

Perceptions of Online Grocery Shopping using the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Electronic Benefit Transfer Card

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The main objective of this qualitative study is to explore the general and contextual (i.e., within family mealtime routines) perceptions of an online EBT program among caregivers with children enrolled in Head Start.

Methods: This focus group study is ongoing. Two were completed in fall 2019 and additional focus groups will be conducted in winter 2020 until saturation is met. Participants (n=16) are primarily non-Hispanic Black (88%) and 100% female. Mean (SD) is 40.7 ± 15.5 years and median income is \$42,302.

Measurable Outcomes/Analysis: Main outcomes are general and contextual perceptions of online EBT shopping. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were independently coded by 2 researchers and analyzed for themes.

Results: On average, focus groups lasted 75 minutes. A preliminary theme includes mixed awareness of grocery delivery/curbside pickup but with an overall positive perception. Two participants regularly participate in online delivery and find it very convenient. The majority of participants did not feel that online grocery shopping would improve healthy eating and most had reservations about others picking out fresh produce and meats. When asked about using SNAP benefit/EBT card to purchase food online, participants who receive it believe it would encourage them to use this program.

Conclusion: Results of this study will form the design of a future online EBT pilot study tailored to the needs of Head Start families.

INTRODUCTION

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was formative legislation that proposed expanding the use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card for online grocery shopping
- Many families who receive SNAP benefits face barriers to support healthy eating and meal patterns for their families, such as time and money¹
- There are limited studies that report SNAP recipients' perceptions of online grocery shopping
- Without this information, it is not possible to develop and implement a fully optimized online EBT policy and program
- With the recent pandemic, there is a greater need for an online grocery program for SNAP recipients

OBJECTIVE

To explore the general and contextual (i.e. within family mealtime routines) perceptions of an online EBT program among caregivers with young children enrolled in Head Start

METHODS

Participants and Recruitment

- Participants were recruited from a larger family-meals intervention, known as Simple Suppers
- Families enrolled in Simple Suppers have a young child enrolled in Head Start in the south side of Columbus, Ohio
- Three focus groups were held until data saturation was met with a total of 19 participants

Data Collection

- Each focus group lasted 75 minutes on average.
- Questions focused on current family mealtime routines, current grocery shopping habits, and perceptions of online shopping and delivery services (Figure 1)

Data Analysis

- Focus groups were transcribed verbatim and coded by 2 researchers in 3 steps and analyzed for themes (Figure 2)

METHODS (continued)

Figure 1. Caregiver Interview Guide



Family mealtime patterns

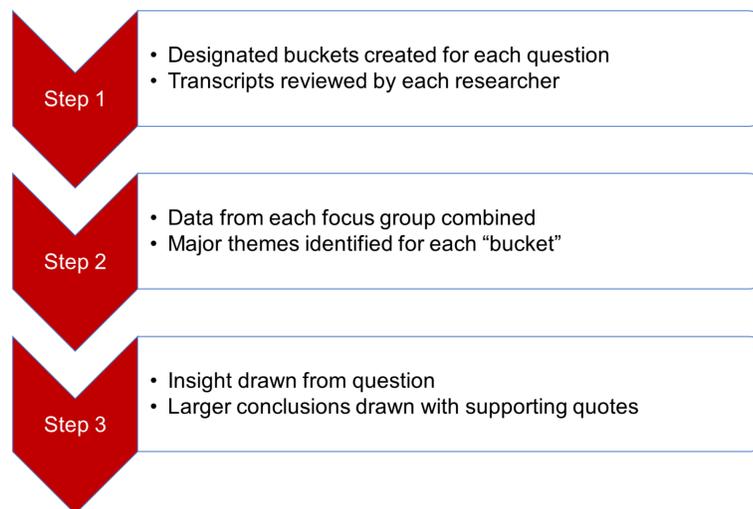
- How many times a week does your family eat dinner together?
- How often is dinner prepared together?
- How often is a separate meal made for your children?
- What does your family typically eat for dinner?
- Do you feel like you eat together as a family enough?



Grocery shopping and SNAP EBT card

- How comfortable are you with shopping for food?
- How do you typically shop for food?
- Have you heard of food delivery programs for SNAP recipients?
- What if the online stores accepted EBT cards?
- Is there anything else you can think of that would help you eat together more often?

Figure 2. Focus Group Methodology



CONCLUSIONS

- Most participants were open to the idea of online grocery shopping despite concerns of someone else picking out their fresh produce, meats, and getting wrong/missing items
- Many families find that maintaining family meals can be difficult because of limited free time due to extracurricular activities. Online grocery shopping can help save time through delivery or curbside pickup options
- By saving time, families should be able to dedicate their evenings to preparing a healthy family meal and continue to model good behaviors for their children, that have been shown to be a protective measure against childhood obesity^{2, 3, 4, 5}
- The results from this study will aid in the design of a future online EBT pilot study tailored to the needs of Head Start families

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

- Over 60% of caregivers who participated in the focus groups do not receive SNAP benefits. Continued investigation into why eligible individuals are not enrolling in SNAP is essential
- Prior to the COVID-19 epidemic, only a few states were piloting an online ordering system for SNAP recipients. Since the pandemic, the local governments of many other states (now including Ohio) have expanded the use of SNAP benefits to purchase groceries online. An online grocery shopping program would allow safe acquisition of groceries and continue to allow families to purchase healthy foods.

RESULTS

Figure 3. Focus Group Themes



6. Using SNAP benefits when ordering groceries online

Most don't receive benefits but agreed it would be important when shopping online

CONTACT INFORMATION

Please email Shivani.Gupta@nationwidechildrens.org for questions or suggestions.

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