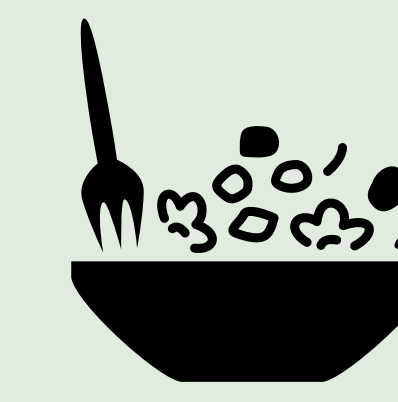


Utilization of Food Assistance Programs and Anxiety

Among UC San Diego Undergraduate Students

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OBJECTIVE

- To determine if there is an association between the utilization of food assistance programs and anxiety symptoms among undergraduate students at UC San Diego.

BACKGROUND

- Over 1/3 of undergraduate college students in the United States report being affected by anxiety.
- Anxiety is linked to the co-occurrence of other health and mental health disorders, disrupted sleep quality, and decreases in academic performance and overall well-being.
- Many undergraduate college students face food insecurity, which has shown to be associated with elevated levels of anxiety.

METHODS

A **cross-sectional study** was carried out through the distribution of an anonymous 18-item online survey. Data was collected over a one-week period.

- Participants consisted of a community sample from the undergraduate student population at the University of California (UC), San Diego.
- Distribution** of survey via social media and online discussion platforms (Instagram, Discord, Canvas), and email sent by the HWSPH department.
- Exposure Variable** (utilization of food assistance programs) was assessed using a series of questions on frequency of usage of various food assistance programs: never, daily, weekly, monthly.
- Outcome Variable** (anxiety) was assessed using a series of questions from the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7) questionnaire.
- Other demographic variables assessed: age, financial aid status, living arrangements, undergraduate major.

SPSS: Pearson correlation coefficient and linear regression analysis were used to measure the strength of the relationship between utilization of food assistance programs and anxiety among undergraduate students at UC San Diego.

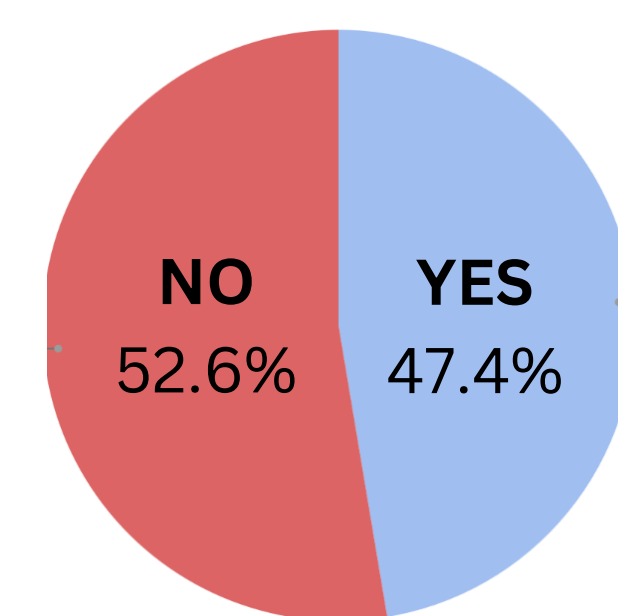
RESULTS



Sample Characteristics

- Total of **54 Participants** (n = 54)
- 66.7% of participants were aged between 20-21 years old.
- Health and Medicine-related undergraduate majors made up the largest group (25.9%), followed closely by participants pursuing a STEM discipline (20.4%).
- 55.6% of participants were seniors, 29.6% were juniors, 9.3% were sophomores, and 5.6% were first year students.
- 53.7% of participants reported living in off-campus housing; 27.8% reported living on-campus, and 18.5% of participants reported living with family at home.
- 73.7% of participants reported receiving financial aid.

Figure 1. Utilization of Food Assistance Programs



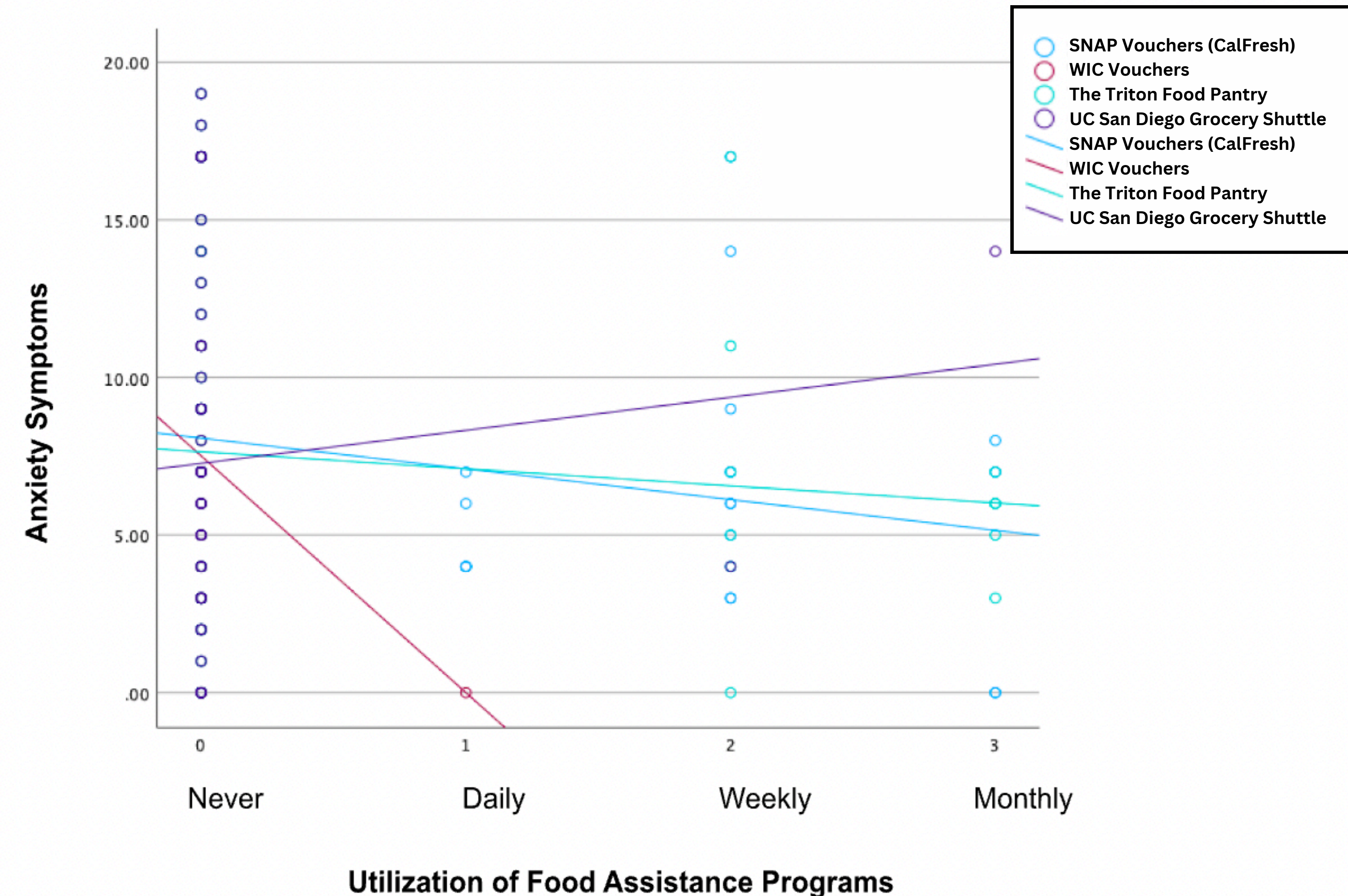
Exposure-Outcome Characteristics

$$r^2 = 0.075$$

$$p = 0.417$$

The relationship was not statistically significant, as indicated by a p-value > 0.05.

Figure 2. Correlation Between Utilization of Food Assistance Programs and Anxiety Symptoms



Pearson's correlation displays a **weak positive relationship** between the utilization of food assistant programs and anxiety symptoms among undergraduate students at UC San Diego.

CONCLUSION

- Survey results demonstrated a significant underutilization of food assistance programs among participants.
- GAD-7 results indicated that anxiety symptoms were notably common among the surveyed UC San Diego students.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Suggestions for **Future Studies:**

- Targeted recruitment strategies** could be used to ensure a higher representation of food assistance program users within the participant sample.
- eg. Posting flyers with the survey link around food pantries might help encourage the participation of frequent food pantry visitors.

Resulting Implications for **Future University Policies Related to Student Health** on College Campuses:

- There is a significant need to address student perceptions of both food insecurity and food literacy, in addition to the greater promotion of food assistance programs at an administrative level.
- University-led awareness campaigns** (eg. social media, informational sessions on campus), as well as **enhancing the visibility of signage and flyers that promote food assistance programs** in high-traffic areas around campus could help increase student awareness and utilization of food assistance programs.

Longitudinal studies that evaluate the impact of the association between food assistance program usage and anxiety over time could help us better understand the long-term benefits and drawbacks of such programs.