Work-family spillover, time use and food choices: perceptions and strategies of low income workers

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Presentation Goals

- Share insights from qualitative research on time use and food choices
- Suggest implications for research & policy
  - Time conceptualization
  - Consumption conceptualization
Grounded Theory Approach

- Understand workers’ perspectives of work, family roles, time, and food choices
- Understand workers’ strategies for integrating the time pressures from work and family demands and food choices
Conceptual Model
Work-Family Spillover and Time

INDIVIDUAL
CHARACTERISTICS

WORK
Social
Processes
Conditions

ROLE SPILLOVER &
INTEGRATION

FAMILY
Social
Processes
Conditions

FOOD CHOICES
Data: Qualitative

Qualitative interviews with purposive samples

1. Fruit and Vegetable Consumption
   51 multi-ethnic low/mod. income urban workers

2. Situational Eating
   30 low/mod income rural-urban workers
   (USDA/CSREES-preliminary)

3. Work-Family Integration
   60 multi-ethnic, low wage, urban working parents
   (NIH- beginning)
Data: Consumption Events

4. **Situational Eating**: 30 low/mod. income workers

   24-hr non-quantitative telephone recall of consumption events over 7 consecutive days

   (USDA-CSREES- preliminary)

   - Foods, beverages, water
   - Associated activities
   - Eating location
   - Food sources
   - People present
   - Values negotiated
Qualitative Findings: Strategies to beat the clock

- Skip
- Simplify
- Speed up
- Anytime, Anyplace Consumption
- Multi-task
- Take turns
- Anticipate
Qualitative Findings: Strategies to beat the clock

- Trade offs
  - Income – multiple jobs
  - Education – school at night
  - Social – more time with family, spouse
  - Recreation & physical activity
  - Personal energy- mental & physical
Qualitative Findings: Consequences of strategies

- Reduced self-efficacy about food choices
- Guilt – no time for family or health
- Compensation for time crunch by eating
- Health/weight problems
Consumption Locations

Food (n=825) & Beverage Only (n=195)

(preliminary estimates)

- Home
- Work
- Family/Friend Home
- Vehicle
- Sit-down Restaurant
- Fast Food Restaurant
- Event

Percent

August 04
Cornell Food Choice Research
Multi-tasking: Activities Associated with Food (preliminary)

- None reported
- Self-care
- Travel
- Read
- Plan/Get ready
- Relax/Sit
- Childcare
- Recreation/Walk
- Housework
- Work/School
- TV/Movie/Radio
- Social/Talking

Percent
Multi-tasking-Activities Associated with **Food & Beverage Only** (preliminary)

- None reported
- Self-care
- Travel
- Read
- Plan/Get ready
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- Recreation/Walk
- Housework
- Work/School
- TV/Movie/Radio
- Social/Talking

Percent

August 04 Cornell Food Choice Research
Work Patterns

- Food at work
  - Multiple food/beverage events at work
    - Food to break up boring job
    - Food for social contact
  - No food at work
    - Save time for other activities, get home on time
  - Eating/drinking to mark work/home transition
Summary: Personal food routines

- People construct food routines around work and family obligations
  - Non-standard consumption patterns
  - Multi-tasking
  - Anytime, Anyplace eating
Summary: Strategies have consequences

- In constructing their routines people make trade-offs
  - For income, education, family, taste, health, relaxation, recreation, sleep, social interaction
- Trade-offs have consequences
- Gender differences in perception of time pressures
Implications: Measurement of Time

- Traditional time and convenience measures may not capture the complex processes involved in people’s food choices
  - Conceptualization of time
    - Not time use but time pressures & energy demands
    - Time over which a person has control
Implications: Measurement of Consumption

- Conceptualization of consumption events
  - What constitutes reportable eating?
  - How do people define consumption events? Are meals/snacks meaningful?
  - How do beverages and water fit in?
  - How does time or place of consumption affect reporting?
  - How do associated activities affect reporting? What was primary activity? What was secondary?
Implications: Research Questions

- What are the costs of trade-offs?
  - Nutrition, health, food expenditures, self-efficacy, variety, physical activity, social connections

- Question assumptions of the Thrifty Food Plans

- How are gender roles related to food and eating continuing to evolve? What are the implications for individual, child, and family health?
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