

SHORT ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the knowledge, behaviors, motivation, and barriers that rural low-income women experience in feeding their young children. Qualitative descriptive research was used to investigate the knowledge, motivations, and practices of these mothers. The sample included 18 mothers whose children were under the age of 54 months. All mothers were English speaking, over the age of 18, living at or below 185% of the federal poverty line, participating in federal food programs (Women, Infants and Children (WIC) or Food Stamps), and living in Missouri counties considered more than 50% rural. Four main categories emerged from interviews with the mothers: (1) what mothers want for their children and why; (2) challenges; (3) feeding strategies; and (4) sources of strength. A major finding was that the mothers very much wanted to do what is best for their children; they wanted to provide nutritious foods and role-model healthful eating habits in order to help their children avoid diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and cancer. Additionally, the results suggested that mothers who relied on family, friends, and government programs (e.g. WIC, Food Stamps, TANF) provided more healthful foods for their young children than those who did not. (Some of the latter group narrowly missed the qualification cut-off for the federal programs.) Like previous research, the current study indicates that, for this sample of mothers, poverty and rural living intersect to create major challenges (e.g., limited financial reserves, long distances to grocery stores) that make it difficult for them to provide the nutritious meals they desire for their children.