

FCSM Session: Using Administrative Data to Examine Food Assistance Program Effectiveness

Discussant Remarks

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Outline

- Introduction
- Findings from Cunnyingham et al, Wheaton et al.
 - Admin, QC, and Survey data quality issues
 - SNAP unit composition and modeling assumptions
- SNAP eligibility and access rates at Census
- SNAP and WIC
- Future research



Findings on Data Quality



Findings on Admin, QC, and Survey data: Cunnyngham et al.

- Overall, nice to see the NDB, QC, and State admin data closely tracks.
- NDB vs. State files: IL exception: strange differences between NDB and IL state data around 2013. Do we know the reason?
 - Why would the benefits be lower in the IL state data?
 - Are those 2013 data used in the SNAP unit analysis?
- QC vs. State files: Differences in age and case type distributions imply issues with edits or actual differences.
- Shows that state admin data have issues; they aren't necessarily the "gold standard," but the QC, NDB, and State files are quite consistent.



Findings on Admin, Models, and Survey data:

Wheaton et al. compare across MATH+ and TRIM3 and two other models.

- They find that certain unit subgroups have participation rates of 100 percent or more *across all microsimulation models and data sources* examined:
 - Cases with **single adult with children**,
 - Cases with **countable income below 50 percent of the poverty** guideline,
 - Cases **eligible for between 76 and 99 percent of the maximum benefit** for their case size.

These subgroups also have high participation rates in the MATH CPS estimates:

- Cases with one person,
- Child-only cases, and
- Cases with adults aged 18 to 49 without disabilities in childless households



Findings from QC data: Cunnyngham et al.

Shares of select SNAP case types in the QC data from each state

From Slides 8, 9, 10: Select household characteristics of SNAP cases:	IL	MS	TN
One adult + children	24	29	27
Two or more adults + children	9	14	15
One member (adult or child)	56	48	52
No earnings	53	49	52

Bolded groups represent large shares of SNAP cases overall.

No earnings group, not mutually exclusive, but the top three are.

➔ The bolded groups are also the ones with the overly high participation rates.

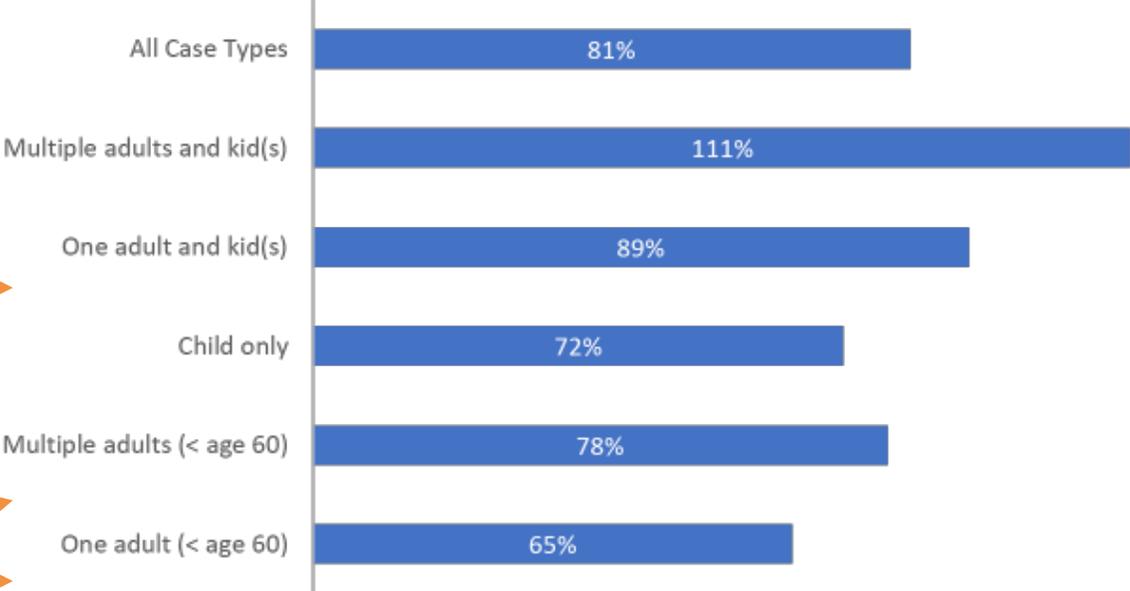


Subgroup Shares of Admin Cases in Linked Data (Wheaton et al.)

- One adult with kid(s) cases represent high share of all SNAP admin cases (previous slide), **and** the linked sample underrepresents them.
- Similar situation with Adults with no children: high share but low representation in linked data.



Share of SNAP Cases Represented in Linked Data, 2012 to 2016



Source: Slide 12, Wheaton et al.



CPS ASEC Interview Status by SNAP Case

Wheaton et al.

- Interesting findings:
 - Slide 8: **Multiple adults with kids** had a much higher rate of getting interviewed among those sampled (72% compared to 64% for all types), and a higher rate of whole imputes (18%).
 - Slide 8: **One adult with kids** and **one adult** cases had much lower Whole Impute rates (9% each compared to 14% for all types).
 - Slide 9: **One adult, with income less than 50% FPL** has much lower rate of getting interviewed (56% compared to 64%) than any other group including other types below 50% FPL.
 - Imputation rate is also lower than average for this group, suggesting interviewing is the problem.
- Upshot: Imputes don't explain the low shares of One adult + kids or One adults or Very-low-income cases.



Findings on SNAP Unit Composition



Comment on Estimation Issues

- Note that the subgroups with overly high estimated participation rates are the most disadvantaged and thus most likely to participate.
 - Mathematically, the high participation levels affect the numerators in an expected way, but *the estimates of eligible units of these subgroups should be easy to estimate*. Income wouldn't be close to the threshold, as the most obvious.
 - But also, because of the high participation levels, there are fewer eligible non-participants, making these participation rates more likely to be “high” and thus go over the 100% mark.
 - Even more reason to think these unit types are missing in survey data.
 - Still, it points to the importance of correctly identifying these case types as separate units from other household members, ineligible or not.



Findings on SNAP Units

- **Major Finding on Children** by Cunnyingham/Czajka et al:
 - CPS ASEC is widely found to have low representation of children
 - Wheaton et al., Czajka et al., Meyer et al.
 - They find that the gap is sufficient to fully explain the low eligibility estimates.
- Multi-unit cases found to be small share of SNAP cases
- But less clear findings on other groups:
 - One-adult + child units
 - Lack of children in the survey would imply there would too many One-adult units, but that's not the case.
 - One-adult, non-elderly
 - No-income or 0 – 50% FPL



Findings: One-adult + children SNAP cases

Wheaton et al.

One-adult + children cases are found to be:

- Less likely to be interviewed when part of the CPS ASEC sample, though less likely to be imputed. (multiple adult with children, more likely)
- Less likely to be found in the linked data as well.
- Among these cases, the TRIM3 estimates found (slide 17):
 - 52% were found to be eligible and One-adult + children cases.
 - 21% were found to be eligible but another type of case.
 - 20% were found to be ineligible and another type of case.
 - 7% were found to be ineligible and One-adult + children cases.
- Blue highlight shows that 42% were either *modeled* incorrectly or participants are not on their application, including spouses who should be.



Findings on One-adult + children SNAP cases: Wheaton et al. (cont.)

Slide 18: Inconsistencies in linked data for One Adult + Children cases/households	
Case child or adult not in ASEC HH	28% + 15% = 43%
ASEC/TRIM3 spouse not in Case Unit	20%
ASEC/TRIM3 partner not in Case Unit	28%
ASEC/TRIM3 other adult not in Case Unit	15%

The first row suggests survey data issue.

The second row is a potential issue

- of a SNAP applicant not including their spouse as they should, OR
- The spouse is not eligible (immigrant or other reason)

The third row could be similar to spouse.

And the fourth is likely a modeling issue.

Upshot: Need to understand why so many of these survey households have more people than in the matching admin cases.



How do linked SNAP participants look? Are they modeled as eligible?

- Wheaton et al. examine whether matching SNAP cases are estimated as eligible or not in TRIM3 and to explore the implications of imputation.
- ~75% of matches are eligible. (73% IL, 78% MS, 73% TN)
- Eligible units are more likely than Ineligible units
 - to completely match SNAP cases on all members; and
 - to not use imputed survey data.
- This is good news. However, I wish the estimates of eligibility could be better aligned with the admin records of participation.
- And would have been nice to compare to MATH+ estimates.



Using Administrative Data to Examine Cross-Program Participation in SNAP and WIC

Hodges et al.

- Great plan. We need more information on WIC participation in other programs, and SNAP is a good place to start, especially since children are likely to be covered by SNAP and yet we see the WIC drop-off as children age.
- Be ready for double trouble in matching to both SNAP and WIC.
- Why only three states? You'll need as much data as possible to get at the numbers in both programs.
- Longitudinal analysis! Yay. May need more than one state.
 - Maybe you can not include the survey data and link on SNAP and WIC PIKs to understand the dynamics.



WIC admin data research

- If recent data become available, impact of COVID on participation in both programs would be good to look at.
 - Since WIC participants didn't have to visit offices, that may have made it easier to participate.
- WIC eligibility estimates would benefit from better understanding of monthly income changes.



SNAP Eligibility and Access Rates

Bhaskar et al.

- It is so great to see how this work has developed and become a regular product provided to States that share their SNAP data.
- It may be time to revisit the modeling assumptions given the insights raised by recent studies including those in this session.
 - Multi-units: Though these studies are focused on linked CPS ASEC data, the general insights about multi-units should be re-examined.
 - And similar analysis of linked ACS SNAP admin data is warranted.
 - Are children and members of lowest income households also missing from ACS survey rosters?



Future Research

- Income dynamics
 - How best to model income for eligibility purposes when we have (poor) annual income data in the CPS
- SNAP unit modeling
 - Compare simulation methods more directly across models
 - Multi-units: what is best?
 - Need bigger samples
- PIK error implications
 - What can we say about the CPS/ACS individuals who don't have a PIK?
 - Extend the work matching on sex and age for those who don't have PIKS.



Future Research

- Survey representation of low-response groups
 - Expand the analysis to more years and states, and extend to ACS
- Admin data quality (QC and State files)
 - Add information to SNAP cases about ineligible unit members when they are known (as suggested by Wheaton et al).
- Match CPS ASEC households to their full prior year of SNAP case data to see how case composition and other variables changed over the year (also suggested by Wheaton).
 - How does that inform the eligibility model?
 - Pull in SNAP data with income data, if possible.



THANKS

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SNAP-Eligible Units

- We should keep in mind that when using the household composition of SNAP cases, we aren't looking at the true distribution of eligible participants and non-participants.
 - What might the differences be?
 - Most Non-participant-Eligible units are probably closer to the eligibility threshold:
 - Higher monthly income, more adults, those eligible for only a small benefit
 - Could this partially explain the apparently lower rates of more-likely-to-participate cases among the estimated eligible?



Subgroups in linked data by other unit members by type

Czajka et al.

Illinois data Tables 8, 9, 10	Child + one adult	Children + no earnings	One adult	No earnings
Unrelated individual or subfamily	17.6%	20.7%	14.7%	14.2%
Related subfamily	19.5%	18.3%	6.1%	9.3%
Unit = Case	50.0%	64.6%	57.0%	57.0%
Rough total	87.1%	103.6%	77.8%	80.5%