Abstract

Are food stamps income or food supplementation?: A meta-analysis

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Over the 50-year history of the United States food stamp program (now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP), there has been sustained interest in whether recipients view food stamp benefits as income or as food supplementation. Understanding how food stamp participants treat such benefits is crucial to evaluating proposals concerning the future direction of the program; yet, studies that have attempted to answer this question have used very different methods and come to very different conclusions. This analysis provides a comprehensive literature review and, using meta-analytic methods, provides a systematic evaluation of prior studies to investigate sources of the diversity. This analysis explains some of the variation in previous study results, highlighting the impact that study design characteristics can have on conclusions regarding household use of food stamp income, and underscoring factors that researchers should take into account when evaluating the empirical evidence on how food stamp recipients treat benefits.

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