

2. Survey Methodology and Data

Administrative Record Data

The Iowa Department of Human Services provided administrative record data of all cases receiving food stamps for the period December 1996 through January 1998. The unit of observation was the case head. The records in the file corresponded to unique cases. Each case record included the case name (the person who applied for food stamps), the person name (the case head), program participation information (that is, whether the case received only food stamps or also received FIP or Medicaid, and the case's participation by month in the FSP), an ABAWD indicator for the case if the case was cancelled or closed, household size, number of adults, and demographic information on the case head. This file was used to draw the sample and for initial comparative analysis. Later, similar information was added for the period January 1998 through March 2000. Information from administrative data was added to that obtained from the sampled households to supplement information related to program participation.

Iowa Food Stamp Leavers Survey and Questionnaire Development

The Iowa Food Stamp Leavers survey was conducted to evaluate the status of persons who had left the Iowa Food Stamp Program during 1997. The survey drew on the experience and findings of an earlier survey, the 1998 Iowa Survey of Program Dynamics (I/SPD). This earlier survey, funded by the US Census Bureau and Iowa State University, was designed to investigate methods for integrating locally relevant questions into the Census Bureau's Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD) instrument. The Iowa Food Stamp Leavers survey included questions from the I/SPD, although the structure and questions were shortened considerably and other sections of particular interest for the study of the FSP and ABAWD population were added.

The unit of observation for the Iowa Food Stamp Leavers survey was the case head (as defined in the FSP case in 1997). The questionnaire included sections on household characteristics and status (including a roster of household members), employment and employment-related questions of the case head, earnings and household income, program participation, education and training, and health insurance. The survey also included questions designed to provide indicators of well-being and self-sufficiency and to measure food and housing security. The USDA Food Security Module (18 food security related questions) was included in order to classify households on the basis of food security, food insecurity, and hunger (Bickel et al. 2000). Questions related to housing insecurity asked about the quality of housing and reliance on family, friends, or other community services for housing. Other questions were added to measure "means of making ends meet," including the use of community food kitchens, and other community resources. The questionnaire was administered through a telephone interview.

Survey Design and Implementation

Sample

The Statistical Laboratory at Iowa State University designed and administered the survey and edited the data. Nusser, Anderson, and Anderson (2000) provide a detailed description of the survey design and implementation. The target population for the survey was defined to be all Iowa FSP cases that were active at least one month during 1997 and that had case heads living in Iowa at the time of the survey. Because of resource constraints, cases with case heads that had left Iowa were defined to be ineligible. The Iowa Department of Human Services provided a data file containing all cases receiving food stamps between December 1996 and January 1998. This file contained 111,435 records.

Records in the FSP file correspond to unique cases, and the unit of observation was the case. Each case is associated with individuals identified as the case name (the person who applied for food stamps) and the person name (the case head, the oldest person in the household on food stamps). A case was defined as leaving the FSP (i.e., a “leaver”) if, after having received FSP benefits, the case experienced a minimum of two consecutive months’ absence from the program during the period December 1996 through January 1998. The choice of the two-month criterion was used to allow for some administrative slippage and to conform to the other Food Stamp leaver studies underway. Some of the leavers as classified by the 1997 status may have returned to the FSP and be participants at the time of the survey in 1999.

In the Iowa Food Stamp Leavers study, cases that remained active in the FSP throughout 1997 were included in the sample design in order to allow comparison between those who left the FSP and those who did not. Cases with an out-of-state address and records indicating only participation in December 1996 or January 1998 were removed from the target population file.

The data file that formed the basis for the sampling frame contained 104,196 records after the file was cleaned. A stratified random sample of cases was selected based on three variables that partitioned the frame into 18 strata (2 food stamp leaver levels \times 3 household composition levels \times 3 population density levels). The three variables were defined as follows:

1. Food Stamp (FS) leaver

- Leaver: case was active in 1997 and left the FSP for at least two consecutive months during the period December 1996 through January 1998.
- Stayer: case was active in 1997 and either did not leave the FSP by December 1997 or left only during single nonconsecutive months.

2. Household composition

- Likely ABAWD: case had no children in household, case head was 18-49 years old, and case did not receive FIP benefits.
- Family: number of children in household was greater than zero, or the work registration status of the case head indicated an exemption due to pregnancy, or the case head received FIP benefits.
- Other household (not family and unlikely to be ABAWD): case head work registration status was exempt,¹ case head was a child under 18 years of age, or case head was an adult 50 years old or older.

3. Population density, based on rural-urban continuum codes for counties (Butler and Beale, 1993)

- Metro: county is in a metropolitan area. This categorization corresponds to counties in metropolitan areas with population of 250,000 to 1 million and in metropolitan areas with population of less than 250,000 (county codes of either 2 or 3).
- Adjacent to metro: county is adjacent to a metropolitan area. These counties include counties with an urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metropolitan area; urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metropolitan area; and completely rural or urban population of less than 2,500, adjacent to a metropolitan area (county codes of 4, 6, or 8).
- Nonadjacent to metro: county with urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metropolitan area; urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metropolitan area; and completely rural or urban population of less than 2,500, not adjacent to a metropolitan area (county codes of 5, 7, or 9).

Resource constraints dictated a target sample size of approximately 700 completed cases. Relatively more cases were sampled from the subpopulations of the ABAWDs, FSP

¹ Reasons for exemption from work registration include being physically or mentally unfit to work; caring for dependent child(ren) under age 6, or for an incapacitated person; enrolled in Promise Jobs; receiving FIP-UP benefits, or UI benefits; enrolled in a certified alcohol or drug rehab program; being a migrant or seasonal worker; already working the required number of hours; or enrolled in school half-time.

leavers, and ABAWD-FSP leavers because they were the subpopulations of interest. The telephone survey was conducted with case heads who were located and willing to participate. A \$25 gift certificate to a local food store was provided to all respondents completing the interview as an incentive, and great efforts were made to obtain participation in the survey.

Survey Implementation

Sample case heads were mailed letters prior to receiving a first telephone contact. Those case heads with telephone numbers were sent a letter introducing the study and were provided a toll-free number should they have questions about the study. Other mail and investigative follow-up was conducted for those case heads with no known telephone number or for nonresponders. Table 1 summarizes the final outcome of calls for the entire sample.

A case was considered “located” if any contact information was obtained on the case head that led to a contact telephone number. Efforts to obtain a contact telephone number included resubmitting the case to the Iowa Department of Human Services for more recent information, conducting directory assistance searches and change of address searches, using reply postcards and an 800 toll-free call-back number, and using any information gathered from a third-party (relative, neighbor or friend when possible). Of the 2,526 total contacted for interview, about 50% of these cases (1275) were located for possible interview. Telephone interviews were conducted during June, July, and August of 1999.

A case was considered eligible if the respondent was living in Iowa in a non-institutionalized setting at the time of the study and verified receipt of FSP benefits in 1997. Of those located, 16% (199) had moved out of state, were deceased, institutionalized, or were never on FS and were deemed ineligible. Nearly two-thirds of those ineligible had moved out of the state. Of the 1,076 eligible and located cases, 735 (68.3%) were interviewed. There were an additional 106 cases deemed located and eligible, but who did not provide an interview. In addition, there were 235 cases who were not contacted (no phone or not contacted after a maximum number of calls).

The response rate for the entire sample was 36.0%. This includes the 49.5% unlocatable cases. The overall response rate was adjusted for the eligibility rate (AAPOR, 1998; Nusser, Anderson, and Anderson, 2000). The relatively high percentage of unlocatable cases reflects the great difficulty in tracking this population in 1999 using contact information that in many cases was two or more years old. The unlocatable rate was about double that obtained for the I/SPD, a sample drawn from similar records but tracked in a few months after the administrative data snapshot was taken.

FSP leavers comprised approximately three-fourths (548 of 735, 74.6%) of those interviewed (Table 2). Household composition strata were determined from administrative record data. Based on classifications using the administrative data, nearly two-thirds (437 of 735, 64.4%) of respondents in the completed interviews were identified as likely ABAWDs. Analyses of the interview data, however, revealed that

about one-half of the likely ABAWD respondents were not ABAWDs in 1997 when they left the FSP, or in December 1997 if they were FSP stayers. In other words, only about one-third (230 of 735, 31.3%) of the completed interviews could be classified as having been individuals who were ABAWDs in 1997. We relied on the interview data for the ABAWD and non-ABAWD classifications used for the subsequent analyses. Of the 230 ABAWDs interviewed, 187 were leavers and 43 remained in the program in 1997 and were classified as “stayers”.

Weights were calculated for each case to adjust for unequal selection probabilities and nonresponse within sampling strata, and for ineligible cases. The 735 sample interviews were weighted to represent the population of cases in Iowa that received food stamps at some time in 1997 and were eligible to participate in the survey (e.g., were residing in Iowa at the time of the interviews). All statistics given in this report are weighted estimates. The estimated population size is 91,578 cases: of these, there were an estimated 8,106 ABAWD (8.9%) and 83,472 non-ABAWD cases. There were 51,332 stayer cases (56.1%) and 40,246 leaver cases (43.9%). Means and variances for the sample data were calculated using SAS (Survey Means) and account for the stratified survey design.

Comparison between the total FSP population in 1997 (based on administrative records) and the sampled population shows that in many respects the survey is representative of Iowa’s 1997 Food Stamp population (Table 3). The FSP population is predominantly white (over 80 percent); the case averaged nearly 2.5 persons in the household and had an average of 7.7 months on FSP during 1997. However, the survey participants were more likely to be female respondents (72%), were older, and had fewer one-person households than the overall FSP population.

Groups for Comparison

Given the objectives of the study and survey, the analysis focused on two groups for comparison: individuals who left the FSP (“leavers”) and those who did not leave the FSP (“stayers”) in 1997; and ABAWDs. All respondents received food stamps for at least one month in 1997. If a participant in 1997 did not receive food stamps for at least two consecutive months after having received food stamps for at least one month, then the respondent was said to have “left” the program and was classified as a leaver. The two-month interval was used to assure a period of being out of the FSP. Within the ABAWD group, stayers and leavers were compared. The leaver and stayer groups were defined as for the survey strata. It is important to reiterate that the stayers and leavers could have changed status since 1997. Some of the leavers in 1997 could have returned and been FSP participants in 1999. The ABAWD classification was determined based on reported survey information. Statistical tests (t-tests) compared the FS stayers versus leavers and, within the ABAWD group, stayers versus leavers. All data reported in the tables come from the weighted survey data.