:

What is your rank?

How long have you been in the military?

How many dependents do you have?

How long have you been stationed at [name of installation]?

Domain	Potential Questions	Additional notes
Typical patterns of food acquisition and eating behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do you typically eat your meals on weekdays? What about on weekends? Where do your family members usually eat their meals on the weekdays? On weekends? For each family member would you let us know: Are some meals eaten at home? If yes, which ones? Are some meals procured outside of home? If yes, which ones and where are these meals purchased? ? 	Responses will be explored in-depth through follow-up questions.
Strategies to get food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do you purchase food (not including restaurants)? How often do you purchase food? • Do you and/or any household members have dietary restrictions? If yes, who has these dietary restrictions and what are those restrictions? • [If someone has dietary restrictions] Do you have difficulty obtaining food that meets the needs of the person(s) who has dietary restrictions? If yes, what are those difficulties? • What foods do you and members of your household prefer to eat? What types of 	Responses will be explored in-depth through follow-up questions, especially where responses suggest challenges or barriers to regularly acquiring enough food.

	<p>food do you wish you could get more often? What types of food are you not getting that you assess that you should include in your diet?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any social norms around meals? If yes, what are they? [For the military member] Are there any specific norms related to meals that you follow when you are with your unit? If yes, what are they? • Do members/spouses feel they rely on cheaper, less nutritious foods to feed the household? If yes, what types of food are you purchasing? • Do you (member or spouse) skip meals? If yes, who is skipping meals? Why are you/other household member skipping meals? How often do you/your household member skip meals each month? • Do you have issues with lack of diversity in food that you are able to purchase? If yes, why? • Are you concerned that you or your household is not getting enough nutritious foods? If yes, what nutritious food are you and your household not getting in sufficient quantities? • Do you use food pantries or other food assistance services to supplement the foods you purchase? If yes, what services are you using? • Why are you using these services? 	
Physical access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you get to where you buy or get food (i.e., what kind of transportation do you 	Responses will be explored in-depth through follow-up questions, especially

	<p>use)? Do you ever have difficulty getting to a retail food store or other location where you purchase food? If yes, why? How often each month do you have transportation difficulties?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What food retail outlets do you use? If they don't mention the commissary, ask if they use the commissary. If they don't use the commissary, ask why they do not use the commissary • What types of foods are available in these retail outlets? Are the types of food sold in these retail outlets familiar and adequate in your opinion? • What types of DoD resources for accessing food are you aware of? (e.g., the commissary, online shopping, delivery pilots). Do you use those resources? Why/why not? • Service member only: What do you think of the dining facilities—cleanliness, food options, accessibility, comfort? • Service member only: Do you eat in the installation dining halls? If no, why? • If yes: What types of food are served at the dining halls? Are you able to find foods you are willing to eat? If not, why (lack of variety, food not to your taste, something else)? • Are dining halls or other food options available on the installation when you need to eat your meals (for example, late night shifts, early hours on the weekend, etc.)? • Do work hours (or work 	<p>where responses suggest challenges accessing regular meals, lack of access or use of on-base sources (e.g., DFAC, commissary) or other sources of food.</p>
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	<p>location) affect your access or time for meals? If yes, how?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service member only: Are you responsible for shopping for food and cooking your meals? If yes, do you have time to shop and cook if you do not eat in dining hall? 	
<p>Perceptions of food insecurity and financial ability to acquire food</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have difficulty financially making ends meet? • Have you ever needed to sacrifice what you or your family is able to eat because of your financial situation? • If you do feel like you need to sacrifice, what are examples of what you sacrifice in terms of food? 	<p>Moderator will explore the relationship between financial difficulties and food insecurity in-depth through follow-up questions.</p>
<p>Spending on food acquisition within the context of other expenses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have a monthly/family budget? If no, why not? • What are the top ten things that your household spends its income on? • In terms of top ten list, where do you place “getting food”? • If food is not mentioned in the list, ask where expenditures on food fall in the household budget. 	<p>Responses will be explored in-depth through follow-up questions, especially whether other expenses create difficulties acquiring food.</p>
<p>Contributing factors to difficulty accessing food (focus on process: how, when, why, and where)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your monthly BAH payment cover the cost of your housing? If not, how much more do you pay above BAH? Are you renting your housing? Is the housing you renting the same type of housing that DOD expects you to rent, i.e. if due to your rank and dependency status you are eligible for a 3 bedroom townhouse, are you renting a 3 bedroom townhouse or something else? If it is something else, what type of housing are you renting? • If you are not renting, did you 	<p>Responses will be explored in-depth through follow-up questions investigating why/how these contributing factors impacted access to food (e.g., why did a spouse losing their job affect food access? Was housing or other expenses dependent on the spouse having a job?)</p>

	<p>purchase a home for which you have a mortgage? If yes, does your BAH payment cover your monthly mortgage cost?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have unexpected expenses affected your household's ability to pay for food? If yes, what type of expense and how much? Were these one time expenses or recurring? If they are recurring, how often do these recur?• Have PCS moves affected your household's ability to pay for food? If yes, what specifically about the PCS move caused the impact (for example getting receipts together for reimbursement took a long time, DOD reimbursement took a long time, expenses that were not reimbursed)? If there are expenses that are not reimbursed, what were those expenses?• How do deployments impact your family's access to food? If yes, how?• Have changes in the status of your spouse's employment affected your household's ability to pay for food? If yes, how? If the spouse is unemployed ask if the spouse is seeking employment.• Have changes in access to childcare affected your household's ability to pay for food? If yes, how?• Have changes in childcare expenses affected your household's ability to pay for food? If yes, how?• Do you have any loans? If yes, what loans do you have? What are the monthly payments for each of those loans?	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any credit card debt? If yes, how much? Are you paying the monthly minimum payment or more? • Are you able to account for all of your monthly expenses in addition to housing, utilities, and food? For example, do you have mobile phone service? Are you paying the cost of your phone in addition to the monthly cost of the mobile service? Do you have streaming service or cable TV? If yes, which services do you have? • 	
<p>Access to and use of food assistance programs, Other Strategies to address food insecurity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel that people look down on others who use food assistance? • Do you personally have concerns with using food assistance? If yes, why? • Is eligibility for food assistance an issue for you receiving food assistance? If yes, how? • What food assistance programs do you know about? PROBE: Do they currently food assistance program(s) 	
<p>Family preferences/ constraints</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your family have physical or mental health concerns that affect food access? • If children in household: Have you had to use any strategies to make sure your child/ren has/have enough to eat? If yes, what were they? 	

GUIDE FOR IMPROMPTU INTERVIEWS OF MEMBERS AND SPOUSES

We will recruit individuals by asking if they or anyone in their family is in the military and whether they would be willing to discuss issues of food access and getting food near or on military installations. The questions are from the USDA 6-item food security scale. Note that, since individuals will be approached at food establishments, the interviews need to be kept short. We will aim to acquire a depth of information on one question versus superficial information on all questions. This may mean that most respondents will not answer all six questions, but instead will provide in-depth information for one or two questions from the scale. We will rotate questions asked to ensure that all questions are asked at least three times at each site visit location (i.e., one person will be asked the first question on the scale, the next person will be asked the second question on the scale, etc.).

Introduction

We are looking at issues of food access and how people get food here on [NAME OF installation] and around the installation. Would you be willing to talk about your experience with food and answer a few questions around food access for your household?

First, are you an active duty service member or the spouse of an active duty service member? [if no, state that we are only interviewing service members and military spouses and thank them for their time]

What is your/your spouse's rank?

How long have you been in the military/been married to your service member?

How long have you been located at this installation?

Thank you. The next questions are about your experiences acquiring food:

Have you ever had the experience where the food that you bought just didn't last, and you didn't have money to get more?

Yes

No

[If yes, what specifically happened? When did this happen? How did you handle the situation?] Can you expand/Tell me more? Why, when, where? How did you handle?

Have you ever had the experience where you couldn't afford to eat balanced meals?

Yes

No

[If yes] Can you expand/Tell me more. Why, when, where? How did you handle?

Have you or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

Yes

No

[If yes] Can you expand/Tell me more. Why, when, where? How did you handle?

Have you ever eaten less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

Yes

No

[If yes] Can you expand/Tell me more. Why, when, where? How did you handle?

Have you ever been hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

Yes

No

[If yes] Can you expand/Tell me more. Why, when, where? How did you handle?

[If individual answers no to all (i.e., they are food secure)] Tell me more about your food purchasing and preparation?

GUIDE FOR FOOD SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS

In terms of the food provided to service members: can you speak to what is served? What is available?

What are your goals in providing food? What are the guidelines, if any?

How are menus planned?

What is the meal schedule?

How do you handle food restrictions? Individual preferences?

Do you know how well the dining facilities are utilized by service members? Do you have data on use?

We know from survey data that service members do not eat all their meals in the dining facilities. Do you have a sense for why they do not use the dining facilities for every meal? Which meals are busiest/most popular? Which meals are skipped the most?

Have you received any feedback from service members on the food available at dining facilities? What about the hours?

Is there anything you would change about the types of food you provide to service members?

Is there anything you would change about when food is offered?

Is there anything you would change about your dining facilities?

Any changes to how you provide food to service members?