

Understanding food insecurity from client surveys at food pantries



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Introduction

- Food distribution programs effectively lower regional poverty rate (Bohn et al. 2013)
- 5,500 clients visit a food distribution agency/week in Santa Cruz county (HIA 2014)
- Current surveys capture clientele demographics, but identifying causes behind visits will inform best practices to address food insecurity
- Santa Cruz is blend of students and community members, therefore causes behind visits have specific, local dimensions

Project Goals

- Determine the distinct Santa Cruz communities that utilize distribution programs
- Document the food preferences of these populations
- Identify specific factors contributing to student visits
- Identify differences in use of food assistance programs between student and non-student populations
- Compare generational differences in use of food assistance programs

Methods

- Used nonrandom purposive selection of 5 sites reflecting demographic range of clientele
- To incentive, offered monetary raffle
- To survey clientele, 2-3 surveyors/site implemented anonymous, online responsive surveys in Winter 2016
- Used *t*-tests and chi-squared analyses to compare students and non-student clientgroups

Survey

Asked questions related to:

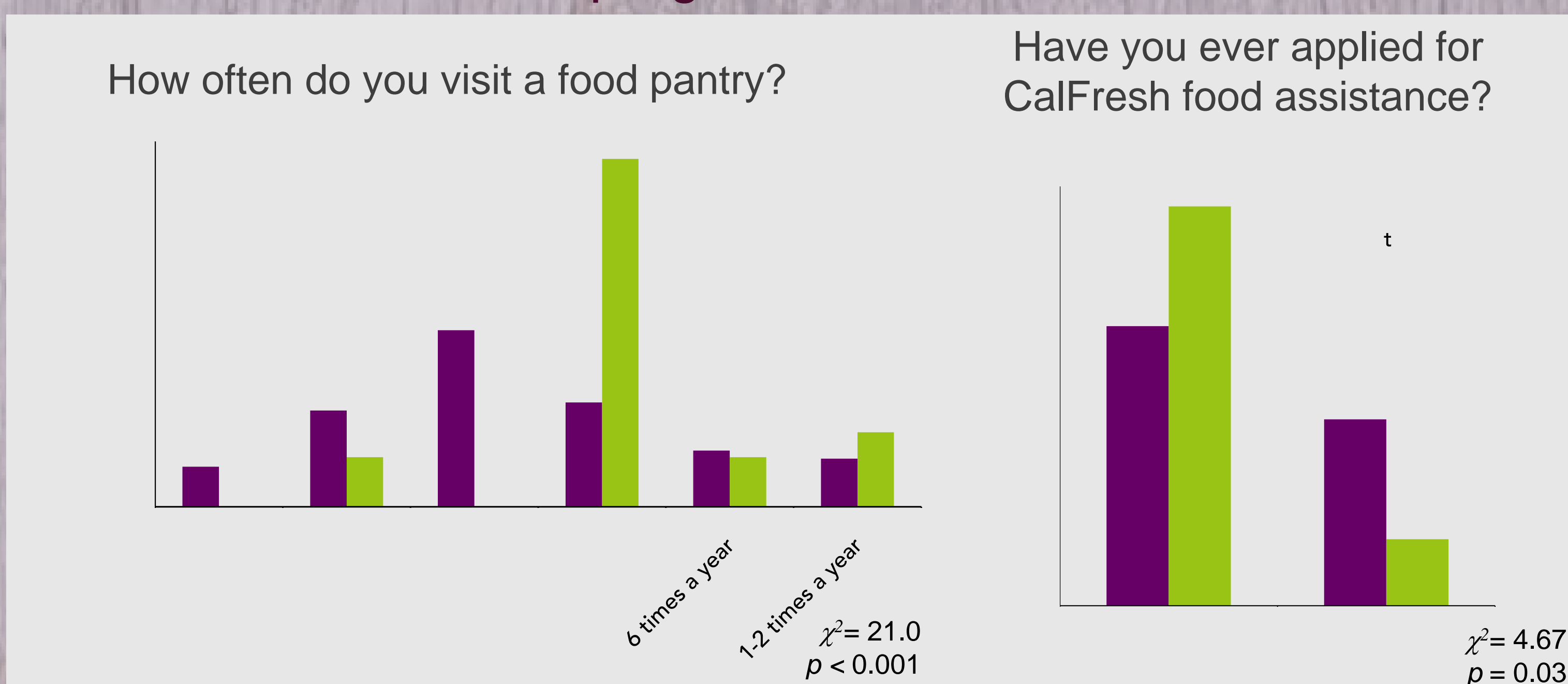
- Demographics
- Education & Student Status
- Income
- Housing & Commuting
- Experiences & preferences around food distribution
- Health Perceptions
- Public Assistance Utilization

Results and Outcomes

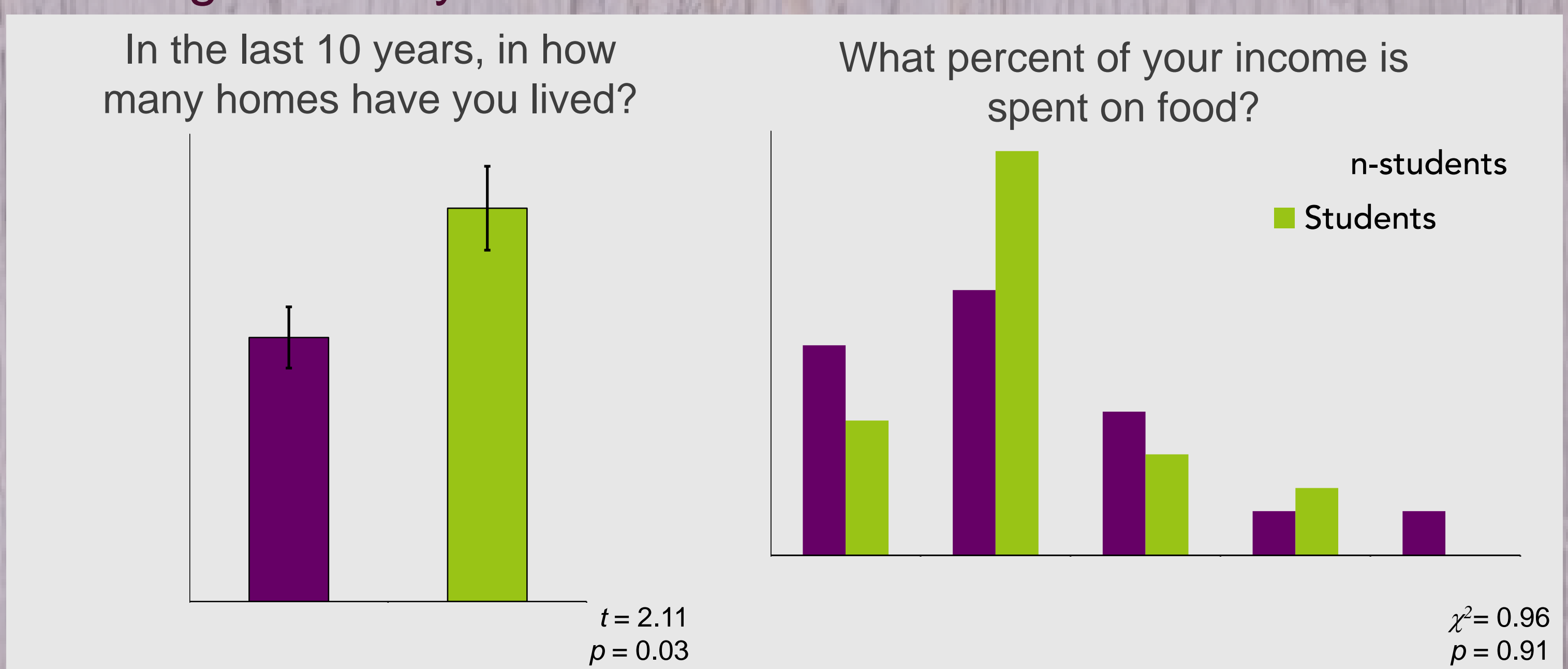
General findings

- 87 food pantry visitors completed the survey
- Three key demographic groups visit Santa Cruz food pantries: **students** (24% of respondents), **immigrants** (21%) and **retirees** (17%)
- Both students and non-students express primary preferences for 'fresh fruit and vegetables' and then 'dairy & eggs' in food aid programs

Use of food assistance programs



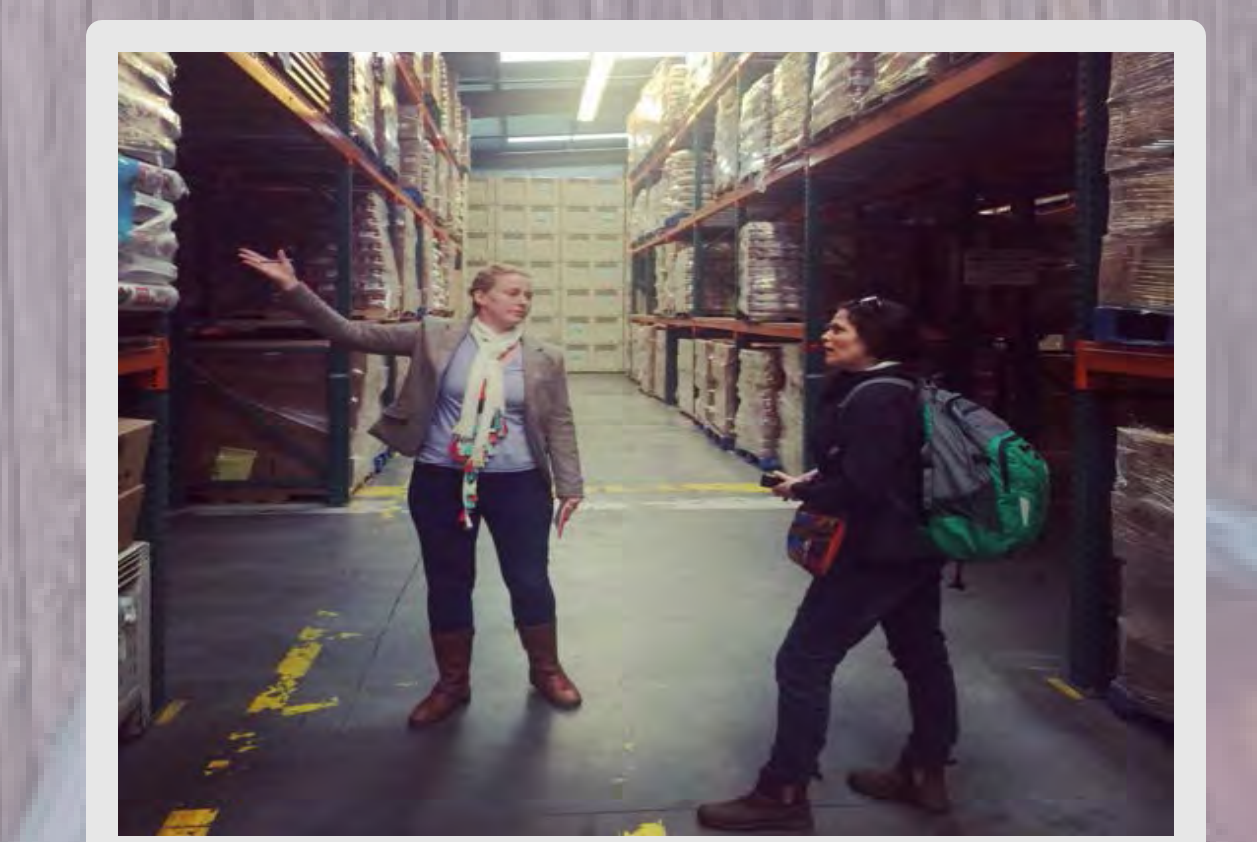
Housing instability and financial burdens



Generational differences in food assistance



Photos from our visit to Santa Cruz Second Harvest Food Bank, which distributes 8 million lb food/annually to >200 distribution agencies, including the participating sites in this project



Conclusions & Future Directions

- The need for assistance may be motivated by different stressors between clientele types: for example, student populations experience more housing insecurity than non-students, changing residence an average of 3.5 times
- Despite need, students utilize food assistance programs less than non-student populations
- A majority of student visitors report spending between 62-100%, of total income on combined food and housing costs, indicating limited allocation of funds for emergencies, medical bills, debt repayment, taxes, childcare, transportation, and other expenses
- Most survey respondents reported that their families did not use food assistance during their childhood – suggesting that the need for such programs may be new to them as adults, or that such programs did not exist/were not previously utilized
- Future studies should compare graduate & undergraduate experiences with hunger
- While homeless populations are food insecure, understanding visitation drivers and food preferences may require different methods as they did not participate substantially in our survey

Literature Cited

- Bohn, S. et al. (2013). The California Poverty Measure. *Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC)*. www.ppic.org
- Hunger in America Report (HIA). (2014). Report for Santa Cruz County. *Feeding America*. Prepared by WeStat & The Urban Institute. www.feedingamerica.org

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