

Investigating the Cultural Competence of SNAP in Rhode Island and Connecticut Adults

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Overview

In this cross-sectional, mixed-methods investigation, we explored self-reported perceptions of cultural barriers and facilitators to purchasing culturally relevant foods among low-income households with children that receive SNAP benefits.

Background

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the country's largest and most important anti-hunger program that provides nutrition benefits to households < 135% of the federal poverty line¹
- While it is well documented SNAP alleviates food insecurity, there is mixed evidence on how well it improves nutrition-related outcomes and diet quality²⁻⁵
- Although SNAP provides benefits to culturally diverse populations there is little research investigating the cultural relevance of SNAP and how food benefits align with recipients' cultural backgrounds⁶⁻⁷
- There is growing evidence that cultural factors, like cultural relevance, impact food insecurity and policymakers have increasingly signaled their awareness of culturally-relevant nutrition programs⁸⁻⁹

Study Design

This mixed methods investigation uses baseline data collected from Summer 2023 of an ongoing differences-in-differences study

- Participants were recruited by community partners in CT and RI, by research assistants at community events, and through text blasts to WIC listerservs
- Interested participants completed a brief screener on Qualtrics, provided consent, and completed a text-verification step.
- Participants completed a 45-minute online survey that included a food frequency questionnaire (FFQ) and demographic questions (n=1,336)
- If the participant reported having a child in their household, they were invited to complete a 15-minute online survey that asked about their child's eating habits and open-ended questions about cultural barriers (n=678).

Inclusion Criteria

- ✓ 18 years old or older
- ✓ Live in Rhode Island or Connecticut
- ✓ Receive SNAP
- ✓ Speak English or Spanish
- ✓ Primary caregiver or guardian to child 1-8 years old

Results

Of the 678 participants, the vast majority of participants received WIC (89%) and most identified as women (96%). The sample was fairly racially diverse with ~40% identifying as Hispanic and 15% as Black.

95% of participants reported they were able to find foods that fit within their culture using their SNAP dollars, however, there were differences by race

	Hispanic (n=263)	Non-Hispanic White (n=236)	Non-Hispanic Black (n=105)	Other & Multi-Racial (n=59)	Non-Hispanic Asian (n=15)	p-value
Cannot Find Foods Within Culture Using SNAP Dollars	6.5% (n=17)	1.7% (n=4)	7.6% (n=8)	1.7% (n=1)	6.7% (n=1)	p=0.020

Participants were asked to answer: "Tell us about how you find foods that fit within your culture when using your SNAP dollars?". The responses were analyzed using an applied thematic approach.

Theme #1

Most participants expressed ease and wide availability in finding foods that fit within their culture when using their SNAP dollars

"I go to my local Spanish grocery store and they are always stocked with what I need." - White, Latine, CT

Theme #2

Barriers to using SNAP to purchase culturally relevant foods include cost and transportation

"When I need to buy Jamaican food here in [town name], there are little to no options and there are no busses available to take me." - Black, Non-Latine, CT

Theme #3

Some participants identify as lacking a culture and eating Americanized foods

"I don't really have food that fit into my "culture". My family eats regular Americanized dishes. It's not that hard at all all to find food to make those dishes." - More than one race, Non-Latine, RI

Conclusion

- This study provides a glimpse into the cultural backgrounds and factors of a large sample of SNAP participants.
- While barriers persist, participants indicated they are able to purchase culturally relevant foods due the availability of large supermarkets with diverse offerings.
- Notably, some participants view themselves as "lacking culture" potentially indicating acculturation.
- While this study indicates that SNAP benefits are culturally relevant, there are disparities by race

Funding Source & References

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This study was approved Brown University and University of Rhode Island IRB

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