

The Food & Eating Module of the American Time Use Survey

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Food & Eating Module of ATUS

- ERS developed a module of questions to accompany the American Time Use Survey
- By adding a small number of questions, the ATUS data can be used to analyze the relationship among time use patterns and:
 - Eating patterns, nutrition, and obesity
 - Food assistance programs
 - Grocery shopping and meal preparationThe module is organized around these three themes.



Eating Patterns, Nutrition, Obesity

- Motivation—our research questions:
 - Are certain patterns of eating and of time use associated with obesity?
 - How does meal preparation time affect indicators of well-being?



Eating Patterns, Nutrition, Obesity

- Eating as a secondary activity

“We’re interested in finding out more about how people fit meals and snacks into their schedules. Yesterday, you reported eating or drinking between [fill times]. Were there any other times you were eating yesterday—for example while you were doing something else? About how long would you say you were eating while you were [fill activity]?”

Not including plain water, were there any other times yesterday when you were drinking any beverages? About how long would you say you were drinking while you were [fill activity]?”



Eating Patterns, Nutrition, Obesity

- Height and weight

Allows for the calculation of Body Mass Index (BMI)

“I’m going to switch topics and ask you a few final questions about your physical health that might affect how you use your time. In general, would you say your physical health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor? How tall are you without shoes? How much do you weigh without shoes?”

Note: Pregnancy screen for women age 18-50.

ATUS time diary will have information on the amount of time spent being active and the amount of time being sedentary.



Food Assistance

- Food stamps—our research questions:

Are food assistance recipients' time patterns different from those of non-participants? Does household composition matter? What does this mean for:

- Welfare to work
- Access to food stamp application and recertification
- Time costs of participation
- Thrifty Food Plan



Food Assistance

“In the past 30 days, did you or anyone in your household get food stamp benefits?”

This information will allow analysis of the time use patterns of food stamp recipients versus others, and in particular, non-participating low-income persons.



Food Assistance

- School meals—our research questions:
 - What are the time benefits of school meals?
 - What are the time use patterns of parents whose children participate in school meal programs versus others?



Food Assistance

- School meals—breakfast

“Please think back over the past week starting last Monday up to today, Monday. In the past week, did [Fill names of children] eat a BREAKFAST that was prepared and served at a school, a paid day care or Head Start center, or a summer day program? This question refers ONLY to BREAKFASTS prepared at the school or center—not meals brought from home.”

“Which children?”

Note: All households with children asked; no income screen.



Food Assistance

- School meals—lunch

“Please think back over the past week starting last Monday up to today, Monday. In the past week, did [Fill names of children] eat a LUNCH that was prepared and served at a school, a paid day care or Head Start center, or a summer day program? This question refers ONLY to LUNCHES prepared at the school or center—not meals brought from home.”

“Which children?”

Note: All households with children asked; no income screen.



Food Assistance

- Household income

This question asks if total household income before taxes was above or below 185% of poverty threshold, and if below, if household income was above or below 130% of poverty threshold.

The ATUS CATI software automatically calculates the 185 and 130 percent of poverty threshold based on the respondent's household composition.

Note: This is last question of Module due to sensitivity.



Food Assistance

- Household income con't.

Below 185% poverty threshold is income eligibility for WIC and for reduced-price school meals

Below 130% poverty threshold is income eligibility for food stamps and for free school meals



Grocery Shopping & Meal Preparation

- Food preparation and grocery shopping:

“I’d like to ask you a couple questions about food preparation. Are you the person who usually does the grocery shopping in your household?”

“Are you the person who usually prepares the meals in your household?”



Status of Module

- Module runs October 2005-December 2006, funded by ERS and NIH-NCI-Applied Research Program
- Module data available from BLS September 2007 along with 2006 ATUS data
- Request to run Module in 2007 and every other year afterwards
- Continued development of module questions



Possible Partnering Activities

- Funding assistance for module
 - estimated cost: \$400,000 for one year
- Funding for increasing ATUS sample of certain populations
- Research collaboration
 - FANRP competitive grants announcement in March 2006



Contact Information

- More info and updates:

www.ers.usda.gov/Emphases/Healthy/ATUS/

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