

Formal and Informal Food Assistance: Differences Between Non-Metro and Metro Across the Great Recession

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Abstract

This research investigated how households in metro and non-metro areas coped with food hardships during the Great Recession. This investigation was spurred by two previous works. First, Guo (2012) found that non-metro households were more likely to receive assistance from a nonprofit, friend, or family member when experiencing material hardship. Unfortunately, food insecurity was not one of the hardships investigated. The second study, Sabia and Nielsen (2013), found that residents of non-metro areas were more likely to experience food insecurity, raising questions of their access to food assistance programs. Consequently, this research sought to identify differences in the receipt of food assistance between metro and non-metro areas. Most importantly, this study utilized nationally representative data from the 2004 and 2008 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), allowing for an analysis of receipt changes over the course of the Great Recession. Measures of both government and informal food assistance were investigated to include a comprehensive analysis of potential assistance sources. The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, bivariate tests were conducted to identify variations in receipt between metro and non-metro households. Next, parallel logistic regression analyses were generated to explore differences in the likelihood of receipt based upon metro status in 2005 and 2010. Lastly, a longitudinal fixed effects model, using data from 2004 to 2011, was generated to more fully investigate how assistance receipt may have been affected by the Great Recession. Consistent with Guo (2012), our preliminary results suggest that, despite similar levels of food security, a higher proportion of non-metro households received both government and informal food assistance. Similarly, results at the multivariate level indicate that, holding all else equal, non-metro households were significantly more likely to receive both formal and informal assistance in 2005 and 2010. These results combine to suggest that metro households may be underserved by food assistance programs relative to those in non-metro areas. Additional results suggest that food insecure households, households receiving government assistance, and households receiving Medicaid were more likely to receive assistance throughout the time period of analysis.

References

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