



UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY  
CENTER FOR POVERTY RESEARCH

# **Combating Very Low Food Security in the U.S.**

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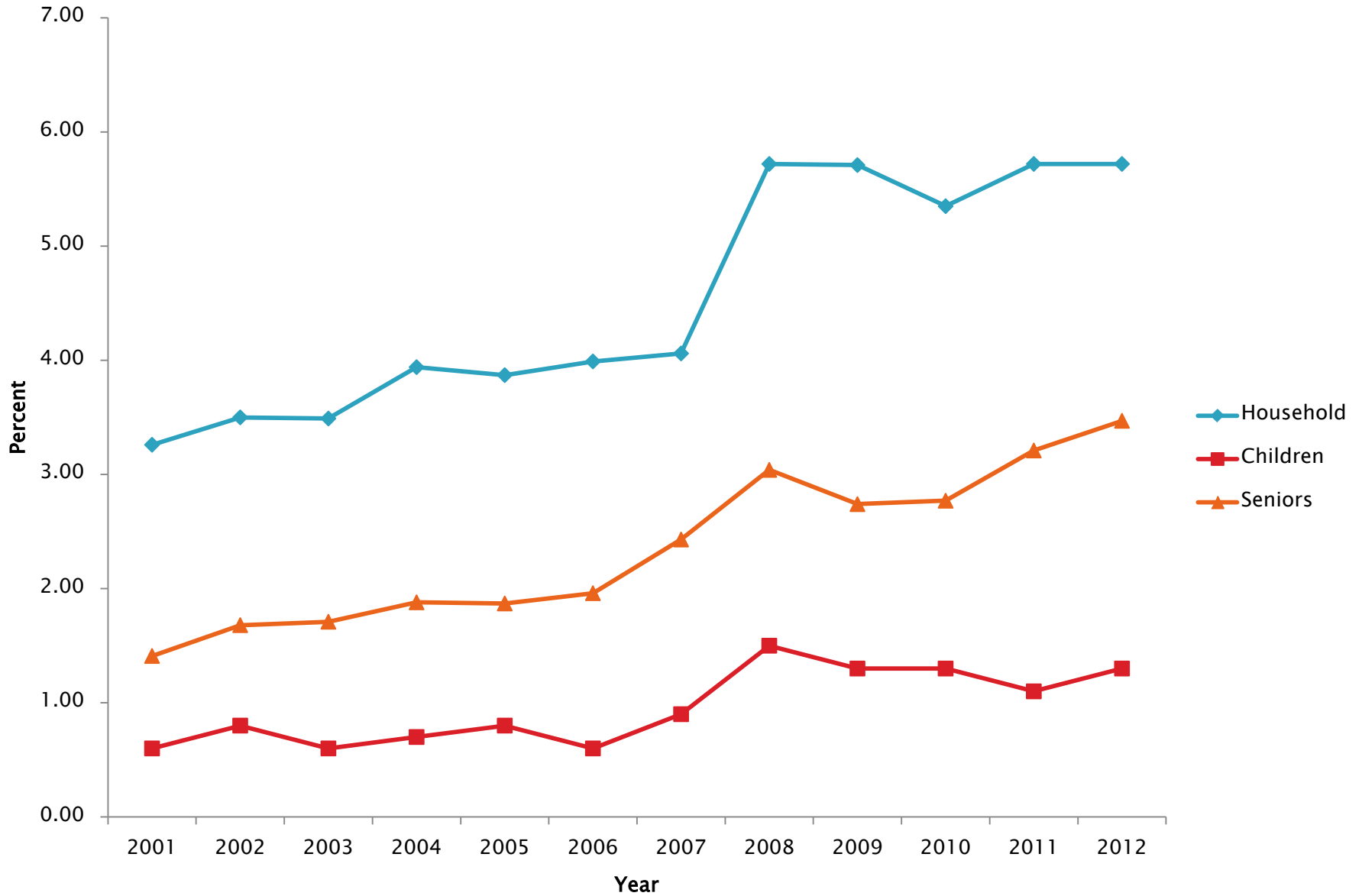
# Acknowledgements

- ▶ My comments draw heavily from my research with Dr. Craig Gundersen at the University of Illinois.
- ▶ We are grateful for financial support from the Food and Nutrition Service in USDA and the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger.
- ▶ The opinions expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the USDA or NFESH



- ▶ Rates of Very Low Food Security increased dramatically with the onset of the Great Recession
  - Stabilized in recent years for households overall, and children, but continue to rise among seniors

# Figure 1: Rates of Very Low Food Security





# Why?

- ▶ Low incomes are a leading factor
- ▶ But income is only part of the story, making any policy response more challenging



# Among Children other Factors Include

- ▶ Mother's mental health
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Immigrant status
- ▶ Complex families
- ▶ Inconsistent/Non-existent child support
- ▶ Housing instability
- ▶ Financial management
- ▶ Social isolation
- ▶ Summertime



# Among Seniors other Factors Include

- ▶ Age
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Education Attainment
- ▶ Race/Ethnicity
- ▶ Marital Status
- ▶ Social Isolation
- ▶ Presence of Grandchildren
- ▶ Home Ownership



## **Among Households with Children, Negative Health Consequences Include**

- ▶ higher risks of some birth defects
- ▶ lower nutrient intakes
- ▶ greater cognitive problems
- ▶ higher levels of aggression and anxiety
- ▶ poorer general health
- ▶ higher probability of mental health issues
- ▶ higher probability of anemia and asthma
- ▶ higher probability of behavioral problems
- ▶ more instances of oral health problems

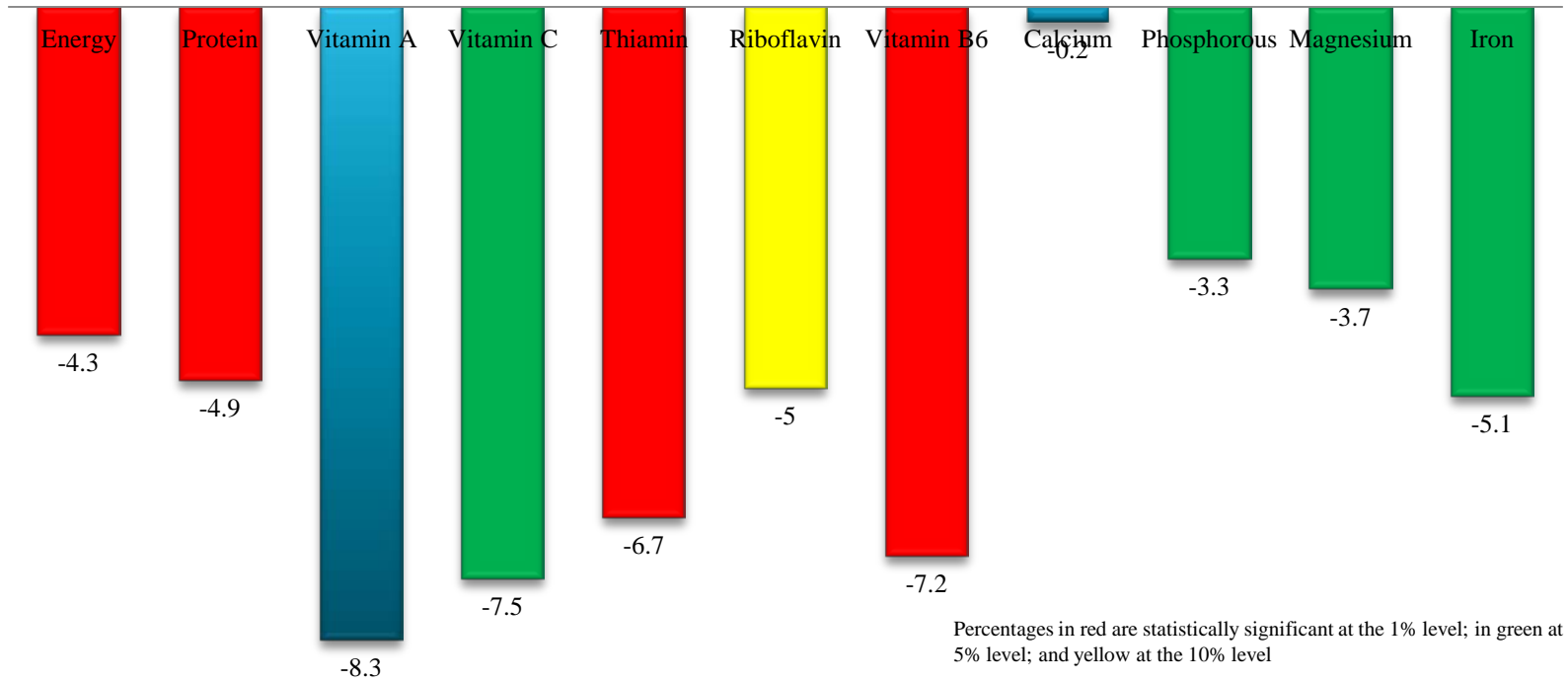




**Among Seniors, Food Insecurity is Associated with Worse Nutrient and Health Outcomes, and some of these Effects are Large**

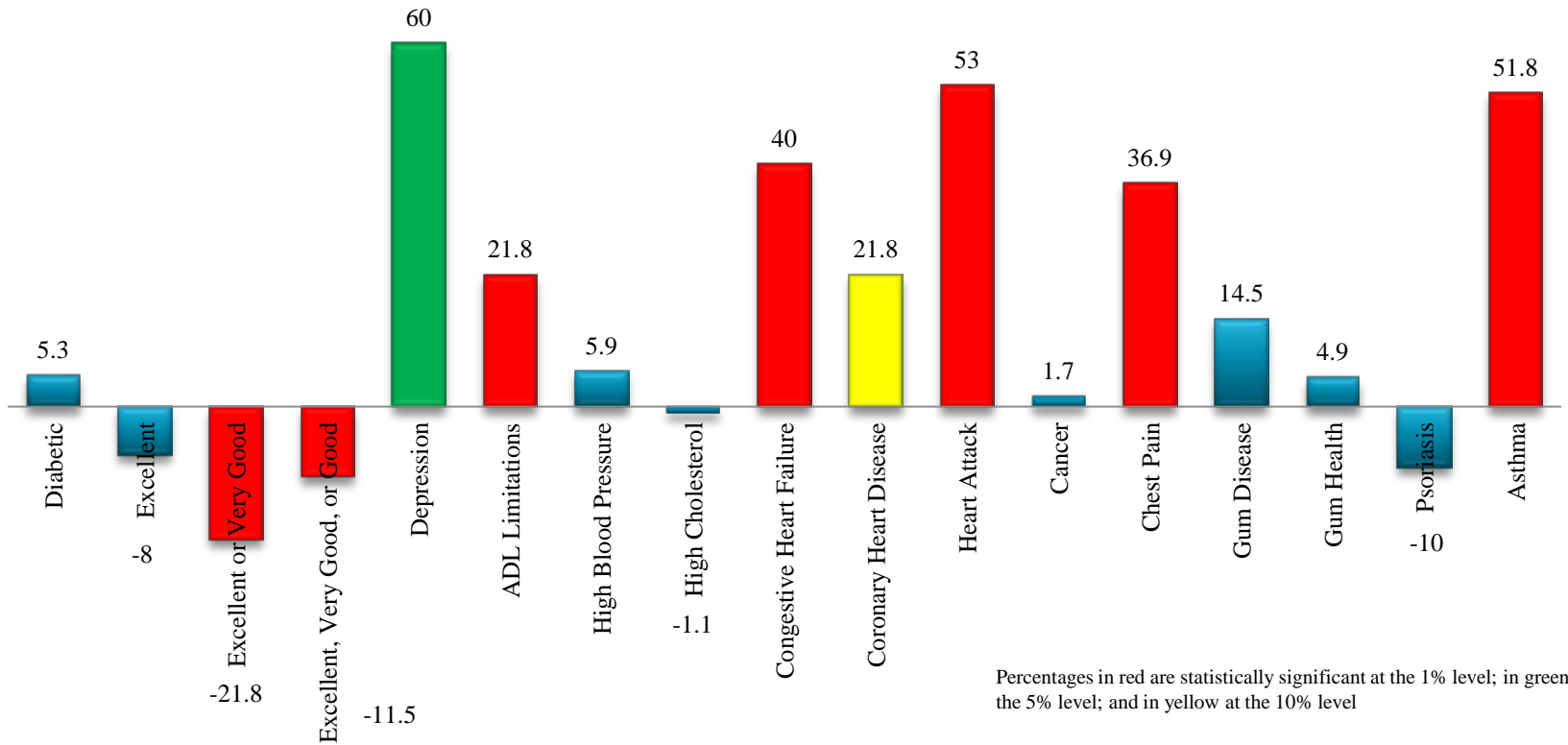


**Figure 2. Regression-Adjusted Estimates of the Effect of Food Insecurity on Nutrient Intakes of Seniors 60+ (Percent Change Relative to Average of Food Secure Seniors)**





**Figure 3. Regression-Adjusted Estimates of the Effect of Food Insecurity on Health Outcomes of Seniors 60+ (Percent Change Relative to Average of Food Secure Seniors)**





**The Risk of Food Insecurity is Greater for 40-49 and 50-59 year olds, but the Negative Health Consequences of Food Insecurity are More Severe for Adults 60+**



# Effectiveness of the Food Safety Net

- ▶ The best research suggests that SNAP, NSLP, and WIC are all effective in reducing childhood food insecurity, including VLFS among children, and SNAP is also effective in reducing household FI and VLFS
- ▶ No conclusive evidence on SNAP and seniors



# Policy Considerations

- ▶ Improving program take-up rates
  - SNPA take-up rates among seniors only 35%
  - Much higher among other groups, but still a challenge for many on SNAP who are working or with disabilities
    - One study of SC found 2/3rds of exits out of SNAP were for failure to recertify or to provide the correct paperwork. The latter were especially disadvantaged (Ribar and Edelhoch 2008)
  - Enhance school feeding programs, especially in summertime



# Policy Considerations

- ▶ Improve Adequacy of SNAP benefits
  - TFP is too low for many areas of the country
  - TFP has unrealistic expectations of time available for food preparation
  - Net income calculation needs to be revised
  - Correcting this likely will improve takeup



# Policy Considerations

- ▶ **Expand wrap-around services**
  - Financial and nutritional education (what role for local school districts?)
  - Improve coordination between mental and physical health services (including treatment programs) and food and nutrition education and assistance





# Research Considerations

- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Human capital
- ▶ Vulnerable populations
- ▶ Mixed-Methods studies



# References

- ▶ Gundersen, Craig, and James P. Ziliak. 2014. "Childhood Food Insecurity in the U.S.: Trends, Causes, and Policy Options." *The Future of Children*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton-Brookings.
- ▶ Ziliak, James P. and Craig Gundersen. 2014. *The State of Senior Hunger in America 2012: An Annual Report*. National Foundation to End Senior Hunger.
- ▶ Gundersen, Craig, and James P. Ziliak. 2013. *Food Insecurity and Health among Senior Americans*. A report to Feeding America and National Foundation to End Senior Hunger