Introduction

- Food distribution programs effectively lower regional poverty rate (Bohn et al. 2013)
- 5,500 clients visit a food distribution agency/week in Santa Cruz county (HIA 2014)
- Current surveys capture clientele demographics, but identifying causes behind visits will inform best practices to address food insecurity
- Santa Cruz is blend of students and community members, therefore causes behind visits have specific, local dimensions

Project Goals

- Determine the distinct Santa Cruz communities that utilize distribution programs
- Document the food preferences of these populations
- Identify specific factors contributing to student visits
- Identify differences in use of food assistance programs between student and non-student populations
- Compare generational differences in use of food assistance programs

Methods

- For demographic analysis used nonrandom purposive selection of 5 sites reflecting range of clientele
- To incentive, offered monetary raffle
- To survey clientele, 2-3 surveyors/site implemented anonymous, online responsive surveys in Winter 2016

Survey

Grouped questions around
- Demographics
- Education & Student Status
- Income
- Housing & Commuting
- Experiences & preferences around food distribution
- Health Perceptions
- Public Assistance Utilization

Results and Outcomes

General findings

- 87 food pantry visitors completed the survey
- Three key demographic groups visit Santa Cruz food pantries: students (24% of respondents), retirees (21%), and immigrants (21%)
- Both students and non-students express primary preferences for ‘fresh fruit and vegetables’ and then ‘dairy & eggs’ in food aid programs

Use of food assistance programs

- How often do you visit a food pantry?
- Have you ever applied for CalFresh food assistance?

Housing instability and financial burdens

- In the last 10 years, in how many homes have you lived?
- What percent of your income is spent on food?

Conclusions & Future Directions

- The need for assistance may be motivated by different stressors between clientele types: for example, student populations experience more housing insecurity than non-students, changing residence an average of 3.5 times
- Despite need, students utilize food assistance programs less than non-student populations
- Students report spending majority of total income on combined food and housing costs, indicating limited allocation of funds for emergencies, debt repayment, taxes, childcare, transportation, and other expenses
- Most survey respondents reported that their families did not use food assistance during their childhood – suggesting that the need for such programs may be new to them as adults, or such programs did not exist/were not utilized previously
- Future studies should compare graduate & undergraduate experiences with hunger
- While homeless populations are food insecure, understanding visitation drivers and food preferences may require different methods as they did not participate substantially in our survey

Literature Cited


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