

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF PANTRY CLIENTS

Food pantries serve the majority of EFAS clients, and therefore also provide the bulk of food to low-income clients served by the EFAS. In this chapter, we describe the characteristics of households that use food pantries, including household food security and other measures of hardship. We review the extent to which pantry clients rely on different forms of emergency food assistance, and analyze pantry clients' satisfaction with the food they receive from the pantry they visited on the day of the interview. Because pantry households may include persons eligible for one of several government food assistance programs, we report the participation of household members in these programs, as well as pantry respondents' explanations for why their households do not participate in programs for which they appear eligible.¹ We also describe key characteristics of pantry client households defined by (1) demographic composition which is relevant to food assistance programs and policy-making and (2) use of private and/or public food assistance to better understand those households who rely solely on one or more EFAS sources, or those who rely on private and public food assistance to try to meet their food needs.

A. NUMBERS OF CLIENTS SERVED BY FOOD PANTRIES

We estimated monthly numbers of unique or different households served by food pantries based on the numbers of households observed at the pantries we visited, and how often clients reported that they received food from one or more pantries per month. Based on these data,

¹Because pantry clients include every member of the survey respondent's household, we do not focus in this chapter on the characteristics of the household member who completed the survey. Most pantry respondents (who were at the pantry picking up food for their household) were age 45 or older (54 percent), female (71 percent), either Hispanic or non-white (51 percent), unmarried (74 percent), without a college education (80 percent), in fair or poor health (54 percent), U.S. citizens (93 percent), and not in the labor force (62 percent). See appendix tables D.2 and D.3 for details.

about 4.3 million different households received food from food pantries during a typical month in 2001 (table III.1). The total number of people served by food pantries was 12.5 million (8.0 million adults and 4.5 million children under age 18) during a typical month in 2001.

TABLE III.1
ESTIMATED NUMBERS OF DIFFERENT CLIENTS SERVED
BY FOOD PANTRIES WEEKLY AND MONTHLY IN 2001

| | Weekly Number | Monthly Number |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Households | 1.5 million | 4.3 million |
| Total Persons | 4.3 million | 12.5 million |
| Adults | 2.8 million | 8.0 million |
| Children | 1.5 million | 4.5 million |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

NOTE: See appendix A for details regarding the methods used to estimate unique numbers of client households and total clients.

There are several reasons why it is reasonable to focus on the number of unique clients served by pantries per month. About half (discussed later in section E) of pantry client households visit a food pantry once a month or less, and two-thirds of food pantries restrict visits to once a month or less per household (Ohls et al. 2000). To estimate monthly numbers of households and people served by food pantries, we first estimate weekly numbers.² We then calculate the monthly number based on how often clients visit food pantries per month. As described more fully in appendix A, these estimates are derived from sampling probabilities and

²Estimated numbers of households and people served weekly by pantries are included in Table III.1 for reference purposes.

include adjustments for survey nonresponse and other factors relating to survey coverage. The estimates may be quite sensitive to a number of factors including sampling error, measurement error, non-coverage of small providers and providers who are open infrequently or on an ‘emergency basis’ only, and seasonality. (The latter factor results from the data collection having been limited to only approximately four months.) However, despite these limitations, we believe that the estimates provide the best estimates of the food pantry population which can be obtained from the available data, and that they represent a reasonably good approximation of the number of pantry client households and clients at food pantries in a typical month.

The study design limits our ability to precisely measure patterns of use over a year and to estimate the total number of households and clients served by food pantries during 2001. First, data were collected for a 14-week period rather than for a year’s period so the survey data do not reflect seasonal patterns of food pantry usage. Second, while we collected a limited amount of data about clients’ use of pantries for the previous 12 months, space limitations on the instrument precluded obtaining all the data necessary to fully characterize annual usage. Also, these data may contain considerable measurement error in clients’ abilities to accurately report the number of months in the last 12 months that they visited a food pantry.

The annual number cannot be derived by simply multiplying the monthly number by 12, which would assume that an entirely new set of clients is served each month, nor is it equal to the monthly number, which would assume that no new clients are served each month. Some indication of the potential range of possible numbers of different clients annually can be derived by examining the implications of alternative estimates of turnover in the system, where we define turnover as the average percentage of the clientele which is “new” each month in the sense of not having used a pantry in the previous 12 months. If, to take a likely lower bound, we assume that this turnover rate is only 4 percent per month, this would imply that the annual

number of different clients is 18.0 million. On the other hand, if, we assume a monthly turnover rate of 8 percent of the caseload, this would imply that the annual number of different clients is 23.5 million.

This range for the estimated annual number of pantry clients (18.0 to 23.5 million people) is somewhat lower than the annual estimate reported for America's Second Harvest study, which was 21.1 to 26.1 million people, although the two ranges partially overlap. (For the Second Harvest estimate, see Kim, Ohls, and Cohen 2001, as modified by subsequent revisions which will be reflected in the final version.) Furthermore, this direction of the difference is surprising, because the sample frame for the Second Harvest estimate was limited to food pantries served by Second Harvest food banks, and therefore narrower than that for the EFAS study. Several reasons may explain the difference: (1) different data collection methods including sample frames, survey questions, and mode of interview, (2) statistical sampling error in both surveys, (3) measurement error, (4) seasonality, and (5) different estimation approaches. The EFAS client survey's estimate of 18.0 to 23.5 million annual pantry clients is substantially higher than the 7.7 million pantry clients estimated using data collected in the September 2000 Current Population Survey (CPS) (Nord et al. 2002). Reasons for these differences may include different survey methods and the absence of the homeless population in the CPS, which would underestimate the total number of pantry clients in the U.S.

B. HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

In this section, we consider the demographic characteristics and residential status of pantry households, as well as indicators of the material hardship experienced by these households. We describe the food security of pantry households in a separate section (C), below.

1. Demographic Characteristics of Pantry Households

Three-tenths of pantry households (29 percent) are single-person households (table III.2). Of these households, more are female (18 percent) than are male (11 percent). About 31 percent of pantry client households include at least four people. Almost one-half (45 percent) of pantry client households include children under the age of 18. One-third (32 percent) of pantry client households include a person 60 or older. One-quarter (26 percent) of pantry client households include an employed person, and 45 percent of client households received case welfare in the last month.

The vast majority (87 percent) of pantry respondents report that all members of their household are U.S. citizens. About 69 percent of client households receive pantry assistance in a metropolitan area.

2. Residential Status of Pantry Households

About three-fifths (62 percent) of all pantry households report renting their residence, and one-quarter (24 percent) include homeowners (table III.3). Only 6 percent of pantry households include respondents who live in their residence for free, and about 8 percent of pantry households are homeless.³

The most common type of residence pantry households occupy is a house or condominium (43 percent), followed by an apartment (35 percent) and by a mobile home (15 percent). Only 7 percent of pantry households reside in other settings. Of households residing in a house or condominium, one-half rent the residence, and 38 percent include homeowners. Of households

³Homeless respondents either indicated that they consider themselves homeless, or that they live in locations (shelters/missions, cars/vans, abandoned buildings, public places/railroad stations, or outdoors) not intended to serve as permanent housing.

TABLE III.2
HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD PANTRY CLIENTS

| Characteristic | Percent Unless Otherwise Stated | (SE) |
|---|------------------------------------|------|
| Household Composition | | |
| Single female respondent living alone | 17.6 | 1.59 |
| Single male respondent living alone | 11.0 | 1.57 |
| Single respondent living with children under the age of 18 | 26.1 | 1.84 |
| Married/cohabiting respondent living with children under the age of 18 | 19.1 | 2.16 |
| Married/cohabiting respondent living without children under the age of 18 | 13.5 | 1.17 |
| Single respondent living with other adult(s) | 12.7 | 1.87 |
| Number of Household Members | | |
| 1 | 29.5 | 2.42 |
| 2 | 20.6 | 1.36 |
| 3 | 19.0 | 1.81 |
| 4 | 14.3 | 1.32 |
| 5 | 7.6 | 0.88 |
| 6 or more | 9.1 | 1.23 |
| Average number | 2.9 | 0.10 |
| Median number | 2.0 | 0.39 |
| Number of Children Age 0-17 | | |
| 0 | 54.9 | 2.62 |
| 1 | 15.7 | 1.54 |
| 2 | 15.3 | 2.32 |
| 3 | 7.4 | 1.35 |
| 4 or more | 6.6 | 0.90 |
| Average number | 1.0 | 0.08 |
| Number of Household Members Age 60 or Older | | |
| 0 | 68.0 | 2.55 |
| 1 | 24.7 | 2.18 |
| 2 | 6.5 | 1.07 |
| More than 2 | 0.9 | 0.64 |
| Household contains members who are employed | 26.4 | 2.60 |
| Proportion of households with cash welfare last month | 44.5 | 3.48 |
| Proportion of households with cash welfare and person employed | 6.2 | 0.91 |
| U.S. Citizenship | | |
| No household members are citizens | 1.3 | 0.47 |
| Some household members are citizens | 11.9 | 1.78 |
| All household members are citizens | 86.7 | 2.10 |
| Metropolitan Status of Provider | | |
| Metropolitan | 69.4 | 9.95 |
| Non-Metropolitan | 30.6 | 9.95 |
| Sample Size | 2,397 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

TABLE III.3

RESIDENTIAL STATUS OF PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS

| | Reside in This Setting | | Of Those Residing in This Setting, Percentage That Are Not Homeless | | | | | | Are Homeless | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|------|---|------|----------------|-------|-----------------|------|--------------|-------|
| | | | Own Residence | | Rent Residence | | Reside for Free | | | |
| | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) |
| All settings | 100.0 | 0.00 | 24.2 | 2.53 | 61.9 | 2.87 | 5.8 | 1.00 | 8.0 | 1.65 |
| House/condominium | 43.0 | 3.16 | 37.5 | 3.85 | 50.5 | 4.97 | 9.0 | 2.08 | 3.0 | 0.61 |
| Mobile Home | 15.3 | 3.10 | 51.4 | 4.65 | 40.2 | 4.06 | 5.0 | 1.27 | 3.3 | 1.38 |
| Apartment | 34.7 | 3.55 | 0.5 | 0.25 | 93.2 | 1.59 | 2.9 | 0.70 | 3.3 | 1.55 |
| Room | 2.6 | 0.70 | N/A | -- | 42.7 | 11.61 | 6.2 | 3.72 | 51.0 | 13.07 |
| Hotel/Motel | 1.7 | 0.63 | N/A | -- | 37.3 | 15.58 | 0.5 | 0.54 | 62.2 | 15.59 |
| Shelter/Mission | 0.5 | 0.16 | N/A | -- | N/A | -- | N/A | -- | 100 | 0.00 |
| Car/Van | 1.3 | 0.53 | N/A | -- | N/A | -- | N/A | -- | 100 | 0.00 |
| Abandoned Building | 0.0 | -- | N/A | -- | N/A | -- | N/A | -- | 100 | 0.00 |
| Public Space/ Railroad Station | 0.3 | 0.17 | N/A | -- | N/A | -- | N/A | -- | 100 | 0.00 |
| Outside | 0.6 | 0.22 | N/A | -- | N/A | -- | N/A | -- | 100 | 0.00 |
| SAMPLE SIZE | 2,381 | | 459 | | 1,589 | | 142 | | 191 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

NOTE: When type of ownership is missing (for example, own, rent, live for free and not homeless, or live for free and considered homeless, as well as the cases with missing residential setting), the case is excluded from the first column.

N/A = not applicable.

living in an apartment, 93 percent rent their residence. One-half (51 percent) of households living in mobile homes own their residence, and two-fifths (40 percent) are renters.

C. FOOD SECURITY

Food security, defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” (Bickel et al. 2000; Hamilton et al. 1997), was used to categorize household food security based on responses to a six-item short form.⁴ About 79 percent of pantry households were classified as food insecure during the 12 months preceding the interview (table III.4). About 38 percent of pantry respondents were food insecure without hunger, and 42 percent of pantry respondents were food insecure with hunger (fig.III.1). One-fourth (26 percent, table D.4) of all pantry client households report that one or more adult members did not eat for a whole day because of a lack of money for food.⁵ This is an indication of severe food-related hardship for a subset of pantry client households.

While food insecurity is common among all household types, the prevalence and severity of food insecurity varies by household composition. For example, 58 percent of pantry client households with neither children nor elderly are food insecure with hunger, compared with 40 percent of households with children, and 25 percent of households with at least one elderly person but no children (fig. III.2).

Since, as we describe below, more pantry households participate in the Food Stamp Program

⁴In addition to the six-item short form, a seventh question on adults not eating for a whole day was included since this is a likely population to be vulnerable to food insecurity. These questions are a subset of the standard 18-item measure used by USDA for its annual estimates of food security in the U.S. See appendix C for details about the food security measurement.

⁵We also assessed responses to individual indicators of food insecurity and hunger for all pantry households and for households of different sizes (Table D.4 in appendix D).

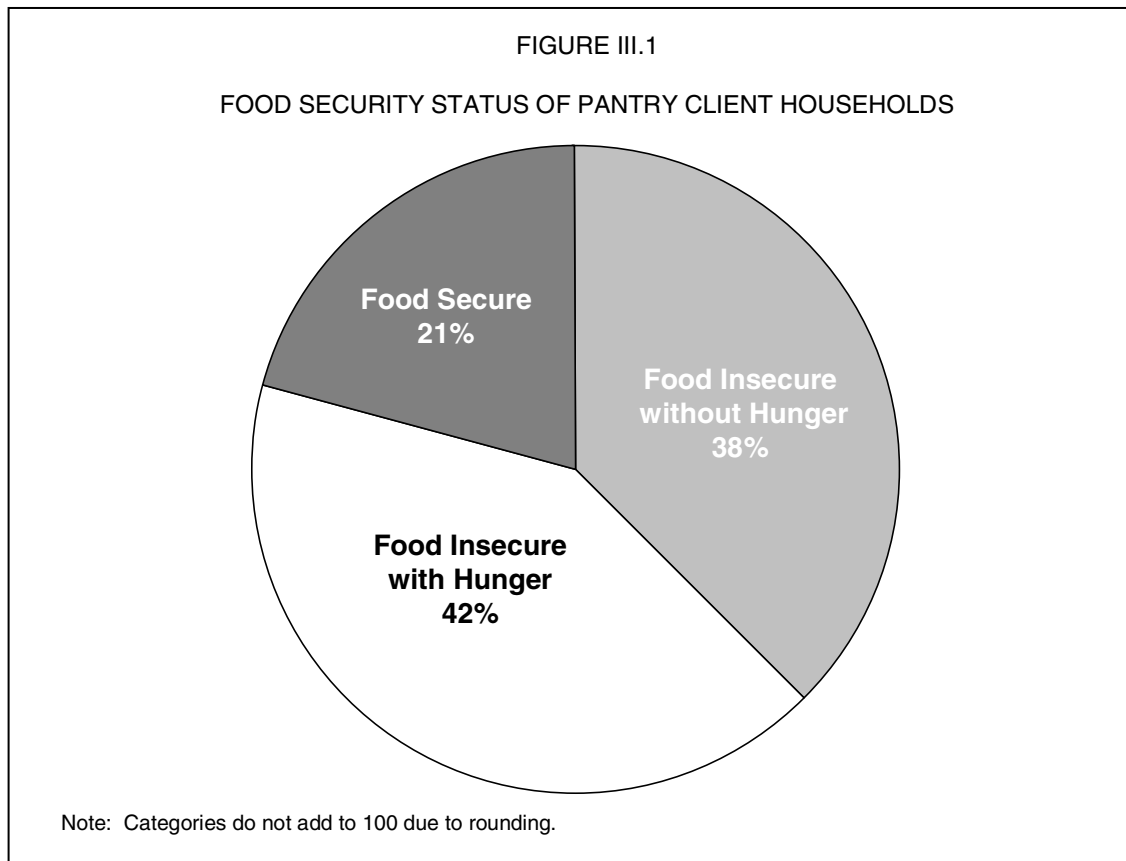
TABLE III.4

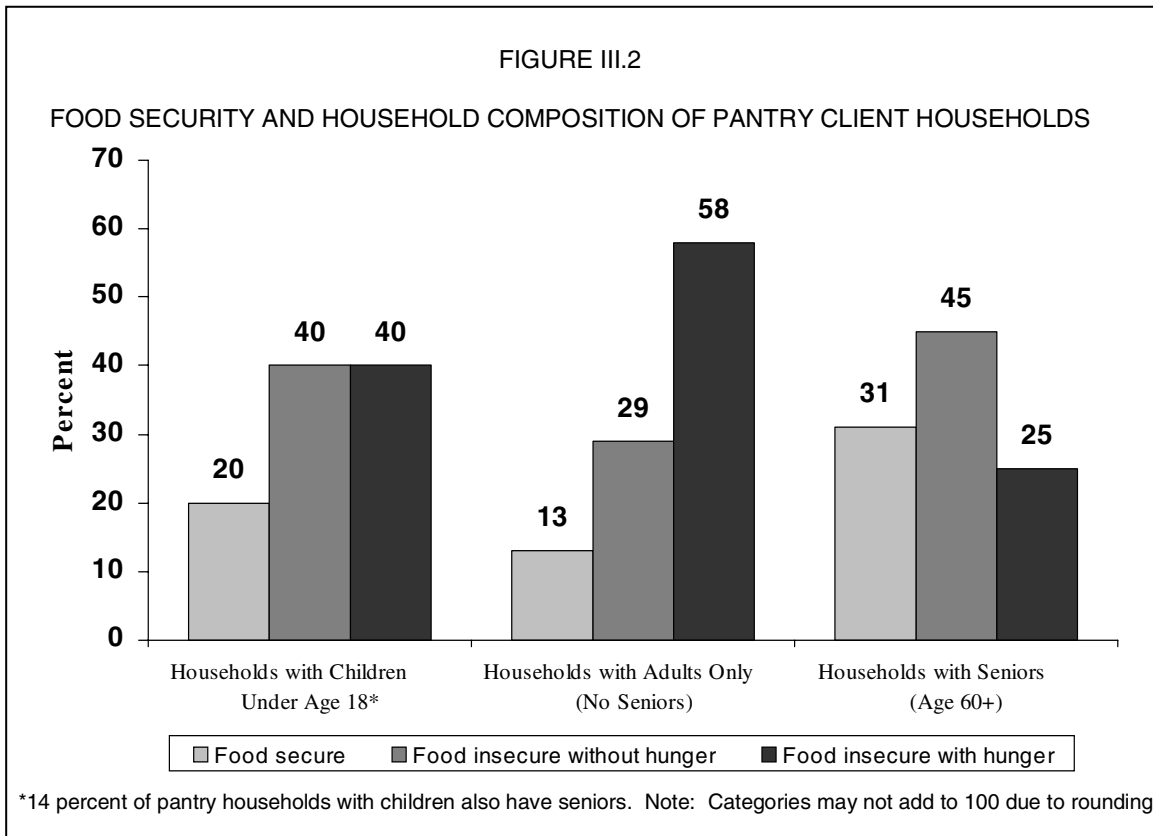
FOOD SECURITY STATUS OF FOOD PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS,
BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE (Percentages)

| | All Households | (SE) | Households With Children Under 18 ^a | (SE) | Households With No Children but With Seniors (60 or Older) | (SE) |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------|---|------|--|------|
| Food Secure | 20.8 | 2.18 | 20.4 | 3.03 | 30.9 | 4.71 |
| Food Insecure | 79.2 | 2.18 | 79.6 | 3.03 | 69.1 | 4.71 |
| Food Insecure without Hunger | 37.7 | 1.55 | 40.0 | 2.34 | 44.6 | 4.01 |
| Food Insecure with Hunger | 41.5 | 1.88 | 39.6 | 2.05 | 24.5 | 2.51 |
| SAMPLE SIZE | 2,372 | | 1,091 | | 566 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

^a14 percent of pantry client households also contain a person age 60 or older.





(FSP) than in any other government food assistance program, it is useful to consider how food security for pantry households receiving food stamps compares with food security for other pantry households. The food security patterns for pantry households receiving food stamps are generally similar to those observed for other low-income, low-resource pantry client households (table III.5). For households ineligible for FSP benefits because of higher levels of income and resources, however, the proportion that is food secure (35 percent) is substantially higher than for households participating in the FSP (18 percent) and other FSP-eligible households (19 percent). It is interesting to note that about one-third (35 percent) of all pantry households ineligible for food stamps are classified as food secure. These households appear to be using food pantries as

TABLE III.5

FOOD SECURITY STATUS OF FOOD PANTRY HOUSEHOLDS,
BY PARTICIPATION IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM
(Percentages)

| | All Pantry Households | (SE) | Pantry Households That Participate in FSP ^a | (SE) | Pantry Households That Do Not Receive Food Stamps, but Are Seemingly Eligible | (SE) | Pantry Households That Do Not Receive Food Stamps and Are Seemingly Ineligible for FSP | (SE) |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|------|--|------|---|------|---|------|
| Food Secure | 20.8 | 2.18 | 17.8 | 3.19 | 19.0 | 2.61 | 35.1 | 5.89 |
| Food Insecure | 79.2 | 2.18 | 82.2 | 3.19 | 81.0 | 2.61 | 64.9 | 5.89 |
| Food Insecure without Hunger | 37.7 | 1.55 | 38.7 | 2.27 | 36.9 | 2.60 | 38.5 | 3.50 |
| Food Insecure with Hunger | 41.5 | 1.88 | 43.5 | 2.78 | 44.1 | 2.40 | 26.4 | 5.12 |
| SAMPLE SIZE | 2,372 | | 1,071 | | 984 | | 249 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

^a Defined as participation in the last year.

a way of preventing food insecurity, although food pantries would not be considered a normal source of food for food-secure households.

D. INCOME, POVERTY, AND MATERIAL HARDSHIP

The survey of EFAS clients allows us to construct both income- and consumption-oriented measures of the hardships faced by pantry households. Using income-oriented measures, we can compare the monthly or annual cash income of a household with the corresponding poverty threshold for households of that size. Using consumption-oriented measures, we can investigate what proportion of pantry households have access to certain basic necessities, such as permanent shelter and sufficient food to avoid food insecurity or at least hunger.

1. Income and Poverty Levels

The survey of EFAS clients included two measures of household income: (1) last month's income, and (2) last year's income. The average income of pantry households was \$781 for the most recent month, and \$10,776 for the most recent year (table III.6). Average monthly income for the most recent year ($\$898$ or $\$10,776 \div 12$) was higher than average income for the most recent month, consistent with the hypothesis that the average pantry household has experienced a recent decline in its cash income. Compared with the corresponding average income levels, median household income levels were somewhat lower: \$660 for the most recent month, and \$8,000 for the most recent year.

In the most recent month, 93 percent of pantry households had incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level, and therefore met the gross income requirement for the Food Stamp Program. Only 8 percent of pantry households had incomes above 130 percent of the poverty level during the most recent month, and only 13 percent had incomes above 130 percent of the

TABLE III.6

INCOME AND POVERTY OF FOOD PANTRY CLIENTS

| Characteristic | Percent Unless Otherwise Stated | (SE) |
|--|------------------------------------|-------|
| Household Income Last Month (mean dollars) | 781 | 36.5 |
| Household Income Last Month (median dollars) | 660 | 25.4 |
| Household Income Last Month as a Percentage of Poverty | | |
| At or below 130% | 92.5 | 1.72 |
| Above 130% | 7.5 | 1.72 |
| Annual Household Income (mean dollars) | 10,776 | 770.4 |
| Annual Household Income (median dollars) | 8,000 | 165.8 |
| Annual Household Income as a Percentage of Poverty | | |
| At or below 50% | 31.7 | 2.52 |
| 51 to 100% | 43.7 | 2.71 |
| 101 to 130% | 11.5 | 1.57 |
| Above 130% | 13.1 | 2.77 |
| Sample Size | 2,397 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

poverty level during the most recent year. Three-quarters of pantry households were at or below the poverty level over the course of the most recent year.

2. Consumption-Oriented Indicators of Material Hardship

The various consumption-oriented indicators of material hardship we investigated in this study included homelessness, household food insecurity and hunger, and access to amenities useful for acquiring, storing, or preparing food (kitchen appliances, a working telephone, and a working motor vehicle). About 8 percent of all pantry households are homeless (table III.7). As noted in section C, about four-fifths (79 percent) of pantry households are food insecure, and about two-fifths (42 percent) are food insecure with hunger. While only 3 percent of pantry households lack access to a stove, oven or microwave and only 5 percent lack access to a refrigerator,⁶ 23 percent lack access to a working telephone, and almost half (49 percent) do not have access to a working car, truck, or motorcycle.

E. CHARACTERISTICS OF EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE SYSTEM USE

To make ends meet, pantry users might require additional sources of emergency food. Other private programs, such as kitchens and shelters, as well as government-sponsored programs, are possible avenues for food assistance.⁷ In addition, clients might seek less traditional methods, such as food from restaurant handouts, trashcans, and dumpsters.⁸

⁶Although 8 percent of pantry client households are homeless, these findings indicate that about half of them have access to at least some working kitchen appliances.

⁷Use of government-sponsored programs, including the Food Stamp Program (FSP), the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) are discussed later in this chapter.

⁸Other coping strategies, such as borrowing food from others or sending children to a friend's or relative's home to eat, which are included in the CPS Food Security Supplement, were not measured by this survey.

TABLE III.7

INDICATORS OF HARDSHIP FOR FOOD PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS

| Hardship Indicator | Frequency for All Clients | |
|--|---------------------------|------|
| | Percent | (SE) |
| Homeless | 8.0 | 1.64 |
| Food Insecure | 79.2 | 2.18 |
| Insecure without hunger | 37.7 | 1.55 |
| Insecure with hunger | 41.5 | 1.88 |
| Lack access to stove, oven, or microwave | 3.4 | 0.84 |
| Lack access to refrigerator | 4.5 | 0.97 |
| Lack access to a working telephone | 23.1 | 1.70 |
| Lack access to a working car, truck, or motorcycle | 48.5 | 2.88 |
| SAMPLE SIZE | 2,388 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

1. Use of Other Sources of Emergency Food Assistance by Pantry Respondents

In order to characterize the use of other sources of emergency food assistance, respondents who were similar to each other in terms of monthly pantry use in the last year were placed into one of three groups: (1) those who visited a pantry once a month or less (55 percent), (2) those who visited two or three times a month (24 percent), and (3) those who visited weekly (four or more times a month) (21 percent). From the provider survey we know that two-thirds of pantries limit household visits to once a month or less. Therefore, these estimates of the frequency of visits most likely indicate the pantries' rules as well as the clients' desire to pick-up food at a certain frequency based on need.

Forty percent of all pantry respondents visited a pantry for 10 to 12 months in the last year (table III.8). Reliance on pantries during the last year is similar for respondents who visited pantries weekly as it was for respondents who visited two to three times a month or once a month or less. Thirty percent of all respondents visited only one to three months during the last year, a level of reliance suggesting that these households are either new, sporadic, or short-term users, or that the pantries they visit are open infrequently or on an 'emergency basis' only.

Most pantry households do not rely on additional emergency food assistance besides food pantries. One-fifth (19 percent) of pantry households received a meal from an emergency kitchen during the last year. Twelve percent of pantry households received food from a shelter during the last year, and 6 percent turned to restaurant handouts, dumpsters, or trashcans for food. During the month before the interview, 11 percent of pantry households received a meal from an emergency kitchen. Among households that received such meals, about half report fewer than four meals over the course of the last month.

TABLE III.8

USE OF EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE BY FOOD PANTRY CLIENTS
(Percentages)

| | All Pantry Clients | (SE) | Clients Who Visit Once a Month or Less | (SE) | Clients Who Visit 2-3 Times a Month | (SE) | Clients Who Visit 4 or More Times a Month | (SE) |
|---|--------------------------|------|---|------|--|------|---|------|
| Proportion of all Pantry Clients | 100 | 0.0 | 54.8 | 4.77 | 24.0 | 2.97 | 21.2 | 2.57 |
| Number of Months Visited Pantries in the Last 12 Months | | | | | | | | |
| 1 - 3 months | 29.7 | 1.70 | 34.3 | 2.65 | 27.9 | 3.51 | 20.2 | 3.65 |
| 4 - 6 months | 21.3 | 2.12 | 21.0 | 2.95 | 20.4 | 2.37 | 23.1 | 2.79 |
| 7 - 9 months | 9.4 | 0.91 | 9.6 | 1.26 | 8.6 | 2.06 | 9.6 | 1.69 |
| 10 - 12 months | 39.5 | 3.01 | 35.1 | 5.09 | 43.2 | 3.73 | 47.0 | 4.06 |
| Use of (Other) Sources of Emergency Food in the Last 12 Months | | | | | | | | |
| Kitchens | 19.0 | 2.55 | 13.3 | 2.60 | 28.2 | 6.02 | 23.4 | 3.95 |
| Shelters | 12.1 | 1.58 | 8.7 | 1.67 | 16.4 | 2.93 | 16.3 | 3.47 |
| Restaurant handouts/dumpster/ trash can | 5.7 | 1.08 | 3.8 | 0.91 | 8.9 | 2.96 | 6.8 | 2.05 |
| Number of Meals at Kitchens in the Last Month | | | | | | | | |
| None | 88.9 | 1.58 | 93.4 | 1.46 | 82.8 | 2.70 | 84.4 | 3.10 |
| 1-3 | 5.3 | 0.79 | 3.5 | 0.82 | 8.5 | 1.69 | 6.1 | 1.48 |
| 4-9 | 3.6 | 0.89 | 1.8 | 0.60 | 5.8 | 2.13 | 6.1 | 1.76 |
| 30 or more | 0.5 | 0.33 | 0.0 | -- | 0.2 | 0.15 | 1.9 | 1.51 |
| SAMPLE SIZE | 2,397 | | 1,251 | | 581 | | 565 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

2. Factors That Precipitated the Need for Emergency Food Assistance

Pantry respondents were read six possible explanations for seeking emergency food assistance, and were asked to identify which reasons applied to their household. The most frequent reason for needing emergency food assistance, identified by 93 percent of pantry respondents, is having low wages or being on a fixed income (table III.9). About 89 percent of respondents say they ran out of money or had high expenses. About 72 percent of pantry respondents say that they preferred to get food at a pantry instead of asking for assistance directly from the government. About two-thirds of pantry respondents cite unemployment or other job-related problems, and a similar fraction cites health or personal problems. About one-third (36 percent) of pantry respondents identify problems with food stamps or welfare as a reason for needing emergency food assistance.

3. Access to Emergency Food

Although many pantries provide food to anyone who says they need it, some pantries restrict who can receive food and how often. In some instances, respondents must meet income or residency guidelines, fall into a specific target group such as a certain age group, or be referred by a church or other agency (Ohls et al. 2001). Other factors that might affect whether an individual or household receives food include a pantry's hours and days of operation as well as frequency of visits.⁹ About one in five pantry respondents (22 percent) report needing food from a pantry in the last 12 months, but not being able to get it (table III.10). In the EFAS Provider Survey, 39 percent of pantry providers reported having to limit food distribution due to lack of food at some time during the year (Ohls et al. 2001).

⁹The typical food pantry is open two times a week for three to four hours (Ohls et al. 2001).

TABLE III.9

EVENTS/FACTORS PRECIPITATING THE NEED FOR EMERGENCY
FOOD ASSISTANCE BY PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS

| | Percent | (SE) |
|--|---------|------|
| Reasons for Seeking Emergency Food Assistance ^a | | |
| Low wages/on a fixed income | 93.0 | 1.11 |
| No more money/high expenses | 88.6 | 1.40 |
| Prefer to get food here instead of asking for help from the government | 72.4 | 2.51 |
| Unemployment/other job-related problems | 69.0 | 1.70 |
| Health or personal problems | 68.0 | 1.88 |
| Problems with food stamps or welfare | 36.4 | 2.54 |
| SAMPLE SIZE^b | 2,388 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

^a Multiple responses allowed for this question.

^b Of the factors listed above, 65 individuals answered “don’t know” and 3 refused to answer whether or not they “prefer to get food here instead of from the government; 20 or fewer individuals either answered “don’t know” or refused to answer each of the other factors.

TABLE III.10

INACCESSIBILITY TO EMERGENCY FOOD
BY PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS

| | Percent | (SE) |
|---|---------|------|
| Proportion of Pantry Clients Who Had Trouble Getting Food From Pantries (n = 2,388) | 22.0 | 2.09 |
| Reasons For Inability To Get Food ^a (n = 584) | | |
| Transportation problem | 29.9 | 3.11 |
| Provider ran out of food | 10.9 | 1.88 |
| Did not arrive on time | 9.8 | 2.12 |
| Came too often | 9.2 | 1.64 |
| Client was sick | 8.1 | 2.02 |
| Lack of information about provider services | 7.0 | 1.53 |
| No referral | 6.7 | 2.37 |
| Lacked proper identification or papers | 4.7 | 1.37 |
| Did not live in a certain area | 4.5 | 1.11 |
| Did not meet income guidelines | 4.3 | 1.38 |
| Closed-unspecified | 4.3 | 0.93 |
| Pantry closed on weekdays | 3.8 | 1.22 |
| Respondent's behavior | 2.7 | 1.39 |
| Pantry closed on weekends | 2.3 | 0.89 |
| Otherwise ineligible | 1.7 | 0.58 |
| Lines too long, overcrowded | 1.2 | 0.76 |
| Disabled | 1.1 | 0.51 |
| Other ^b | 4.4 | 1.19 |
| In the last 12 months, Client Has Been Unable To Get Food (n = 589) | | |
| Often | 22.0 | 1.80 |
| Sometimes | 25.2 | 3.07 |
| Rarely | 24.5 | 2.57 |
| Only happened once | 28.3 | 2.71 |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

^aMultiple responses allowed for this question.

^bIncludes all responses which were given by less than 1 percent of clients.

When asked to identify why they were sometimes unable to receive food from a pantry, respondents mention transportation problems more than any other reason (30 percent of respondents, table III.10). Eleven percent of respondents say they were unable to receive food because the pantry ran out of food, 10 percent say they did not arrive on time to receive food, and 9 percent say they came “too often.” This latter explanation is consistent with the fact that two-thirds of pantries report that they limit the frequency with which households can obtain food (Ohls et al. 2001).

Only 4 percent of pantry respondents say they were unable to obtain food because the pantry was closed on weekdays, and only 2 percent say they were unable to obtain food because the pantry was closed on weekends. According to the provider survey, three-tenths of pantries distribute food five or more days per week, and three-fifths are open for four hours or less each day. However, in an emergency, four-fifths of pantries will make food available when they are normally closed (Ohls et al. 2001).

The vast majority of respondents (88 percent) offer only one reason for not being able to get food from a pantry when they needed it. One-fifth (22 percent) of respondents say they were often unable to get food when they needed it from a pantry. At the same time, more than half (53 percent) report that they were unable to get food only once or rarely, suggesting that this is not a frequent problem among individuals who live in an area that is served by one or more pantries.¹⁰

F. RESPONDENT SATISFACTION WITH PANTRY PROVIDERS

Pantries distribute groceries, including canned goods, rice, cereals, bread, and sometimes fresh fruit or meat, to respondents for off-site use. Donations from food banks and/or similar

¹⁰The survey of EFAS clients does not enable us to measure the number of individuals that live in areas that are not served by at least one pantry.

nonprofit organizations and community food drives are the most frequent sources of these commodities. Pantries might also receive donations or purchase food from farmers and growers, as well as supermarkets, wholesalers, manufacturers, caterers, and restaurants to help fill their shelves. Some have refrigeration and freezer storage available, while others can store only non-perishable food items. Because pantries might be limited by what they receive through donations as well as by what they are capable of storing, providing an adequate amount of food, as well as a good variety of food could present a challenge.

The survey of pantry respondents included two measures of respondent satisfaction with emergency food assistance: (1) satisfaction with the *amount* of food received from the respondent's EFAS provider and (2) satisfaction with the *variety* of food received from the respondent's EFAS provider. In addition, the survey asked respondents about their perceptions of any religious activities the provider might offer.

1. Level of Satisfaction with the Amount and Variety of Food Received

At the time of their visit, pantry respondents were asked whether they were “very satisfied”, “somewhat satisfied”, “somewhat dissatisfied”, or “very dissatisfied” with the food items they received in terms of both the amount of food and variety of food. The vast majority of respondents report satisfaction with both the amount and variety of food they received at pantries (95 percent and 94 percent, respectively; table III.11). About two-thirds of respondents are “very satisfied” with the amount of food they receive, and a similar fraction is “very satisfied” with the variety of food available through the pantry.¹¹

¹¹Table D.5 in appendix D indicates how pantry client satisfaction varies by race/ethnicity and sex.

TABLE III.11

PANTRY CLIENTS' SATISFACTION WITH EFAS PROVIDER'S FOOD

| | Very Satisfied | | Somewhat Satisfied | | Somewhat Dissatisfied | | Very Dissatisfied | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------|--------------------|------|-----------------------|------|-------------------|------|
| | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) |
| Amount of Food (n = 2,296) | 68.7 | 2.56 | 26.7 | 2.17 | 3.0 | 0.65 | 1.6 | 0.42 |
| Variety of Food (n = 2,317) | 65.0 | 2.26 | 28.5 | 1.69 | 4.7 | 0.78 | 1.8 | 0.45 |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

2. Respondent Perceptions of Faith-Based Activities

About three-fifths of pantry respondents received services from providers affiliated with a religious organization. Providers with a religious affiliation might be expected to be more likely than non-religious providers to ask pantry respondents to participate in religious activities, such as attendance at religious services before receiving food. The proportion of respondents who report that they were asked to participate in prayers or other religious activities was about twice as high for officially “faith-based” providers (18 percent) as opposed to “non-religious” providers (9 percent, table III.12). Of respondents asked to participate in religious activities, 69 percent describe themselves as “very comfortable” with these activities; 20 percent describe themselves as “somewhat comfortable,” and 11 percent describe themselves as “somewhat uncomfortable” or “very uncomfortable.”

Among respondents who report that they are asked to participate in religious activities, three-quarters report that they do *not* share a religious affiliation with the provider (data not shown). Respondents' comfort level with religious activities offered by the provider is not dramatically different for respondents unaffiliated with the religion of the provider than for

TABLE III.12

PANTRY CLIENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROVIDER-SPONSORED RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

| | Frequency for All Clients | | Frequency for Clients of Religious Providers | | Frequency for Clients of Non-Religious Providers | |
|---|---------------------------|------|--|------|--|------|
| | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) |
| Clients asked to participate in prayers or other religious activities (n = 2,344) | 13.7 | 1.78 | 17.5 | 1.94 | 9.3 | 2.99 |
| Among clients asked to participate in religious activities (n = 356): | | | | | | |
| Feel very comfortable with religious activities | 68.9 | 4.08 | 67.2 | 5.11 | 72.6 | 4.82 |
| Feel somewhat comfortable with religious activities | 19.8 | 3.46 | 21.2 | 3.54 | 16.7 | 5.49 |
| Feel somewhat uncomfortable with religious activities | 6.5 | 2.95 | 9.4 | 3.87 | 0.3 | 0.24 |
| Feel very uncomfortable with activities | 4.8 | 1.93 | 2.2 | 1.20 | 10.5 | 3.15 |
| Clients who perceive their provider as secular or having a different religious affiliation than their own (n = 2,340) | 88.5 | 1.40 | 85.1 | 1.91 | 92.5 | 2.04 |
| Among clients perceiving their provider as secular or having a different religious affiliation than their own (n = 1,978): | | | | | | |
| Clients asked to participate in prayers or other religious activities | 11.5 | 1.60 | 16.0 | 2.39 | 6.7 | 1.79 |
| Among clients asked to participate in religious activities by a provider seen as secular or having a different religious affiliation (n = 265): | | | | | | |
| Feel very comfortable with religious activities | 64.3 | 4.43 | 64.0 | 5.58 | 65.2 | 8.23 |
| Feel somewhat comfortable with religious activities | 23.4 | 3.91 | 25.1 | 4.85 | 19.1 | 4.15 |
| Feel somewhat uncomfortable with religious activities | 6.1 | 3.51 | 8.5 | 4.68 | 0.0 | -- |
| Feel very uncomfortable with religious activities | 6.2 | 2.82 | 2.4 | 1.46 | 15.8 | 6.52 |
| SAMPLE SIZE | 2,344 | | 1,517 | | 827 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

respondents as a whole. These findings suggests that *either* religious activities offered by pantry providers are not perceived as objectionable by most clients, *or* that the clients who are present at pantries that ask them to participate in religious activities are those who may be more likely to be comfortable with such activities.

G. FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION

Several government food assistance programs can function as important sources of food for low-income households. These programs include the Food Stamp Program (FSP), the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and additional programs for senior citizens (including Meals-on-Wheels)¹² and for children in child care centers or Head Start programs. In this section, we consider both the participation of pantry household members in these programs, and the reasons why households do not participate in programs for which they appear eligible.¹³

1. Participation in Food Assistance Programs

About one-third (32 percent) of pantry respondents are in households that have not received assistance from any public food assistance program during the last year.¹⁴ Another one-third (32

¹²Many senior meals programs are funded through the Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP), formerly known as the Nutrition Program for the Elderly (NPE).

¹³The measurement of program eligibility was based on the demographic, income, and asset information gathered by the survey, but was imprecise because of item non-response and possible changes in household composition, income, or assets over the course of the past year. Appendix C describes how program eligibility was estimated based on household characteristics.

¹⁴By “public food assistance program”, we refer to any of the seven programs mentioned above: the FSP, WIC, the SBP, the NSLP, the SFSP, senior meals programs, and nutrition programs for children in child care centers or Head Start Programs.

percent) are in households that have received assistance from only one program, and the remaining one-third (36 percent) are in households that have received assistance from multiple programs (table III.13). Among households with members eligible for at least one government food assistance program, four-fifths have participated in at least one program, while one-fifth (19 percent) have not participated in any program. Among pantry households with members eligible for multiple programs, more than half (55 percent) have received assistance from more than one program.

Among specific government food assistance programs, the FSP was most widely used; almost half (48 percent) of pantry clients report some FSP participation in their household during the last year. About 32 percent of pantry clients report household members' participation in the NSLP during the last year, and 28 percent of pantry clients report participation in the SBP. The proportion of clients reporting household members' participation in each of the other programs is much lower: 13 percent for WIC, 8 percent for the SFSP, and 4 percent each for Meals-on-Wheels or senior meals programs and for meals offered through a child care center or Head Start program.¹⁵

Among pantry client households that appear eligible for assistance through particular government food assistance programs, participation rates of household members vary considerably by program. Eighty-four percent of households with members eligible for the National School Lunch Program report NSLP participation during the last year, and 73 percent of households eligible for the School Breakfast Program report SBP participation during the last

¹⁵Table D.6 in appendix D indicates how food assistance program participation patterns vary by frequency of pantry use.

TABLE III.13

PARTICIPATION OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS IN FEDERAL
FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS BY FOOD PANTRY CLIENTS

| Participation in Food Assistance Programs in the Last Year ^a | Households of All Pantry Clients | | Seemingly Eligible Households ^{b,c} | |
|--|-------------------------------------|------|---|------|
| | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) |
| No Programs | 31.5 | 2.87 | 19.3 | 2.40 |
| One Program | 32.1 | 2.06 | 25.5 | 1.61 |
| Two or More Programs | 36.4 | 2.11 | 55.2 | 2.33 |
| Food Stamp Program (FSP) | 48.0 | 4.36 | 54.9 | 4.17 |
| Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) | 13.0 | 0.98 | 61.3 | 2.92 |
| Meals in Child Care Food Program or Head Start | 4.2 | 1.06 | 19.4 | 4.83 |
| School Breakfast Program (SBP) | 28.0 | 2.19 | 72.6 | 3.18 |
| National School Lunch Program (NSLP) | 32.3 | 2.16 | 83.6 | 1.90 |
| Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) | 8.4 | 1.15 | 21.4 | 3.26 |
| Meals-on-Wheels or Senior Meals Program | 4.2 | 0.75 | 14.1 | 2.34 |
| SAMPLE SIZE | 2,371 | | | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

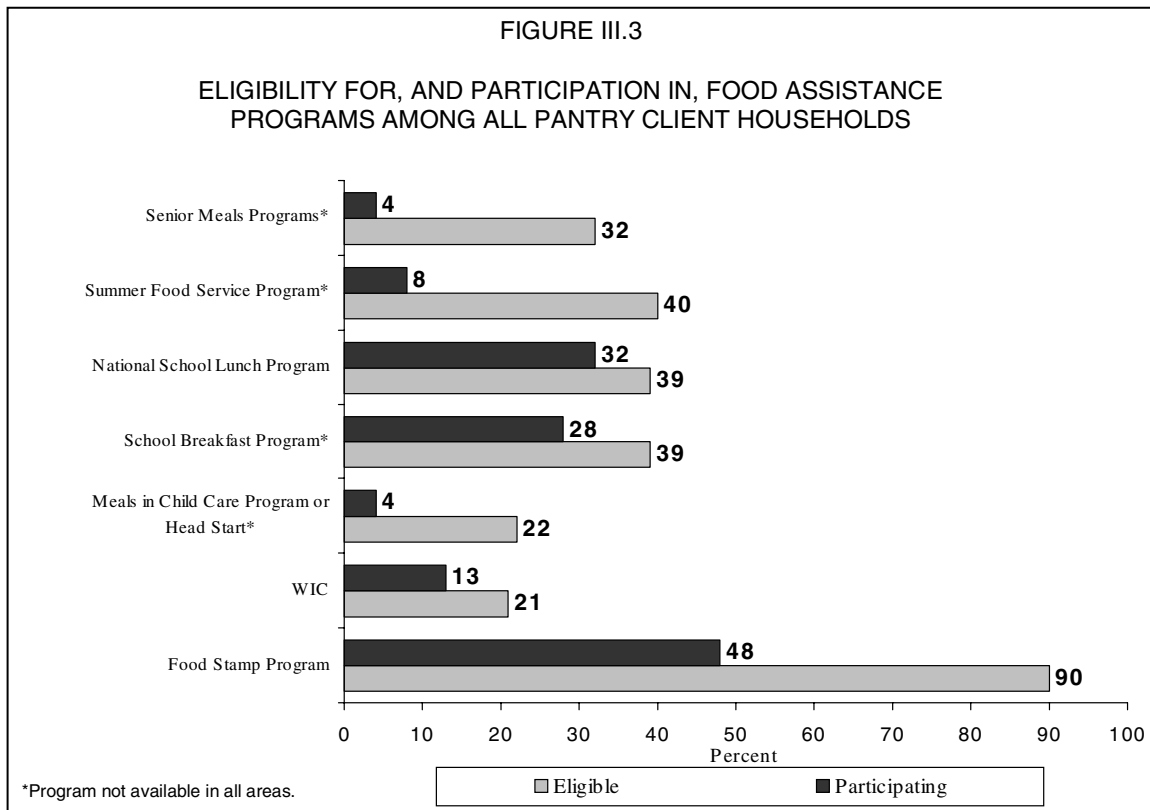
NOTE: The percent of eligible cases out of all pantry household clients, except the cases with unknown program eligibility, are: FSP: 90%; WIC: 21%; Meals in Child Care Program or Head Start: 22%; SBP: 39%; NSLP: 39%; SFSP: 40%; Meals-on-Wheels or Senior Meals Program: 32%.

^aParticipation in the last year does not necessarily mean that the household participated in the last month.

^bWhen program participation is not reported, seemingly eligible households are identified by income/resources (FSP program), income/household characteristics (WIC, NSLP, SBP), or household characteristics only (remaining programs).

^cSample size varies by program.

year.¹⁶ Three-fifths (61 percent) of households with members eligible for WIC report WIC participation during the last year. Although more pantry households participate in the Food Stamp Program than in any other government food assistance program, the participation rate of eligible pantry households in the FSP was only 55 percent, similar to the national FSP participation rate of 59 percent in 2000 (Cunnyngham 2002).



Participation rates of eligible household members in the remaining government food assistance programs are estimated to be well under one-half for each program, which may

¹⁶In calculating these participation rates, we have included all seemingly eligible pantry users in the denominator. Some programs, including the senior meals programs, the SFSP, the SBP, and meals in child care programs or Head Start, are not available at all locations, and so some non-participants may not have effective access to them. We lack sufficient reliable data to take this into account.

indicate a lack of the availability of these programs in some areas of the country. Only 21 percent of households with members potentially eligible for the Summer Food Service Program report SFSP participation during the last year. (The survey did not inquire whether children are participating in summer programs, so this rate includes all households with children.) Only one-fifth (19 percent) of households potentially eligible for nutrition benefits through a child care center or Head Start program report that members received such benefits. (The survey did not inquire whether children are enrolled in child care or Head Start, so this rate includes all households with young children.) Only 14 percent of households eligible for nutrition benefits through Meals-on-Wheels or some other senior meals program report receiving such benefits. The survey did not gather information on whether child care or elderly feeding programs are available in the regions where EFAS clients live.

2. Reasons for Non-Participation in Food Assistance Programs

The Food Stamp Program is the linchpin of the U.S. nutrition safety net, and is by far the largest of the government food assistance programs available to most citizens in need. Among pantry respondents in seemingly eligible households who have not received food stamps during the last year (45 percent of all seemingly eligible pantry households), 77 percent have not applied for the FSP in the last year, while 7 percent have applied and been turned down and 16 percent are currently applying for food stamps (table III.14). About half of those turned down are reapplying (4 out of 7 percent).

Approximately one in 10 seemingly eligible pantry households (11 percent) is not currently participating in the FSP, but has participated in the last 12 months. More than half (53 percent) of these households have used food stamps within the last 12 months and are currently reapplying. Twelve percent have applied for food stamps during the last year, been

TABLE III.14

REASONS NOT CURRENTLY PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM (FSP)
(Seemingly Eligible Pantry Client Households Not Currently Participating)

| | Percentage of Subgroup | (SE) |
|---|---------------------------|------|
| Households with No FSP Participation in the Last Year | | |
| As a percentage of all seemingly eligible pantry households (n = 2,051) | 45.1 | 4.17 |
| Application for the FSP in the last 12 months (n = 953^a) | | |
| Did not apply for food stamps | 76.9 | 1.84 |
| Applied for food stamps, were turned down and are reapplying | 4.2 | 0.88 |
| Applied for food stamps, were turned down and are not reapplying | 3.2 | 0.60 |
| Currently applying for food stamps | 15.8 | 2.10 |
| Reasons Application for FSP Was Turned Down (n = 90^{b,c}) | | |
| Income was too high | 59.4 | 7.39 |
| Missing paperwork | 10.5 | 6.03 |
| Too many assets | 7.4 | 4.51 |
| Work requirements were not satisfied | 6.2 | 2.82 |
| Citizenship status | 2.6 | 1.33 |
| Value of car was too high | 2.6 | 1.78 |
| Barriers to Applying for Food Stamps/Never Applied (n = 796^{c,d}) | | |
| Don't think they qualify, sanctioned, lost eligibility, or doubtful of eligibility | 46.8 | 4.95 |
| Prefer not to receive welfare/help from government | 8.8 | 1.85 |
| Too much paperwork/can't fill out forms | 8.2 | 1.59 |
| Small benefits not worth the effort | 8.2 | 2.18 |
| No longer need food stamps | 6.4 | 1.62 |
| Do not know about FSP or how to get benefits | 5.1 | 2.18 |
| Do not have transportation to Food Stamp office | 4.9 | 1.20 |
| Feelings of embarrassment/discomfort | 4.6 | 1.27 |
| Questions too personal | 1.2 | 0.54 |
| Food Stamp office hours are inconvenient | 1.0 | 0.47 |
| Negative attitudes of Food Stamp office staff | 0.8 | 0.45 |
| Households Not Currently Participating in the FSP, but Participated in the Last Year | | |
| As a percentage of all seemingly eligible pantry households (n = 2,051) | 10.8 | 1.69 |
| Participation in FSP in the last 12 months (n = 208^e) | | |
| Have used food stamps in the last 12 months and are currently reapplying for the program | 53.3 | 5.51 |
| Have used food stamps in the last 12 months and are not currently reapplying for the program | 46.7 | 5.51 |

TABLE III.14 (continued)

| | Percentage of Subgroup | (SE) |
|---|---------------------------|------|
| Application for the FSP in the last 12 months (n = 208^e) | | |
| Applied for food stamps in the last 12 months, were turned down, and are reapplying | 12.1 | 4.44 |
| Applied for food stamps in the last 12 months, were turned down, and are not reapplying | 13.8 | 4.55 |
| Applied for food stamps, and not turned down | 74.2 | 7.60 |
| Reasons Application for FSP Was Turned Down for Those Who Lost Food Stamps in the Last Year, Reapplied and Were Turned Down (n = 53^{c,f}) | | |
| Income was too high | 54.6 | 8.83 |
| Missing paperwork | 28.3 | 8.28 |
| Work requirements were not satisfied | 8.4 | 5.27 |
| Too many assets | 1.9 | 1.39 |
| Citizenship status | 6.1 | 4.84 |
| Value of car was too high | 0.0 | -- |
| Barriers to Applying for/Receiving Food Stamps If Not Turned Down (n = 130^{c,g}) | | |
| Don't think they qualify, sanctioned, lost eligibility, or doubtful of eligibility | 41.8 | 5.89 |
| Feelings of embarrassment/discomfort | 10.4 | 7.33 |
| No longer need food stamps | 4.8 | 2.81 |
| Too much paperwork/can't fill out forms | 3.8 | 2.79 |
| Do not have transportation to Food Stamp office | 1.1 | 0.59 |
| Small benefits not worth the effort | 0.7 | 0.52 |
| Prefer not to receive welfare/help from government | 0.5 | 0.45 |
| Negative attitudes of Food Stamp office staff | 0.2 | 0.17 |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

NOTE: Sample for all tabulations is limited to seemingly eligible households not currently participating in FSP.

N/A = not applicable

^aBase is all seemingly eligible households with no participation in the FSP in the last year.

^bBase is households in previous panel who had applied for food stamps in the last year and were turned down.

^cMultiple responses were allowed, but responses with very low frequency are not reported.

^dBase is all seemingly eligible households not receiving food stamps in the previous year who have not applied for food stamps in the last year, and do not have plans in the near future to apply.

^eBase is all seemingly eligible households that participated in the last year, but that are not currently receiving food stamps.

^fBase is all seemingly eligible households that are not currently receiving food stamps, but have received food stamps during the past year, stopped receiving them and were turned down when they reapplied for the FSP.

^gBase is all seemingly eligible households that are not currently receiving food stamps, but have received them in the last year and have not had an FSP application turned down in the last year.

turned down, and are reapplying, and another 14 percent were similarly turned down and are not reapplying.

The most common reason pantry respondents who have had an FSP application turned down in the past year give for being turned down is that their income is too high (59 percent of respondents with no FSP participation in the last year, 55 percent of respondents who are not currently participating in the FSP, but have participated in the past year). This reason for denial of benefits affects about six percent of all seemingly eligible pantry households that not currently participating in the FSP. The second most common reason for denial is missing paperwork (11 percent and 28 percent, respectively), which affects about two percent of all seemingly eligible pantry households that are not currently participating in the FSP.

When asked what barriers they face in applying for or receiving food stamps, 47 percent of pantry respondents with no FSP participation in the past year who have never applied for food stamps cite either doubts about their eligibility, loss of eligibility, or previous sanctions, as the most common barriers to FSP participation. Among pantry client households who are not currently participating in the FSP but have participated in the past year and have not had an FSP application turned down, 42 percent cite either doubts about their eligibility, loss of eligibility, or previous sanctions, as the most common barriers to FSP participation. These barriers to current FSP participation are reported by 35 percent of all seemingly eligible pantry households that are not currently receiving food stamps.

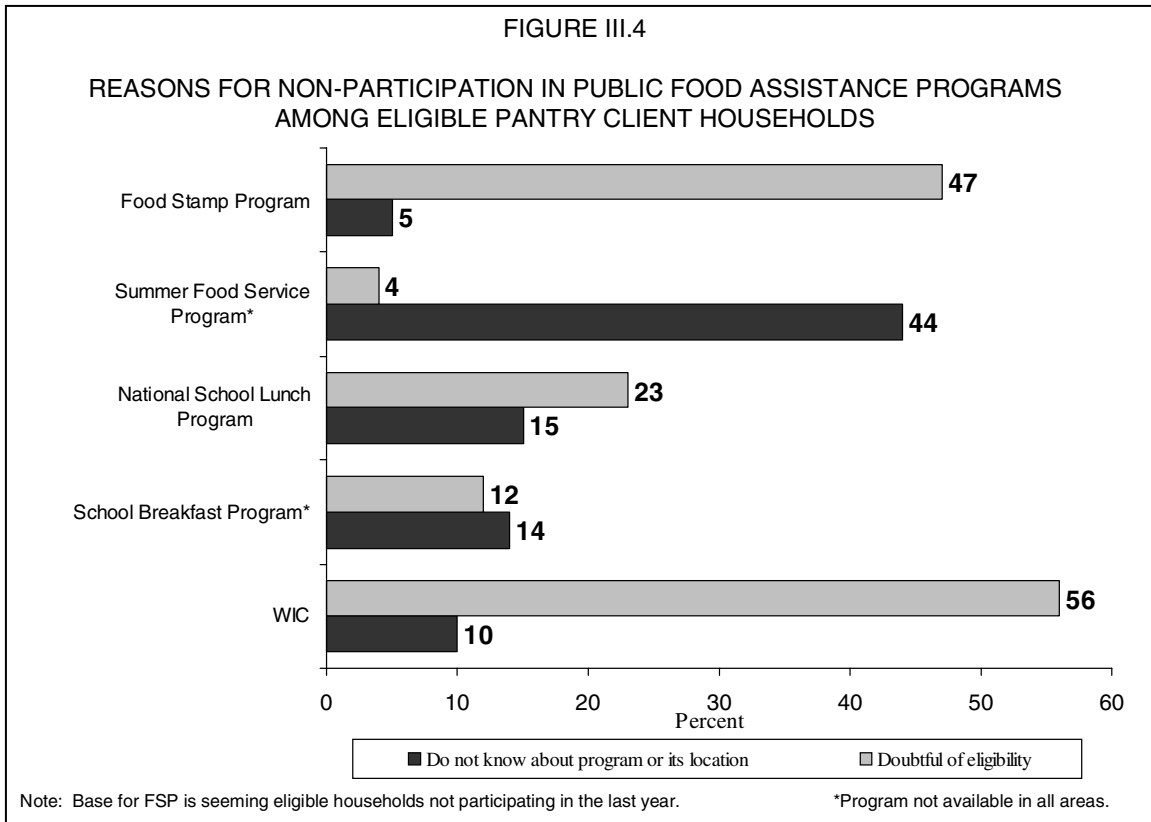
Pantry clients were also asked why household members did not participate in each of four child nutrition programs during the last year: WIC, the SBP, the NSLP, and the SFSP. For WIC

TABLE III.15

REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION IN CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS AMONG SEEMINGLY ELIGIBLE
BUT NON-PARTICIPATING PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS
(Percentages of Adult Respondents Indicating Given Reason)

| Reason for Non-Participation | Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) | | School Breakfast Program (SBP) | | National School Lunch Program (NSLP) | | Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) | |
|--|--|------|-----------------------------------|------|--|------|---------------------------------------|------|
| | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) | Percent | (SE) |
| Doubtful of eligibility | 56.4 | 5.17 | 12.0 | 3.43 | 22.8 | 5.29 | 4.1 | 1.31 |
| Do not know about program or its Location | 10.1 | 2.78 | 13.8 | 4.01 | 14.9 | 4.79 | 43.7 | 4.01 |
| Program unavailable in school/ Area | 0.0 | -- | 16.8 | 5.47 | 9.4 | 3.99 | 20.7 | 3.72 |
| Do not know how to participate or how to get benefits | 4.7 | 1.74 | 2.6 | 1.64 | 5.2 | 2.9 | 5.4 | 1.45 |
| Difficulty filling out forms | 1.8 | 1.54 | 1.1 | 1.04 | 2.2 | 1.77 | 0.3 | 0.34 |
| Lack transportation to program or office hours inconvenient | 1.1 | 0.58 | 3.7 | 2.41 | 0.0 | -- | 3.4 | 0.78 |
| Feelings of embarrassment or Discomfort | 2.9 | 2.49 | 3.6 | 1.42 | 5.9 | 2.28 | 0.5 | 0.25 |
| Not worth the trouble | 3.9 | 2.13 | 0.0 | -- | 0.0 | -- | 1.7 | 0.92 |
| Do not like food that is served | 0.0 | -- | 5.9 | 2.18 | 13.1 | 4.7 | 0.9 | 0.37 |
| Do not eat meal at that time of Day | 0.0 | -- | 4.7 | 1.99 | 0.0 | -- | 0.0 | -- |
| Eat meal at home or from other sources of support | 2.3 | 1.26 | 32.9 | 5.94 | 13.4 | 3.77 | 5.4 | 1.29 |
| SAMPLE SIZE | 169 | | 219 | | 129 | | 540 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).



and the NLSP, the most commonly cited reason is doubtfulness of eligibility, cited by 56 percent of respondents with household members seemingly eligible for WIC, and by 23 percent of respondents with household members seemingly eligible for the NSLP (table III.15, fig. III.4). In the case of the SBP, by contrast, one-third of pantry respondents with seemingly eligible household members report that they did not participate because their child ate breakfast at home. In the case of the SFSP, 44 percent of pantry respondents with seemingly eligible household members report that they were unaware of the program, a far higher percentage than for any of the other child nutrition programs. However, the SBP and the SFSP are not available in all areas.

H. CONTRASTING DIVERSE GROUPS OF PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS

By contrasting multiple groups of pantry client households, we can better understand the diversity of households served by the nation's food pantries. Comparing different groups of pantry client households also allows us to distinguish which households face the greatest hardships, as indicated by income and poverty levels, residential status, and household food security. Moreover, comparing program participation patterns of different groups of households can indicate which are most dependent on EFAS for food assistance and which have the most access to public food assistance programs.¹⁷

1. Households Defined by Demographic Characteristics

Nearly half (45 percent) of pantry households include children younger than 18, while one quarter includes elderly members (60 or older) but no children (table III.16).¹⁸ The remaining 30 percent includes neither children nor elderly members.

As we would expect, pantry households with children are larger than other pantry households, averaging 4.3 persons compared with 1.7 per household for each of the groups of households without children (table III.16). Of the three types of households, those with elderly members (and no children) are the least likely to rely on workers for economic support. About 40 percent of pantry client households with children include at least one employed person. The proportions of households relying on cash welfare (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or General Assistance) are similar across the three groups.

¹⁷Appendix C describes the analytic methods we used to test for the statistical significance of differences between groups of households and to account for sample design effects.

¹⁸Of pantry households including children, 14 percent also include an elderly member (Table III.16).

TABLE III.16

HOUSEHOLD, INCOME, AND POVERTY CHARACTERISTICS OF PANTRY
CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS, BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP

| Characteristics | Group 1 Households with Children Under Age 18 (45% of Pantry HHs) | | Group 2 Households without Children but with Elderly (Age 60+) (25% of Pantry HHs) | | Group 3 Households with Neither Children or Elderly (30% of Pantry HHs) | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---------|---|-------|--|-------|
| | Mean | (SE) | Mean | (SE) | Mean | (SE) |
| Household Characteristics | | | | | | |
| Household includes elderly (%) | 14.1 ^{b,c} | 1.94 | 100.0 ^a | 0.00 | 0.0 ^a | -- |
| Persons per household | 4.3 ^{b,c} | 0.09 | 1.7 ^a | 0.08 | 1.7 ^a | 0.08 |
| Household with workers (%) | 39.5 ^{b,c} | 4.00 | 11.1 ^{a,c} | 2.00 | 18.8 ^{a,b} | 2.51 |
| Household with cash welfare (%) | 41.4 | 4.76 | 51.8 | 4.61 | 43.1 | 3.93 |
| Income and Poverty | | | | | | |
| Monthly cash income (\$) | 889 ^{b,c} | 43.4 | 775 ^{a,c} | 52.2 | 628 ^{a,b} | 33.5 |
| Monthly income ≤ 130% of poverty (%) | 94.5 ^b | 1.58 | 88.0 ^a | 3.07 | 93.0 | 1.70 |
| Annual cash income (\$) | 13,636 ^{b,c} | 1,212.1 | 8,813 ^a | 452.1 | 8,143 ^a | 486.2 |
| Annual income ≤ 50% of poverty (%) | 52.6 ^b | 4.48 | 31.3 ^{a,c} | 5.09 | 43.7 ^b | 2.71 |
| Annual income 51-100% of poverty (%) | 30.4 ^{b,c} | 3.38 | 59.8 ^{a,c} | 4.55 | 45.5 ^{a,b} | 3.92 |
| Annual income 101-130% of poverty (%) | 9.9 ^c | 3.10 | 5.6 | 1.68 | 4.2 ^a | 1.38 |
| Annual income > 130% of poverty (%) | 7.1 | 1.80 | 3.3 | 1.61 | 6.6 | 1.77 |
| Sample Size | 1,101 | | 570 | | 694 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

^aSignificant difference from mean for group 1 at the 0.05 level

^bSignificant difference from mean for group 2 at the 0.05 level

^cSignificant difference from mean for group 3 at the 0.05 level

Monthly and annual incomes are highest for pantry households with children and lowest for pantry households with neither children nor elderly members (table III.16). Because households with children contain more members than households with elderly members, they are more likely to have been at or below 130 percent of the poverty level in the last month and more likely to have been in extreme poverty (at or below 50 percent of the poverty level) during the last year. Compared with households without elderly members or children, those with elderly members are more likely to be eligible for Social Security and SSI benefits, which helps to explain their higher monthly income levels and lower incidence of extreme poverty.

Consistent with their lower incidence of extreme poverty, households with elderly members and no children are more likely to live in an owner-occupied dwelling than are other types of pantry households (table III.17, fig. III.5). In contrast, pantry clients living with neither children nor elderly members are significantly more likely to be homeless than are other pantry clients and are significantly less likely to be food secure. Nearly three-fifths (58 percent) of pantry households without children or elderly members experience food insecurity with hunger, compared with two-fifths of pantry households with children and one-quarter of pantry households with elderly members and no children.

Households with elderly members and no children are less likely than other pantry households to report problems with welfare or the Food Stamp Program (table III.17). Contributing factors to fewer problems with the FSP are: low rates of work participation, steady incomes, and lower levels of FSP participation. Pantry households with elderly members are less likely to report the receipt of FSP benefits during the last year, although the proportion of households eligible for the FSP is similar across groups. Nearly all (92 percent) pantry households with children receive assistance from such public food assistance programs as the

TABLE III.17

RESIDENTIAL STATUS, FOOD SECURITY, AND PROGRAM PARTICIPATION
OF PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS, BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP

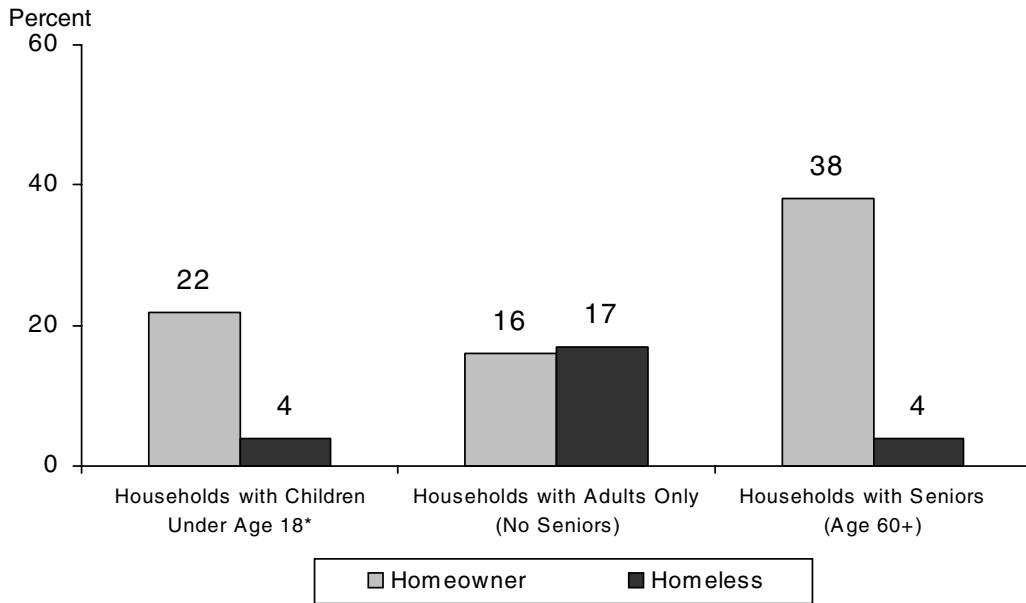
| Characteristics | Group 1 | | Group 2 | | Group 3 | |
|---|---|------|--|------|---|------|
| | Households with Children under Age 18 (45% of Pantry HHs) | | Households without Children but with Elderly (Age 60+) (25% of Pantry HHs) | | Households with Neither Children or Elderly (30% of Pantry HHs) | |
| | Mean | (SE) | Mean | (SE) | Mean | (SE) |
| Residential and Food Security Status | | | | | | |
| Household member owns residence (%) | 21.8 ^b | 3.29 | 38.2 ^{a,c} | 4.26 | 16.3 ^b | 2.97 |
| Homeless respondent (%) | 4.3 ^c | 1.22 | 3.6 ^c | 1.39 | 17.0 ^{a,b} | 3.84 |
| Food secure (%) | 20.4 ^c | 3.03 | 30.9 ^c | 4.71 | 13.2 ^{a,b} | 2.33 |
| Food insecure (%) | 79.6 ^c | 3.03 | 69.1 ^c | 4.71 | 86.8 ^{a,b} | 2.33 |
| Food insecure without hunger (%) | 40.0 ^c | 2.34 | 44.6 ^c | 4.01 | 28.6 ^{a,b} | 3.43 |
| Food insecure with hunger (%) | 39.6 ^{b,c} | 2.05 | 24.5 ^{a,c} | 2.51 | 58.2 ^{a,b} | 3.80 |
| Program Participation | | | | | | |
| Problems with FSP or welfare reported (%) | 39.8 ^b | 2.68 | 24.6 ^{a,c} | 3.29 | 40.0 ^b | 3.06 |
| HH includes FSP recipients (%) | 53.7 ^b | 4.89 | 33.0 ^{a,c} | 4.79 | 50.2 ^b | 4.74 |
| HH includes eligible non-recipients of the FSP (%) | 36.5 ^b | 3.53 | 47.8 ^{a,c} | 4.55 | 36.3 ^b | 3.10 |
| HH members are ineligible for the FSP (%) | 6.8 ^b | 1.45 | 13.9 ^a | 3.10 | 10.3 | 2.11 |
| HH members' FSP eligibility is uncertain (%) | 3.1 | 1.14 | 5.2 | 1.76 | 3.2 | 1.10 |
| HH members rely on public food assistance (%) | 91.5 ^{b,c} | 1.17 | 46.8 ^a | 4.68 | 51.3 ^a | 4.59 |
| HH members rely on pantries, kitchens, and/or shelters (%) | 22.0 ^c | 2.81 | 22.0 ^c | 4.27 | 36.7 ^{a,b} | 4.44 |
| HH members rely on pantries only (%) | 6.9 ^{b,c} | 1.14 | 41.9 ^a | 5.45 | 30.6 ^a | 3.18 |
| Sample Size | 1,101 | | 570 | | 694 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

^aSignificant difference from mean for group 1 at the 0.05 level^bSignificant difference from mean for group 2 at the 0.05 level^cSignificant difference from mean for group 3 at the 0.05 level

FIGURE III.5

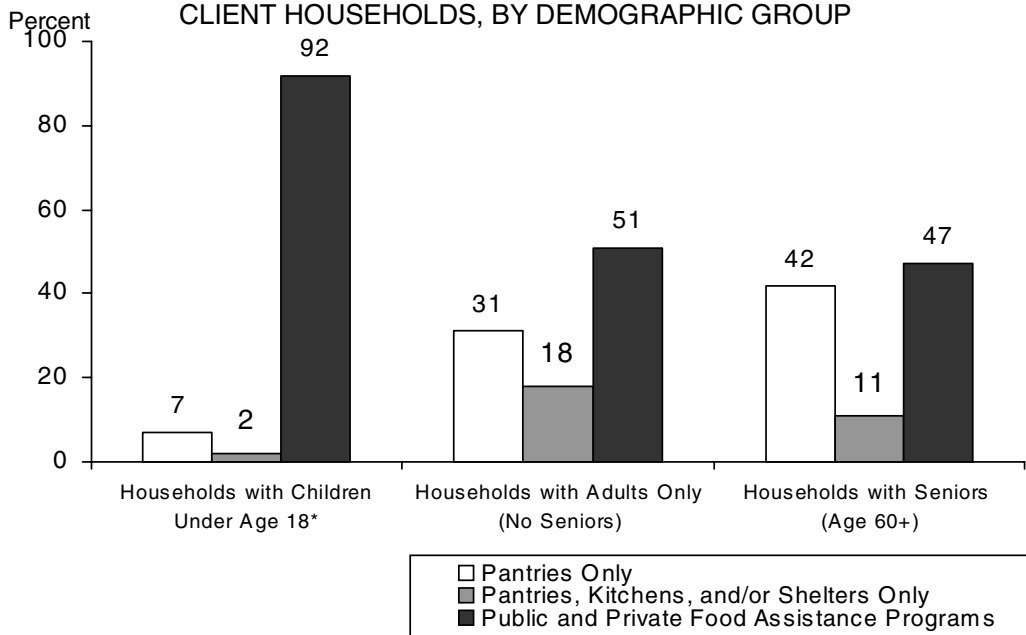
RESIDENTIAL STATUS OF PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS,
BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP



*14 percent of pantry households with children also have seniors.

FIGURE III.6

FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION OF PANTRY
CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS, BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP



*14 percent of pantry client households with children also have seniors.

Note: Categories may not add to 100 due to rounding. Food assistance categories are mutually exclusive.

FSP, WIC, School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program, Summer Food Service Program, or child care or senior meals programs (fig. III.6). Households with neither children nor elderly members are more likely than other pantry households to rely not on public food assistance programs but on other sources of EFAS, such as shelters and soup kitchens. This finding is consistent with the higher incidence of homelessness among this group of pantry households.

2. Households Defined by Participation in EFAS and Public Food Assistance Programs

More than two-thirds (69 percent) of pantry households rely on one or more of the public food assistance programs listed above for food assistance (table III.18, fig. III.7). Only 9 percent of pantry households rely on multiple sources of EFAS (such as shelters or soup kitchens in addition to food pantries) but not on public food assistance programs.¹⁹ About one-fifth (22 percent) of pantry households rely only on EFAS pantries.

Not surprisingly, households using public food assistance programs—many of which are targeted at children—are much more likely to include children than are other pantry households (table III.18). Pantry households using public food assistance programs are larger on average than are other pantry households (3.3 persons per household versus 2.0 persons per household). Households relying only on EFAS pantries are more likely to include elderly members than other pantry households, while pantry households relying on multiple forms of EFAS are most likely to include neither children nor elderly members.

¹⁹As shown later in Table III.19, 26 percent of pantry client households using public food assistance programs also use two or more forms of private food assistance.

TABLE III.18

HOUSEHOLD, INCOME, AND POVERTY CHARACTERISTICS OF PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS, BY PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

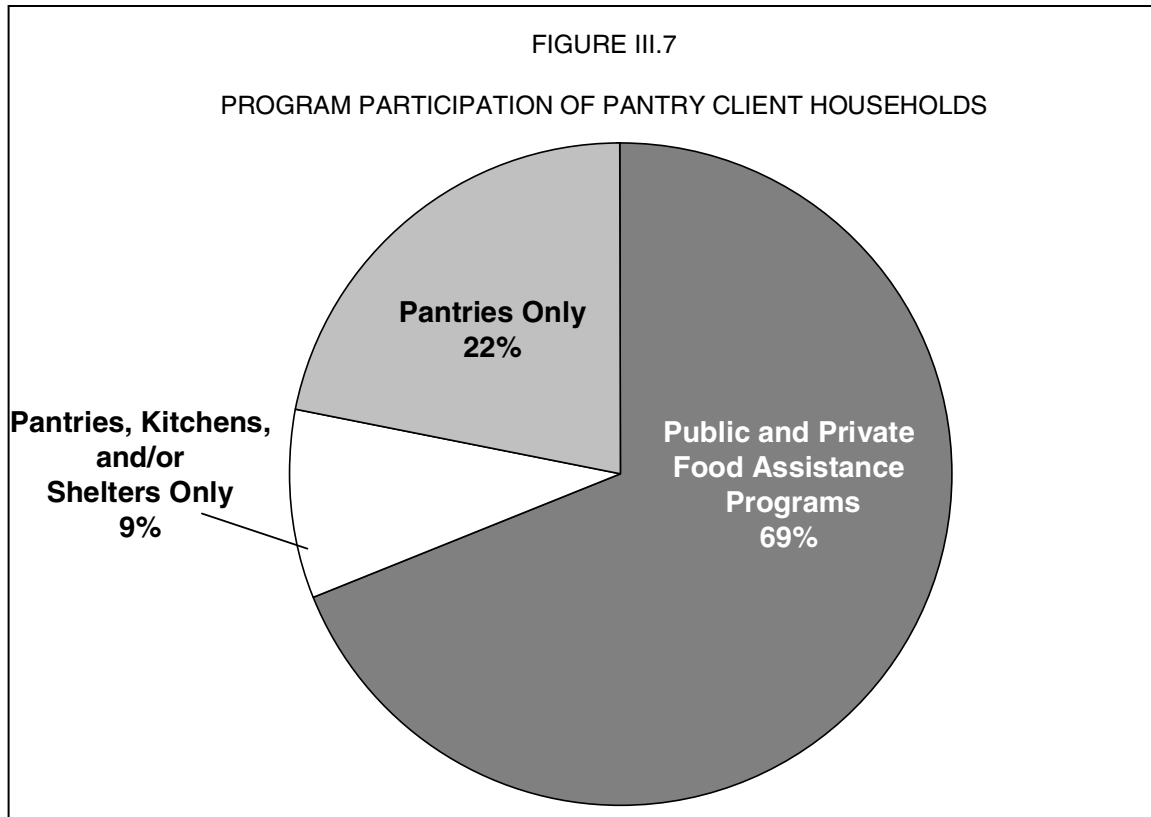
| Characteristics | Group 1 Households Using Public and Private Food Assistance Programs (69% of Pantry HHs) | | Group 2 Households Using Pantries, Kitchens, and/or Shelters Only (9% of Pantry HHs) | | Group 3 Households Using Pantry Only (22% of Pantry HHs) | |
|--|--|-------|--|-------|---|---------|
| | Mean | (SE) | Mean | (SE) | Mean | (SE) |
| Household Characteristics | | | | | | |
| Household includes children (%) | 60.9 ^{b,c} | 2.81 | 8.3 ^a | 2.65 | 14.0 ^a | 2.60 |
| Household includes elderly (%) | 25.1 ^c | 2.20 | 32.8 | 6.54 | 47.9 ^a | 4.67 |
| Household has neither children nor elderly (%) | 24.4 ^{b,c} | 2.44 | 62.0 ^{a,c} | 5.97 | 41.8 ^{a,b} | 3.70 |
| Persons per household | 3.3 ^{b,c} | 0.13 | 2.0 ^a | 0.13 | 2.0 ^a | 0.10 |
| Household with workers (%) | 27.6 | 3.24 | 20.6 | 4.46 | 24.9 | 3.65 |
| Household with cash welfare (%) | 49.7 ^c | 3.66 | 35.3 | 7.48 | 34.1 ^a | 3.78 |
| Income and Poverty | | | | | | |
| Monthly cash income (\$) | 770 | 37.2 | 681 ^c | 62.1 | 823 ^b | 46.5 |
| Monthly income ≤ 130% of poverty (%) | 96.2 ^{b,c} | 1.06 | 89.2 ^a | 3.18 | 84.8 ^a | 3.01 |
| Annual cash income (\$) | 10,607 ^b | 875.2 | 8,022 ^{a,c} | 822.1 | 12,593 ^b | 1,271.7 |
| Annual income ≤ 50% of poverty (%) | 49.3 ^c | 3.07 | 52.4 ^c | 5.87 | 25.2 ^{a,b} | 3.65 |
| Annual income 51-100% of poverty (%) | 39.9 ^c | 3.97 | 36.9 ^c | 5.64 | 52.5 ^{a,b} | 3.51 |
| Annual income 101-130% of poverty (%) | 6.7 | 2.11 | 3.8 ^c | 2.24 | 10.0 ^b | 2.02 |
| Annual income > 130% of poverty (%) | 4.0 ^c | 1.33 | 7.0 | 2.44 | 12.3 ^a | 2.92 |
| Sample Size | 1,531 | | 224 | | 592 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

^aSignificant difference from mean for group 1 at the 0.05 level

^bSignificant difference from mean for group 2 at the 0.05 level

^cSignificant difference from mean for group 3 at the 0.05 level



Households using only EFAS pantries tend to have higher levels of monthly and annual income than households using multiple forms of EFAS and are less likely than either other type of household to have been in extreme poverty during the last year (table III.18). By not seeking assistance from any other EFAS or public food assistance program, these households may indicate that they face fewer hardships than other pantry client households. In contrast, households relying on public food assistance programs are more likely than are other pantry households to have monthly incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level. Households with incomes below this threshold meet the gross income requirement for participation in the FSP and for the receipt of free school breakfasts and lunches.

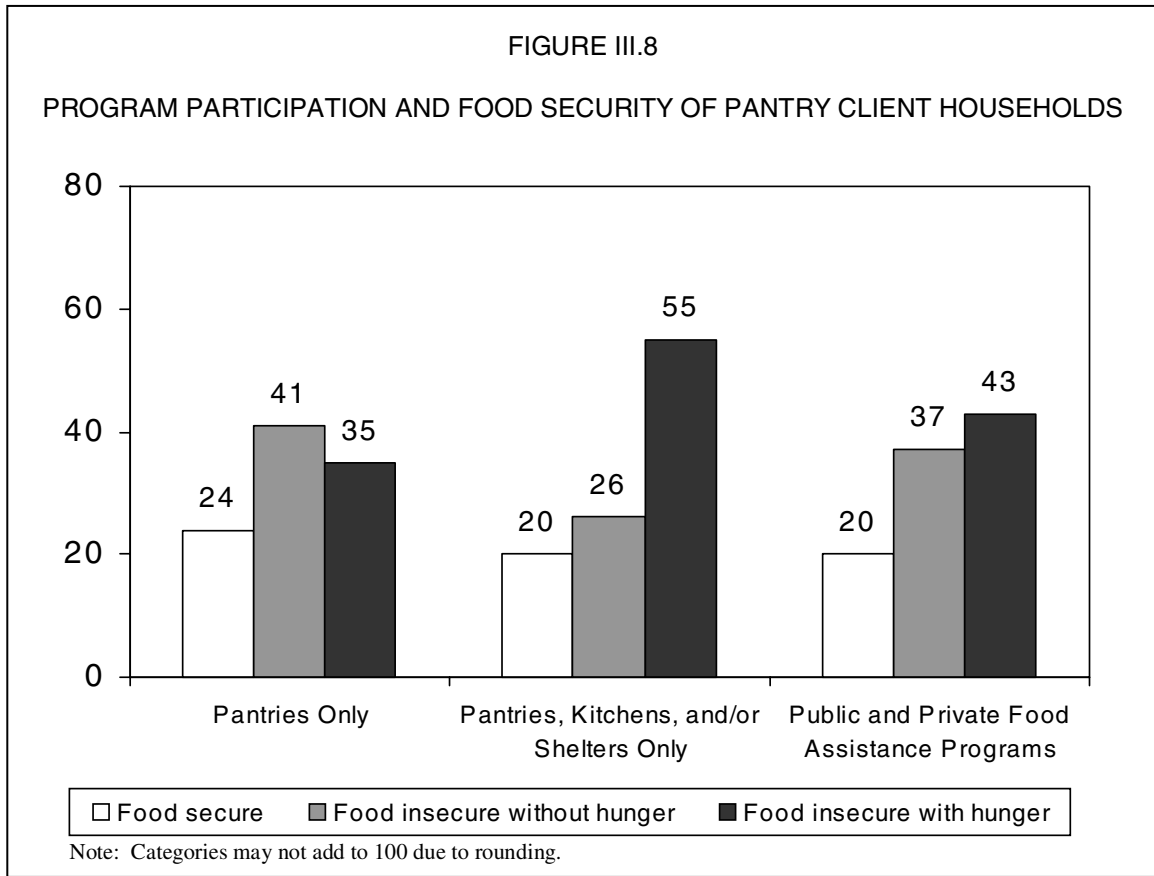
TABLE III.19

RESIDENTIAL STATUS, FOOD SECURITY, AND PROGRAM PARTICIPATION
OF PANTRY CLIENT HOUSEHOLDS, BY PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

| Characteristics | Group 1 Households Using Public and Private Food Assistance Programs (69% of Pantry HHs) | | Group 2 Households Using Pantries, Kitchens, and/or Shelters Only (9% of Pantry HHs) | | Group 3 Households Using Pantries Only (22% of Pantry HHs) | |
|--|--|------|--|------|---|------|
| | Mean | (SE) | Mean | (SE) | Mean | (SE) |
| Residential and Food Security Status | | | | | | |
| Household member owns residence (%) | 21.4 ^c | 2.65 | 14.9 ^c | 3.74 | 34.1 ^{a,b} | 4.23 |
| Homeless respondent (%) | 6.5 ^b | 1.78 | 22.3 ^{a,c} | 4.80 | 7.5 ^b | 2.04 |
| Food secure (%) | 20.1 | 2.49 | 19.8 | 3.69 | 24.1 | 3.66 |
| Food insecure (%) | 79.9 | 2.49 | 80.2 | 3.69 | 75.9 | 3.66 |
| Food insecure without hunger (%) | 37.2 ^b | 1.93 | 25.7 ^{a,c} | 4.19 | 41.4 ^b | 3.46 |
| Food insecure with hunger (%) | 42.7 ^{b,c} | 2.17 | 54.5 ^{a,c} | 4.22 | 34.5 ^{a,b} | 3.34 |
| Program Participation | | | | | | |
| Problems with FSP or welfare reported (%) | 39.4 ^c | 3.07 | 42.7 ^c | 5.93 | 25.1 ^{a,b} | 2.63 |
| HH includes FSP recipients (%) | 70.8 ^{b,c} | 4.53 | 0.0 | -- | 0.0 | -- |
| HH includes eligible non-recipients of the FSP (%) | 22.7 ^{b,c} | 3.50 | 73.7 ^a | 3.99 | 74.9 ^a | 2.91 |
| HH members are ineligible for the FSP (%) | 4.7 ^{b,c} | 1.08 | 18.6 ^a | 4.04 | 21.7 ^a | 2.73 |
| HH members' FSP eligibility is uncertain (%) | 1.9 | 0.79 | 7.6 | 3.14 | 3.4 | 0.99 |
| HH members rely on pantries, kitchens, and/or shelters (%) | 25.7 ^{b,c} | 3.12 | 100.0 ^a | 0.00 | 0.0 ^a | -- |
| Sample Size | 1,531 | | 222 | | 592 | |

SOURCE: National Emergency Food Assistance System Client Survey (2001).

^aSignificant difference from mean for group 1 at the 0.05 level^bSignificant difference from mean for group 2 at the 0.05 level^cSignificant difference from mean for group 3 at the 0.05 level



Of all three groups defined by public and private program participation, clients relying only on pantries are the most likely to live in an owner-occupied dwelling, while clients relying on multiple forms of private food assistance (and no public programs) are the most likely to be homeless (table III.19). Further confirming this intuition, the prevalence of food insecurity with hunger varies dramatically by group: more than half (55 percent) of households relying on multiple forms of EFAS are food insecure with hunger, compared with about two-fifths (43 percent) of pantry households using public food assistance programs and 35 percent of households relying only on pantries (fig. III.8). Taken together with the group differences in income and poverty levels, these findings suggest pantry households using public food assistance programs face fewer material hardships than pantry households relying only on multiple forms of

private food assistance but face more material hardships than households relying only on pantries.

The higher level of hardship experienced by pantry users who rely on multiple forms of EFAS may reflect the fact that this is a group that uses shelters and kitchens. The underlying differences seen in table III.19 may not be due to multiple EFAS use per se, but rather to kitchen and shelter clients in general being more likely to experience material hardship.

Given the hardships of pantry households using multiple forms of EFAS, policymakers may want to consider ways to expand participation of these households in public food assistance programs. While 74 percent of these households appear to be eligible for the FSP, 43 percent experienced problems receiving FSP or welfare benefits, and many do not consider themselves eligible for the FSP. Pantry client households using multiple forms of private food assistance have, relative to the poverty level, a similar distribution of annual income as have pantry client households using public food assistance programs. Nonetheless, the proportion of FSP-eligible households considering themselves ineligible for food stamps is twice as high for households using multiple forms of private food assistance (49 percent) as for households using public food assistance programs (22 percent—data not shown). Given the high proportion of eligible households considering themselves ineligible for the FSP, educating pantry clients on the eligibility standards for the FSP and other public food assistance programs could help increase needy individuals' participation in these programs.