Food Insecurity, SNAP Participation, and Alleviation of Hunger

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SNAP

• Primary goal
  • The alleviation of food insecurity

• Two key questions
  • To what extent does SNAP meet this goal?
  • Are SNAP benefit levels sufficient to meet this goal?
The diagram shows a comparison between Food and Other Goods.

- The red area represents Other Goods, and the green area represents Food.
- The horizontal axis is labeled as $\min_{og}$, indicating the minimum Other Goods.
- The vertical axis is labeled as Food.
- The diagram suggests a comparison or allocation between these two categories.
Central Challenges in Evaluating Food Stamps

- Selection into food stamps
  - A large proportion of eligible children do not receive food stamps
    - Children are not randomly assigned to food stamps
- Measurement error
  - In surveys, up to one-in-five food stamp recipients report that they do not receive food stamps
Previous work

- Addressing selection
  - DePolt et al., 2009; Gundersen and Oliveira, 2001; Jensen, 2002; Mykerezi and Mills, 2010; Nord and Golla, 2009; Nord and Prell, 2010; Ratcliffe et al., 2011; Van Hook and Ballistreri, 2006; Wilde and Nord, 2005; Yen et al., 2008
  - Have generally found that SNAP leads to reductions in food insecurity

- Addressing measurement error
  - Gundersen and Kreider, 2008
  - Higher rates of food insecurity of SNAP recipients are based on perhaps optimistic assumptions about degree of misreporting
Kreider et al., forthcoming

- **Addressing**
  - Selection
    - Relying on weaker assumptions
  - Measurement error

- **Central findings**
  - In comparison to a situation where no child receives SNAP, if all eligible children receive SNAP, the decline in food insecurity among households with children is
    - at least 14.9 percentage points (when no misreporting)
    - at least 8.1 percentage points (when misreporting within reasonable range)
Dollars Needed to be Food Secure

- To meet their weekly food needs, respondents in CPS are asked whether they would have to spend
  - more
  - less
  - same
- If the answer is “more” or “less”, a question regarding how much “more” or “less” is asked
  - See Gundersen and Ribar, 2011 for more details
- Normalize to put in per-capita format
- Limit sample to
  - SNAP eligible households
  - Food insecure households
  - Those reporting that need more resources
Per-Capita Weekly Dollars Needed to be Food Secure
Among SNAP Eligible Households

Recipient  Non-Recipient

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Recipient</th>
<th>Non-Recipient</th>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
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Policy Implications

- SNAP is successful with respect to central goal, therefore major changes to structure should be approached with caution
  - In particular, caution with respect to
    - Switching to block grants
    - Restricting purchases
- SNAP benefits are seemingly too low for at least some recipients
  - May want to consider changes to benefit formula
    - Raising minimum amount
    - Changing relationship between net income and benefit levels


