

A report summary from the Economic Research Service

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Food Security: Insights From Administrative Records

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Key Points

- This report investigates how survey misreporting of participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) affects our understanding of the relationship between SNAP and food security.
- Many SNAP respondents do not identify themselves as program participants on Federal surveys, an obstacle this study overcomes by using Federal survey data from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS) linked to administrative data from 19 States for the 2017–19 survey years.
- The linked data show nearly half (47.3 percent) of all SNAP participants erroneously report that they did not receive SNAP on the 2017–19 CPS-FSS surveys.
- The data also show that the sample of SNAP households matched to administrative data is more food secure than the sample of SNAP households identified solely by responses to CPS-FSS.
- The study finds that SNAP participation has a positive effect on U.S. households' food security. However, using only survey-reported SNAP participation can lead to overestimating the effect of SNAP on food security by as much as 50 percent compared with using administrative records (38.4 percent versus 24.4 percent).

Why Does This Matter?

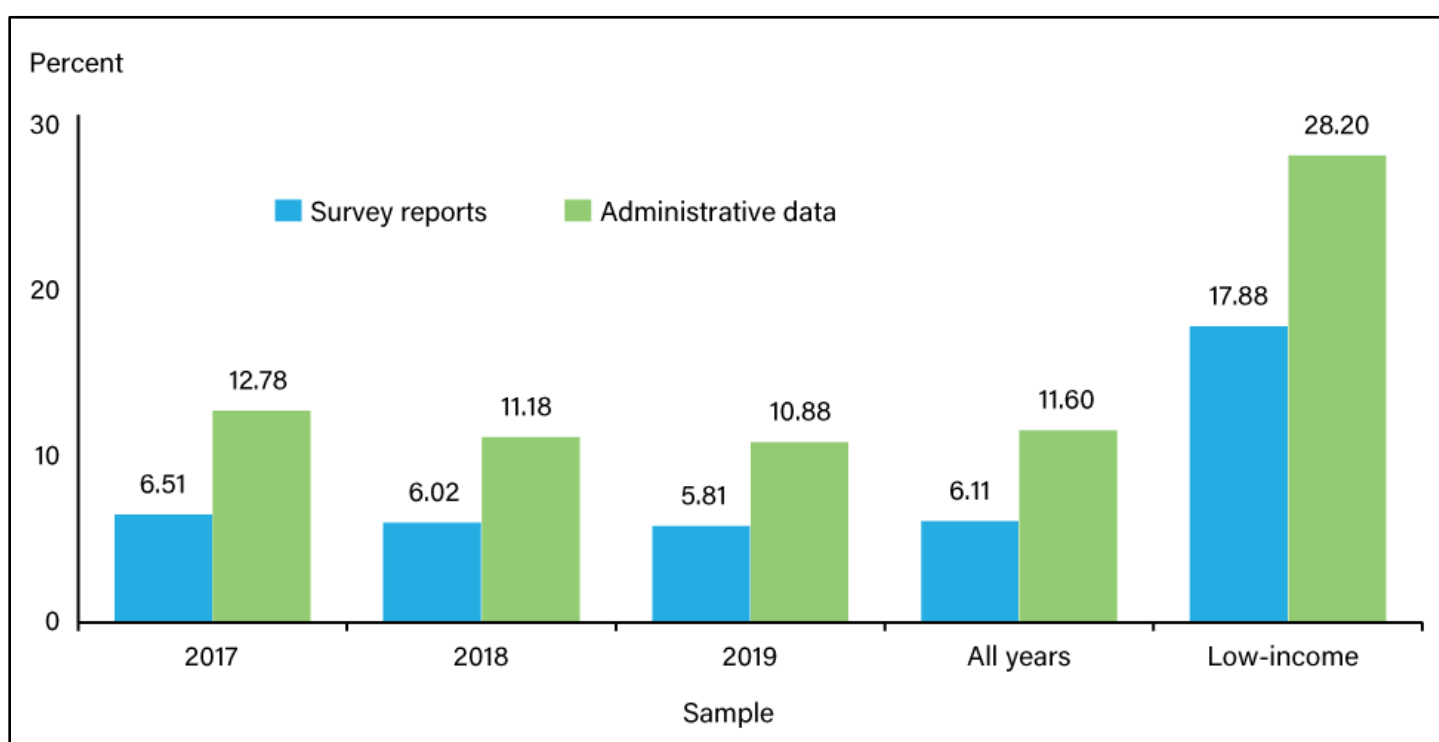
Almost all existing information about SNAP and its relation to food security comes from studies using Federal survey data. Depending on the survey and years of data used, respondents in these data collections are known to misreport participation in SNAP by as much as 50 percent. Research has shown that this misreporting has important consequences for

understanding the relationship between SNAP participation and other significant program outcomes, such as poverty. This study examines how SNAP administrative records linked to the annual CPS-FSS improve understanding of the relationships between SNAP and food security.

A Few More Details

USDA, Economic Research Service has partnered with USDA, Food and Nutrition Service and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (Census Bureau) to make administrative records of SNAP participants available for research purposes. The Census Bureau had developed the technology that links those records to census data collections through encryption of personal information. Using administrative records linked to the CPS-FSS for 19 States (including Arizona, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Tennessee, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) for the 2017–19 survey years, this study examines the relationships between participation in SNAP, food security, and survey misreporting.

Fraction of population participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) according to survey reports and administrative data



Note: The Census Bureau has ensured appropriate access and use of confidential data and has reviewed these results for disclosure avoidance protection CBDRB-FY24-CES023-010.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (Census Bureau), Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data matched to SNAP administrative records for Arizona, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Tennessee, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming for 2017, 2018, and 2019. The Census Bureau has ensured appropriate access and use of confidential data and has reviewed these results for disclosure avoidance protection CBDRB-FY24-CES023-010.

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