"Those who need it the most": Equity framing in 2021 U.S. print news about food assistance

Presenter: Sarah Perez-Sanz MPH

part of the U.S. social safety net for decades, although not without controversy over who should receive benefits and in what form. These issues became even more significant with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many Americans relied on food assistance programs. We evaluated news coverage of these programs from the second year of the pandemic through an equity lens: during this time policy changes occurred at the state and federal levels to address food insecurity and accessibility to safety net programs.

Methods

- We collected articles about food insecurity or food assistance published by U.S. newspapers and wire services between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2021.
- 2. We developed and refined a coding instrument to capture patterns and themes in coverage informed by conversations with stakeholders.
- 3. We performed intercoder reliability testing to ensure that coder alignment did not occur by chance.

News coverage during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic did not explicitly connect food assistance programs to achieving health equity.



Most Oregon children soon will receive up to \$1,100 apiece to help buy food

Although marginalized groups were disproportionately impacted by food insecurity during the pandemic, the news media rarely framed food assistance as a way to address racial inequities.

THE MORNING CALL

Food insecurity rose significantly in households with children and among people of color, report finds

Results

- 1. Just 28% of articles argued that food assistance programs are needed because they help address inequities in food access. When arguments about equity appeared, they were most often in discussions of school lunch programs
- 2. Only 6% of articles mentioned people of color as recipients of food assistance programs, and even fewer (4%) specifically evoked addressing racial inequity as a rationale for program change.

Co-authors:

Hina Mahmood, Pamela Mejia, Sarah Perez-Sanz, Kim Garcia, Sarah Gollust, Jeff Niederdeppe, Erika Franklin Fowler, Laura Baum, Breeze Floyd Lori Dorfman

Website: www.bmsg.org

Facebook:facebook.com/BerkeleyMediaStudiesGroup

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