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

Discussant Remarks

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Outline

- Introduction
- Findings from Cunnyngham 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**

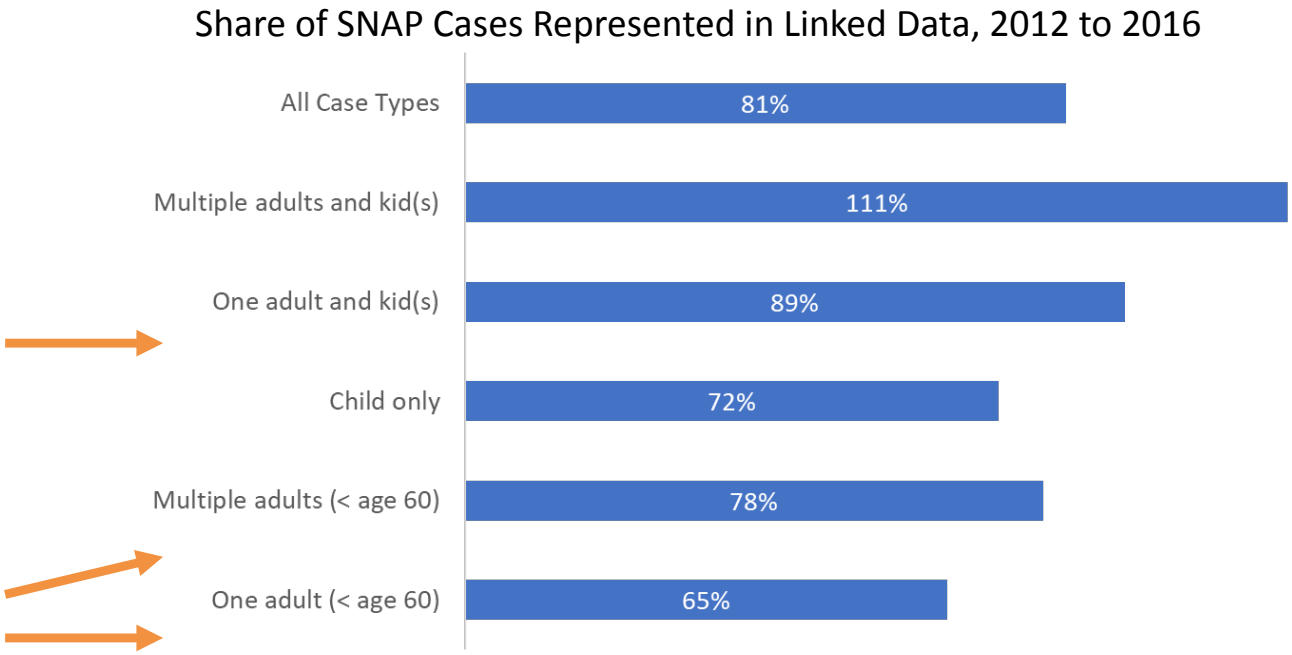
Bolded groups represent large shares of SNAP cases overall.

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.



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 Cunnyngham/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%