

Featured CPRDC Research Project: Causal Effects of Mental Health Conditions on Food Insecurity and the Mediating Role of SNAP



Researchers Helen Jensen, Brent Kreider and Oleksandr Zhulyevskyy at the Department of Economics at Iowa State University, with co-investigators Kimberly Greder (Iowa State) and John Pepper (University of Virginia), are conducting this research study funded by the University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research, with USDA funding. Their research question is summarized as follows:

The primary purpose of this study is to assess causal effects of adult mental health conditions on food insecurity in households with and without children. We will focus on SNAP-eligible households and adults in the 18-64 years old age range. Previous research has examined the effects of food insecurity on emotional distress and depression and has also shown that mental health conditions are associated with socioeconomic hardships in general and food insecurity in particular. Yet, much less is known about causal effects.

We will address two key research questions:

- 1) To what extent does the mental health of low-income adults causally affect the food security of their households? Do these effects vary across socioeconomic and demographic characteristics (e.g., age and number of children in the household)?
- 2) Whether and to what extent do participation in SNAP and mental health conditions interact in shaping a household's food security outcome?

Our main hypothesis is that mental health conditions adversely affect food security. A key data set used in the analysis is the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).

Featured Data Set: National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)



The National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) is the primary source of information on U.S. health. It is the largest in-person health survey and has been providing information on the nation's health since 1957. NHIS data are used to monitor progress related to national health objectives, evaluate health policies, and track changes in personal health behaviors and health care system use.

The survey provides information regarding medical conditions, health insurance coverage, doctor's office visits, physical activity, and other health behaviors. This restricted-use data set is available from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) through the CPRDC. Researchers interested in using this data set can obtain more information from the CDC's related website.

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The Central Plains Research Data Center (CPRDC) is a special research facility at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln that is operated in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau to provide researchers with approved projects access to restricted-use federal data. Data are available from a number of federal agencies, including the Census Bureau, the National Center for Health Statistics, the Internal Revenue Service, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and other agencies. Restricted access data sets are typically more detailed and provide finer geographic coverage than public use data sets. A Census administrator is on site to assist researchers in the development of proposals, to facilitate security clearances, and to assist in implementation of approved research projects. The purpose of the CPRDC is to enhance academic research, research infrastructure, and the recruitment of research oriented faculty and graduate students. The CPRDC is supported by a consortium of university entities including the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Iowa State University, the University of Iowa, and the University of South Dakota.