Food Security Among Older Adults

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Definitions of Categories of Food Insecurity

- A household is placed into food security categories based on responses to 18 questions on the Core Food Security Module (CFSM)
- Examples of questions
  - “I worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more”
  - “Did you or the other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food”
  - “Were you ever hungry but did not eat because you couldn’t afford enough food”
  - “In the last 12 months did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food?”
Definitions of Food Insecurity Categories

• Marginally food insecure (Threat of hunger)
  • 1 or more affirmative responses to CFSM

• Food insecure (At-risk of hunger)
  • 3 or more affirmative responses to CFSM

• Very low food secure (Facing hunger)
  • 8 or more affirmative responses to CFSM (households with children)
  • 6 or more affirmative responses to CFSM (households without children)
Figure 1. Trends in Threat of Senior Hunger
Table 4. Top Ten States in Terms of the Threat of Senior Hunger in 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>26.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>24.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>24.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>20.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>20.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>19.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>19.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>18.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>18.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>17.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hunger Rates
By Income Categories

- marginally food insecure
- at-risk of hunger
- hunger

Income Categories:
- <50% of PL
- 50-100% of PL
- 100-200% of PL
- >200% of PL
Hunger Rates
By Race Categories

- marginally food insecure
- at-risk of hunger
- hunger

white
black
Figure 5. Trends in Threat of Senior Hunger by Age

- 60-69 years old
- 70-79 years old
- 80+ years old
Multivariate Regression Models

- Controlling for other factors we find that food insecurity is more likely among older adults
  - Living at or below the poverty line
  - Without a high school degree
  - Who are African-American or Hispanic
  - Who are divorced or separated
  - Who have a grandchild living in the household
  - Who are younger
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)

Percentages in red are statistically significant at the 1% level; in green at the 5% level; and yellow at the 10% level
Figure 3. Regression-Adjusted Estimates of the Effect of Food Insecurity on Health Outcomes of Seniors 60+
(Percents Change Relative to Average of Food Secure Seniors)

Percentages in red are statistically significant at the 1% level; in green at the 5% level; and in yellow at the 10% level.
What Can be Done?

• **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**
  • Primary goals are to alleviate hunger and improve the well-being of poor people
  • By far, largest food assistance program in the United States
    • Benefit levels
    • Size of program
    • Available to all ages

• **Eligibility Criteria**
  • Gross income test
    • Not binding for seniors
  • Net income test
    • Net monthly income (after various deductions) less than the poverty line
  • Asset test
    • Less than $3,000
    • Waived in many states
What Can be Done?

- **SNAP**
  - Encourage participation
    - Over 60
    - Between 40 and 60
  - Address barriers for grandparents raising grandchildren
    - Entering program
    - Benefit levels
  - Reevaluate minimum benefit levels
- Reach out to the socially isolated
- Help those with mobility issues
- Recognize importance of informal food assistance programs
  - For those receiving SNAP
  - For those ineligible for SNAP
Future Research Directions

- Why is there a negative age gradient?
- How do the dynamics of multi-generational households influence food insecurity?
- How do chronic health conditions influence food insecurity and vice-versa?
- How might allowing home-delivered meals to be purchased with SNAP benefits influence food insecurity rates?