

## **IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO COMPLETING A COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAM ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY: A PILOT STUDY**

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Food insecurity can lead to poor health outcomes, low nutrient intakes, cognitive problems, mental health issues, and various other health problems. One way that Baton Rouge addresses this problem is by providing a community wellness program which offers free fresh food, education, and community support to food insecure individuals. The program offers eligible individuals to participate in cooking classes, nutrition classes, and grocery store tours. Many participants enroll in the program; however, only approximately one-third complete the program. Studies have reviewed successful programs centered on cooking-related interventions designed to alleviate food insecurity. However, there is limited research exploring the barriers to intervention participation and program completion for this specific population. Therefore, the purpose of this pilot study was to assess barriers to completion which contribute to poor retention rates. After content validity testing, the survey was utilized to assess participants' reasons for not completing the nutrition program. All program participants were eligible for the study. A list of participants and telephone numbers was provided by the program director, and each participant was called. After verbally consenting to the study, each participant answered four closed-ended questions and four open-ended questions. Overall, participants enjoyed the hands-on experience and resources provided to them, but commented about the length of the class. Main barriers included lack of transportation to the program site, lack of reminders and/or forgetfulness about upcoming nutrition classes, or other personal issues. Participants suggested increasing communication via email or text message for upcoming class reminders, and offering multiple cooking class times to provide flexible hours. Results of this study can be used to identify associated barriers for this specific population and identify ways to improve program participation rate by providing appropriate resources for success.