

Chapter 6

UI and SNAP as a Safety Net during the Great Recession

Evidence from Georgia

Lakshmi Pandey
Peter Bluestone
Alex Hathaway
Georgia State University

Sarah E. Larson
University of Central Florida

Erdal Tekin
American University, IZA, and NBER

Two groups of programs make up the backbone of the United States' social safety net: 1) social welfare and 2) social insurance. Social welfare programs include Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These programs base eligibility for benefits on means testing that requires beneficiaries to have income sources below a certain threshold. Social welfare programs provide relief to low-income households, and there is evidence that the pool of eligible beneficiaries increases during difficult economic times like the Great Recession. In contrast, social insurance programs, such as Unemployment Insurance (UI) and social security retirement benefits, take an individual's contributions to the program into account. These programs are based on earned eligibility and require that certain events occur, such as losing a job or reaching a certain age, before one qualifies for benefits. Although social insurance programs are not specifically designed to shield individuals

against recessions, they typically serve the populations that are the most vulnerable to economic downturns—primarily the elderly, the unemployed, and the disabled. Between 2007 and 2010, the aggregate spending in the main safety-net programs rose from \$1.6 trillion to \$2.1 trillion, and caseloads grew from 276 million to 310 million recipients (Moffitt 2013). The largest expansion in the social safety net came from SNAP, EITC, and UI, which collectively accounted for nearly a third of the increase in spending on social programs during the Great Recession.

SNAP is the largest federal assistance program, providing food access to a range of eligible families and individuals. Because of its entitlement nature, the caseload for SNAP grew tremendously nationwide over the past decade, with about one in every seven Americans receiving benefits at the height of the Great Recession. Furthermore, in early 2009, SNAP benefits were increased as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and states were encouraged to relax eligibility rules, further contributing to the growth in caseloads (Moffitt 2013). Other research has found that food expenditures for low-income families increased by about 5.4 percent from 2008 to 2009, while those families' food insecurity declined by 2.2 percent (Nord and Prell 2011).

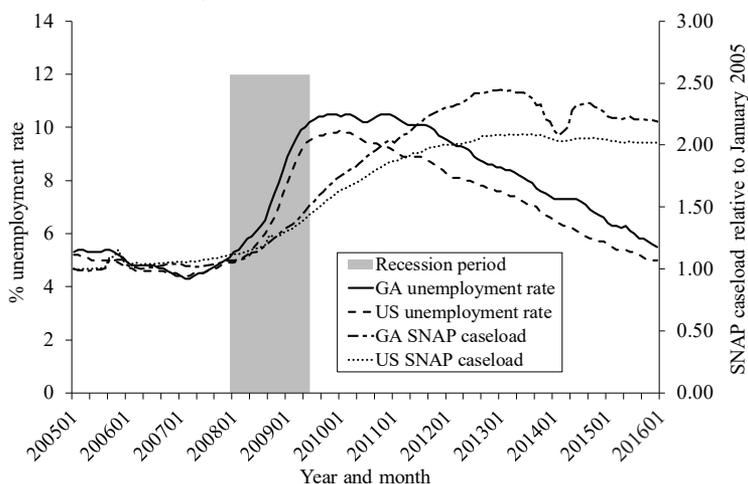
Unemployment insurance provides temporary, partial earnings replacement to involuntarily unemployed persons with sufficient recent employment and earnings to qualify. The duration of regular UI benefits is 26 weeks in most states, although several states including Georgia have altered the UI benefit duration cap in recent years. An additional 13 weeks or more may be provided under the Extended Benefits (EB) program if the unemployment rate in a state rises above certain levels. During recessions, the federal government often temporarily extends the standard UI program. In response to the Great Recession, UI benefits were extended to 99 weeks in many states between 2009 and 2012 (Mazumder 2011).

The Great Recession, which lasted from December 2007 to June 2009, resulted in shrinking economic output and generational highs

in unemployment. All states felt its impact, but some, like Georgia, were hit particularly hard and felt lingering effects long afterward. Georgia's unemployment rate more than doubled, from 5.1 percent in December 2007 to 10.5 percent in October 2009 (Figure 6.1), and the number of job seekers soared from about 250,000 to 503,000. At the height of the Great Recession, Georgia lost about 26,000 jobs every month (Tharpe 2012). Between December 2007 and June 2009, the state lost nearly 340,000 nonagricultural jobs, the sixth largest drop in the country; moreover, this job loss represented more than 8 percent of the state's employed workforce and was the eighth largest proportional decline in the country. In addition, Georgia's recovery was particularly sluggish: the state lost about 62,000 jobs, the third most of any state, during the eight months after the Great Recession officially ended in June 2009.

By 2017, the economic outlook for the state had improved considerably, driven by growth in housing construction and employ-

Figure 6.1 Unemployment Rate and SNAP Caseload (relative to January 2005)



SOURCE: Georgia Department of Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services; Bureau of Labor Statistics.

ment (Heaghney 2016). Although the unemployment rate has fallen steadily since the Great Recession, it has not returned to prerecession levels and remains above the national average. The last time the state had an unemployment rate below the United States' average was in July 2007.

Georgia is an ideal setting in which to study the interactions of SNAP and UI because the state has struggled economically in the wake of the Great Recession. In this chapter, we examine the individual and joint roles that SNAP and UI played in protecting Georgians against the full impact of the Great Recession. Our analysis provides insight into the relationship between SNAP and UI caseloads from December 2006 to December 2014, with a particular emphasis on the differences between the pre- and postrecession periods as well as the various factors that may have influenced these changes. In addition, the trends in reliance on these programs vary by demographic factors, and we examine how age, gender, and race have affected recovery. To help residents during future economic downturns, we also discuss lessons learned about SNAP and UI reliance in Georgia that can aid in formulating public policy targeting the groups most severely affected by the Great Recession.

EXISTING LITERATURE

The literature discusses the extent to which social safety net programs like SNAP and UI act individually and in tandem to provide relief during times of economic hardship. Most of the available evidence comes from studies using survey data at the national level (e.g., Anderson, Kirlin, and Wiseman 2012; Bitler and Hoynes 2013). For example, Prell (2013) uses data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey from 2004 to 2009 on households' multiprogram or joint participation patterns in SNAP and UI. The author finds that 14.4 percent of SNAP households also received UI in 2009; at the same time, 13.4 percent of UI households

received SNAP. The SNAP participation rate among eligible individuals rose from 56 to 69 percent from 2003 to 2007 (Andrews and Smallwood 2012; Miller 2013). Using panel data from the nationally representative Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) from 2000 to 2011, Anderson, Kirlin, and Wiseman suggest that the extended length of unemployment spells during the Great Recession was a major contributor to increased participation in both programs.

Furthermore, Gould-Werth and Shaefer (2014) also use panel data from SIPP to evaluate changes in the joint participation in SNAP and UI by job losers between 2000 and 2011. Their results show that more people applied for both SNAP and UI during the Great Recession and that the joint recipients came from higher income strata. Han (2015) uses longitudinal data from Wisconsin to define joint recipients as those who collected SNAP during a UI benefit spell as well as those who sought alternative social assistance options after exiting the UI program. Han concludes that, before and after the Great Recession, a large proportion of SNAP/UI joint recipients continued to rely on SNAP after exiting UI. SNAP eligibility requirements were also relaxed during the Great Recession, indicating that the safety net programs were responsive to economic change.

Several researchers have estimated the impact of UI and SNAP on poverty and employment and evaluated the characteristics of program recipients (Ben-Shalmon, Moffitt, and Scholz 2011; Rosenbaum 2013; Tiehen, Jolliffe, and Gundersen 2012). Tiehen, Jolliffe, and Gundersen find that SNAP spending represented only 0.5 percent of the gross domestic product but was estimated to reduce poverty in the United States by 16 percent. Over the long term, the number of SNAP families receiving benefits from multiple programs has fallen because of the decline in the TANF caseload, offsetting participation increases in programs such as Supplemental Security Insurance, Social Security Disability Insurance, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (Moffitt 2014).

Unlike much of the previous research, which relied on national surveys based on self-reported information, our data are drawn from

state administrative records, which are largely free of measurement or reporting error. Our analysis builds on similar work of O’Leary and Kline (2014) and Heflin and Mueser (2013), who provide insight into the roles that SNAP and UI played during the Great Recession in Michigan and Florida, respectively. O’Leary and Kline discover that SNAP participation is negatively correlated with meeting income and job separation eligibility requirements for UI. In contrast, Heflin and Mueser find that the number of families in Florida utilizing SNAP and UI surged during the Great Recession, and that the share of UI grew in relative importance. However, the authors conclude that only a minority of those joining the SNAP program also collected UI benefits.

The Great Recession not only affected the size of the caseloads for SNAP and UI but also may have altered the mix of participating individuals and households along dimensions of income, education, and other demographic characteristics (Finifter and Prell 2013). For example, in a state with a sharp increase in unemployment, the working-age population and children may be hit the hardest, whereas in a state with a large retired population, the effects of a recession would likely be different. Analyses using national data assume these compositional changes are uniform across states, potentially masking interesting patterns unique to each state. For instance, during the Great Recession, Iowa, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia had significantly higher SNAP participation rates than the national average (Cunnyngham 2011). In contrast, the economies of states like North Dakota and Wyoming did not feel the impact of the Great Recession as strongly, as measured through SNAP participation rates, and their participation rates were in the bottom third of the nation. Additionally, by virtue of the size of their economies and populations, some states contributed more to the overall economic activity in the country than others, masking the influence of smaller states. Understanding how individual states fared during the Great Recession can help state policymakers tailor programs to the specific needs of their citizens.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Our data on SNAP and UI individual benefits were obtained from the administrative case records maintained by the respective state agencies in Georgia. Monthly data on SNAP recipients came from the Georgia Department of Human Services' Division of Family and Children Services. Weekly UI benefit data were obtained from the Georgia Department of Labor.¹ Our main analysis period for SNAP is from October 2004 to July 2014, while the benefits data and wage records from the UI universe cover January 2006 to September 2015. Most analyses are limited to individuals between the ages of 18 and 64.

The SNAP data include monthly benefits and reported income as well as some demographic and geographic characteristics of all eligible individuals and households. Because SNAP benefits are provided to the household as a unit, we conduct our analyses at the household level under the assumption that resources—including earned income and SNAP and UI benefits—are pooled at the household level and shared by all members of the household. SNAP benefits are typically disbursed monthly; therefore, our unit of analysis is either the case-month or the household-month. Following the convention in the literature, in constructing SNAP spells—periods when individuals receive continuing benefits—we treat single-month interruptions in SNAP participation as continuous benefit coverage (Heflin and Mueser 2013). If an interruption in benefits lasted for more than a month, we assume that a new spell had begun.

The UI benefit data contain all covered employers in the state of Georgia and incorporate the amount and duration of benefits and the preprogram wages for up to five quarters. Unfortunately, the UI benefit file does not contain the demographic characteristics of recipients. Note that we only have data on UI benefit recipients, not the entire population of those who filed UI applications.

RESULTS: THE EFFECTS OF THE GREAT RECESSION ON SNAP AND UI PARTICIPATION IN GEORGIA

In this section, we detail the results from our analysis of Georgia's SNAP and UI administrative data from January 2006 to September 2015. The first subsection provides an overview of the trends in SNAP caseload and unemployment rates for Georgia compared to the nation. Focusing then on the state of Georgia, the second subsection looks at the changes in SNAP and UI participation through new program spells over time. The third subsection assesses how substantial a role these benefits played in the overall income of Georgia families and how policy changes affected benefits and, therefore, income sources. In the fourth subsection, SNAP entrants and leavers are evaluated for their sources of income and reliance on UI at the beginning and end of a SNAP spell. Next, in the fifth subsection, we consider the influence of demographic factors and break down how age, gender, and race affect program participation. We pull together the important results of our analysis in the sixth and final subsection. Ultimately, both programs acted as vital safety-net programs and saw a surge in caseloads during the Great Recession. While UI rebounded relatively quickly to prerecession levels for several reasons, SNAP has struggled to reduce its caseload.

Labor Market Context of Analysis

When comparing Georgia to the nation, we see that the Great Recession had a pronounced impact on that state's relative SNAP caseloads and unemployment rates, pushing Georgia above the national averages. As Figure 6.1 demonstrates, the SNAP caseload and unemployment rate in Georgia began to rise more quickly than in the United States as a whole during the Great Recession. The period afterward exhibited slow recovery, especially in Georgia, as the state maintained a higher SNAP caseload and unemployment rate than the national average through the end of 2015. In contrast, prior to the

Great Recession, the SNAP caseload and unemployment rate in Georgia closely tracked the nation's as a whole.

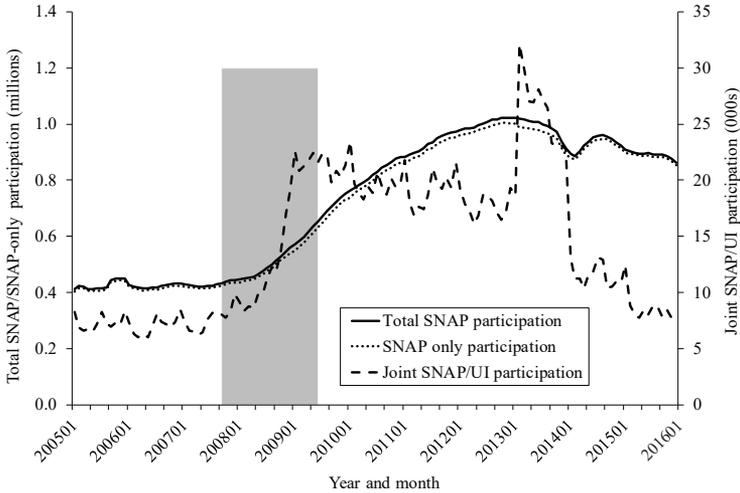
Georgia's SNAP caseload, or participation, has remained above the national average since 2008, with usage peaking in January 2013 at 2.45 times that of the January 2005 level. This peak occurred sooner than the national high point in March 2013 and represented a considerably larger increase: the United States peaked at 2.09 times the January 2005 nationwide level. For both Georgia and the United States, however, SNAP participation rates remained elevated through 2015 at rates almost twice their 2005 levels, despite declines in the unemployment rates.

At the onset of the Great Recession, Georgia's unemployment rate increased faster than the U.S. average, peaking at 10.5 percent in October 2010 and remaining above 10 percent until October 2011. By comparison, the U.S. unemployment rate peaked at 9.9 percent in January 2010 and fell steadily thereafter. To illustrate the difference, Georgia's last month of greater than 10 percent unemployment was September 2011, when the U.S. unemployment rate had already dropped to 8.7 percent. The unemployment rates for both continued to fall after the Great Recession's official end in June 2009, and by October 2015, Georgia's unemployment rate was 5.7 percent, still above the U.S. average of 5.0 percent. While the decline in unemployment was good news for the state, some of the recovery was due to lower labor force participation rather than increased job creation, as well as to changes in unemployment insurance policies, discussed below.

Joint Receipt of SNAP and UI

From this point on, we focus our analysis on Georgia's programs. SNAP and UI play an important role as safety net programs and, as such, responded to the economic decline during the Great Recession with substantial increases in enrollment. Figure 6.2 tracks the monthly total number of SNAP recipients as well as those who received only SNAP benefits and those who jointly received SNAP and UI benefits

Figure 6.2 Georgia SNAP Participation: SNAP Only and Joint SNAP/UI



SOURCE: Georgia Department of Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services; Georgia Department of Labor.

in the same month. Before the Great Recession, total SNAP participation was relatively flat, while joint SNAP/UI participation displayed cyclical ups and downs. When the Great Recession hit in late 2007, SNAP enrollment increased steadily, but joint SNAP/UI enrollment saw a significant jump, reaching the highest share of total SNAP recipients during that time. After the Great Recession, total SNAP enrollment maintained its steady incline until late 2012, and through to the middle of 2015 it remained more than double the 2005 participation level. In contrast, joint SNAP/UI enrollment in 2015 (7,800) was roughly the same as it had been in 2005 (8,300).

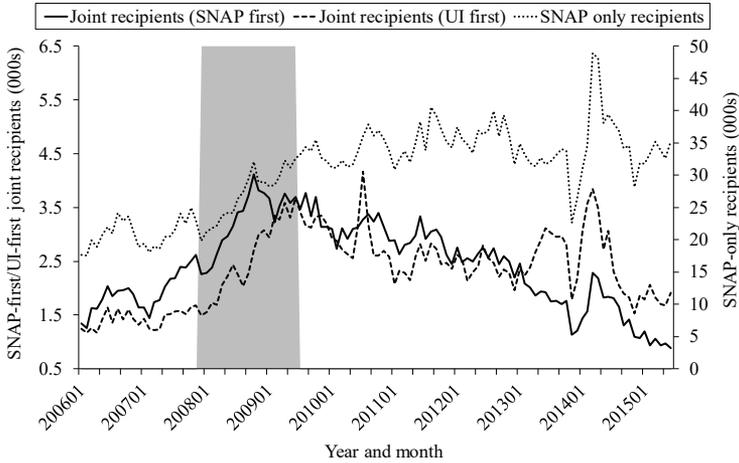
Before the Great Recession, total SNAP participation in Georgia hovered above 425,000, but in its wake, participation more than doubled, and it remained above 800,000 from April 2010 through the end of the study period. In November 2012, total SNAP recipients in the state peaked at over 1.02 million individuals; in comparison, the

joint SNAP/UI group reached approximately 32,000, or 3 percent of total SNAP recipients, in February 2013. As a share of total SNAP recipients, though, joint enrollment peaked at 4 percent in January 2009, due to a marked increase in UI participation during the Great Recession. Because joint SNAP/UI enrollment represents a small proportion of all SNAP recipients, SNAP-only participation closely mirrors total SNAP participation throughout the time line.

Next, we break down the joint SNAP/UI group by the program in which recipients first enrolled. Those who enrolled in UI before SNAP likely had adequate work histories to be eligible for benefits. Those first on SNAP likely had an income low enough to qualify for SNAP but not UI, later becoming unemployed to qualify for UI. The SNAP-only group would include low-income individuals who remained employed as well as those who were unemployed but lacked the work history necessary for UI benefits. In Figure 6.3, the time line shows new SNAP spells per month for SNAP-only recipients and two groups of joint SNAP/UI recipients based on first-program enrollment. New spells for SNAP-only recipients vastly outnumber those for joint enrollees. (Note that there were some technical irregularities with the SNAP data in 2013 and 2014; thus, it is likely that new spells for SNAP-only recipients peaked at 40,582 per month in August 2011.) For the two groups of joint enrollees, the peaks were roughly the same at about 4,100 per month. Figure 6.3 also demonstrates that SNAP-first and UI-first spells move in a similar fashion, rising sharply during the Great Recession and generally declining afterward as UI recipients find jobs or otherwise exhaust their UI benefits. In contrast to SNAP-only, the new spells per month for joint enrollees generally returned to prerecession levels by 2015.

We next use Georgia's UI program data to evaluate new UI spells per month for UI-only, UI-first, and SNAP-first recipients (Figure 6.4). UI-only peaked at around 42,000 new spells per month in the midst of the Great Recession. The UI-first and SNAP-first groups mirrored Figure 6.3, showing joint program recipients by the program in which they first enrolled. The joint recipients in Figure 6.4 more than

Figure 6.3 New SNAP Spells per Month (from SNAP universe)

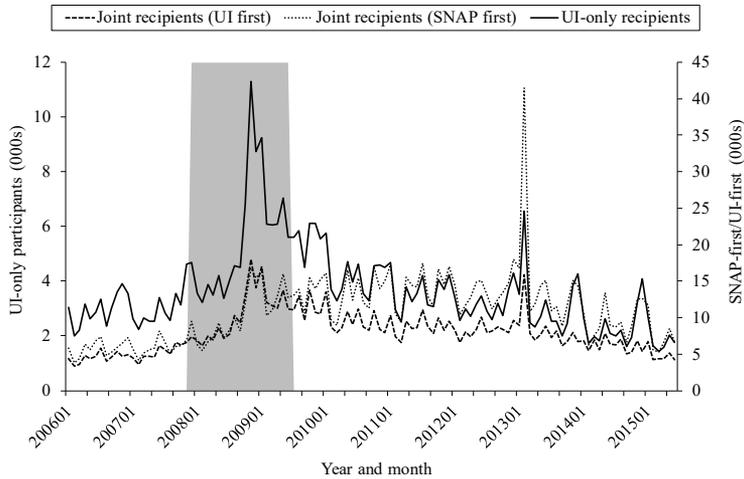


SOURCE: Authors’ computations based on Georgia program administrative data.

doubled during the Great Recession but, overall, maintained more stability than the joint groups in Figure 6.3 from the SNAP data set. UI-first and SNAP-first had a similar number of new spells per month before the Great Recession and maintained comparable increases through 2009. As recovery began, new spells for SNAP-first began to outpace those for UI-first. (Again, note that the February 2013 spike in SNAP-first may be due to technical irregularities; we disregard the spike in our analysis.) By mid-2015, both of the joint recipient groups had fallen back to prerecession levels.

Despite the return to prerecession UI participation levels, not all of the improvement can be attributed to UI recipients’ finding jobs. Some of these declines seen in Figures 6.2 through 6.4 may be due to individuals leaving the labor force completely during the prolonged recovery, and policy changes at the federal and state levels likely played a significant role as well. At the federal level, the Emergency Unemployment Compensation Program of 2008 (EUC08) and the Extended Benefits (EB) program temporarily lengthened the maxi-

Figure 6.4 New UI Spells per Month (from UI universe)



SOURCE: Authors’ computations based on Georgia program administrative data.

num duration of UI benefits and shifted program costs to the federal government; EB splits the cost of unemployment compensation evenly between the federal government and the states, but under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009, 100 percent of the burden was shifted to the federal government (Isaacs 2016). Both EUC08 and EB expired at the end of 2013.

At the state level, Georgia enacted considerable unemployment policy changes in 2012. The legislation decreased the maximum potential UI benefit from 26 weeks (until 2011, all states used a limit of at least 26 weeks, with some setting an even higher limit) to a cap ranging from 14 to 20 weeks depending on the state unemployment rate (Isaacs 2016). This reduction would affect federal program benefits as well, which use state parameters in their calculation of benefits. Georgia’s new policy restricts the duration of benefits to 14 weeks for statewide unemployment rates at 6.5 percent or less and adds another week of benefits for each 0.5 percent increase. The maximum benefit

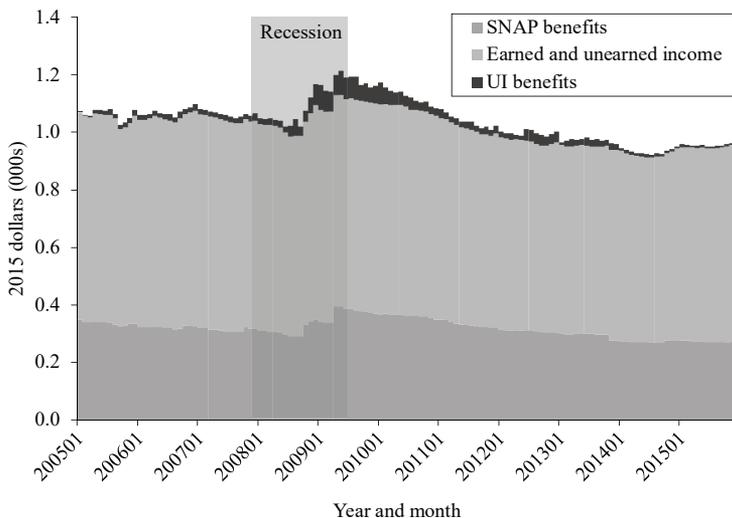
of 20 weeks would be applicable at 9.0 percent unemployment or higher.²

While these changes potentially explain the decline in new UI spells after the spikes of 2008 and 2009, they may also explain the lack of recovery (decline) in the SNAP caseload after the Great Recession. Georgians who exhaust their UI benefits and remain unemployed or underemployed may reach a point where they enroll in SNAP for food access. Combined with the policy changes in the UI landscape, this scenario may have become a reality for many individuals after 2012 and 2013. Furthermore, SNAP also saw federal policy changes under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act that broadened eligibility requirements, particularly for able-bodied adults without dependents, and dramatically increased the program's caseload. Postrecession, the sluggish job growth and policy changes may help explain why SNAP and UI recovered differently.

Comparing SNAP and UI Income Replacement Levels for SNAP Recipients

We next look at how SNAP and UI benefits contributed to the overall income of SNAP recipients and how the proportions of income changed with the Great Recession. We consider income replacement only from the perspective of SNAP recipients because we have data about SNAP households that includes UI benefits; the UI universe data, however, only offers information about employment history, benefit duration, and benefit amount at the individual level, which does not allow for the same income comparisons. In Figure 6.5, SNAP and UI average monthly benefits are stacked with the monthly household income for all Georgia SNAP recipients in 2015 dollars. For all SNAP recipients, SNAP benefits made up a much larger share of total household budgets than UI because so few SNAP recipients received UI benefits as well. Nonetheless, the reliance on SNAP and UI benefits increased during the Great Recession (wide bar) as earned/unearned income fell. Overall, SNAP and UI benefits acted as intended to stabilize household incomes during the Great Recession.

Figure 6.5 Program Components of Monthly Budget for SNAP Households (in 2015 dollars)



SOURCE: Authors’ computations based on Georgia program administrative data.

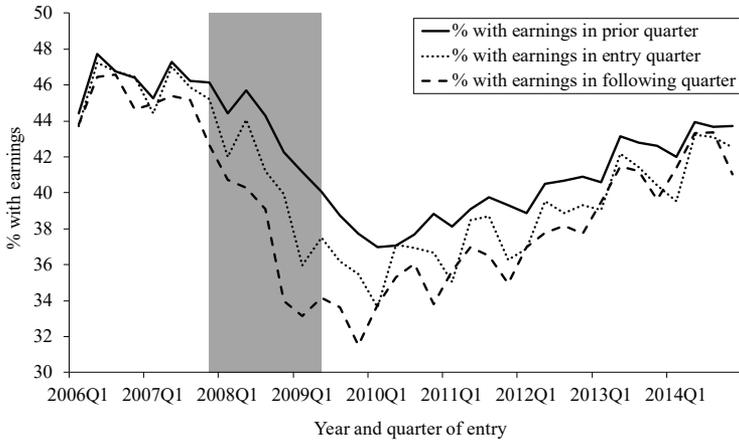
The full budget analysis period, 2005 to 2015, allows us to look at changes in income before, during, and after the Great Recession, including the period after the 2012 Georgia UI benefit change and the expiration of EUC08 and EB at the end of 2013. Before the Great Recession, from January 2005 to November 2007, a SNAP household’s earned/unearned income averaged \$725 and represented 68 percent of the household budget. SNAP benefits made up another 30.4 percent, and UI 1.5 percent. During this time, UI had its lowest share of the total budget seen over the full analysis period, 0.2 percent in January 2005. The Great Recession brought about substantial changes in budget components, as SNAP and UI reached their apex shares in April 2009 and January 2009, respectively, and earned/unearned income had dropped to its lowest level by May 2009. On average during this time, SNAP accounted for 29.8 percent of the budget, UI 4.3 percent, and earned/unearned income the remaining 65.9 percent.

In the postrecession era through the end of 2012, the SNAP share grew to 31.7 percent of the budget, while the share of earned/unearned income continued to fall, averaging 65 percent, and UI fell to 3.3 percent. December 2012 saw the last UI share larger than 3 percent. As the impact of Georgia's unemployment policy changes became apparent in 2013, the UI share fell to 2.2 percent that year and dropped further to 1.1 percent in 2014. The annual averages in 2013, 2014, and 2015 for the three income sources collectively showed a more stable recovery, as the share of earned/unearned income rose and SNAP and UI shares fell. By the end of 2015, UI benefits accounted for only 0.8 percent of the average SNAP recipient's household budget, SNAP benefits 28.4 percent, and earned/unearned income 70.7 percent.

SNAP and UI Dynamics

Last, we narrow our attention to the time frame around an individual entering and exiting a SNAP spell so that we may better understand the circumstances of SNAP and UI usage. For those entering SNAP, we look at the shares that had income and UI benefits over three periods: 1) the quarter prior to entering SNAP (Prior Quarter), 2) the quarter when they enter SNAP (Entry Quarter), and 3) their first full quarter after entering (Following Quarter). For those leaving SNAP, we look at two types of individuals: 1) those on SNAP for nine months or less (Short Duration) and 2) those on SNAP for more than nine months (Long Duration). Additionally, SNAP leavers are divided into two quarters: 1) the quarter of exit (Exit Quarter) and 2) the first quarter after the exiting quarter (Post-Exit Quarter).

We first look at the characteristics of SNAP recipients around their entry into the program (Figure 6.6). Prerecession, all three quarters had similar shares of SNAP entrants who had earnings—approximately 46 percent. As the Great Recession hit, these shares fell significantly: by the first quarter of 2009, the share of entrants with earnings in the quarter after entering SNAP reached only 33 percent, indicating that SNAP recipients were having longer periods without employ-

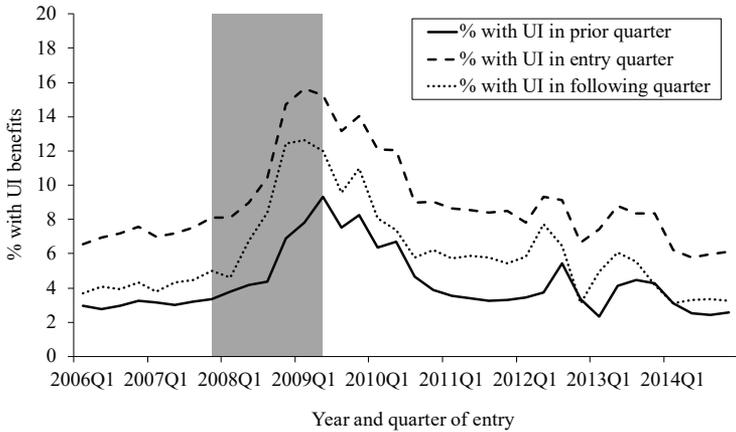
Figure 6.6 Share of SNAP Entrants with Earnings


SOURCE: Authors' computations based on Georgia program administrative data.

ment or other sources of income after enrolling in SNAP. The Entry Quarter contingent fared better, with 36 percent of these entrants having earnings at the same point, whereas the share with earnings in the Prior Quarter fell to 41 percent. During the jobless recovery period directly after the Great Recession—a time when the economy was growing but unemployment remained high—the share of entrants with earnings for all three groups defined in relation to entry quarter (Prior, Entry, and Following) continued to drop until beginning a slow recovery in 2010. By the end of 2014, the shares were still below prerecession levels.

Figure 6.7 incorporates UI in this picture. The share of SNAP entrants with UI benefits surged during the Great Recession, and the share with UI benefits in the same quarter as their SNAP entry peaked at 15.6 percent in the first quarter of 2009. All quarter groups saw declining shares by the end of the Great Recession in June 2009; by 2014, after the end of the jobless recovery, the percentage of SNAP recipients who also received UI was back to prerecession levels for the three groups defined in relation to quarter of entry.

Figure 6.7 Share of SNAP Entrants with UI Benefits



SOURCE: Authors’ computations based on Georgia program administrative data.

Table 6.1 examines some of the data behind these two figures in greater detail and shows Prior, Entry, and Following Quarter information over time. The time line is broken down into four groups relative to the Great Recession: 1) prerecession, 2) Great Recession, 3) jobless recovery, and 4) post-jobless recovery.³ Table 6.1 was created using data on individual spells per month for recipients aged 18–64 and aggregated using quarterly data, meaning there may be a quarter in which a SNAP recipient received benefits for a single month of the quarter or a single week of UI benefits. We then created a monthly average to compare across periods. Note that those who collected UI benefits received considerably more than the average SNAP recipient. For example, in the Following Quarter group, UI benefits were highest during the Great Recession at \$2,617; SNAP benefits were also highest during this time but only averaged \$889. SNAP served many more individuals in all time periods, and only a small percentage were enrolled in both SNAP and UI. However, for that small percentage, the amount of UI benefit was substantially larger, almost three times the SNAP benefit for the same period.

Table 6.1 Georgia SNAP Entrants: Earnings and UI Benefits by Relevant Time Period^a

	Prereces- sion	Great Recession	Jobless recovery	Post- jobless recovery
SNAP average monthly entrants ^b Prior Quarter ^c	19,634	28,148	32,802	31,094
% with earnings	47	43	39	43
Average earnings for those with wages (\$)	3,635	3,893	3,976	3,795
Average other earnings (\$)	1,698	1,656	1,552	1,625
% receiving UI benefits	3.0	6.7	4.1	3.2
Average UI benefits among UI recipients (\$)	1,785	1,913	1,754	1,811
Entry Quarter				
% with earnings	46	40	37	41
Average earnings for those with wages (\$)	2,636	2,762	2,843	2,794
Average other earnings (\$)	1,224	1,091	1,066	1,159
% receiving UI benefits	7.2	13.2	9.0	7.0
Average UI benefits among UI recipients (\$)	1,820	2,148	1,995	1,800
Average SNAP benefits ^d (\$)	481	514	498	470
Following Quarter				
SNAP avg. monthly entrants still receiving SNAP	18,550	27,664	32,494	30,795
% SNAP entrants still receiving SNAP	94	98	99	99
% with earnings	46	36	36	41
Average earnings for those with wages (\$)	3,218	3,170	3,328	3,335
Average other earnings (\$)	1,468	1,139	1,206	1,384
% receiving UI benefits	4.1	10.6	6.2	4.2
Average UI benefits (\$)	2,017	2,617	2,309	1,976
Average SNAP benefits (\$)	782	889	825	756

^a Snapshot periods: Prerecession: Apr 2006–June 2007; Great Recession: Apr 2008–June 2009; Jobless Recovery: Apr 2010–Sept 2012; Post–Jobless Recovery: Jan 2013–Dec 2014.

^b This table shows individual spells/month for ages 18–64, aggregated over a quarterly aggregate; there might be a quarter when SNAP recipients received benefits for a single month of the quarter or a single week of UI.

^c Prior Quarter: quarter immediately preceding entry into SNAP; Entry Quarter: first quarter of SNAP; Following Quarter: first quarter after entry into SNAP.

^d SNAP benefits are per person, inflation-adjusted to 2015 dollars.

SOURCE: Authors' computations based on Georgia program administrative data.

Prerecession, Georgia saw an average of 19,634 SNAP entrants per month. During the Great Recession, the monthly entrants ballooned 43 percent to 28,148, but the peak of 32,802 entrants per month did not occur until the jobless recovery arrived. During the post-jobless recovery period, SNAP enrollment did not return to prerecession levels, as the monthly average remained similar to that of the jobless recovery, at 31,094 per month. For those who entered SNAP in the latter two periods, few—less than 1 percent—left the program after the first quarter, compared to roughly 5 percent who left prerecession.

Furthermore, for all three quarters, the percentage with earnings fell, as expected, during the Great Recession, but the shares continued to fall or remained stagnant during the jobless recovery. In the Following Quarter group, 36 percent of SNAP recipients had earnings during the Great Recession and jobless recovery. During the post-jobless recovery, this share increased to around 41 percent, still below the 46 percent share prerecession. Put another way, before the Great Recession, approximately 10,600 SNAP recipients per month had no income in the following quarter, and in the post-jobless recovery, roughly 18,000 had no income, reiterating the reliance on SNAP and a slow job recovery in Georgia.

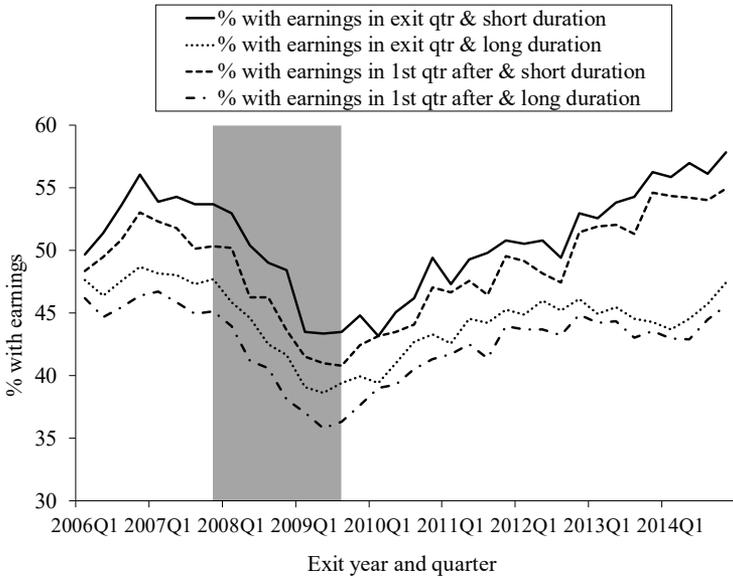
In contrast, the percentage of SNAP enrollees who also received UI benefits has declined from the highs of the Great Recession and jobless recovery. For all three quarters, the percentage of joint enrollees rose quickly from the prerecession into the Great Recession. The jobless recovery showed a downward trend back toward prerecession levels, and during the post-jobless recovery, shares were in line with those before the Great Recession. In the Following Quarter group, the percentage of joint SNAP/UI recipients was 4.1 percent prior to the Great Recession. It jumped to 10.6 percent during the Great Recession, trended down to 6.2 percent in the jobless recovery, and finally returned to 4.2 percent in the post-jobless recovery.

Thus, the SNAP program in Georgia proved not to be particularly cyclical in nature. The average number of monthly entrants to

the program did not decline, even by the end of the jobless recovery, corresponding with the weak recovery in Georgia's labor market following the Great Recession. For the Following Quarter group, the percentage with earnings increased, but not back to prerecession levels. By contrast, the intersection of SNAP and UI was highly cyclical over the study period, as was participation in UI-only. Not until the post-jobless recovery period did the share of joint SNAP/UI recipients in the Following Quarter group fall back to prerecession levels of 4 percent, down from a Great Recession high of nearly 11 percent. This delayed return to prerecession levels explains why some studies examining these programs in other states have not found similar results: the Texas chapter, for example, did not reveal this return to prerecession levels because its study period did not extend beyond jobless recovery.

Finally, we look at the characteristics of those leaving SNAP, first focusing on the percentage of SNAP leavers with earnings (Figure 6.8) and then the percentage of SNAP leavers with UI benefits (Figure 6.9). In Figure 6.8, SNAP leavers with earnings decreased sharply during the Great Recession. Recovery began quickly, though, with a slow upturn beginning in late 2009 and continuing through 2014. This figure also illustrates the differences between SNAP spell duration over the years, allowing us to compare SNAP recipients who collected benefits for three quarters or less (Short Duration) to those who relied on the program for more than three quarters (Long Duration). During the jobless recovery and the post-jobless recovery periods, the gap between Long Duration and Short Duration recipients became more pronounced, in contrast to the two prior periods, when the groups tended to be more closely connected. By the end of 2014, the percentage of Long Duration recipients exiting with income was generally below prerecession levels, while the percentage of Short Duration recipients exiting with income was greater than the percentage before the Great Recession. Looking at SNAP leavers receiving UI benefits in Figure 6.9, we see there was a considerable surge in the percentage of leavers with UI benefits during the Great Recession.

Figure 6.8 Share of SNAP Leavers with Earnings by Spell Duration

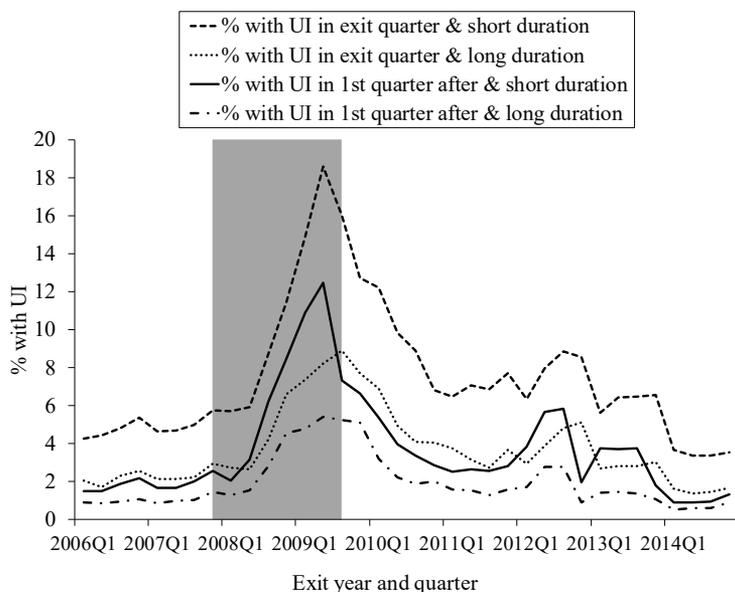


SOURCE: Authors’ computations based on Georgia program administrative data.

The subsequent decrease during the jobless recovery approached prerecession levels, and all four groups—Exit Quarter and Post-Exit Quarter for Long and Short Durations—maintained similar relationships throughout the analysis period. By the end of 2014, the shares of leavers with UI benefits were comparable to those in 2006.

In Table 6.2, we present some of the data behind Figures 6.8 and 6.9, allowing us to make several observations about the length of SNAP spells and earnings upon exit. Individuals who exited SNAP after the Great Recession tended to remain in the program longer than those who exited prior to the Great Recession. In the prerecession and Great Recession periods, the shares of total SNAP recipients were balanced between Short and Long Duration. In the jobless recovery, the balance shifted, and Long Duration recipients made up the majority: the shares were 60 percent Long Duration and 40 percent Short.

Figure 6.9 Share of SNAP Leavers with UI Benefits by Spell Duration



SOURCE: Authors' computations based on Georgia program administrative data.

The shares became further lopsided in the post-jobless recovery period, with 67 percent Long Duration and 33 percent Short Duration. The sustained increase in the long-term use of SNAP is indicative of the slow recovery because individuals on SNAP must be unemployed or have sufficiently low income to remain in the program. Additionally, those receiving SNAP benefits for a short duration were more likely to have earnings upon exit than those who received them for a longer period. In the Post-Exit Quarter, 53 percent of Short Duration SNAP recipients had earnings during the post-jobless recovery period compared to only 44 percent of Long Duration recipients. The Short Duration SNAP leavers also had slightly higher earnings in the post-jobless recovery period: they earned on average \$4,850, while Long Duration recipients earned \$4,685.

Table 6.2 Georgia SNAP Leavers: Spell Duration, Earnings, and UI Benefits by Relevant Time Period^a

	Short Duration ^b				Long Duration			
	Prereces- sion	Reces- sion	Jobless recovery	Post- jobless recovery	Prereces- sion	Reces- sion	Jobless recovery	Post- jobless recovery
Average monthly SNAP leavers	4,863	5,775	8,636	9,359	5,942	5,745	13,083	18,982
Short/Long Duration share of total	45.0	50.1	39.8	33.0	56.0	49.9	60.2	67.0
Exiting Quarter								
Average SNAP benefits ^c (\$)	503	564	548	501	539	582	601	537
% with earnings	54	47	49	56	48	41	44	45
Average earnings for those with earnings (\$)	3,843	4,137	4,461	4,350	4,155	4,289	4,566	4,338
Average earnings (\$)	2,071	1,935	2,185	2,415	1,985	1,776	2,017	1,954
% with UI	4.8	12.2	7.7	4.9	2.2	5.7	3.8	2.2
Average UI benefits (\$)	1,692	2,489	2,000	1,663	1,064	1,657	1,364	1,171
Post-Exit Quarter								
% with earnings	52	44	47	53	46	39	42	44
Average earnings for those with earnings (\$)	4,564	4,753	5,035	4,850	4,574	4,709	4,995	4,685
Average earnings (\$)	2,354	2,071	2,370	2,593	2,096	1,821	2,112	2,056
% with UI	1.8	8.5	3.6	2.2	0.9	3.8	2.0	1.0
Average UI benefits (\$)	1,690	2,650	2,073	1,893	1,180	1,950	1,625	1,317

^a Snapshot periods: Prerecession: Apr 2006–June 2007; Great Recession: Apr 2008–June 2009; Jobless Recovery: Apr 2010–Sep 2012; Post-Jobless Recovery: Jan 2013–Dec 2014.

^b Short Duration: on SNAP three quarters or less; Long Duration: on SNAP more than three quarters.

^c SNAP benefits are per person, inflation-adjusted to 2015 dollars.

SOURCE: Authors' computations based on Georgia program administrative data.

Only a small share of individuals who exited SNAP continued to receive UI benefits. However, the Short Duration leavers were more likely to receive UI upon exit than Long Duration leavers. In the Post-Exit Quarter, only 1.0 percent of Long Duration leavers collected UI upon exiting SNAP, compared to 2.2 percent of Short Duration leavers. This counterintuitive finding may be due to the likelihood that a SNAP entrant was employed prior to enrolling in SNAP. Short Duration recipients may be more likely to have been employed and, thus, eligible for UI. Another possibility is that UI eligibility ran out for Long Duration recipients.

SUBGROUP ANALYSIS OF SNAP AND UI RECIPIENTS

We next analyze some of the demographic characteristics of SNAP recipients and find meaningful trends based on age, gender, and race. In Table 6.3 and Figure 6.10, we present the patterns of Georgia SNAP participation for minors (17 and under), adults (18–64), and the elderly (65+) in each year between 2005 and 2015. Table 6.3 indicates the number of individuals with at least one month of SNAP participation in each year. (Note that the total column is greater than the recipient total because of age changes and, therefore, category changes within a given year.) Consistent with the overall trend in the United States, the number of SNAP recipients increased for all age groups between 2005 and 2012. Adults experienced the largest increase in caseload, with their caseloads more than doubling, but this may not be surprising, as these working-age individuals were the group most likely to experience job loss during the Great Recession. In terms of year-to-year changes, the sharpest increases were seen between 2008 and 2009, at the height of the Great Recession. The number of working-age adults who received SNAP benefits increased by 14.1 percent between 2007 and 2008 and by another 27.7 percent between 2008 and 2009. The Great Recession officially ended in 2009,

Table 6.3 Age of SNAP Recipients in Georgia, 2005–2015

Year	Number of SNAP recipients by age				Number of UI recipients
	Minors (17 and under)	Adults (18–64)	Elderly (65+)	Total ^a	
2005	718,615	651,531	54,495	1,407,082	22,004
2006	725,895	640,098	54,242	1,401,975	30,192
2007	734,912	644,922	54,087	1,414,648	32,066
2008	807,517	736,094	57,005	1,578,992	56,256
2009	954,730	939,893	65,829	1,932,740	98,422 ^b
2010	1,064,752	1,131,141	79,588	2,242,661	95,818
2011	1,117,164	1,260,657	94,460	2,436,249	76,926
2012	1,159,193 ^b	1,352,853 ^b	108,560	2,582,418 ^b	79,444
2013	1,148,663	1,327,222	115,613	2,554,257	73,377
2014	1,131,048	1,274,255	117,667	2,487,422	50,120
2015	1,111,494	1,218,385	122,387 ^b	2,416,750	40,042

NOTE: As part of ongoing data-sharing agreements, administrative data from these state agencies are archived in the Fiscal Research Center at Georgia State University, where three of the authors work as research associates. For more information on the administration and maintenance of these records, see dfcs.dhs.georgia.gov/food-stamps and <http://www.dol.state.ga.us>.

The actual dates were chosen to be similar to other studies of this type. They provide a snapshot of each period and are as follows: Prerecession: April 2006–June 2007; Great Recession: April 2008–June 2009; Jobless Recovery: April 2010–September 2012; and Post–Jobless Recovery: January 2013–December 2014.

^a The total of all ages is greater than the recipient total because of age changes and, therefore, category changes, within a given year.

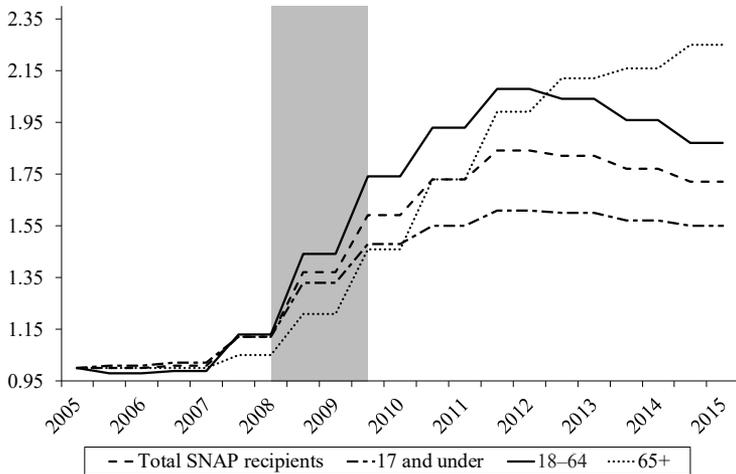
^b Maximum recipients per column.

SOURCE: Georgia Department of Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services; Georgia Department of Labor.

but the caseload continued to climb, reflecting the lethargic recovery of the labor market. Table 6.3 also lists the number of UI recipients between 2005 and 2015 for comparison. Just as with the rise in SNAP caseload, UI cases grew during this period, and the sharpest increase overlapped the Great Recession, as shown in previous figures. The evidence reinforces the theory that SNAP and UI served as crucial safety net programs for a significant number of Georgians.

Looking at SNAP cases by age group over time, Figure 6.10 indexes the composition data to a January 2005 baseline. Here, the

Figure 6.10 SNAP Recipients by Age (relative to 2005)



SOURCE: Authors’ computations based on Georgia program administrative data.

age of each countable SNAP recipient is included, not just those of the heads of household. Beginning in 2012 and continuing through 2015, the count of recipients younger than 65 began to fall, but the number of elderly has continued to rise after having been flat throughout 2005, 2006, and 2007. Note that the elderly made up a relatively small share of total SNAP recipients, roughly 5 percent of the 2015 total; however, as Table 6.3 and Figure 6.10 show, this is the only group whose caseload did not drop at any point during the analysis period. These results are consistent with the literature, which shows that older workers lack the resources to retire and are therefore remaining in the labor force longer (Burtless 2016). The elderly may prove an interesting demographic to monitor as the baby boom generation retires, straining the safety net and age-related entitlement programs.

In addition, earnings and UI benefits differ by gender (figure not presented). Throughout the analysis period, female-headed SNAP households received higher average SNAP and UI benefits than male-headed households. The shares of SNAP entrants with earnings in

the Prior, Entry, and Following Quarters were also higher for female households than for male. For all three groups defined in relation to entrant quarter, the share with earnings in 2006 hovered around 50 percent, well above the 35 percent average for males at the same time. While female households rely on SNAP benefits at higher levels throughout the period of the study, male households were hit harder by the Great Recession with regard to earned income. Both genders, however, follow a similar pattern of shares falling during the Great Recession and slowly recovering to prerecession levels by 2014.

The share of SNAP entrant households with UI benefits shows less variation by gender, although higher percentages of female households relied on joint SNAP and UI benefits than did male ones. The female Entry Quarter groups mirror their male counterparts; the prerecession and post-jobless recovery periods have nearly identical numbers. During the Great Recession, the growth in shares of SNAP entrants with UI was similar, with the female groups showing slightly higher percentages. For example, at the time that the share with UI in the Entry Quarter peaked at 14 percent for the males, the female group reached 16 percent.

When looking at SNAP leaver characteristics, the results show that the Great Recession had more of an effect on males with Long Duration of SNAP benefits than on females. The percentage with earnings fell during the Great Recession and slowly recovered afterward. Echoing the SNAP entrant data, females had higher shares of earnings upon exit from SNAP than males throughout the analysis. For example, in April 2014, the share of males with earnings in the Exit Quarter and the Post-Exit Quarter was around 50 percent for Short Duration and under 40 percent for Long Duration. In contrast, the comparable shares for females were around 10 percentage points higher: Short Duration earnings were near 60 percent and Long Duration 50 percent. UI benefits in the Exit and Post-Exit Quarters looked similar for both genders. Ultimately, the Great Recession appears to have affected male-headed households more than female-headed households.

Finally, we look at race (figure not presented). The data on households by race are broken down into three categories: 1) White, 2) Hispanic, and 3) Other.⁴ For all three racial groups, the number of SNAP entrants had not returned to prerecession levels by the end of 2014, although all three groups increased enrollment during the Great Recession and jobless recovery. Overall, looking at the joint use of SNAP and UI, Hispanic SNAP entrants had the lowest percentage across the entire analysis period. In contrast, “Other” households had the largest percentage of joint usage of all three racial groups, regardless of the period. In addition, Other entrants experienced the largest increase of usage of both UI and SNAP during the Great Recession.

When looking at SNAP leavers, White households exhibited a gap in Short and Long Duration groups throughout the time line. In contrast, the duration groups for Other and Hispanic households fell closer to each other in the prerecession period, but the duration groups diverged during and after the Great Recession. By 2014, the percentage with earnings in the Exit and Post-Exit Quarters was higher for Short Duration recipients for all racial groups, and the percentage with UI benefits was higher for Long Duration recipients, potentially because the Long Duration group had exhausted its UI benefits.

SUMMARY OF LESSONS FROM ANALYSIS

Our data allowed us to evaluate not only the immediate effects of the Great Recession on Georgia but also those that lingered several years after its official end. Georgia’s labor market has struggled to recover, and SNAP and UI utilization can help gauge the economic health of the state. Although SNAP and UI reacted differently to the stress of the Great Recession, both helped to stabilize incomes and increase Georgians’ access to necessities. Our results show that UI maintained a cyclical nature, with enrollment spiking during the Great Recession but falling relatively quickly back to prerecession levels. SNAP, on the other hand, is still feeling the burden from the economic

fallout. Unlike UI, SNAP does not have time-limited benefit restrictions, and many more Georgians have remained eligible for SNAP than in the prerecession era. Also, the joint SNAP/UI recipients represented only a small portion of the total Georgia SNAP population, but UI provided substantially larger benefits and was able to complement SNAP to stabilize incomes.

Assuming no change in federal SNAP legislation, what will the next recession look like in Georgia? As with what happened during the Great Recession, we can expect that many Georgians will return to UI and SNAP to lessen the economic shock. Georgia's reduction of UI benefits to a cap of 14–20 weeks will likely have a considerable effect on both programs, with more rapid SNAP applications from UI recipients. If the state experiences another slow recovery after the next recession, we may see another boom in SNAP enrollment as unemployed Georgians quickly exhaust their UI benefits and shift to SNAP, and the program would likely struggle to recover to prerecession levels. Moreover, our results show that more retirement-age Georgians are using SNAP. With this quickly growing population relying on SNAP benefits, the program may face further issues with the sustained swelling of its caseload.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we discussed how Georgia's citizens used SNAP and UI benefits to ease the burdens associated with the economic downturn of the Great Recession and maintain their household income. SNAP was used by considerably more Georgians than was UI, but for those who did receive UI, the benefits were generally larger. Trends in usage during the Great Recession were similar for both programs; however, while UI and joint SNAP/UI participation returned to prerecession levels by the post-jobless recovery period, SNAP participation remains elevated well above prerecession levels.

Several potential reasons exist for this disparity. First, UI benefits are available only for a limited time, while SNAP benefits are not in most cases. The restrictions on UI are especially relevant because of the changes to Georgia's UI benefit cap, which reduce the maximum duration of benefits from 26 weeks to a range of between 14 and 20. Additionally, the two major federal UI-related programs instituted during the Great Recession have expired. Second, many people lost their jobs during the Great Recession and collected UI but became ineligible for the program when they regained employment. Finally, despite some job creation, some workers may be employed in low-wage jobs and not receiving UI but may still be eligible for SNAP benefits. This situation was especially likely during the jobless recovery period.

SNAP reliance remained high through 2015, but evidence suggests that enrollment may be declining for some groups across the state. Importantly, SNAP enrollment in the elderly population has not shown significant declines, which may have ramifications for the program's caseload going forward. In the future, economic downturns may see a larger reliance on SNAP than UI in Georgia, but policymakers can leverage the interplay between SNAP and UI to alleviate excessive burdens on a single program. As Georgia restricts UI benefits, in a move that was enacted at the same time as an increase in SNAP participation, federal policymakers can supplement income and reduce the caseload of SNAP through programs such as Emergency Unemployment Compensation and Extended Benefits. SNAP participation in Georgia varied along gender and racial lines, suggesting differing impacts. The effects of the Great Recession continue to linger in Georgia, and the impact and interactions of social safety net programs like SNAP and UI will be an area of continued study.

Notes

1. As part of ongoing data-sharing agreements, administrative data from these state agencies are archived in the Fiscal Research Center at Geor-

gia State University, where three of the authors work as research associates. For more information on the administration and maintenance of these records, see dfcs.dhs.georgia.gov/food-stamps and <http://www.dol.state.ga.us>.

2. Scaling up 1 week for each 0.5 percent increase from 6.5 percent at 14 weeks would result in a 19-week duration at 9 percent unemployment, not a 20-week duration. Nevertheless, this is how the statute reads. One must assume it would be at 19 weeks for 8.51 to 8.99 percent, then rise to 20 weeks for 9.00 percent and above.
3. The actual dates were chosen to be similar to other studies of this type. They provide a snapshot of each period and are as follows: Prerecession: April 2006–June 2007; Great Recession: April 2008–June 2009; Jobless Recovery: April 2010–September 2012; and Post–Jobless Recovery: January 2013–December 2014.
4. “White” is “non-Hispanic white”; “Other” is “non-Hispanic nonwhite” and includes all races not part of the other two categories (e.g., African American, Asian, etc.).

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Christopher J. O’Leary
David Stevens
Stephen A. Wandner
Michael Wiseman
Editors

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W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research
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