



Research report

Maternal employment, acculturation, and time spent in food-related behaviors among Hispanic mothers in the United States. Evidence from the American Time Use Survey [☆]



Sarah A. Sliwa ^{a,*}, Aviva Must ^b, Flavia Peréa ^b, Christina D. Economos ^a

^a Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University, 150 Harrison Avenue, Boston, MA 02111, USA

^b Department of Public Health and Community Medicine, Tufts University School of Medicine, 136 Harrison Avenue, Boston, MA 02111, USA

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ABSTRACT

Employment is a major factor underlying im/migration patterns. Unfortunately, lower diet quality and higher rates of obesity appear to be unintended consequences of moving to the US. Changes in food preparation practices may be a factor underlying dietary acculturation. The relationships between employment, acculturation, and food-related time use in Hispanic families have received relatively little attention. We used cross-sectional data collected from Hispanic mothers (ages 18–65) with at least one child <13 years old participating in the 2003–2011 American Time Use Survey ($n = 3622$) to estimate the relationship between employment, acculturation (US-born vs. im/migrant), and time spent in food preparation and family dinner. Regression models were estimated separately for the employed and the non-working and were adjusted for Hispanic origin group, socio-demographic and household characteristics. Working an eight-hour day was associated with spending 38 fewer minutes in food preparation ($-38.0 \pm SE 4.8$, $p < .001$). Although being US-born was associated with spending fewer minutes in food preparation, this relationship varied by origin group. Acculturation did not appear to modify the relationship between hours worked and time spent in food preparation or family dinner. Mothers who worked late hours spent less time eating the evening meal with their families ($-9.8 \pm SE 1.3$). Although an eight-hour workday was associated with a significant reduction in food preparation time, an unexpected result is that, for working mothers, additional time spent in paid work is not associated with the duration of family dinner later that day.

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Introduction

Over the next four decades, Hispanic immigrants and migrants (i.e., im/migrants) and their children will continue to drive population growth: between 2010 and 2060, the US Hispanic population, already the largest minority population in the US, is expected to increase from 17% of the total population to 31% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Many im/migrants who come to the US seek work to improve their economic standing and opportunities for their families. As workers, im/migrants play a vital

role in the US economy. As parents they play a central role in shaping household food behaviors. Unfortunately, lower diet quality and weight-gain have been identified as unintended consequences of im/migration among Hispanic populations (Ayala, Baquero, & Klinger, 2008; Oza-Frank & Cunningham, 2010; Pérez-Escamilla, 2011).

This context highlights the need to better understand the relationships among employment, time in the United States, and food related behaviors (e.g., preparation, procurement, and consumption) among Hispanic mothers. Even in households where mothers are employed and the spouse/partner is not, mothers typically invest more time in meal preparation and childcare responsibilities than fathers (Cawley & Liu, 2012). Accordingly, mothers' food-related time use has the potential to influence their own diets as well as those of family members. Family meals have been associated with numerous positive outcomes for youth, including increased fruit and vegetable consumption among adolescents (Gilman et al., 2000; Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, Story, Croll, & Perry, 2003; Videon & Manning, 2003) and lower prevalence of overweight – although

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: sarah.sliwa@tufts.edu (S.A. Sliwa).

evidence of longitudinal benefits of family meals on weight status is mixed (Fulkerson, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, & Story, 2008; Gable, Chang, & Krull, 2007; Taveras et al., 2012). Yet time is a constraint, and family meals are briefer and less likely when the mother is employed (Cawley & Liu, 2012; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2003). As there are only 1440 minutes in a day, time at work comes at the expense of other activities (Cawley, 2004).

Hispanic women have themselves noted that work contributes to feeling pressed for time, and have identified a busy, fast-paced, lifestyle in the US among factors contributing to changes in eating behaviors (Dubowitz et al., 2007; Lindberg & Stevens, 2011; Sussner, Lindsay, Greaney, & Peterson, 2008; Tovar et al., 2012). Increased demands on one's time are also believed to increase the reliance on convenience foods and fast food (Ayala et al., 2008; Van Wieren, Roberts, Arellano, Feller, & Diaz, 2011). These choices may have deleterious health consequences. Foods prepared away from home are frequently higher in total calories and fat than foods consumed at home (Bowman & Vinyard, 2004; Guthrie, Lin, & Frazao, 2002) and frequent fast food consumption has been associated with weight gain among adults (Pereira et al., 2005). In contrast, time spent in food preparation has been inversely associated with women's BMI (Zick, Stevens, & Bryant, 2011).

Through the multidimensional process of acculturation, im/migrants may learn, acquire, and select aspects of "host" practices while retaining preferences from their country of origin (Berry, 2003; Yeh, Viladrich, Bruning, & Roye, 2009; Zambrana & Carter-Pokras, 2010). The specific behaviors adopted likely vary by place and related contextual factors (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Longer time in the US and greater English language skills have been associated with greater self-reported dietary change (Roshania, Narayan, & Oza-Frank, 2008), lower diet quality, and higher prevalence of overweight and obesity among Mexican-American and other Hispanic populations (Ayala et al., 2008; Batis, Hernandez-Barrera, Barquera, Rivera, & Popkin, 2011; Pérez-Escamilla, 2011). It is theorized that the "obesogenic" environment encountered in the US (Giskes, van Lenthe, Avendano-Pabon, & Brug, 2011; Hill, Wyatt, Reed, & Peters, 2003) plays a role in the rising rates of obesity among im/migrant (Tovar et al., 2013). These relationships are not without nuance; dietary quality may improve with acculturation among Puerto Ricans (Van Rompay et al., 2012) for whom some evidence suggests that weight may trend downward over generations on the US mainland (Bates, Acevedo-Garcia, Alegría, & Krieger, 2008), although another study indicates a pattern of weight gain (Himmelgreen et al., 2004).

Both dietary acculturation and the timesaving strategies adopted by working mothers (Jabs & Devine, 2006; Jabs et al., 2007) can foster an eating pattern that features more readymade items and foods eaten away from home. These relationships may be especially relevant for Hispanics, who have the highest labor force participation rate of minority populations in the US (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012), and a high female-to-male earnings ratio (90% compared to 79% among whites) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), which may further incentivize women to join the workforce. Further, Mexican American women are over-represented in occupations that offer employees limited control and power (Allensworth, 1997), characteristics that may make it challenging to plan and prepare meals (Devine, Connors, Sobal, & Bisogni, 2003). Control over one's work schedule has been associated with family meal frequency among working mothers (Hill, Tranby, Kelly, & Moen, 2013).

This paper seeks to characterize how employment is associated with time spent in food preparation and family dinner among US-born and im/migrant Hispanic mothers, and to establish whether acculturation influences the relationship between employment and time spent in food preparation, or if these are independent processes. The central hypothesis is that employment and being US-born are inversely associated with time spent in food preparation

and family dinner, and that employment and nativity jointly influence food-related time use. A secondary hypothesis is that the association between nativity and food-related time use varies by Hispanic origin group. This information can be of use to researchers and practitioners seeking to make nutrition recommendations or to design interventions that resonate with the time-use decisions made by working mothers.

Methods

Data source

The American Time Use Survey (ATUS) is a nationally representative, continuous, cross-sectional survey that randomly selects participants from households that have completed their last round of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The ATUS oversamples households with children and/or a Hispanic householder.

ATUS designated respondents receive an advance mailer assigning them a specific interview day on which they are asked to recall the events of the previous 24 hours (from 4 am to 4 am) via computer-assisted telephone interviewing. Participants identify their primary activity – the main thing they are doing, where and with whom. Activities are coded using a three-tiered, hierarchical, system. Location of the activity and persons present during the activity (i.e., who was in the room with you, who accompanied you) are assigned "Where" and "Who" codes. Secondary activities (e.g., watching television while eating dinner) are not recorded through the ATUS, with the exception of secondary childcare. Detailed survey methodology has been published elsewhere (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

The Eating and Health (EH) Module, a five-minute segment that followed all ATUS interviews in 2006–2008, collected additional information on secondary eating and drinking, the respondent's responsibility for food preparation and grocery shopping, and other eating and health-related variables. The information about food-related roles in the EH Module was used to provide additional context for understanding cooking-related time investments. Preliminary analysis found that EH Module respondents did not differ significantly from the entire 2003–2011 ATUS sample across key demographics, employment characteristics, or eating-related behaviors.

We compiled demographic and time use variables of interest using the ATUS-X data extracting system for all survey years 2003–2011 (Abraham, Flood, Sobek, & Thorn, 2009). Analyses were conducted using complex survey procedures in Stata 10.1 (Stata Corporation, College Station TX) and applied the 2006 sample weight, to adjust for differential probabilities of selection (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

This research was reviewed and approved as an exempted use of secondary data by the Institutional Review Board at Tufts University.

Analytic dataset

The analytic dataset comprises women ages 18 to 65, of self-identified Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin, who lived with their own child <13 years old. Diary days that fell on holidays (New Year's Day, Easter, Memorial Day, 4th of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas; $n = 72$) and interviews flagged with data quality issues ($n = 23$), or included fewer than 18 hours of coded activity ($n = 12$) were excluded (Statistics Division, 2005). To focus the sample on respondents from Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, individuals whose birthplace was unknown, or who were born outside the United States, Mexico, Central or South America, or the Spanish-speaking Caribbean were excluded from the analysis ($n = 57$). Following the application of all exclusion criteria, the final sample included 3622

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