

# *Food insecurity in Aotearoa – the problem and its impact*

Dr Sarah Gerritsen  
8 July 2021

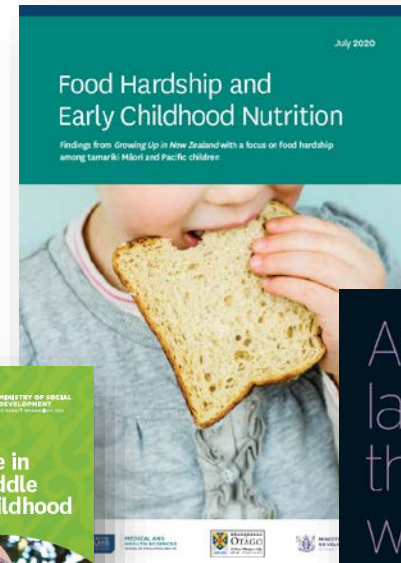
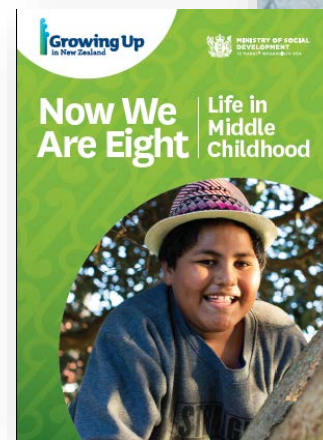
*Te Whāngai i ngā Whetū: Feeding the Stars*  
Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective Online Academic Symposium on Food Insecurity

 [twitter.com/DrGerritsen](https://twitter.com/DrGerritsen)

# Outline and sources for presentation

- Definitions of food insecurity
- What do we know about food insecurity among children?
  - New Zealand Health Survey data
  - Growing Up in New Zealand cohort
- How has COVID-19 changed this?
- What is the impact of food insecurity on children's nutrition, health and wellbeing?

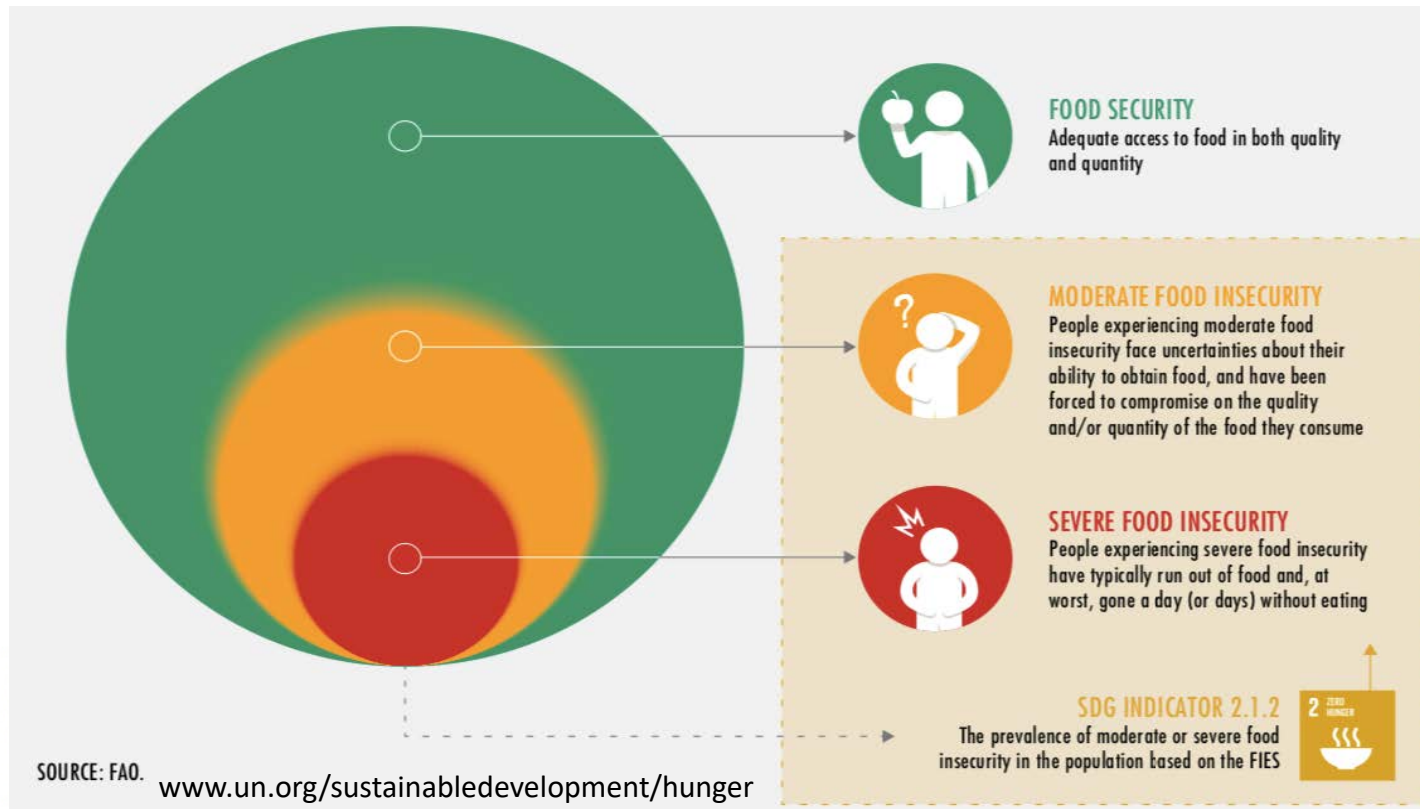
Quotes in this presentation are from children involved in research conducted by the [Office of the Children's Commissioner](#)



# International definition of food (in)security



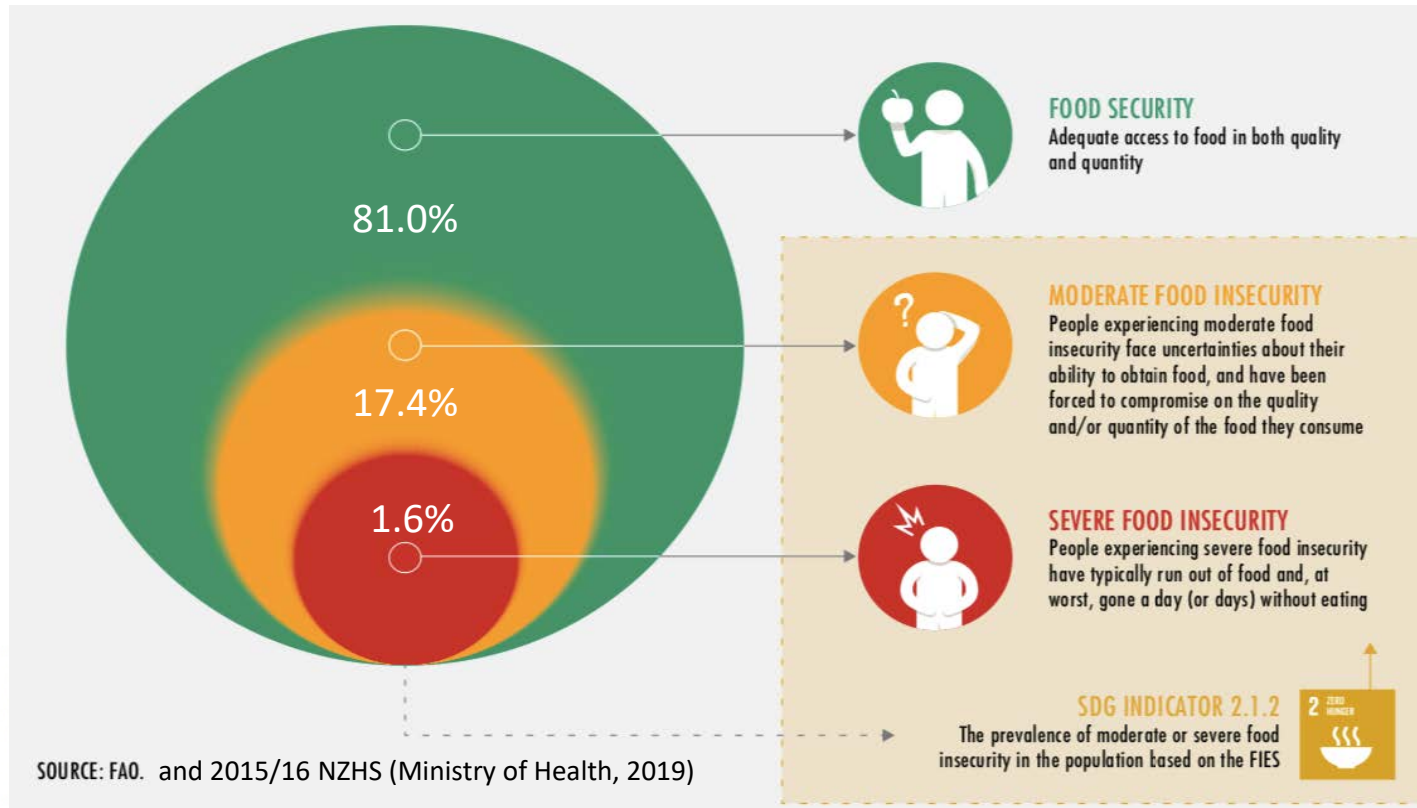
The New Zealand Government has committed to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which includes Goal 2 to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition."



# Food insecurity in New Zealand



In 2015/16, the Ministry of Health found one in five (19 percent) children aged 2-14 years lived in households with moderate to severe food insecurity (2019/20 and 2020/21 figures will be released late 2021).



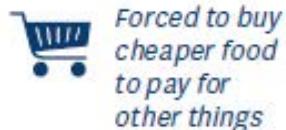
# Definitions of food (in)security



In New Zealand, food security is defined as when a household has:

- access and availability to nutritionally adequate and safe foods
- the ability to acquire such foods in a socially acceptable way
- the ability to meet cultural needs with food (e.g. hosting and gifting).

Measured with an 8-item questionnaire in the NZ Health Survey, repeated in the Growing Up in New Zealand longitudinal study when children were 8-years old. At earlier data collection waves, GUiNZ used three indicators from the NZiDep (Salmond et al 2014) questionnaire:



# Food insecurity indicators at 8-years of age

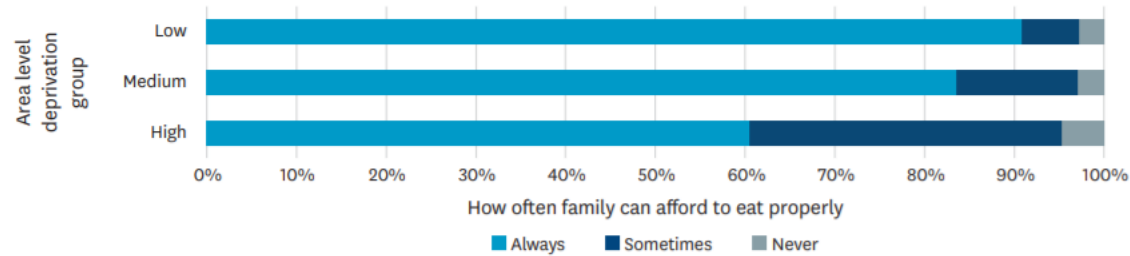


Figure 52. Mother-report of household's ability to afford to eat properly in the past year by area-level deprivation.

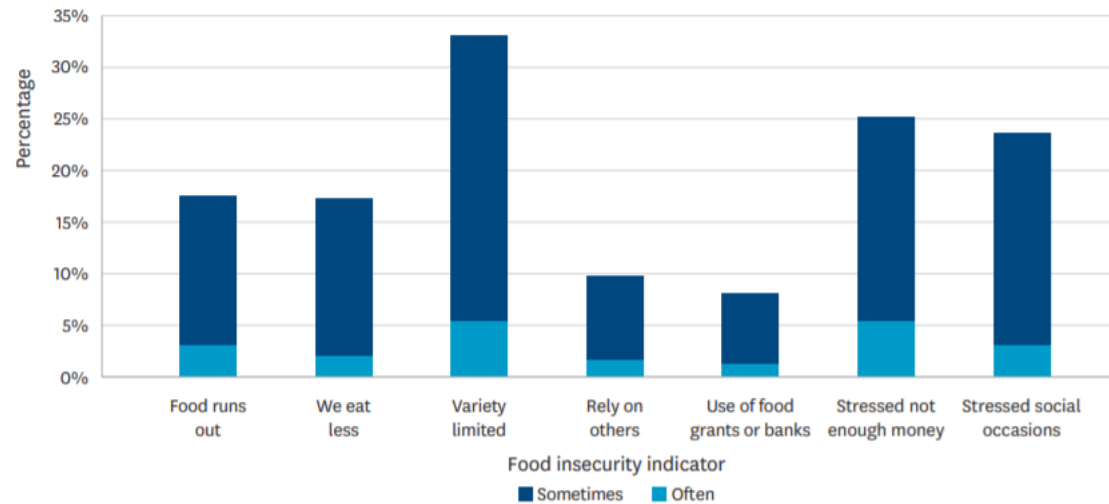


Figure 53. Mother-reported indicators of food insecurity when child was eight years of age.



# Who is more likely to be food insecure?



## Food insecurity is strongly patterned by socioeconomic position.

More common for children who:

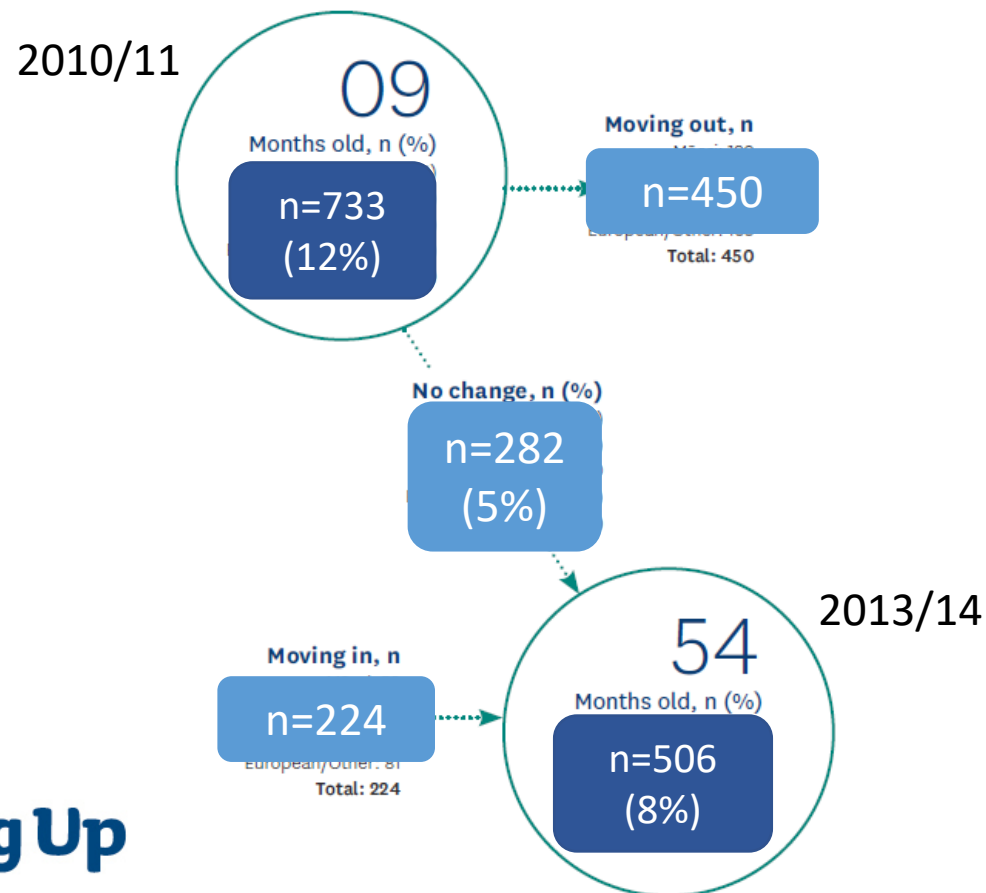
- Live in the most deprived neighbourhoods;
- Have low household income;
- Are supported on a government benefit;
- Live in a rented home, either in public or private housing;
- Are Pacific or Māori ethnicity;
- Live in larger households (more than 2 children);
- Are younger? (9 months compared to 4 years, and possibly older\*).

“Money may not be the key to happiness, but it is the key to living, and I know many people who struggle.”

# Households move in and out of food security



**Figure 3:** Movement in and out of using special food grants or food banks in the past 12 months, when child aged 9-months and 54-months, by child ethnicity



“Sometimes you can’t afford what you need. Can’t afford experiences: camps and school trips, education, food”

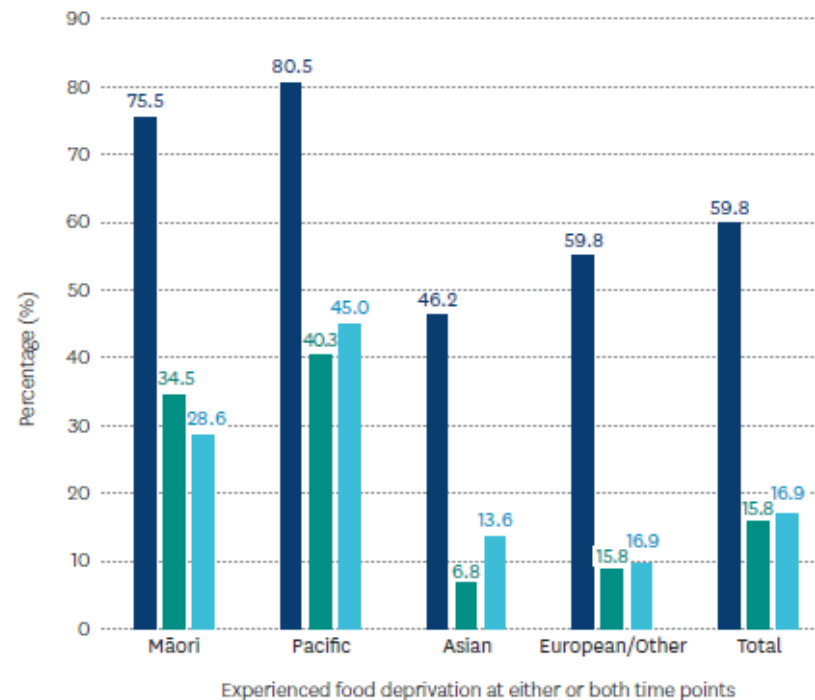


# Childhood exposure is greater than NZHS suggest



**Figure 2:** Food hardships reported by mothers/primary caregivers at either or both early childhood ages (9- and/or 54-months), i.e. exposure at some point during early childhood

“We need more food, water, fruit and vegetables.”



Forced to buy cheaper food to pay for other things



Made use of a special food grants or food banks



Gone without fresh fruit and veg to pay for other things

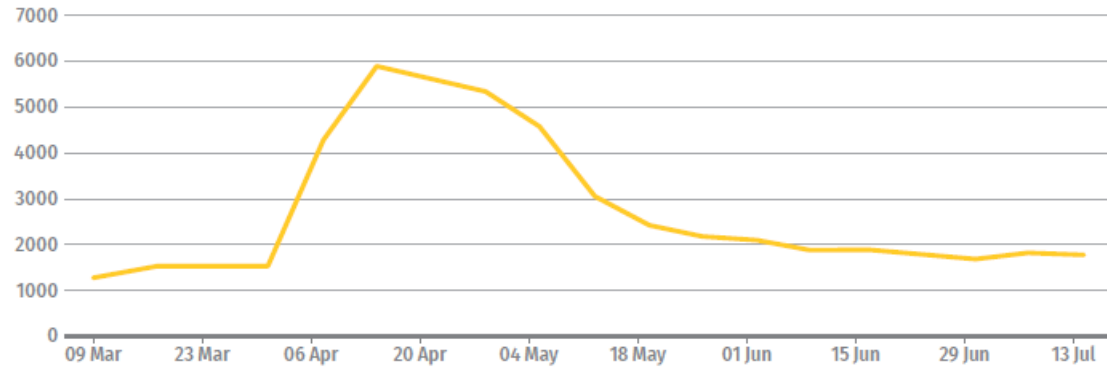
# Food insecurity may have worsened due to Covid



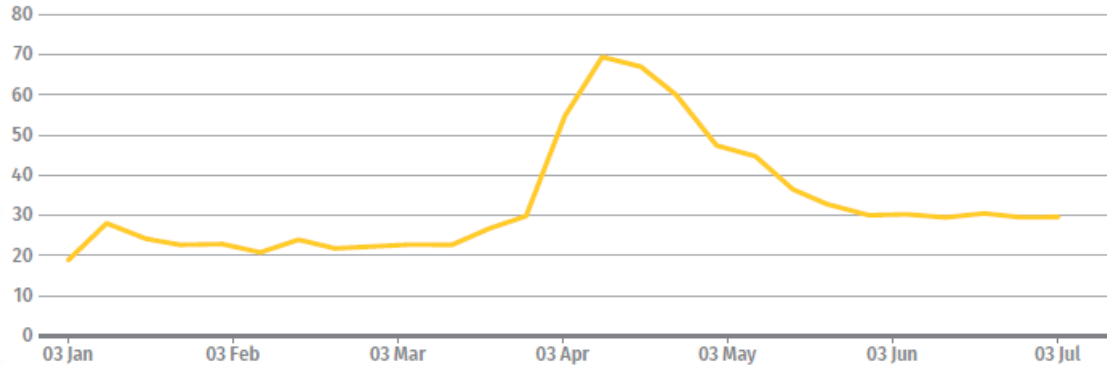
COVID-19  
Alert  
Level **4**  
Stay home.  
Save lives.  
New Zealand Government

## FOOD SECURITY

Food Parcel Distribution March–June 2020



Special Needs Grants For Food (Thousands)



Toby Morris (2021), [K Shaped Recovery](#), The Spinoff



**Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit**  
Working for the eradication of poverty in New Zealand

# Effect of food insecurity on nutrition



Children experiencing food hardship were more likely than other children to have:

- Stopped breastfeeding before their first birthday.
- Had fewer servings per day of fruit or vegetables at 9-months of age.
- Had tried unhealthy food and drinks before 9-months of age.
- Low or moderate variety of fruit or vegetables at age 4 years.
- Consumed three or more soft drinks a week at age 4 years.

More susceptible to the wider ‘obesogenic’ food environment?

Reduced accessibility of healthy food options and easier availability and promotion of unhealthy food and drinks appears to impact more on children experiencing food insecurity.

“Families have to turn to cheap food like takeaways.”

# Relationship between food insecurity and child health



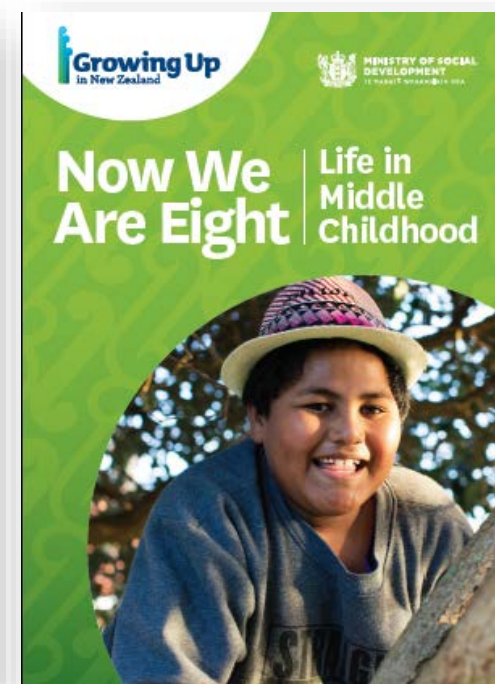
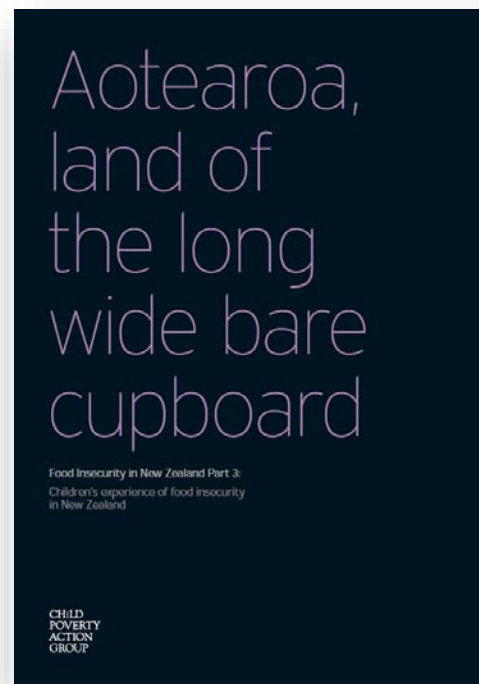
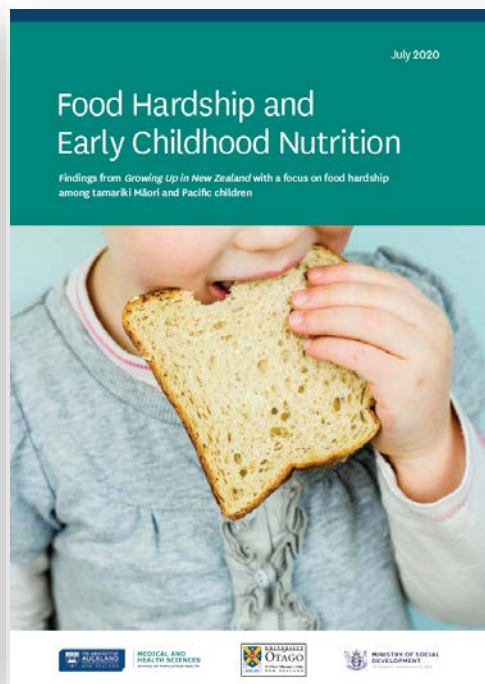
- Childhood obesity? Growing evidence in NZ (Utter 2018, Ministry of Health 2019)
- Lower caregiver rated self-health (Ministry of Health 2019) and more concern about child's health and development
- Child behaviour and social development (Ministry of Health 2019)
- Psychological distress and depression (currently being explored with Growing Up in NZ data)
- Bullying, cognitive development and educational impacts (all still to be explored)

“If you have bad health because you can only afford the bad stuff, you're never gonna get healthy.”

“Can't buy food – without food you can't focus and learn.”

“Kids get mocked, sometimes kids tease kids who don't have lunch or breakfast.”

# More information



Thank you to the participants and researchers involved in this work, and the funders:

