

Effects of Financial and Environmental Factors on Food Desert Residents' Food Purchasing and Consumption

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Background: While the disproportionate prevalence of obesity in low-income populations is well-documented, the reasons for the association are not clear. Research has shown that a set of interrelated factors affect low-income populations' ability to purchase healthy foods and may contribute to the disproportionate prevalence of obesity in low-income populations. Specifically, environmental factors such as the proximity of grocery stores, access to a car, cost of healthy foods, and receipt of food assistance have been identified as factors that influence low-income individuals' purchasing and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables (FFV). While these factors are commonly suggested as reasons for the higher prevalence of obesity in low-income populations, the evidence of their influence is inconsistent. **Objectives:** The purpose of this project is to assess whether there is an association between these factors in food deserts in the state of Florida. **Methods:** Door-to-door interviews of individuals living in food deserts in 3 counties in Florida ($N=1200$) gathered information about income, food purchasing, and FFV consumption. Data were analyzed to assess whether the hypothesized associations were found in the sample. **Results:** Poverty, food assistance, and spending were found to be associated with FFV consumption and shopping behavior, while car ownership and distance to grocery stores were not found to have a significant association with FFV consumption or food spending. **Conclusions:** The support of some of the hypotheses but not others reveals the need for further research on how environmental factors affect food purchasing and consumption behavior of individuals living in food deserts. In addition, identifying the factors that are and are not associated with higher frequencies of FFV consumption highlights the kinds of interventions that are more or less likely to improve nutritional status in low-income populations.