

# **Taking the initiative: A mixed methods study of perceptions of and efforts to address food insecurity in Illinois public libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines efforts of public libraries in Illinois to respond to patron food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic and staff perception of their role. A mixed methods approach was used to gather data via interviews and a survey instrument. The data were subsequently analyzed through the lenses of social justice and the food justice movement. Most respondents to the survey did not have organic food programs at their library during COVID-19. Six themes were identified in terms of library staff perception of their role in addressing food insecurity: 1) unsure of the role, 2) no role, 3) a limited role, 4) have a role if no one else does, 5) a supportive role, and 6) a lead role. The majority of respondents identified having a supportive or lead role for the library. Other findings were the significance of the hierarchical structure of public libraries and the respondent's position in that structure, the need for social justice and food justice awareness and education, and the disconnect between the perception of participants in addressing food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic and their public library's having a meal program.

## **ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS**

public libraries; social justice; community engagement.

## **AUTHOR KEYWORDS**

food insecurity; food justice movement; COVID-19.