Abstract: Estimating the Risk of Food Stamp Use and Impoverishment During Childhood

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Objective To estimate the lifetime risk that an American child will reside in a household receiving food stamps and, as a result, will encounter poverty and a heightened exposure to food insecurity.

Design Thirty years of longitudinal data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics survey data set.

Setting Nationally representative sample of the US population.

Participants Approximately 90 000 childhood years of information are pooled together to create a series of life tables that span the ages of 1 to 20 years.

Main Outcome Measure Self-reporting measure of whether survey households received the Food Stamp Program during the prior year.

Results Between the ages of 1 to 20 years, nearly half (49.2%) of all American children will, at some point, reside in a household that receives food stamps. Households in need of the program use it for relatively short periods but are also likely to return to the program at several points during the childhood years. Race, parental education, and head of household’s marital status exert a strong influence on the proportion of children residing in a food stamp household.

Conclusions American children are at a high risk of encountering a spell during which their families are in poverty and food insecure as indicated through their use of food stamps. Such events have the potential to seriously jeopardize a child's overall health.

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