



Food-Related Decision Patterns among SNAP Participants in Mississippi

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BACKGROUND

- Disparities in diet quality and health status among Mississippians underline the importance of effective public health strategies for reducing disease risk, with a particular focus on underserved and minority audiences.¹⁻³
- While data indicate a reduction in food insecurity with SNAP participation,⁴ studies suggest lower diet quality among SNAP participants, compared to income eligible nonparticipants (IENs) and higher income nonparticipants.⁵⁻⁷
- While food assistance programs in the U.S. have collectively shifted from a primary focus on food provision to include an emphasis on diet quality, insight from program participants may shed light on ways to improve nutritional impacts.

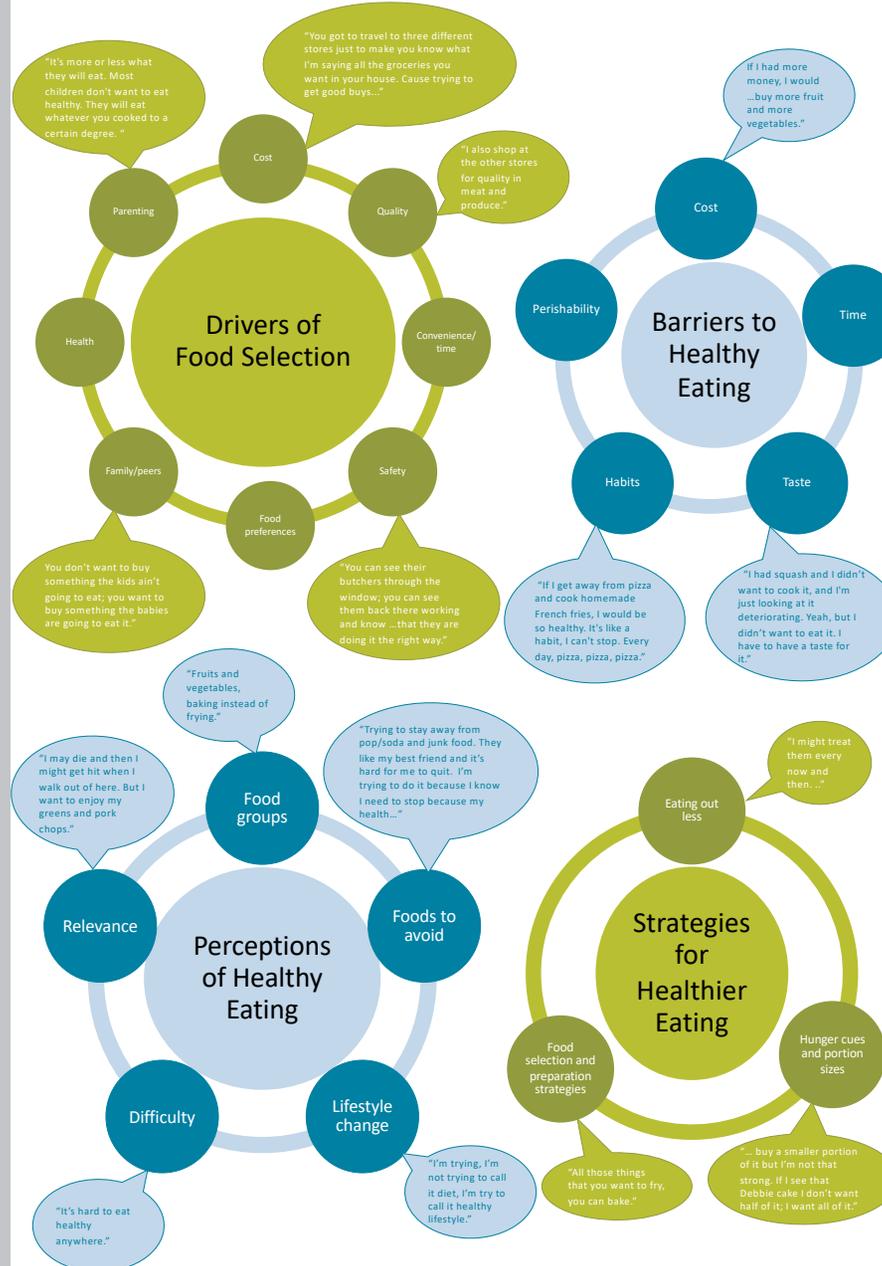
OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to qualitatively explore food-related decision patterns among SNAP recipients in Mississippi. Specifically, this study aimed to explore food-related decision patterns, barriers and strategies related to healthy eating, and perceptions of healthy eating.

METHODS

- Focus groups (n=18) were conducted with 127 low-income female caregivers of children under the age of 18.
- The health belief model was used as a guide to assess food-related decision patterns.
- Cluster sampling was used to randomly recruit participants from the four regional divisions of Mississippi State University Extension.
- Audio recorded focus groups were transcribed verbatim and coded by two independent coders using thematic analysis.⁸

RESULTS



CONCLUSIONS

- SNAP participants in Mississippi report a variety of strategies for managing food costs and striving for healthier eating, while also reporting barriers.
- Upon evaluating study findings against the health belief model used to guide data collection, variability in level of perceived threat, perceived benefits and barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy across focus group participants suggests lack of consensus.
- Focusing on ways to manage costs of healthy foods, honor taste preferences, and work within lifestyle/family contexts may enhance efforts to support healthy eating in this audience.
- Means of intervening to address desirability of behavior and social norms are poorly understood. Future research that explores ways to improve desirability of healthy eating and to enhance perceptions that healthy eating is "normal" are warranted.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funded by Mississippi State University Extension.