Food Pantry Participants’ Perceptions of How Transportation and Pantry Use Influences Food Purchases

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Introduction
• Food pantries alleviate hunger by providing eligible individuals and households with food.
• Food impoverished individuals are at increased risk of not having reliable transportation, making accessing food difficult.1
• Research suggests that pantries are limited in providing clients with healthy foods based on limited funds, resources, and storage space.2
• These difficulties suggest that participants’ food preferences may be unachievable.3

Statement of the Problem
• It is not well known if the food pantry participants receive influences food purchases.
• Nor, how the effect of transportation costs and reliable transportation to grocery stores affect the food choices of those who use food pantries.

Objectives
• Determine how pantry use influences food purchases.
• Determine how reliable and accessible transportation and associated costs influence grocery purchases in a rural community.
• Determine the diet quality of pantry participants using perceptions and statistical analysis.

Methods
Quantitative and qualitative research
• Three focus groups and survey

60 enrolled food pantry clients
• Married with children <18 living in the household
• Single with children <18 living in the household
• Seniors 60 years and older

Analyses
• Descriptive statistics and 2-tailed t-tests used for survey analysis
• Focus groups were analyzed by looking for trends and themes between and within groups

Results
Survey
• A significant difference in miles traveled to grocery stores was found between married and single parents (p = 0.022).
• Cost was not considered a factor for choosing to go grocery shopping (Figure 1).
• Pantry clients over and under the age of 60 consumed below the recommended amounts of vegetables and fruits.
• Majority of dairy products were obtained at stores, while canned goods were from pantry.

Focus Groups
• Many barriers identified to accessing fresh produce, i.e., lack of food preparation knowledge.
• Transportation barriers for accessing food included the need to drive > 20 miles to grocery stores or poor weather conditions.
• Coping methods for barriers included: traveling with others, walking to stores, using resources at home, or getting help from family and friends.

Conclusions
Efforts should be made to help food pantries meet the food preferences of pantry clients. Further research is recommended to improve transportation in rural communities.

References

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