

Effect of a Recessionary Economy on Food Choice among Middle-aged Women with Children: Implications for Health Education and Services

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Introduction



- U.S. economy entered recession in 2007
- Concurrently, consumer food price index increased to 5.5%
 - Highest annual increase in the past decade
- Food choices / dietary quality are influenced by economic resources and food costs
 - Families faced with diminishing incomes consume less expensive foods and lower quality diets

Introduction

- Effect of a recessionary economy on food choice has not been extensively reported
- Food choice decisions: frequent, multifaceted, situational, dynamic, change as circumstances shift
 - Previous research showed **taste, nutrition, cost, and convenience** primarily determined food choice among women.
- **Purpose:** identify factors influencing food choice decisions during an economic recession

Methods



- **Inclusion Criteria:**
 - Women 25-55 years old
 - Facing constrained financial resources in previous 12 months
 - At least 1 child < 18 years old in the household
 - Performed at least 50% of the grocery shopping
- Recruitment occurred from June to August 2009

Methods

- Conducted qualitative interviews
 - 45 - 60 minute one-on-one interviews
 - Used a pretested semi-structured interview guide
 - Audio recorded
 - Transcribed verbatim
 - Created coding scheme with definitions
 - Coded every interview
 - Identified common themes and practices



Results

(n=25)



- Some had experienced more than one financial crisis
- 10 women and 7 spouses were unemployed
- 5 participants and 3 spouses were under-employed
- 1 participant lost house to foreclosure; another at risk of losing house to foreclosure
- 56% had a college degree, 48% were Caucasian, and 20% had never married

Results



Four Major Themes:

1. Variety of shopping strategies used to save money
2. Differing views existed regarding dietary quality
3. Some believed the quality of their diet changed
4. Specific resources were requested to save time and money

Variety of Shopping Strategies

1. Shopping at multiple grocery stores
"And sometimes I will do one store and do another, and then go back to the first store because there was something else that I needed that was less expensive someplace else."
2. Spending more time planning their supermarket trips
3. Using coupons, including paper and internet coupons
4. Minimizing food purchases to minimize food waste
5. Buying fewer "luxury foods"
"All of the luxury items, like as food goes, is not important to me anymore."
6. Dining out less often
7. Choosing less expensive restaurants when dining out



Varied Views on Dietary Quality

- A healthy diet meant:
 - Variety of foods
 - Eating meat (or a protein source), fruits, and/or vegetables
 - Less sugar, fat and salt
- "Eating what the food pyramid recommends and trying to stay away from your fats and sugary foods."*
- Fresh and "natural" foods were preferred over canned and frozen foods
 - Important for participants' family to eat a healthy diet, **esp. their children**

Dietary Quality

- 11 believed their diet had not significantly changed – but using new food preparation strategies
 - 8 reported their diet improved - omitting certain food categories (eg, snacks and desserts)
 - 5 reported their diet worsened – couldn't afford healthy foods and relied on processed foods
- "I would say definitely the meat and produce - it's not there anymore. Salads aren't there anymore. Fruits aren't there anymore. Vegetables aren't there anymore."*

Resources Requested



- Most requested resources for saving time and money
 - *"I think the biggest thing would be to plan menus and to plan what you wanted to eat and to stick to that. Then, buy your groceries according to that and not buy anything else that's not on there."*
 - Ability to track their weekly grocery and food expenses
 - Food cooperatives
- Cooking classes
- New recipes
- However, no resources requested by 6 participants

Conclusions

- Price was the primary factor in food purchase decisions
- Despite less frequent purchase of fresh produce, some purchasing fewer desserts and snack foods
 - Thus, limited food purchasing power may reduce consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables but also reduce consumption of desserts and snack foods
- Further research needed to evaluate impact on overall dietary quality

Conclusion

- In a recessionary economy, food shopping behaviors are altered
 - More coupons
 - Shopping for sale items
 - Shopping at multiple locations
 - Minimizing food waste
 - Omitting certain foods
- Consumers need adequate nutrition education and food preparation skills prior to the occurrence of an economic downturn to obtain adequate and safe foods for an active, healthy life

