

To eat or not to eat? An explorative analysis of food security among disconnected women

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What do I focus on today?

- What is disconnectedness?
- Why should we care about it?
- What does current literature say on this issue?
- Main Research Question
- Data and Preliminary Results
- From here to...

- 1996 welfare reform : from welfare to work
- Early evidence : increased employment among single mothers
- New rules, expansion of EITC at federal level, economic expansion
- However, not all mothers who left welfare found employment
- Growing concern among researchers about those single mothers who left welfare but did not get employed
- “Disconnected Mothers” : neither welfare nor work

Evidence

- In 2008, 1.2 million women were disconnected at one point of time (Loprest & Austin, 2008)
- 1 in 8 low income single mother was disconnected in 1996 but between 2004 to 2008 it increased to 1 in 5 (Wood & Rangarajan, 2008)
- Blank & Novak (2008) 20% single mothers under 200% of FPL were disconnected
- In Michigan, during 79 months of study period, 9.1% single mothers were disconnected at 25% of time
- Studies in Tennessee and Colorado find similar evidence

- Most of these disconnected women face serious barriers to employment
 - Low education
 - Health Problems
 - History of domestic violence
 - Learning disabilities
 - Lack of transportation
 - Alcohol dependence
- Vulnerable group that needs more support

- This group is also difficult to track in database and is absent from many datasets (Powers, Livemore and Creel-Davis,2013)
- 1 in 3 children live in disconnected families (Reed et.al, 2015)
- They face increased material hardship including low food security, poor nutrition, utility shut offs due to inability to pay for them
- Very low average income
 - \$6,200 in 2002 (Haskins,2016)
 - \$9,459 in 2006 (Blank & Kovak,2008)
 - \$6,178 in 2002 among disconnected single mothers as compared to \$17,681 among former TANF recipients who were not disconnected

How do they survive?

- Help from family and friends
 - Some public assistance (Medicaid, SNAP)
 - \$2.00/day (Edin and Schaefer, 2016)
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- Overall food insecurity in the US is declining but what's happening to food security among disconnected women?

Research Question

To what extent do disconnected women experience food insecurity?

Data and Methods

- Current Population Survey : 2005 to 2015
- Food Security Supplement
- Supplemented with data from University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research
- Several definitions of disconnected single mother in literature
- Disconnected Single Mother = no welfare income or income from employment
- Sample consists of all working age single mothers who are disconnected

Food Security Scale

Based on USDA food security questionnaire of 18 questions

High food security: Households had no problems, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food.

Marginal food security: Households had problems at times, or anxiety about, accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety, and quantity of their food intake were not substantially reduced.

Low food security: Households reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted.

Very low food security: Households reported multiple incidents of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

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Comparative Descriptive Statistics

Variable	All Single Mothers (N = 134,181)	Disconnected Single Mothers (N = 35,693)
<u>Race (%)</u>		
White	67.87	64.04
Black Asian	25.21	28.88
American Indian	2.05	2.41
Other (2-or more races)	4.87	4.67
<u>Ethnicity (%)</u>		
Hispanic	82.22	79.01
Non-Hispanic	18.78	20.99
Avg. age	40.18	40.1
Avg. number of children	1.78	1.86
<u>Education (%)</u>		25.77
Less than High School	14.91	34.82
High School	31.29	22.17
Some College	23.56	17.24
Associate Degree or more	30.24	

Comparative Descriptive Statistics contd...

Variable	All Single Mothers	Disconnected Single Mothers
Avg. value of food stamps received	\$832	\$709
<u>Food Security Status (%)</u>		
Highly Food Secure	42.6	31.51
Marginally Food Secure	14.39	16.71
Low food security	12.95	16.87
Very low food security	9.78	14.68

Next Steps

- Descriptive data shows that disconnected mothers are worse off than all single mothers in terms of food security status.
- Regression analysis is the next step to understand this connection better

$$FS_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{it} + \beta_2 Z_{it} + \beta_3 S_{it} + \mu_{it} \text{ where}$$

- FS_{it} denotes the food security status of a single mother (i) in the year (t).
- Marginal food security, Low food security and Very low food security.
- X_{it} is the disconnection status of a single mother (i) in year (t) and the main variable of interest, which is equal to 1 if disconnected and 0 if not disconnected.
- Z is the vector of individual characteristics; S is the vector of state level characteristics
- μ_{it} is the error term.

Thanks!

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