

From Hunger to Food Insecurity and Back

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How Our Group Got Started Studying Hunger and Food Insecurity

- The Federal Government can't do anything about hunger because we don't know how many hungry people there are in the US.
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President's Task Force on Food Assistance, 1984

“While we have found evidence of hunger in the sense that some people have difficulties with access to food, we have also found that it is at present impossible to estimate the extent of that hunger...We cannot report any indicator that will tell us where and by how much hunger has gone up in recent years...”

How Our Group Got Started Studying Hunger and Food Insecurity

- ❑ The Federal Government can't do anything about hunger because we don't know how many hungry people there are in the US. (1984)
 - ❑ Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project (CCHIP) and Cornell University studies – definition, framework, indicators
 - ❑ Beginning in 1995, national data on the percent of US households that are food insecure and hungry.
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Food Insecurity Defined by a Research Participant

'Going hungry, hungry is when there is absolutely nothing in the house. But also going hungry is when you have to eat the same thing all week long and you have no variation from it and you know sooner or later you're gonna run out of that, too, because it's only gonna go so far. So each day you cut the portions down a little bit smaller and a little bit smaller...And you have a tendency to send your kid off to play with somebody else so that they're there at mealtime so that they do eat.'

FROM: Journal of Nutrition Education 24:365-455, 1992.

Food insecurity includes:

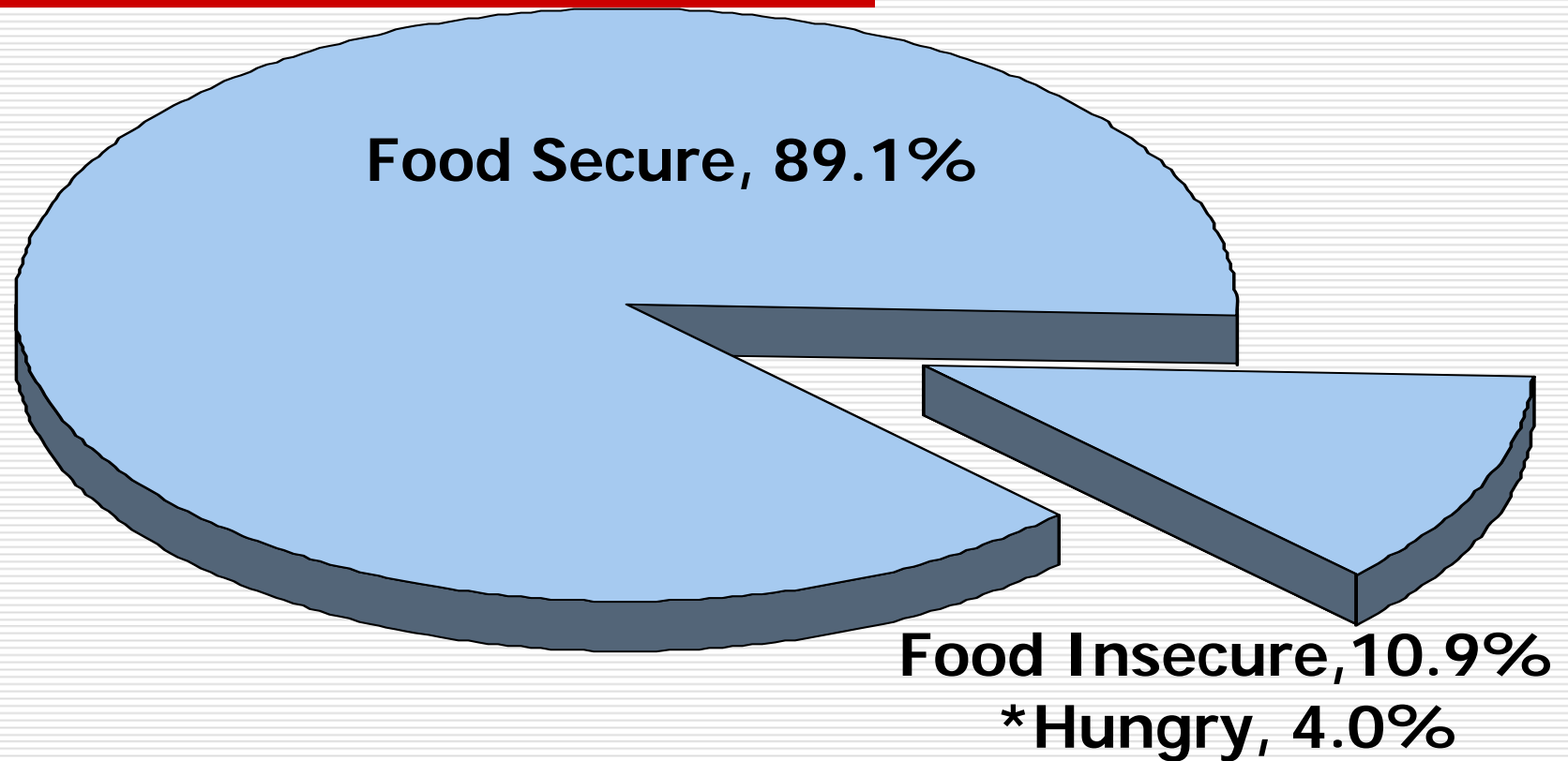
- Availability of & access to food
 - Certainty of availability and access to food
 - Sufficiency of food
 - Social and cultural acceptability of food
 - Nutritional quality and safety of food
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Definitions of Food Insecurity and Hunger

Food insecurity **exists whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain.**

Hunger, **in its meaning of the uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food, is in this definition a potential although not necessary, consequence of food insecurity.**

Prevalence of Food Security and Hunger in US, 2006



USDA, Economic Research Report No. 49, Nov. 2007

***Very Low Food Security = Hunger**

What are the consequences of food insecurity and hunger?

Lower dietary intakes of nutrients found in fruits and vegetables.

Food insecure 6-to-11 year old children were more likely to have:

- Lower arithmetic scores
- Repeated a grade
- Seen a psychologist
- Difficulty getting along with other children

From: *Alaimo, Pediatrics* 108:44-53, 2001.

Compromised Diet Quality and Food Anxiety in Elders

Essie Mae, a black woman in her mid-60's, lives in subsidized family housing in the inner city. She has diabetes for which she takes insulin.

“The end of the month, I start getting out of food...but I have to eat something, ‘cause if I don’t eat behind my [insulin] shot, that shot will make you so sick. . . .”

From: *Journal of Aging and Health* 10 (3): 327-350, 1998.

Compromised Diet Quality and Food Anxiety in Elders (continued)

“This past June, I just didn’t have the money [so] I didn’t have the food to eat. I had a lot of low blood sugar spells. They had to take me to the emergency room.”

From: *Journal of Aging and Health* 10 (3): 327-350, 1998.

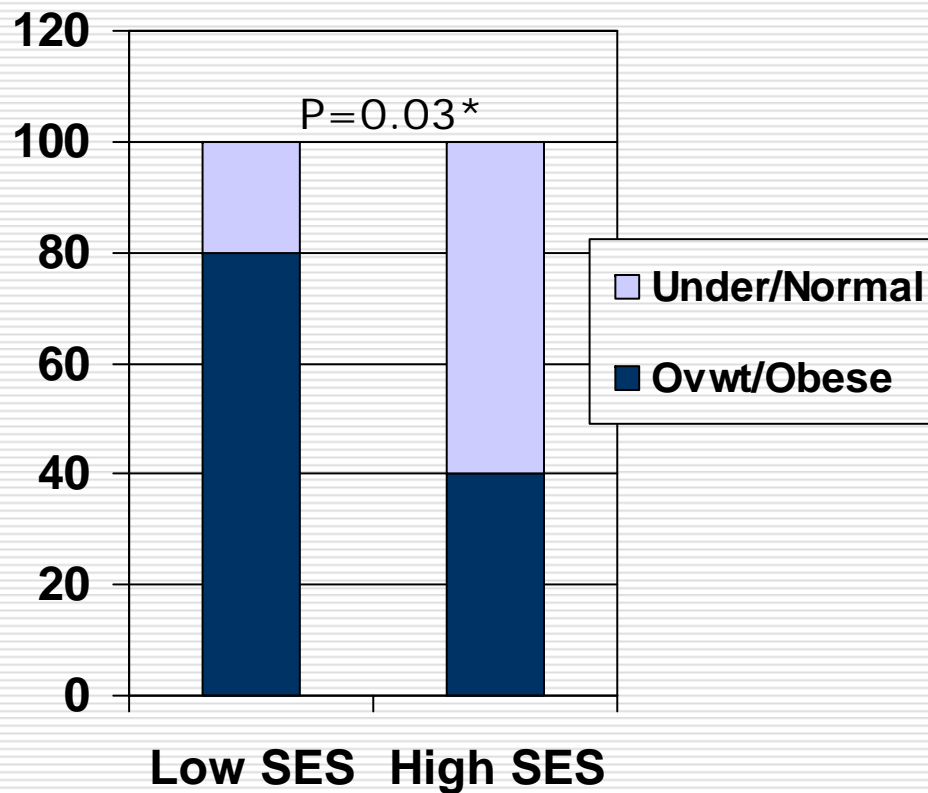
The consequences of food insecurity:

- ❑ Decreased food and nutrient intake and blood levels of nutrients
 - ❑ Compromised health and cognitive achievement in children
 - ❑ Inability to follow medically-prescribed diets in the elderly and others with chronic diseases
 - ❑ Increased risk of obesity in women
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Timing of Food Insecurity Matters

- ❑ There may be critical periods for food insecurity.
 - ❑ These can set individuals on a trajectory or path toward a problem.
 - ❑ Obesity is an example.
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Associations of Adult Weight with Childhood SES (N = 30 NYS Women)



*Fisher's exact test, 1 tailed

From: Olson et al.
Appetite
49:198-207, 2007.

Explanation

- Women who had low SES in childhood tend to have a more binge-like pattern of eating
 - They experienced food insecurity as children ie. times with little food
 - Current attitudes toward food and eating patterns were shaped by these experiences.
 - Food preferences
 - Emotional eating
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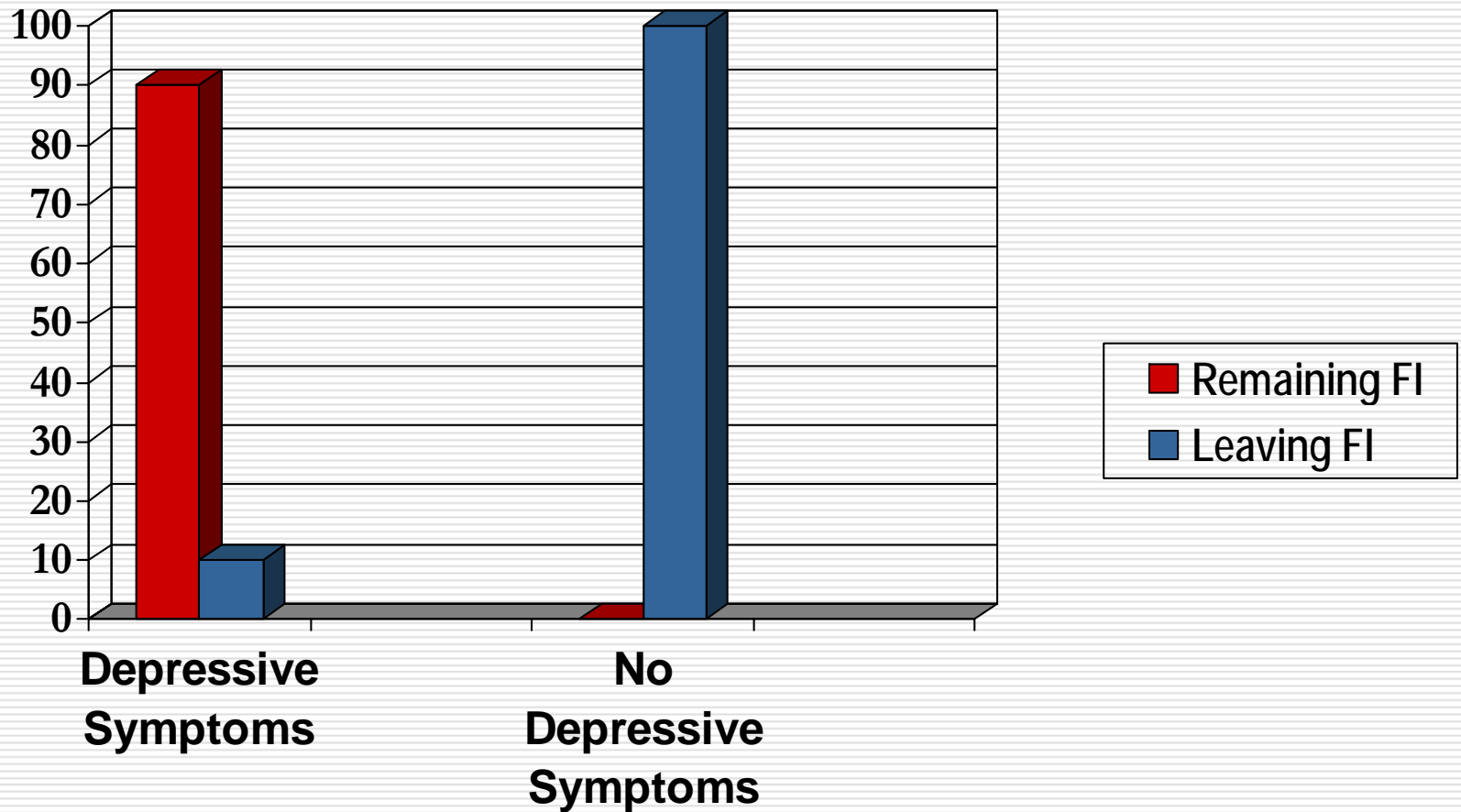
What can be done?

What helps rural NYS families escape food insecurity?

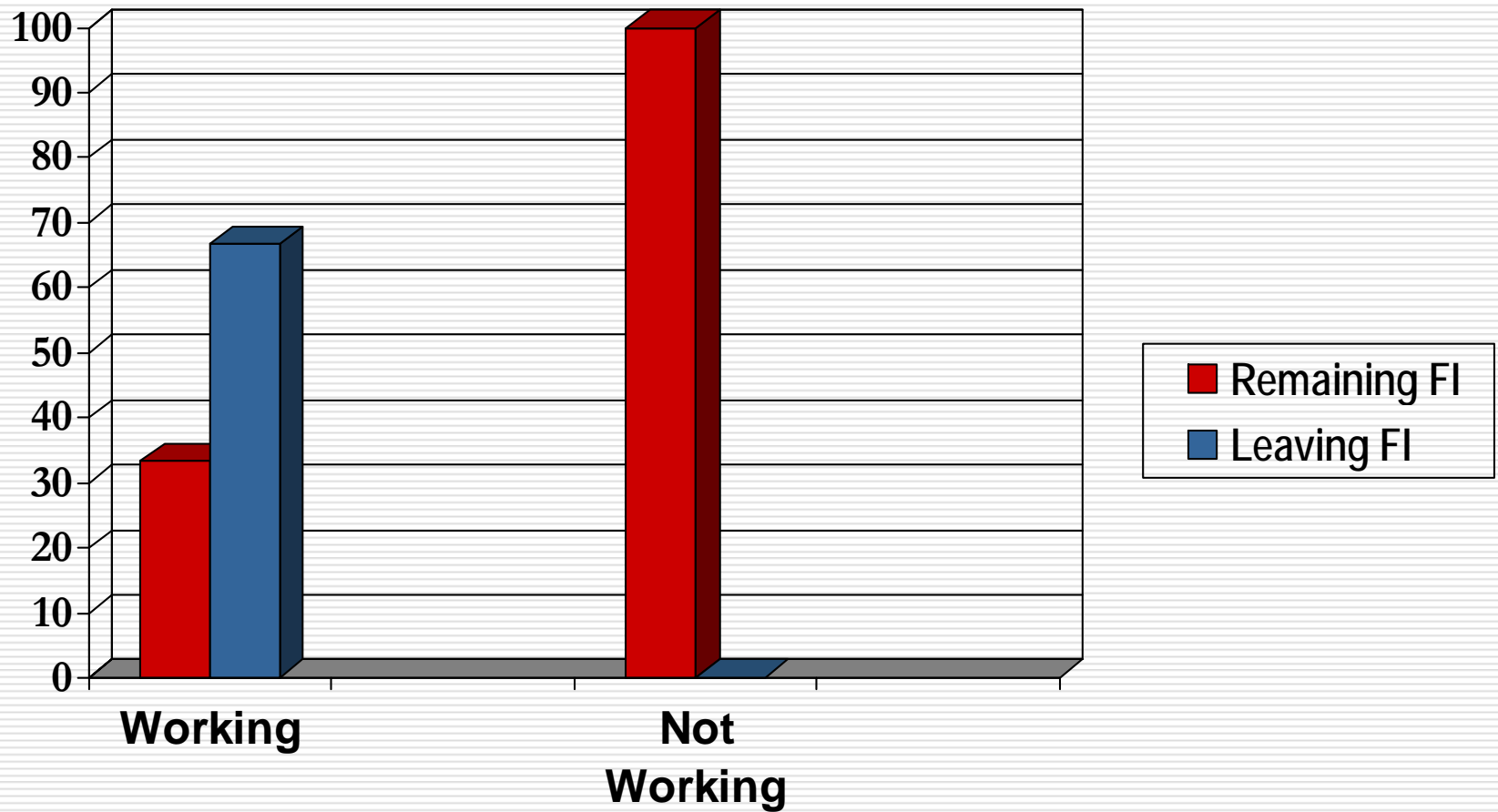
Rural New York Families (N=29)

- ❑ 17 of 29 families (58.6%) were food insecure at year 1
 - ❑ 6 of 17 families (35.3%) escaped food insecurity over 3 years
 - ❑ 11 of 17 (64.7%) remained food insecure
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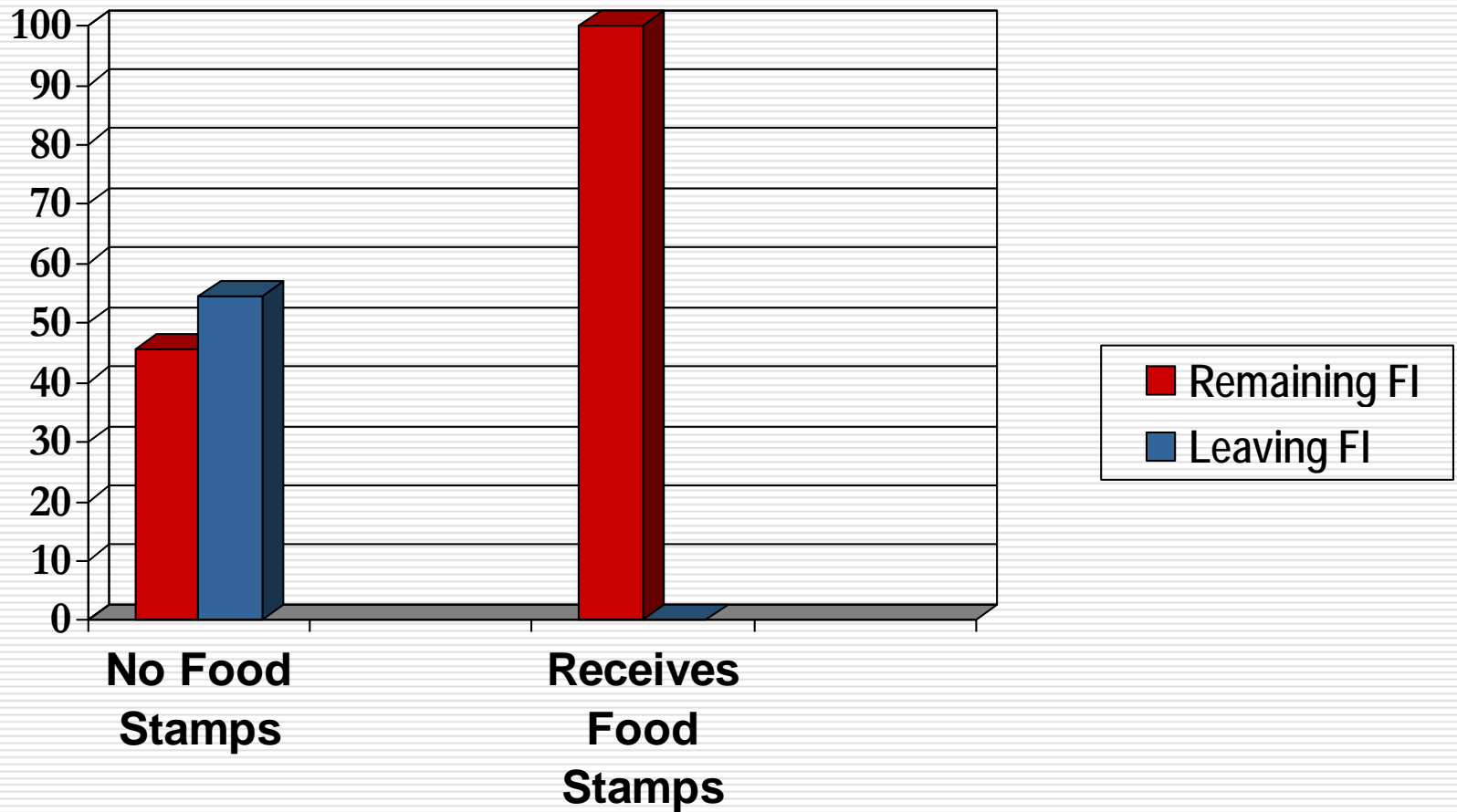
Correlates of Leaving Food Insecurity



Correlates of Leaving Food Insecurity



Correlates of Leaving Food Insecurity



Factors Related to Leaving Food Insecurity, Qualitative Results

□ Family and Social Support

- Child care from mother so participant could work
 - Mother's SSI check provides additional income
 - Housing at minimal rent from father
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Factors Related to Leaving Food Insecurity, Qualitative Results

- Better employment (higher wages)
 - Started a family daycare center in home with training from local childcare council
 - Became a certified nurse's aid after training
 - Additional training in health care field to become a Direct Support Professional
 - An additional part-time job as a Mental Health Program Aide
 - Night shift factory job that doubled hourly wage and added benefits (50 mile commute each way)
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Factors Related to Leaving Food Insecurity, Qualitative Results

□ Use of Financial Management Strategies

- Shopping the sales and stocking up
- Clipping coupons
- Shopping at low-cost stores
- Buying in bulk
- Bartering
- Following a budget

□ Unwise strategies

- Use of credit cards to pay for utilities, healthcare etc = \$1,600 credit card debt

Conclusion

- Opportunity for higher paying jobs and the human capital (capacity to take advantage of them) plus help from family and others were key to leaving food insecurity in NY families.
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Discussion

- ❑ Thank you for listening!
- ❑ Questions and comments



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