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Food security and food insecurity in Europe: An analysis of the academic discourse (1975–2013)

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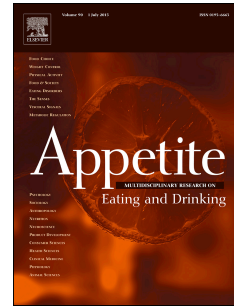
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Food security and food insecurity in Europe:

An analysis of the academic discourse (1975–2013)

In this paper we address the academic discourse on food insecurity and food security in Europe as expressed in articles published in scientific journals in the period 1975 to 2013. The analysis indicates that little knowledge has been produced on this subject, and that the limited research that has been produced tends to focus on the production of food rather than on people's access to food. The lack of knowledge about European food insecurity is particularly alarming in these times, which are characterised by increasing social inequalities and poverty, as well as shifting policy regimes. More empirical, comparative and longitudinal research is needed to survey the extent of food security problems across European countries over time. There is also a need to identify groups at risk of food insecurity as well as legal, economic, practical, social, and psychological constraints hindering access to appropriate and sufficient food.

Key words: food insecurity, food security, review, academic discourse, Europe.

1 INTRODUCTION¹

It is often taken for granted that people in Western countries are 'food secure' in terms of having enough food for an active, healthy life (Anderson, 1990; Hamelin, Beaudry, & Habich, 2002). Studies indicate, however, that up to 14 percent of the population of the United States (US) (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, & Singh, 2014) and 9 percent of the EU27 population have experienced food insecurity (Eurostat, 2010). The prevalence of food insecurity varies between states and countries. Most at risk are low-income groups and other social groups associated with poverty, such as single mothers and ethnic minorities (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2014; Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner, 2014). The terms food insecurity and poverty are often used synonymously, but it should be noted that they are not the same phenomenon (Rose, 1999). Poor people may be food secure if they compensate for their limited financial resources with high levels of food literacy, knowledge and experience about how to procure and prepare cheap, high quality food. Moreover, high-income groups may be food insecure if other expenses have to be prioritised, for example, mortgages and transportation. In addition, income measures are usually aggregated for a year, whereas food insecurity captures periodic food shortages that may reflect transient income shortfalls and/or shock expenses. Food needs are acute and limited access even for shorter periods of time represent a problem.

Whereas food in/security in the US, Canada and, to some extent, Australia has been subject to systematic studies for many years, research on people's access to food in Europe has been sporadic and fragmented, based on a variety of definitions and methodologies. To obtain an overview of the academic literature that does exist in this area, we will, in this paper, address academic contributions on food insecurity in Europe. We ask the following questions. What academic discourses can be identified over the recent decades? What characterises these discourses? Have they changed over time? Scientifically based knowledge about food in/security and its development in Europe is

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