



Ineligible parents, eligible children: Food Stamps receipt, allotments, and food insecurity among children of immigrants[☆]

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Abstract

The Personal Responsibility, Work, and Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) made non-citizens ineligible for federally funded food assistance and reduced Food Stamp allotments (the amount of Food Stamps benefits provided) for households containing a mixture of citizens and non-citizens. Using the Survey of Program Dynamics, we assess the effects of PRWORA on household-level Food Stamps receipt, Food Stamps allotments, and food security among the children of non-citizens. We find that the children of non-citizens experienced more persistent and higher levels of food insecurity following PRWORA's enactment than the children of citizens. While declines in Food Stamps allotments substantially explain the disproportionately high levels of food insecurity among the children of non-citizens in the year following welfare reform, high levels of food insecurity continued as late as 2001 among the children of non-citizens on account of *both* low allotments and Food Stamps receipt among those in need of food assistance.

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1. Introduction

Changes in welfare policy during the 1990s restricted non-citizen's access to food assistance and may have increased food insecurity among non-citizens and their children. Food insecurity involves the limited or uncertain availability of food in a household—a condition resulting from household resource constraints (Bickel et al., 2000). Food insecurity among the children of immigrants is of policy significance because children of immigrants comprise the fastest growing segment of the US population under age 15 (Hernandez and Charney, 1998). Currently, the children of immigrants comprise one-fifth of all children in the United States (Van Hook and Fix, 2000) and 1 in 10 children live in a household with at least one non-citizen parent (Fix and Zimmermann, 2001). If children of immigrants are experiencing increasingly high levels food insecurity on account of reductions in Food Stamps eligibility, this could have long-term deleterious consequences for the physical and cognitive development of this already-disadvantaged population (Johnston and Markowitz, 1993; Morley and Lucas, 1997).

Enacted in 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) made most non-citizens with less than ten years of US residency ineligible for federally funded food assistance (for more details see Espenshade et al., 1997; Zimmermann and Tumlin, 1999). In addition, the rules under PRWORA specified that Food Stamp allotments (the amount of Food Stamps benefits provided) be reduced in proportion to the number of non-citizens living in the household. In the years following the enactment of PRWORA, Food Stamp caseloads and reciprocity levels dropped particularly sharply among non-citizens and their children (Borjas, 2002; Fix, 2001; Fix and Passel, 1999, 2002), and it is likely that allotment levels dropped as well. We evaluate here the relationships among declines in Food Stamps reciprocity, declines in Food Stamps allotments, and food insecurity levels among children of immigrants for the five years following PRWORA's enactment, paying particular attention to the children of non-citizens. Although the majority of children of immigrants remained eligible for Food Stamps following welfare reform for reasons explained below, the children of non-citizens experienced the greatest drops in Food Stamps reciprocity and thus may have become particularly vulnerable to food insecurity.

2. Background

Food Stamps reciprocity declined more for children of non-citizen parents than other children even though most of these children were not the intended targets of welfare reform. As of 1998, 83% of children living with two non-citizen parents and 88% of children living with a non-citizen single parent were US citizens (Fix and Zimmermann, 2001), and US citizen children, regardless of their parents' citizen-

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