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

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Disclaimer

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WIC Background

• WIC provides nutritious foods, nutrition counseling, and health referrals

• Target group: Low-income (<185% FPL) pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age 5

• Growing body of evidence that WIC is associated with improved dietary intake among children

• Growing concerns about declines in WIC participation
SNAP Background

• SNAP provides households with means to purchase healthy and nutritious foods via an EBT card

• Target group: SNAP is available to all households that meet the program’s income and asset criteria, subject to certain work and immigration status requirements

• Like WIC, not all eligible individuals participate (coverage rate is about 82%)

• SNAP participants are adjunctively eligible for WIC
WIC Participation Has Been Declining for a Decade

[Graph showing the decline in WIC participation from 2000 to 2020, with categories for Total, Women, Infants, and Children.]
Not a Fertility Story...

WIC Coverage Rates by Participant Category: CY 2005–CY 2018

WIC Participation Declines as Children Age

Coverage Rates by Participant Category, 2018

- Infants: 98%
- Age 1: 61%
- Age 2: 48%
- Age 3: 41%
- Age 4: 27%

Reasons for Non-Participation in WIC

• [Tiehen & Jacknowitz, 2008] Pregnant women who participate in WIC are more likely
  – to be non-Hispanic black or Hispanic
  – to have less than a high school education
  – to be younger
  – to have never been married
  – to participate in other assistance programs
  – and to have income below the poverty line

• [Jacknowitz & Tiehen, 2010] Women who exited from WIC
  – Breastfed for shorter durations (<6 mos.)
  – Reported that it was too much effort and/or benefits were not worth the time (25%)
  – Reported lack of transportation and/or scheduling issues (9%)
Reasons for Non-Participation in WIC

• Recent work from LA County (Whaley et al. 2017) and FNS’s ITFPS-2 reports supports findings from prior work
• Continued participation associated with
  – Prenatal participation in WIC
  – Breastfeeding duration
  – More than one family member on WIC (parity)
  – Medicaid enrollment
  – Access to WIC education online
• Exists associated with
  – Beliefs about ineligibility
  – Feelings that WIC is inconvenient
  – Perceptions of no longer needing WIC
Current Study

1. What percentage of infants and children in SNAP participant households also participate in WIC, and how do these percentages vary across children’s age groups? [Descriptive Analyses]

2. How do the characteristics of infants and children who participated in both SNAP and WIC differ from those who participated in only one program? [Regression Analyses]

3. What was the effect of the decline of the real value of SNAP benefits that were temporarily boosted by the 2009 ARRA on WIC participation? [Difference-in-Differences]
Data

• Next-Generation Data Platform
• SNAP and WIC participation data from 3 states
  – Covers approximately 5% of WIC and SNAP participants in 2020
  – Cross-section analysis includes all 3 states
  – Longitudinal analysis focuses on 1 state over 10-year period
Strengths

- Overcomes issues of underreporting of program participation
- Capture variation in participation rates at substate level
- Easily identify eligible non-participants
Percent of WIC participants reporting participation in Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF at certification, 1994 - 2018

Note: SNAP refers to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. SNAP values may underestimate SNAP participation at certification because once an individual being certified reports participating in Medicaid—which confers adjunctive eligibility to WIC--WIC clinics may not always follow up and ask about participating in SNAP.
Challenges

- Limited information
- Detail and quality of measures varies
- May not have all household members
Summary & Conclusions

• WIC is an integral component of the USDA programs that promote nutrition security
• Rates of participation among eligible populations have been declining over the past decade.
• Our research will provide valuable information on the WIC participation rates of SNAP participants