

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Understanding Factors Related to Food Waste in The Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, And Children (WIC). A Qualitative Study in Indianapolis, Indiana

STUDENT: Huda F. Al Herz

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Objective: Food waste impact the environment and can be diminished through a change in individual behavior. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in 2010, the amount of food wasted was worth more than \$161 billion. In a developed country, the highest food waste level is from the household. While the issue of wasting food is a global epidemic, this study focuses specifically on Women Infant, and Children (WIC) participants in Indianapolis, IN. Anecdotally, many U.S. food organizations are concerned about the amount of food waste, particularly among the populations they serve.

The literature on food waste suggests that people's behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions regarding food waste are influenced by many factors, including adults' age, children's age, and educational background.

Aim: The purpose of this study is to understand behavior, attitudes, and factors that influence food waste among WIC program beneficiaries in Indianapolis, IN.

Also, this study explores the level of knowledge about food waste and its side effects.

Data Collection: To understand factors, knowledge, and behaviors toward wasting food, 22 members of the WIC population were recruited to participate in virtual focus groups. Virtual focus groups were audio-recorded, and the data was analyzed to categorize recurrent ideas between and within focus groups, identifying prevailing themes and patterns. Participants also completed a brief questionnaire to collect socio-demographic data.

Findings: The main themes were 1) factors influencing food waste in the household, 2) knowledge of the relationship between food waste and environment, and 3) challenges of food waste and advice presented to reduce food waste.

Conclusion: The major food waste issues at the households were the lack of planning and management. Participant's routines/habits of overbuying, overcooking, and lack of reusing or consuming leftovers were obvious.

Implications: Findings will provide valuable insights to be used in community nutrition among WIC clinics, other food organizations, and food waste management authorities to support education about food waste reduction. Further development for educational materials and programmatic needs ascertained in this study may be used to support food waste reduction within WIC clinics throughout the state and shared nationally. These resources will include improved education on a website, within handouts, or booklets to be shared externally. Findings can also be used to make suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Food Waste, Environment, WIC, and Theory of Planned Behavior.