

Background

This report provides information on the participation patterns of infants and children who were enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, known as WIC, from Fiscal Years (FY) 2001 through 2003. Information on the dynamics of WIC participation leads to a better understanding of overall trends in the WIC caseload and the factors that affect participation.

The study focused on four aspects of WIC participation by infants and children—entry, exit, continuity of participation, and re-entry. These events were examined in relation to the age of the infants and children, the characteristics of their mothers, and other broad socioeconomic factors.

In FY 2001 through FY 2003, WIC served an average of 5.7 million infants and children and 1.8 million mothers each month. Average monthly participation has grown to 6.5 million infants and children and 2.2 million mothers in FY 2008. The proportion of total participants who are infants and children has been consistently around 75 percent.

Findings

WIC Entries:

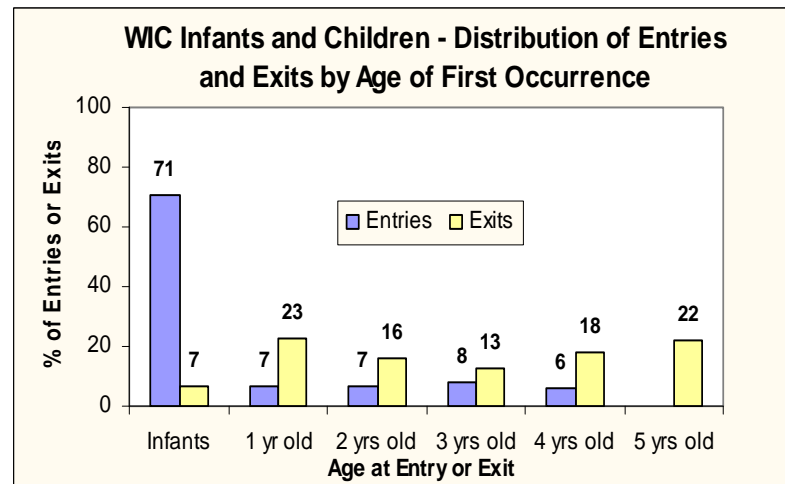
- **For infants and children, about 70 percent of their WIC entries occurred before age 1.** This is similar to the proportion found in a similar study based on data from the early 1990s.
- **A decrease in income combined with enrollment in another public assistance program had the largest positive effect on WIC Program entry.** Compared to those living in families that did not experience a decrease in income and also did not enter another assistance program, infants were six times more likely to enter WIC after these changes and

children in these families were five times more likely to enter WIC.

- **Newborns living in households receiving food stamp benefits were more likely to enter the WIC Program than those not receiving these benefits.** There was also a strong association between participation in WIC and Medicaid among infants and children.
- **Several characteristics of the child's mother were associated with participation in WIC by the infant or child.** Infants and children whose mothers were Hispanic, under age 25 years old, never married, or did not graduate from high school or obtain a GED were more likely to enter WIC.
- **Eligible infants and children living in the Western Region were significantly more likely to enter WIC than all other FNS regions, except the Midwest.**

WIC Exits:

- **Exits from the program by infants and children occurred at all ages.** However, exits were somewhat higher when infants transitioned from the infant to the child WIC food package and at age 5 when their WIC eligibility ended.



- **An income increase combined with an exit from another public assistance program was a significant determinant of WIC exits.**
- **Children enrolled in Medicaid were more likely to stay on WIC longer than those not enrolled in Medicaid.**

WIC Re-entries:

- **Reentry among WIC participants was relatively rare.** Less than 10 percent of children exited and reentered WIC within a 2-year period.

Continuity of WIC Participation:

- **In any 2-year period, about one-third of infants and children participated continuously across the 2 years.** On average, infants and younger children participated for about 20 months in the 2-year period, and older children participated for about 16 months.

Data Source

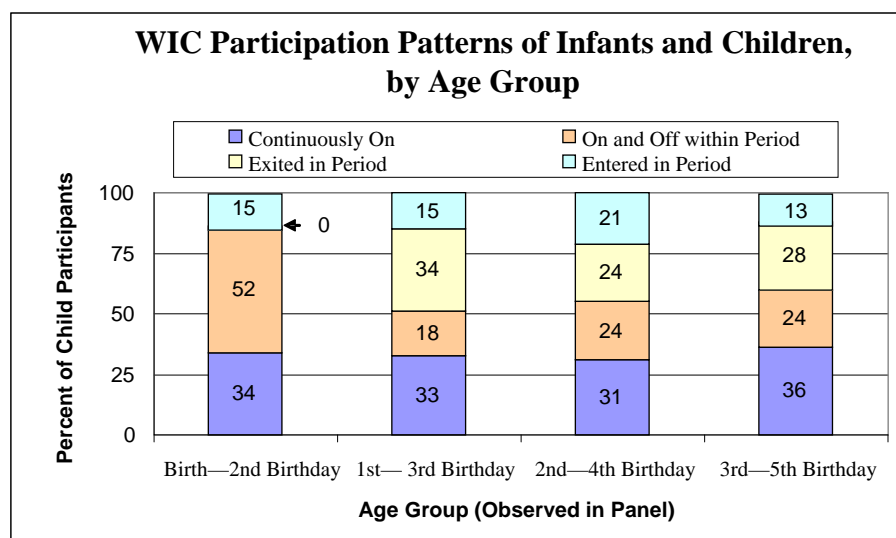
This study is based on the 2001 Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). SIPP is a nationally representative longitudinal survey that is conducted every 4 months over a 3-year period for approximately 5,000 households. The interview asks for detailed data for each of the prior 4 months on household composition and economic circumstances, information that is sufficient to determine income eligibility for WIC as well as identification of WIC participants.

For Additional Information

Castner, Laura A, James Mabli, and Julie Sykes. *Dynamics of WIC Program Participation*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., for the Food and Nutrition Service. March 2009. (Available online at www.fns.usda.gov/fns.)

Acknowledgement

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