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## Perspectives about Family Meals from Single-Headed and Dual-Headed Households: A Qualitative Analysis

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### Abstract

Cross-sectional and longitudinal research has shown that family meals are protective for adolescent healthful eating behaviors. However, little is known about what parents think of these findings and whether parents from single- versus dual-headed households have differing perspectives about the findings. Additionally, parents' perspectives regarding barriers to applying the findings on family meals in their own homes and suggestions for more wide-spread adoption of the findings are unknown. The current study aimed to identify single- and dual-headed household parents' perspectives regarding the research findings on family meals, barriers to applying the findings in their own homes and suggestions for helping families have more family meals. The current qualitative study included 59 parents who participated in sub-study of two linked multi-level studies—EAT 2010 (Eating and Activity in Teens) and Families and Eating and Activity in Teens (F-EAT). Parents (91.5% female) were racially/ethnically and socio-economically diverse. Data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Results from the current study suggest that parents from both single- and dual-headed households have similar perspectives regarding why family meals are protective for healthful eating habits for adolescents (e.g., provides structure/routine, opportunities for communication, connection), but provide similar and different reasons for barriers to family meals (e.g., single-headed=cost vs. dual-headed=lack of creativity) and ideas and suggestions for how to increase the frequency of family meals (e.g., single-headed=give fewer options vs. dual-headed=include children in the meal preparation). Findings may help inform public health intervention researchers and providers who work with adolescents and their families to understand how to approach discussions regarding reasons for having family meals, barriers to carrying out family meals and ways to increase family meals depending on family structure.

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## Keywords

Family meals; parents; adolescents; dual-headed households; single-headed households

Research over the last decade has suggested that family meals play an important role in promoting healthful dietary intake in adolescents. Cross-sectional and longitudinal research on boys and girls from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds suggests that family meals are associated with increased fruit and vegetable intake,<sup>1-4</sup> lower levels of extreme weight control behaviors,<sup>5,6</sup> and better psychosocial health.<sup>7,8</sup> There is also some evidence that family meals may be protective against obesity, although findings have been inconsistent across studies.<sup>9,10</sup> While these quantitative results are important and can help identify risk and protective factors for adolescent obesity in the home environment, it is also important to hear families' perspectives regarding these findings in order to understand why these findings may exist, whether families agree with the findings, the barriers families identify related to these findings and whether families have, or will, apply these findings in their own homes. Families' perspectives regarding the research findings on family meals will aid in the translation of the quantitative research findings into family-based interventions aimed at increasing the frequency and quality of family meals in the homes of adolescents.

It is also key to understand how the research findings on family meals have been understood and experienced by families with differing family structures. Little research has looked at differences by family structure, such as single-headed households versus dual-headed households. The research that does exist on single- versus dual-headed households and family meal frequency has focused on perceived barriers to family meals. This research has shown that married mothers report lack of time, limited cooking skills, and the effort involved in carrying out the meal (e.g. children's picky eating, family conflict) as barriers to family meals, whereas single mothers report the cost of the meal as a major barrier and lack of time and cooking skills as secondary barriers.<sup>11-14</sup> Knowing how parents from different family structures view these research findings and whether they believe the results are applicable to their family type will help to inform whether family meal interventions need to be tailored to different family structures, or whether universal interventions would be feasible and useful for all family types.

Thus, in order to learn more about families' perspectives on family meals, and similarities and differences in these perspectives across family structure, a qualitative study was conducted to answer the following three main questions: (1) What are the perspectives of parents from different family structures (i.e., single- vs. dual-headed households) regarding the research findings showing that family meals are protective for adolescent healthful eating behaviors?; (2) How have parents dealt with the challenges they face in having regular family meals and what suggestions do parents have for helping families eat together more often? (3) How do parents' perspectives differ depending on family structure (i.e., single- vs. dual-headed households)?

## METHODS

### Sample and Study Design

The study sample included 41 families (59 parents) who participated in a qualitative sub-study of two linked large observational cohort studies—EAT 2010 (Eating and Activity in Teens)<sup>15</sup> and Families and Eating and Activity in Teens (F-EAT). The EAT 2010 sample includes adolescents ( $n = 2,793$ ) who are approximately 14.4 ( $SD=2.0$ ) years old; equally split by gender (46.8% boys, 53.2% girls) and the F-EAT sample includes parents ( $n=3,709$ ) who are, on average 42.3 years ( $SD=8.6$ ) old and mainly mothers (62% mothers, 48%

fathers) of adolescents in the EAT 2010 study. The EAT 2010 and F-EAT samples are ethnically/racially and socioeconomically diverse.<sup>15-17</sup>

Families who participated in the EAT and F-EAT studies were eligible to participate in the qualitative sub-study. Although the overall study design included a convenience sample, the selection process for the qualitative sub-study was rigorous. Families (n=150) who participated in EAT 2010 and F-EAT were randomly selected and became the sampling frame for the qualitative sub-study. Families on the list were stratified by single-headed (n = 67) versus dual-headed (n = 83) household status and recruited for the study. Fliers were sent to eligible parents in the mail. Families (n=41) self-selected to participate in the qualitative sub-study. Dual-headed households comprised 44% (n = 36 parents; 18 mother/father pairs) of the sample and single-headed households made up 56% (n = 20 female-headed; n = 3 male-headed). None of the households had more than two primary caregivers and all dual-headed households were heterosexual couples. The majority of parents and adolescents participating in the qualitative sub-study were racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, similar to the overall EAT 2010 and F-EAT samples (see Table 1a-b).<sup>16,18-19</sup> There were no statistically significant differences between parents and adolescents who participated in the qualitative sub-study and parents and adolescents who participated in the EAT 2010 or F-EAT studies. All study protocols were approved by the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Committee.

### Procedures and Measures

For the current study, parents were asked to participate in an in-home visit where all eligible caregivers were interviewed. Research staff, doctoral students at the University of Minnesota in Family Social Science, scheduled in-home visits at each family's convenience and interviewed parents individually. In households where there were two caregivers, caregivers were interviewed in separate rooms to not influence one another's responses. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the depth of the response from the participating parent. All interviews were audio recorded.

The qualitative interview guide was created to elicit parents' perspectives regarding findings in the empirical literature showing significant associations between family meal frequency and adolescent positive health behaviors (e.g., fruit and vegetable intake, psychosocial health, less weight control behaviors). The questions (see Table 2) allowed for an in-depth exploration of the potential reasons "why" the significant associations between family meals and adolescent positive health outcomes exist, what parents thought the barriers or challenges were to applying these findings in their own families, as well as suggestions for how to implement the findings into their own and other families' lives. Using such directive questions was intentional in order to aid in the translation of the previous vast quantitative research findings regarding the protective nature of family meals into family-based interventions to increase the frequency and quality of family meals in the homes of adolescents.

### Analysis

Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and a grounded hermeneutic approach was used to analyze the data (described below).<sup>19,20</sup> All parent transcripts (n = 59) were analyzed, including interviews from both parents from dual-headed households. Transcripts were divided into single- and dual-headed households and then coded. In order for qualitative themes to be counted as a representative theme, 50% of the participants in each group had to endorse the theme. Additionally, for interview data from dual-headed households agreement and disagreement across the themes was examined. There were no

themes that were endorsed more often by one parent than the other in the dual-headed household transcripts.

We used a deductive grounded theory approach to code transcripts, which allows the researcher to begin with a research question and hypothesis based on previous literature and theory as a starting point for analysis and generating themes.<sup>18–20</sup> Transcripts were coded using the three stages of grounded theory analysis, including: open, axial and selective coding. In the open coding stage, constant comparison using line-by-line coding was conducted to identify broad response themes based on the four specific questions participants were asked in the study (Table 2). The broad themes were broken into sub-themes during the axial coding stage to organize participant responses across all content areas discussed by participants. Through selective coding, major overarching themes were identified across content areas and subcategories were collapsed where appropriate.

All transcripts (n=59) were coded by the first three authors to reach saturation of themes. During the coding process, each transcript was coded by two coders (the three coders coded 40 transcripts each) and then consensed. Consistency between the three coders was assessed using the formula number of agreements/total number of agreements plus disagreements.<sup>20</sup> Inter-coder reliability was 97–99% among the coders. Further discussion during consensus meetings resulted in overall agreement (100%) among the coders.<sup>18–19</sup> NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software, was used to organize and code the data (NVivo 10, QSR International Pty. Ltd, Melbourne, Australia, 2000).

## RESULTS

Results from the qualitative analysis are reported in themes, grouped according to the four questions that parents were asked in the in-home interviews (see Table 2). Similarities and differences between single- and dual-headed household responses are described.

### **Question 1: What is your opinion about why family meals seem to matter so much for children's health?**

Four themes were identified for both household types. The themes included: (1) providing structure, (2) opportunities for communication, and (3) strengthening interpersonal relationships. Dual-headed households additionally viewed the family meal as a training ground for promoting healthful eating behaviors in their children through parent modeling and direction.

#### **Both single- and dual-headed households: Providing structure/routine, opportunities for communication, strengthening interpersonal relationships—**

Parents from both single- and dual-headed households identified that family meals provided structure, or a routine, in the family, which allowed for children to feel safe and secure. One mother from a single-headed household stated,

It [family meals] provides good structure, kids know what's expected, it's something they can rely on, always having a time to be together, to eat together, and that makes kids feel safe and protected.

Additionally, a father from a dual-headed household stated,

...having a routine like a family meal every night makes kids get used to eating healthy, they just do it because it is part of their lifestyle.

Parents from single- and dual-headed households reported that family meals were a place to communicate/talk with their children, which allowed them to stay informed about their children's lives, show their child attention and love, and create a space for children to feel

comfortable bringing up anything they wanted to. Parents also thought that this open communication and comfortable feeling during family meals led to an increased likelihood that children would eat more healthfully. A single mother said,

I think family meals let you show them [children] attention and provide an open forum to just let whatever off their chest...it makes them comfortable to talk and it is an important place where I can bring things up too... it [family meals] just causes more bonding and better communication.

A father from a dual-headed household stated,

In the evening [after dinner] we talk too, but it's not always open. It's more like we're just talking about what's happening on the TV...I feel like at dinner there's more of a closeness because we're all sitting down together...you've got open time and people can have conversation about basically anything. I think the good atmosphere around the table helps my children eat the healthy foods put in front of them...you know, like it's the combination of good conversation and good food.

Parents from single- and dual-headed households spoke about family meals as a way to strengthen interpersonal relationships. Parents expressed that when relationships were "cared for," healthful eating also occurred. One father from a dual-headed household stated,

...when you eat dinner together you're a part of something that's bigger than yourself, and you know you're loved if somebody's eating with you...you also tend to eat healthier too.

Parents also viewed the family meal as a place where children learn how to "interact with other people in appropriate ways". A mother from a single-headed household said,

...it [family meals] develops interpersonal skills...which they need to learn...so it's about being pleasant and being comfortable, and just relating to other people's world.

A mother from a dual-headed household stated,

Family meals provide an opportunity for reestablishing family bonds, because we're all around the table, we're all talking, we're doing something together even if it's just eating, so it kind of reestablishes those bonds and holds us together...it keeps us united...and that is probably why family meals protect kids from being unhealthy.

**Dual-headed households: Training ground for healthy behavior**—Parents from dual-headed households additionally identified that family meals provided a training ground for healthy behaviors to occur, through modeling and parental direction, which ultimately promoted healthful eating behaviors in children. One mother from a dual-headed household stated,

...at family meals kids see their parents eating healthy and so they will too...now, or eventually.

A father from a dual-headed household stated,

They learn good manners around what types of food to eat, which ones are better for you and how to politely decline food you don't want to eat...it makes them unafraid of interacting with other people around food. A lot of times people's problems with food are because of other people, so having family meals teaches them how to have positive experiences with food in a safe atmosphere.

**Question 2: Research tells us that many families face challenges in helping their families eat family meals. What are some of the challenges your family faces with eating family meals?**

Both single- and dual-headed households identified having a “picky eater” as a barrier to having family meals. Additionally, parents in single-headed households included: (1) cost, and (2) the burden of being solely responsible for planning family meals. Parents from dual-headed households identified: (1) time constraints, (2) being tired and (3) running out of ideas.

**Both single- and dual-headed households: Picky eaters**—Parents from both single-headed and dual-headed households stated that having a picky eater in the family made it very difficult to have family meals. One mother from a single-headed household stated,

We have a picky eater right here, that’s probably the biggest problem with having family meals. It also makes it hard to have more healthy foods at family meals... squash even, I love squash, but she [daughter] won’t touch it, because she has this perception that it’s nasty.

A father from a dual-headed household stated,

My son, he’s a picky eater, real picky, in fact all three of my kids are picky eaters and all three of them want to eat at different times...so most of the time we don’t eat together to avoid the fighting and complaining about the food.

**Single-headed households: Cost and sole responsibility**—Parents from single-headed households reported that the cost of having family meals was a major barrier to having family meals and especially having healthy foods at family meals. One mother stated,

Financially I think it’s harder to have family meals every night...the funds aren’t there.

In regards to having healthy foods at family meals one mother reported,

We don’t eat healthy food at family meals because the healthy stuff costs so much...that is another reason we don’t eat together that much.

Another single mother stated,

It’s cheaper to eat grease and garbage as opposed to buying the healthy foods for dinner. It’s a shame that you can eat cheeseburgers and chips as opposed to buying some grain or veggies, stuff like that. To me, it’s cheaper to eat garbage...it’s cheaper to eat junk food.

Parents from single-headed households also reported that it was difficult to be the person solely responsible for carrying out family meals. One mother stated,

I think the biggest challenge is probably you just get kind of tired of being responsible for dinner all the time...I had this idea in my mind that oh when my kids got older they would be responsible for dinner, like you know either once a week or once every two weeks, but I haven’t really gotten around to actually implementing that. I mean they’ll do it every once in a while.

**Dual-headed households: Time constraints, tired, and lack of ideas**—Parents from dual-headed households identified that busy schedules and lack of time were major barriers to having family meals. One father stated,



I think lack of time is the number one thing. That's when the fast food comes in and everyone eats on their own.

A mother said,

I think time is a major reason for not eating together. Time to cook or, when people get busy and they're off doing a variety of things then it's hard to plan ahead long enough to make sure that you have the time to prepare a meal that is healthy.

Parents from dual-headed households also said that feeling tired was a reason for not having more frequent family meals. One mother said,

A lot of times I'm tired, so we go for whatever is quicker...we probably eat Chinese once a week because it's quick and easy, you make a phone call. Unfortunately we don't always sit down and eat together if it's fast food, like we would if it was home cooked.

Additionally, parents from dual-headed households stated that running out of ideas of what to cook was a common barrier to having family meals. One father said,

...probably the biggest challenge is just figuring out what's for dinner and coming up with ideas that everyone likes.

### **Question 3: What has your family done to meet the challenges of having family meals?**

Parents from single- and dual-headed households identified budgeting and smart shopping/planning as a main way that they had attempted to address the barriers to family meals. Parents from dual-headed households additionally identified: (1) being creative, (2) making meals kids will eat, and (3) getting kids involved with the meal preparation.

**Both single- and dual-headed households: Budgeting and smart shopping/planning**—Parents from single- and dual-headed households identified that budgeting and smart shopping/planning was the main way they had thought to address the barriers of cost. One mother from a single-headed household stated,

Well, I guess what I have mostly done is to even out my food stamps that I get every month. I divide them into 4, you know, for each week of the month, and then I spend this much a week to try to get the different foods that we need so we can eat together as much as possible.

A mother from a dual-headed household stated,

When you go to the stores, always pick up the coupons in the papers at the front doors. There is always a sale somewhere. And don't go to the store hungry... because you're going to buy everything you see. And always before you get to the checkout line stop and ask whoever you are with, do we really need this?

Another mother from a dual-headed household said,

I think actually one thing that I found helpful is being more intentional in planning meals in advance...I mean it's one thing to go to the grocery store with a list or just half a list, it's another thing to go the grocery store with a list with ingredients in mind for what you're actually going to make for the week.

**Dual-headed households: Being creative, making meals kids will eat, getting kids involved with meal preparation**—Parents from dual-headed households identified that they attempted to be creative in the ways they carried out family meals. One father stated,

We try to be creative or we'll say things like, 'just try this and see what you think'. Or we'll make things that we know that they'll at least eat, you know, a little bit of and not complain...or we'll try to frame it in different ways, you know like, you need to eat this, it's good for your long-term health and for growing and you know and if nothing else just acquiring a taste for it.

Parents from dual-headed households also identified that they try to cook things that their children will like at the family meals. One mother from a dual-headed household stated,

We just try to make really tasty stuff that the kids will eat and we do a pretty good job. Like we make pretty good tasting broccoli and the fish we had last night was great...so if you just try a little bit harder you can make a pretty tasty meal, one that is even nutritious.

Additionally, parents from dual-headed households identified that they try to include their children in the meal preparation or carrying out of the meal. One mother stated,

My most favorite thing to do is to show them how to cook. That's the first thing I show them. I'm not bragging, I'm not boasting, because people love our cooking, they really do.

#### **Question 4: What are your suggestions for helping your family and other families have more family meals?**

Both single- and dual-headed households identified the importance of: (1) making family meals fun and (2) trying something new as ways to increase the frequency of family meals. Parents from single-headed households also identified: (1) giving kids fewer options at meals and parents from dual-headed households additionally identified: (1) making family meals a priority.

**Both single- and dual-headed households: Making meals fun, trying something different**—Parents from single- and dual-headed households identified that one way to increase the frequency of family meals was to make family meals fun. One single mother stated,

Well, I think families should make it fun. I think once in a while families should check out the cooking shows, just for fun. They don't have to do it, but watching the shows you might get one idea for trying something new and fun, you know.

Parents from single- and dual-headed households also suggested that families should try something new to increase the frequency of family meals. Numerous parents suggested planting a garden, while other parents suggested introducing different foods at family meals to make meals "exciting to look forward to" and "to eat more healthy". One mother from a dual-headed household stated,

I think a garden is a really good thing to do with kids. They actually see it growing and then they'll pick it and eat it when we serve it at dinner.

Another father from a dual-headed household said,

Try to have some different things once in a while so kids get used to them, like brussel sprouts or something like that.

**Single-headed households: Give fewer options**—Parents from single-headed households additionally identified that parents should give fewer options to children regarding food served at family meals. A single mother stated,



I would tell them, don't let your kids have too many choices about what they're going to eat. You just raise them from a baby to eat what is in front of them. I think people have let their kids make too many decisions about what they're going to eat, you know. Then you don't have to stress and make so many meals...and you will have more of them [family meals].

**Dual-headed households: Make family meals a priority**—One suggestion parents from dual-headed households had was to make family meals a priority. A father from a dual-headed household suggested,

You have to actually make time to have family meals and to cook it [the meal]. You have to also buy healthy foods...don't buy the prepackaged stuff because it's just a bunch of junk that's not even food.

## Discussion

Results from the current study identified several similarities in both single- and dual-headed households' responses to reasons "why" previous quantitative research findings show family meals are protective for adolescent healthful eating behaviors. Parents from both types of households stated that family meals provided an atmosphere where communication, trust, interpersonal connectivity and structure/rituals can occur, which provides a sense of safety and security for adolescents. Parents hypothesized that when adolescents had a consistent place for communication to occur, for connection and trust to evolve, and for healthful behaviors to be modeled and reinforced (dual-headed households only identified this theme), it promoted healthful eating in adolescents.

Parents from single- and dual-headed households identified both similar and different ideas about how to deal with barriers to having family meals, which supported the themes they identified as challenges to having family meals. Single- and dual-headed households both identified budgeting using smart shopping/planning ideas as a way to address barriers. Dual-headed households also focused on being creative about what is eaten at family meals and getting kids involved with the meal preparation. Additionally, parents from single- and dual-headed households identified both similar and different suggestions for increasing the frequency of family meals. Single- and dual-headed households agreed that making family meals fun and trying something new were ideas to increase family meal frequency. Additionally, single parents identified that giving fewer options at meals would increase the frequency of family meals because parents wouldn't feel as burdened in preparing the family meal. Whereas, parents from dual-headed households focused on more practical/logistical aspects of the family meal such as making family meals a priority.

Results from the current study corroborate findings from prior quantitative research indicating that barriers to family meals may differ by family type.<sup>11,13,14,21–23</sup> Dual-headed households focused on time constraints, feeling tired/overwhelmed and lack of ideas for family meals, whereas single-headed households identified cost and burden of preparing the meal as major barriers to family meals. In addition, the current study advances the research on family meals by identifying that both single- and dual-headed households perceive having a picky eater as a barrier to carrying out family meals, whereas previous research has only investigated picky eating in dual-headed households.<sup>11,13,14</sup>

Results from this study may be useful for public health interventionists who need to identify factors to target in obesity prevention interventions that parents will buy into/support and that will be most helpful for their specific family structure. For example, within family-based intervention programs it would be important to tailor messages regarding family meal barriers according to family type. For single-headed households it would be important to

focus on budgeting and low-cost meals, whereas for dual-headed households the messages should focus on creative meals and child involvement. Additionally, research findings may be useful for healthcare professionals, dietitians and other providers who work with families. For example, providers can share with families ways in which they may benefit from family meals, deal with challenges to family meals, and suggestions for increasing family meals, based on their family structure.

Strengths of the current investigation include the use of a qualitative design that allowed for identifying hypotheses from parents regarding “why” family meals are protective. Additionally, including both parents from different family structures (i.e., single- vs. dual-headed households) allowed for understanding how research results may be specific to family structure. One limitation to the study results is the use of a convenience sample drawn from two linked ongoing observational studies. However, the two observational studies are large ethnically/racially and socio-economically diverse epidemiological cohort studies, not intervention studies, and participation in the studies is not likely to have influenced parent responses to the qualitative interviews.

## Conclusion

Results from the current study suggest that parents from both single- and dual-headed households agree regarding why family meals are protective for healthful eating habits for adolescents, but provide different ideas and suggestions for how to apply these findings depending on family structure. Future family-based interventions targeting family meals should consider challenges faced by different types of families as they develop and carry out interventions.

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**Table 1a**

Demographics of parents (N = 59) participating in the qualitative study

	Parents from Dual-Headed Households (N = 36; 18 dyads)		Parents from Single Headed Households (N = 23)	
	Female Parents (n = 18)	Male Parents (n = 18)	Female Parents (n = 20)	Male Parents (n = 3)
<b>Race</b>				
White	8 (44%)	7 (39%)	7 (30%)	1 (33%)
Black or African American	6 (33%)	8 (44%)	10 (55%)	2 (67%)
Hispanic or Latino	1 (6%)	2 (11%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)
American Indian or Native American	1 (6%)	--	--	--
Other	2 (11%)	1 (6%)	1 (5%)	--
<b>Education</b>				
Did not finish high school	1 (6%)	3 (17%)	2 (10%)	1 (33%)
Finished high school/GED	6 (33%)	2 (11%)	6 (30%)	2 (67%)
Some college or training after high school	8 (44%)	8 (44%)	10 (50%)	--
Finished college	2 (11%)	4 (22%)	1 (5%)	--
Advanced Degree (e.g., Master's Degree, PhD, MD)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	1 (5%)	--
<b>Job Status</b>				
Working full-time	8 (44%)	9 (50%)	10 (50%)	2 (67%)
Working part-time	5 (28%)	3 (17%)	3 (15%)	--
Stay at home caregiver	2 (11%)	2 (11%)	6 (30%)	--
Currently unemployed but actively seeking work	3 (17%)	2 (11%)	1 (5%)	1 (33%)
Not working for pay (unable to work, retired, student)	--	2 (11%)	--	--
<b>Income</b>				
Less than \$20,000	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	8 (40%)	1 (33%)
\$20,000–\$34,999	2 (11%)	1 (6%)	6 (30%)	2 (67%)
\$35,000–\$49,999	7 (38%)	6 (33%)	5 (25%)	--
\$50,000–\$74,999	6 (33%)	8 (44%)	1 (5%)	--
\$75,000–\$99,999	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	--	--
\$100,000 or more	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	--	--

**Table 1b**

Demographics of adolescents (N = 41) participating in the qualitative study

	Adolescent in Dual-Headed Household (n = 18)	Adolescent in Single-Headed Household (n = 23)
<b>Gender n(%)</b>		
Male	8 (44%)	10 (43%)
Female	10 (56%)	13 (57%)
<b>Race</b>		
White	8 (44%)	9 (39%)
Black or African American	7 (39%)	10 (43%)
Hispanic or Latino	1 (6%)	3 (13%)
American Indian or Native American	1 (6%)	1 (4%)
Other	1 (6%)	--
<b>Age</b>		
Pre-teens (12–14)	9 (50%)	13 (57%)
Teens (15–18)	9 (50%)	10 (43%)

**Table 2**

Qualitative interview questions and themes regarding parents' perspectives of the family meals among single- or dual-headed households

	Common Themes Between Households	Unique Themes Between Households	Dual-Headed Household Themes:
<p><b>Interview Introduction:</b> You may be aware that quite a bit of research has been done looking at family meals. The research shows that having family meals is protective for children across many areas such as: school achievement, reducing risk behaviors (e.g., smoking, drinking, risky sex) and healthy eating habits. We are particularly interested in understanding more about how family meals influence children's healthy eating habits, such as eating more fruits and vegetables and being at a healthy weight. Please answer the following questions with your family in mind.</p> <p><b>Question #1:</b> What is your opinion about why family meals seem to matter so much for children's health?</p> <p><b>Question #2:</b> Research tells us that many families face challenges in helping their families eat family meals. What are some of the challenges your family faces with eating family meals?</p> <p><b>Question #3:</b> What has your family done to meet the challenges of having family meals?</p> <p><b>Question #4:</b> What are your suggestions for helping your family and other families have more family meals?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing Structure/Routine</li> <li>• Opportunities for Communication</li> <li>• Strengthening Interpersonal Relationships</li> <li>• Picky Eaters</li> <li>• Budgeting, Shop Smart/Planning</li> <li>• Make Family Meals Fun</li> <li>• Try Something New</li> </ul>	<p><b>Single-Headed Household Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food Cost</li> <li>• Solely Responsible for Carrying out Family Meals</li> </ul>	<p><b>Dual-Headed Household Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training ground for Healthy Behavior</li> <li>• Time Constraints</li> <li>• Too Tired</li> <li>• Lack of Ideas</li> <li>• Be Creative</li> <li>• Make Meals Kids will Eat</li> <li>• Get Kids Involved with the Meal Preparation</li> <li>• Make Family Meals a Priority</li> </ul>