

Research and National Issues of Concern – Ties to Food Stamp Nutrition Education
Discussion Session – 17 March 2004
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Each person identified herself/himself and suggested research issues to discuss.

1. HIPPA regulations and their impact on collecting data

- a) HIPPA regulations are now rippling - affect building and accessing many research databases.
 - Cannot access medical information for research.
 - Every medical practice uses a different form.
 - Affects other research data - schools, health data, school readiness, test scores, height and weight; doing needs assessments in school.
- b) Keystone Healthy School Zones in Pennsylvania are able to access aggregated school data. Ohio has a similar program.
- c) Many decisions on HIPPA access are made at a very low level - made by secretaries?
- d) Nebraska - data goes to the Health Department; if obesity is classified as a disease, can get data. Need information in the area of birth outcomes; get some data through WIC.

2. Data from grocery stores/food retailers, etc.

- a) Can't get access to grocery store sales data. Can't get food purchases data from food stamp people at stores that don't take EBT cards. Stores can separate food stamp purchases from other purchases.
 - Some stores may want to sell this data to researchers. Can sell as aggregated information, if good relations are maintained with the stores. This is unlikely in every case.
 - Pennsylvania maintains a good partnership so sales will be shared by stores. Piloting in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia - social marketing.
 - If stores are participating in 5-A-Day, this will help them share information.
- b) One issue is where food stamp recipients are buying food - often not in supermarkets, so purchase data may be harder to get. Purchase at farmer's markets, shared food programs, community action. Food stamp recipients also buy goods with cash - no way to get this consumption data.
- c) Technology is there to use small hand scanners to inventory purchased food in food stamp recipients' kitchen.
- d) FSNE should be putting research money into food retail information, food poundage, differences in amounts purchased over time, milk type.
- e) Arizona is piloting use of EBT cards at farmer's markets.
- f) Need to look at demographics of purchases - how far do food stamp recipients travel to shop for food? Many car pool to go to discount stores miles from their home - Kmart, Sam's, Super Albertsons.

- g) Questions – which category do purchased foods fall under – for example – broccoli pizza?

3. Lifestyle and skills

- a) We don't know much about food stamp recipients' life style choices - why they make the food purchases that they do, how they shop, how they learn, what is important to them.
- b) Nebraska - if they don't know how to prepare, they don't know how to shop. Nebraska is developing a curriculum on food preparation skills. Basic life skills are a struggle for food stamp recipients, especially in urban settings. Learning food preparation skills remains the biggest success story in Nebraska programs. What motivates food stamp families to change? Food stamp recipients often look at how long a food purchase will feed a family, not the nutrient content.
- c) Rise in obesity is correlated with loss of FCS programs in schools.

4. Other research needs, possibilities, and work being done

- a) Research should focus on the continuum of receiving food stamps, not just end consumption behavior.
- b) Ethnographic mapping would be excellent in more areas - what does it tell us?
- c) Vermont - research project provided free sack of fruits and vegetables to seniors. Study revealed increase in fruit and vegetable - sack consumed, yet recalls showed no changes in consumption. The qualitative questions used were not discriminating enough.
- d) Pennsylvania - other research faculty are doing research with food stamp audiences such as financial management - all researchers should get together to plan and share research such as a research round table that addresses the food stamp recipients - the value of service learning should be shared with all researchers.
- e) Food security conferences - a great opportunity for everyone to get on the same page. Graduate students help identify problems. Extension assistantships are excellent opportunities.

5. Final thoughts

We should encourage more regional research and extension food stamp research projects that are a good match for our interests and resources.