

Background

- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) increases access to nutritious foods for low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women and their children under five-years-old.
- WIC participation has decline for the past 6 years (Oliveira, 2017)
 - This decline is partially attributed to reduced access to large food stores in low-income communities (USDA/ERS, 2015).
- Discount variety stores (DVS) can be useful points of food access for individuals in these communities (Cannuscio et al., 2013).
- While some research has explored the facilitators and barriers to redeeming WIC benefits among WIC recipients (e.g., Bertmann et al., 2014; Najjar, 2013), this is the first known study to assess WIC implementation feasibility from the perspective of food store employees.

Objective

To identify facilitators and barriers to WIC implementation in multiple DVS locations.

Identifying the facilitators and barriers associated with WIC implementation may lead to more successful program adoption, allowing more families to benefit from WIC and increase DVS revenues.

Methods

Participants

Participant characteristics	Frequency
Gender	
Female	26
Male	10
Age Group	
20-30	15
30-40	10
40-50	6
50-60	3
60+	2
Position in DVS	
Corporate	6
Store Manager	8
Store Asst. Manager	14
Cashier	8

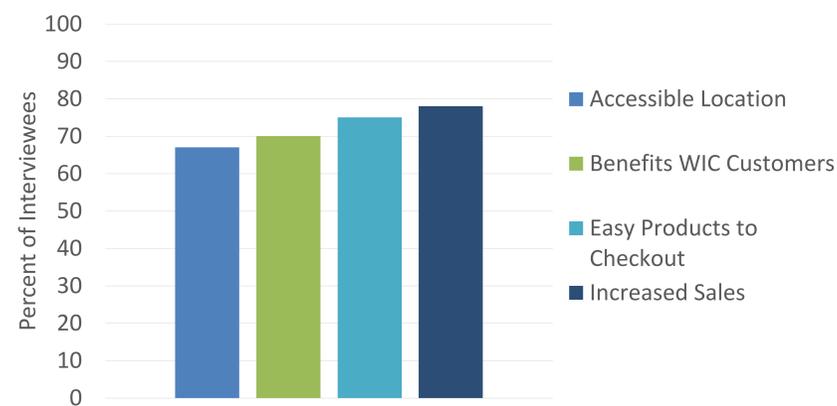
Procedure

- 36 in-depth interviews
- 10 DVS in low-income communities in NC
 - These stores implemented WIC over a 10-month pilot study to assess WIC feasibility
 - 9 stores were located in food deserts
- Interviews were transcribed and coded using an inductive approach to identify qualitative themes

This research was supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Policy for Action Program
To obtain a copy of this poster, please email VGalica@uncc.edu.

Results

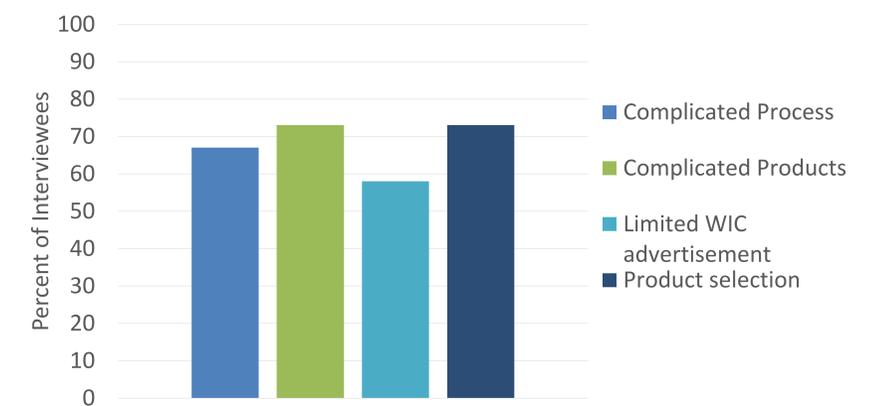
Facilitators to WIC Implementation



- **Increased sales.** 78% of participants reported witnessing a greater number of transactions and/or transactions for a larger monetary value after WIC was implemented. Employees reported that new customers began shopping at DVS after WIC was implemented.
- **Easy products to checkout.** 75% of interviewees noted that processing the bread, eggs, milk, and infant formula that were most commonly purchased by WIC recipients was easy to complete at the register.
- **Accessible location.** 67% of participants discussed WIC recipients' proximity to DVS locations, as opposed to larger chain grocery stores, as a facilitator to WIC implementation.

“Other supermarkets have pulled out...We were sticking it out, and we were maintaining our stores there, so it's markets like that where WIC can be a real asset to the citizens who...don't have the ability to drive to a supermarket.”
- **Benefits WIC customers.** 70% of participants viewed WIC implementation as an opportunity for DVS to “serve the underserved.”

Barriers to WIC Implementation



- **Limited product selection.** 73% of interviewees noted that DVS's inherently smaller size limited the variety of WIC approved products available for purchase.

“Some of the customers...don't understand why we don't have certain stuff in the store. Like their WIC voucher would say yogurt...but we don't have that in here to give them.”
- **Complicated products.** 73% of interviewees noted that it was difficult for both DVS employees and customers to identify which products in the store were WIC-approved.
- **Limited WIC advertisement.** 58% of interviewees noted that restrictions imposed by the State agency regarding WIC advertisement were barriers to the success of the WIC program in DVS.
- **Complicated process.** All but one participant noted the substantial changes DVS had to undergo to become WIC authorized, given the program's strict eligibility requirements; 67% felt this process was exceedingly complicated and created a barrier to implementation.

“I think the biggest challenge is it's not easy to rollout... based on the regulations, the whole program is restrictive...It makes it difficult for smaller retailers.”

Conclusions

- Most employees have a positive view of WIC, but barriers related to product selection and training must be addressed to improve future WIC implementation.
- Notably, DVS employees frequently reported that inconsistent and insufficient training, exacerbated by high employee turnover in both staff and management positions, made WIC implementation substantially more challenging. While many store employees reported increased sales as a result of WIC implementation, some employees noted that substantial revenue was lost due to inaccurate processing of the WIC paper vouchers.
 - WIC's new electronic benefit transfer system (eWIC), which does not require as much detailed and manual training, should address several barriers to implementation.
- Future research is needed to evaluate implementation of eWIC in DVS.