

## Food Stamp/SNAP Participation Rates: The Role of Including Group Quarters

Michelle Jiles and Tracy Loveless

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly the federal Food Stamp program) is the largest domestic food and nutrition program. The purpose of the SNAP is to aid people in accessing food. One measure of the success of SNAP is the percent of a state's at-risk population serviced by SNAP. It is an indicator of how well states are meeting the needs of this population. Research on reciprocity rates has focused primarily on the population in households. Of the over 8 million group quarters residents, 8 percent stated they received SNAP in the past 12 months. Research on SNAP has noted this lack of inclusion of the group quarters population in the count and characteristics of those on SNAP (U. S. Census Bureau 1981, Tauber, et. al. 2004, Tauber, et. al. 2005). This same research notes the small sample size of survey data used to describe the SNAP population (Tauber, et. al. 2004, Tauber, et. al. 2005).

This research has three goals: first, to examine the social, economic, and demographic characteristics of those in group quarters reporting SNAP reciprocity versus those not on SNAP. How do these groups differ by characteristics and group quarters' type? Second, this research assesses the quality of the data for those reporting SNAP. What percent of group quarters cases are imputed? What are the imputation rates by group quarters type? How do characteristics vary between imputed and not imputed cases? What is the imputation process? Third, this research provides a clear understanding on state reciprocity rankings by comparing states rankings before and after the inclusion of the group quarters population. Does the inclusion of the group quarters population significantly impact state rankings of reciprocity or the characteristics of recipients?

The American Community Survey (ACS) is best suited for this analysis than other household surveys due to its (1) large representative sample, including the group quarters population, and (2) ability to go beyond an institutional/noninstitutional dichotomy. It is possible to analyze the group quarter's population using the ACS, but there are several analytic components to note. The ACS asks reciprocity for the 12-months preceding interview with the interview taking place in any month during the data collection year (January-December). There are two implications: (1) respondents could be referencing the current year, previous year, or some combination depending on month of interview, and (2) since respondents were not necessarily living in the current state of residence when they received SNAP there could be a residency/reciprocity bias in the estimates for states. The 12-month reference period is an issue for many ACS estimates as it is not a point-in-time survey. The residence/reciprocity discrepancy affects both the household and group quarter's population so bias is evenly shared. However, to further account for this bias analysis of state rankings will include both the current and previous residence to assess any substantive difference. It is possible that an individual interviewed in the group quarters could have also been part of an interviewed household. In essence, their response would be a double-count of participation. There is no feasible way to assess this occurrence. It is important to note there is a difference in the meaning of the SNAP question in households vs. group quarters. For households, the question asks if, in the previous 12-months, you or anyone *in the household* received SNAP while the group quarters question asks if the individual *person* received SNAP. To produce comparable data, the reference person can be used as a proxy for the household's demographic, social, and economic characteristics (Chauhuri, et. al. 2002, Rose, et. al. 1998).

### Citations

Chaudhuri, Shubham, Jyotsna Jalan, and Asep Suryahadi. 2002. "Assessing Household Vulnerability to Poverty from Cross-Sectional Data: A Methodology and Estimates from Indonesia." Department of Economics Discussion Paper Series, No., 0102-52. Columbia University.

Rose, Donald, Jean-Pierre Habicht, and Barbara Devaney. 1998. "Household Participation in the Food Stamp and WIC Programs Increases the Nutrient Intakes of Preschool Children." *The Journal of Nutrition*. Vol., 128, No., 3, pp. 548-555.

Taeuber, Cynthia M., Dean M. Resnick, Susan P. Love, Jane Staveley, Parke Wilde, and Richard Larson. 2004. "Differences in Estimate of Food Stamp Program Participation Between Surveys and Administrative Records." U. S. Census Bureau.

Taeuber, Cynthia M., Jane Staveley, and Richard Larson. 2005. "Modeling Participation in the Maryland Food Stamp Program Using Census Data and Administrative Records." The Jacob France Institute. University of Baltimore.

U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No., 110. 1981. "Characteristics of Households and Persons Receiving Noncash Benefits: 1979." *Current Population Survey*.