



E-FAN-04-010

September 2004

Prototype Notebook

Short Questions on Dietary Intake, Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors

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Abstract

This report provides a compendium of 128 survey questions used in previous research to assess dietary knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors for low-income populations over the age of 18. The short questions or sets of questions on nine topics, including fruits and vegetables; grains, legumes, and fiber; variety; fat; calcium food sources; nonalcoholic beverages; knowledge, attitudes; and behaviors, are drawn from an extensive inventory and evaluation of available questions reported in the research literature. Each question is presented using a common template including the citations, data sources, and characteristics such as question reliability, validity, sensitivity to change, availability in other languages, mode of administration, use in populations with low-income and/or low-education levels, relation to nutrition and health outcomes, and availability of comparative data. This report is part of a larger ERS research effort to develop a common core set of questions to assess the dietary behavior impact of Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) on Food Stamp Program participants.

This report was prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., under a cooperative assistance agreement with the Economic Research Service. The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of ERS or USDA.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background. The Economic Research Service (ERS) contracted with Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) to develop a prototype notebook to be used by an expert panel at an ERS workshop entitled “Developing Common Core Survey Questions to Assess Key Dietary Behavior Outcomes of FSNE: Launching the Research Process.” The prototype notebook contains a selection of short questions or sets of questions on dietary intake (fruits and vegetables; grains, legumes, and fiber; variety; fat; calcium food sources; nonalcoholic beverages), knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, drawn from an extensive inventory and evaluation of available questions. The expert panel will use the selected questions in the prototype notebook as a starting point to develop and test a core set of questions to assess key dietary behavioral outcomes with the Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) audience.

Process. The literature search focused on research publications since 1998 that included U.S. adults 18 years of age and older and/or FSNE or low-income populations. However, several older surveys were reviewed to ensure that relevant topics were fully addressed. MPR project team members reviewed questions by critically examining and interpreting the available evidence and data and including this information in an inventory. The inventory incorporated not only the questions, but also the citations, data sources, and characteristics such as question reliability, validity, sensitivity to change, availability in other languages, mode of administration, use in populations with low-income and/or low-education levels, relation to nutrition and health outcomes, and availability of comparative data. To assist in evaluating the questions for inclusion in the notebook, MPR team members assigned a preliminary ranking to each question. Two senior members of the team independently reviewed the selected questions and achieved consensus on the final selections for the notebook, using their expert judgment to select questions from the inventory for inclusion based on readability, ease and mode of administration, question sequence, question structure or style, reference period, and balance across and within topic areas.

Results. MPR team members reviewed 48 survey instruments and inventoried 459 questions, or sets of questions, from 26 of these instruments. The most questions were available for the behaviors topic area, whereas the fewest were available for the nonalcoholic beverages topic area. To expand available questions on healthy weight for the expert panel’s use, 13 questions were included in the notebook at the request of ERS. These questions did not undergo the same intense review of testing and outcome criteria, and therefore were not ranked. The final prototype notebook includes 128 questions categorized by topic area.

Applications/considerations. As the expert panel selects questions for an instrument for use with the FSNE population, careful attention must be given to question format, lead-ins, response categories, and reference periods. It will also be necessary to consider whether questions can be “pulled out” from their set or module from another instrument and recombined. Finally, there were several topics or subtopics most in need of research and development based on how few useful questions were found: variety, moderation, portion size and portion control, nonalcoholic beverages, weight loss and maintenance, whole grains, and snacking related to television watching.