Could the Net Health Effect of Food Stamps be Negative?

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Therefore, food stamps, or essentially an increase in income, are hypothesized to affect (increase) both alcohol and cigarette consumption habits, are the efforts to improve health futile among this population? Food stamps still meet the fundamental purpose of alcohol consumed to substitution of alcohol for cigarettes. Policymakers can see that while food stamps promotes increased food spending, it also provides means to pick up another pack of cigarettes. Food stamp participants smoke over 2.5 times more cigarettes a day than those not on food stamps, and also had a higher rate of smokers.

### Results:

- **Tobit, Probit, and Double Hurdle Model Results:**
  - **Outcomes:** Alcohol grams consumed days 1 and 2 and average # of cigarettes consumed in the past 30 days
  - **Variables:** Ever been on food stamps, food stamp dollars received last, high school graduate, college graduate, female, married, & income
  - **Food stamps no significant effect on the amount of alcohol consumed.**
  - **Food stamp participants smoke almost 8 more cigarettes/day (tobit model):**
    - The larger the family, the fewer adult members who consume alcohol
    - Females consume less alcohol and cigarettes
  - **College graduates have a significantly lower average number of cigarettes daily, by as many as 29 with the truncated model**
  - **The average number of cigarettes smoked per day for all of the sample from the Tobit model is about 3.5:**
  - At nearly every income level, those on food stamps smoke more than those who are not (as shown in the figure above)

- **Summary Statistics by Food Stamp Participation (Treatment):**

### Conclusions:

If those on food stamps are still consuming alcohol and smoking even more cigarettes and assuming that restrictions do not change consumption habits, are the efforts to improve health futile among this population? Food stamps still meet the fundamental purpose of the program, but much is still unknown about how bad consumption habits can be transformed. Limiting food stamp dollars from being used to purchase alcohol and cigarettes has been unsuccessful, if not counterproductive. Further research would need to examine how food stamp participation results in fewer grams of alcohol consumed. Possible explanations could include anything from the type of alcohol consumed to substitution of alcohol for cigarettes.

Smoking is a prominent habit among food stamp participants. Obviously, restrictions on cigarette purchases with food stamp benefits have not translated to fewer smokers. Considering that smoking is a leading contributor to the main causes of death in the US, policymakers can see that while food stamps promotes increased food spending, it also provides means to pick up another pack of cigarettes.

### Key Statistics:

- Approximately 37% received food stamps in the past year
- 9-25% have had food stamps at some point in their life
- Average monthly payment to participating households was $120.59
- The average amount of alcohol consumed on day 1 of the examination by those on food stamps is lower than non-participants: 2.7 vs. 3.99 grams
- On day 2, both decreased consumption to 4.12 and 2.38 grams
- Food stamp participants smoke over 2.5 times more cigarettes a day than those not on food stamps, and also had a higher rate of smokers.

### Takeaway:

- Food stamp participants...
  - Consume 2.5 drinks more days out of the past year
  - Are less likely to drink and drink less overall
  - Are much more likely to smoke and smoke more cigarettes daily
  - Have a higher probability of food not lasting the whole month
  - Are unlikely to have a college degree
- Policies related to restricting the use of food stamps have complicated and unanticipated effects

### Data:

- National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 2007-2008
- 9,762 individuals were sampled using datasets: Demographics, Dietary (Total Nutrient Intakes – Days 1 and Day 2) and Questionnaires (Alcohol Use (ages 20+), Food Security, and Smoking – Cigarette (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2010)
- In the dietary portion of the survey, participants report their food consumption over the course of two days, which we used assuming it is the most reliable indicator of alcohol consumption

### References:


