SNAP-Ed Program and Participant Characteristics were not Associated with Improvement in Household Food Security

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THE PROBLEM
The goal of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) is “to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy choices within a limited budget and choose active lifestyles consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPlate.” SNAP-Ed also improves food security—“the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable food for physical, social, or psychological wellbeing.” The association of program characteristics, such as the number of lessons provided and lesson delivery format, and participant characteristics, such as participation in nutrition assistance programs such as SNAP, WIC, and food pantries, with the efficacy of SNAP-Ed to improve food security is currently unknown.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides financial benefits to improve food security. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides nutrition vouchers for food and education. Food pantries provide food at no cost.

The study objective was to determine the association of SNAP-Ed program characteristics (number of lessons and lesson delivery format) and baseline participant characteristics (participation in federal nutrition assistance programs and food pantries) with improvements in long-term household food security among households with children in Indiana after a SNAP-Ed intervention.

OBJECTIVE

The study objective was to determine the association of SNAP-Ed program characteristics (number of lessons and lesson delivery format) and baseline participant characteristics (participation in federal nutrition assistance programs and food pantries) with improvements in long-term household food security among households with children in Indiana after a SNAP-Ed intervention.

METHODS

SNAP-Ed is a nutrition education program available at no cost to SNAP participants. SNAP-Ed is designed to improve food security through a series of lessons offering education on healthy dietary and lifestyle choices while also encouraging food dollars.

Program Characteristics:
- Lesson Delivery Format was classified as a categorical variable with 3 levels (individually, group, or combination) indicating participation status at baseline.
- WIC was classified as a categorical variable with 2 levels (yes, no) indicating participation status at baseline.
- Food Pantry was classified as a categorical variable with 2 levels (yes, no) indicating participation status at baseline. This variable also includes use of soup kitchens.

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THE INTERVENTION

SNAP-Ed is a nutrition education program available at no cost to SNAP eligible participants that is designed to improve food security through a series of lessons offering education on healthy dietary and lifestyle choices while also encouraging food dollars.

RESULTS

- SNAP-Ed is effective whether lessons are delivered to an individual, group, or combination of formats.
- SNAP-Ed may improve food security among participants regardless of participation in other nutrition assistance programs.
- Participants using food pantries may benefit more from SNAP-Ed.
- A 1-unit improvement in food security is sufficient to move from food insecure to food secure.
- SNAP-Ed helps maximize nutrition per food dollar using the Social Cognitive Theory and can be applied when households are and are not receiving nutrition assistance.
- Results help build an evidence-base for SNAP-Ed in regard to its positive impact on improving food security and justify program maintenance and expansion.
- Future research should investigate changes in nutrition assistance program participation status over time due to participation in SNAP-Ed and whether these changes are significantly associated with increases in food security.
- Interdisciplinary methods required from social sciences, economics, nutrition science, public health, and statistics to help USDA Food and Nutrition Service end hunger in American households with children.

CONCLUSION

Food pantry use was significantly associated with the improvement in food security over time among the SNAP-Ed intervention compared with control group participants in Indiana households with children, and participants in nutrition assistance programs and SNAP-Ed at baseline and program characteristics were not significantly associated.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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