

Using eligibility for free or reduced-cost school lunch as a proxy for poverty status in the 2009 YRBS

Summary

Using data on the percent of students in public school who are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch as a proxy for poverty status, a new variable on poverty level has been created and is available for analysis in the YRBS 2009 dataset.

Eligibility for free or reduced-cost lunch is based on the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (130% and 185% of FPL, respectively).

The variable

1. The new poverty variable is named 'poverty.'
2. It is based on the percentage of students in a school who were eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch. Schools were then ranked lowest to highest based on percent eligibility.
3. It is only available in the 2009 YRBS.
4. The variable has 4-levels (percent of students at school eligible for free/reduced-cost lunch):
 - a. 1 = Low poverty (0% <= eligibility < 50%)
 - b. 2 = Medium poverty (50% <= eligibility < 70%)
 - c. 3 = High poverty (70% <= eligibility < 80%)
 - d. 4 = Very high poverty (eligibility >= 80%)

Using the data

1. The poverty variable can **only** be analyzed at the **citywide** level – no analyses by borough or DPHO level are possible.
2. Analyses using the variable should include a footnote alerting readers to the meaning of this variable. Example: "School poverty is based on percent of students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch."
3. Please keep in mind that this is a school-based measure, not an individual one.