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Increased Risk for Very Low Food Security among Mexican-origin Women Born in Mexico

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Background: Nutrition-related health conditions disproportionately affect disadvantaged populations that face increased vulnerability to food insecurity and poor nutritional health, such as hard-to-reach older adults residing in *colonias* along the U.S.-Mexico border. Among U.S. Mexican-immigrant destinations, the archetype is the more than 2,500 *colonias* along the southwestern U.S. border. The availability of an adequate household food supply is critical for the older population. Mexican-origin older adults face physical, economic, and sociocultural contextual challenges to the accessibility, affordability, adequacy, and appropriateness of food resources on multiple levels: individual and community. Although previous research examined customary correlates of food security, such as poverty or socioeconomic status among Hispanics or older adults, there is little work that examined the influence of nativity, especially on food security in border regions that are culturally unique.

Objectives: This study seeks to examine data from 140 face-to-face interviews conducted by *promotoras de salud* (indigenous community health workers) with women 50 years and older in 44 *colonias* along the South Texas border with Mexico to: (1) describe the level of food insecurity among this hard-to-reach population, and (2) examine the relationship between nativity (country of birth) and food security status.

Methods: Using data from older women who participated in the 2009 Colonia Household and Community Food Resource Assessment (C-HCFRA), we examined demographic characteristics, health characteristics, food access and mobility, federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs, quality of food environment, food security, eating behaviors, and alternative food sources.

Results: 77% of participants experienced food insecurity, with 68% experiencing very low food security. Very low food security was associated with being born in Mexico, adjusting for household income and food assistance program participation.

Conclusions: This study provides compelling evidence for enhanced research efforts that will better understand coping strategies and the use of food and nutrition assistance programs for reducing hardship associated with very low food security among older U.S.- and Mexico-born Mexican-origin women.