



# Geographic differences in women's use of the Internet for health and cancer information

 UNIVERSITY OF  
FLORIDA



Kim Walsh-Childers, Amy Dailey, Mary Ann Burg,  
Melvin (Doug) Livingston, & Xiaohui Xu

# Health disparities & rural women

- Rural women have higher rates of accidental injury & vehicle-related death, suicide, cigarette smoking, obesity, cervical cancer
- Rural women are less likely to have mammograms, Pap tests or colorectal screening.
  - ▣ Difference for mammograms remains significant after controls for income & other sociodemographic variables.
- Rural women have less access to health professionals
  - ▣ More likely to lack insurance, travel longer distances to receive care
  - ▣ Source: American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists Committee on Health Care for Underserved Women

# Access to information is important

- Information satisfaction is related to better QOL for cancer patients.
- Online health information use can increase self-efficacy and coping.
- Pew data: 60% of “e-patients” (42% of all adults) say online health information has helped them or someone they know.
  - Increased from 31% of e-patients in 2006.

# Rural Internet access is increasing

- Rural access lags urban/suburban access, but catching up.
  - 38% had home broadband in 2008 vs. 59% of urban/suburban residents
  - 2009: 46% of rural residents had broadband vs. 67% of urban/suburban
- \$7.2 billion economic stimulus program will increase rural broadband

# Our analysis

- Purpose: To examine geographic differences in online health and cancer information-seeking
- Analysis restricted to women and those who sought health/cancer information from some source
  - ▣ Tested for differences by survey modality
  - ▣ For health information-seeking, mail vs. telephone survey respondents analyzed separately
  - ▣ Regression analyses for use of online health and cancer information controlled for home Internet access, race, income, education, health status; for cancer information-seeking, included cancer experience and perceived cancer risk

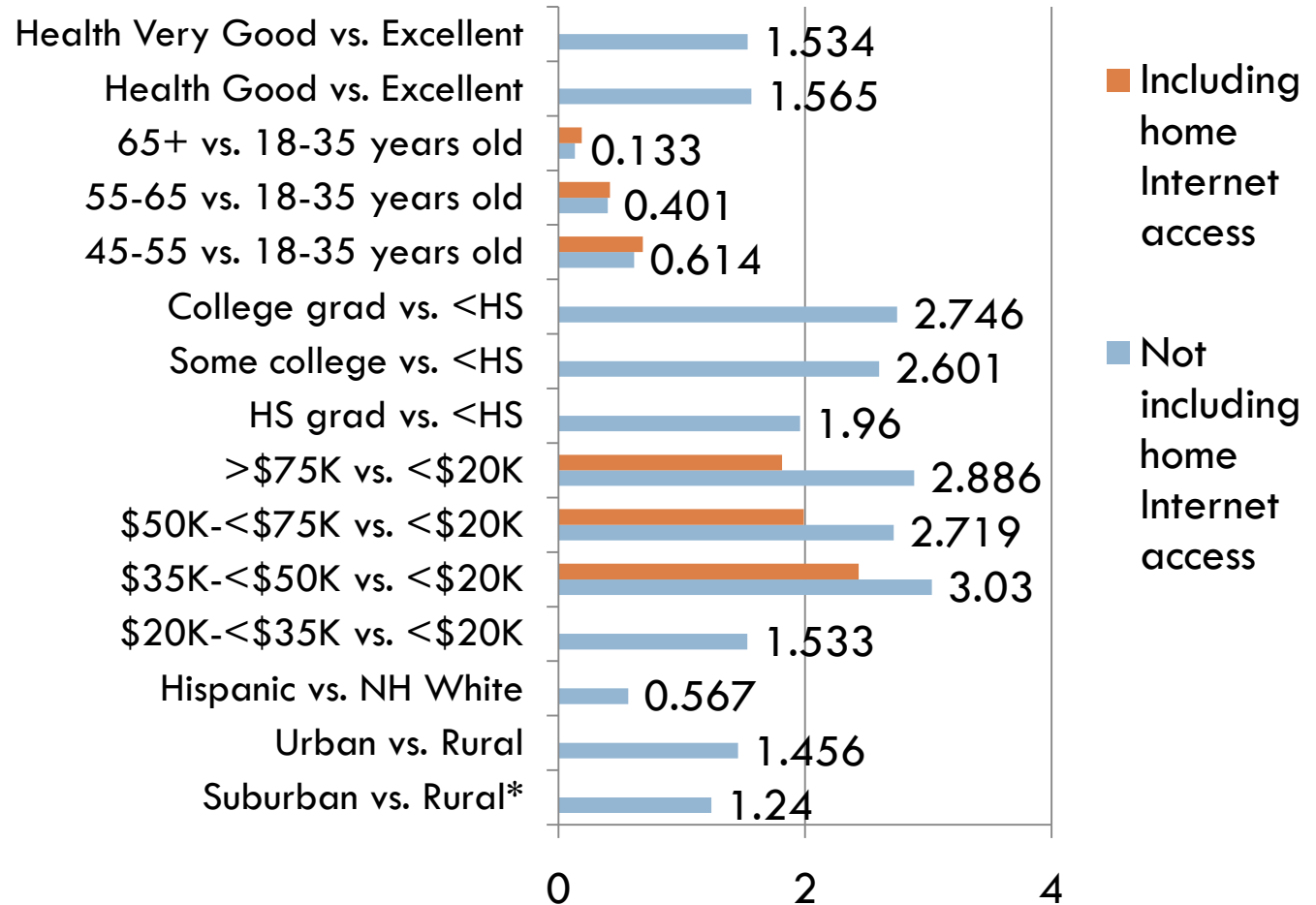
# Women's use of online health/cancer information by area of residence

Weighted % of health/cancer information-seekers who used the Internet as a source

Residence	Sought health information online		Sought cancer information online
	Mail	Phone	Either Method
Urban	59.22	70.11	59.08
Suburban	57.68	61.46	51.56
Rural	47.69	53.50	44.17
	p. <.05	p.<.05	p.<.05

# Internet use for health information

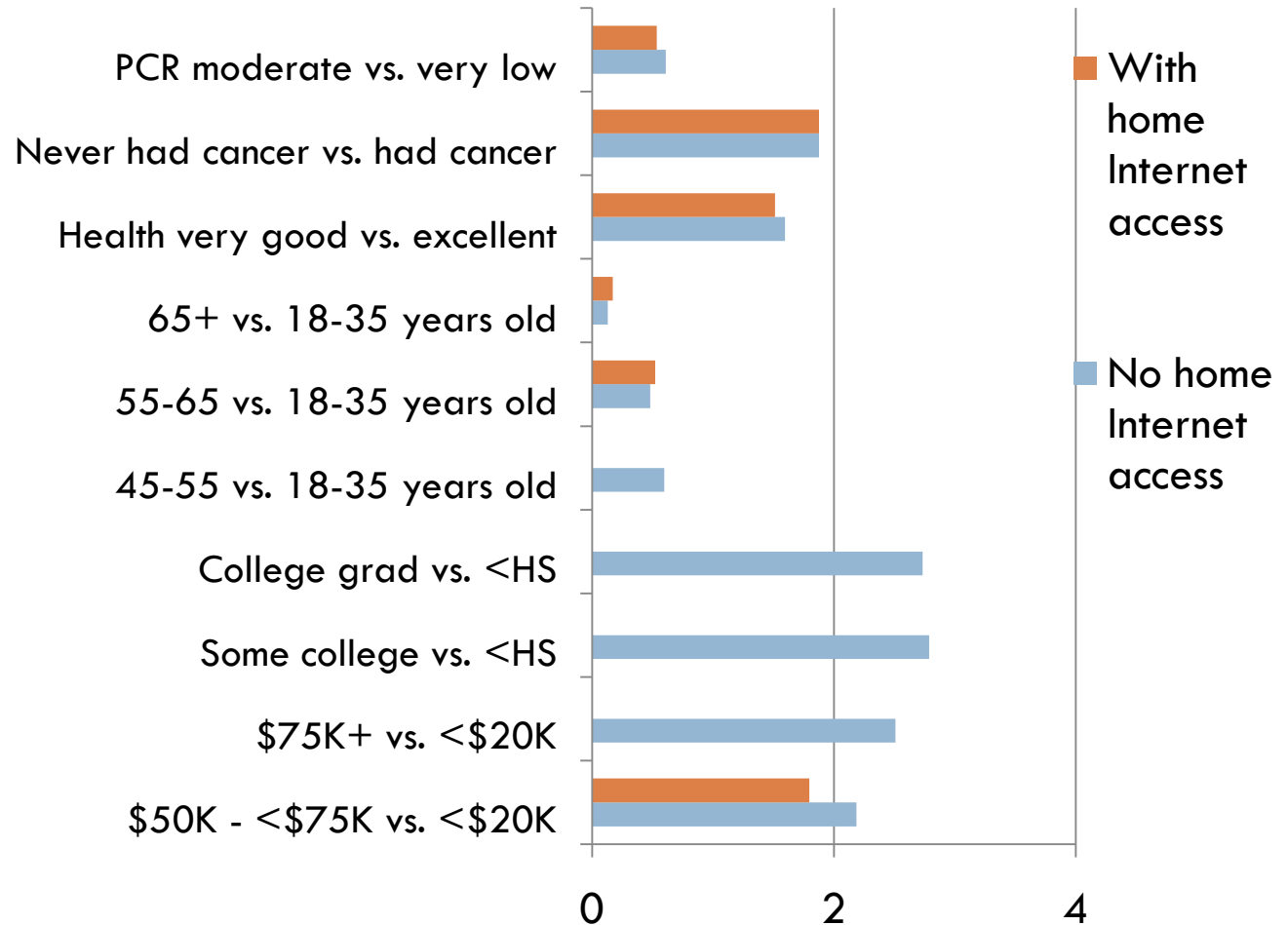
Odds ratios for selected socio-demographic characteristics significantly associated with seeking health information online (95% confidence level)



\*Suburban vs. Rural use not significantly different

# Internet use for cancer information

Odds ratios for selected socio-demographic characteristics significantly associated with seeking cancer information online (95% confidence level)





# Rural/urban differences in online health activities

Weighted % of women who have used the Internet

Residence	Help with diet, weight, physical activity		Look for a health care provider	
	Mail	Phone	Mail	Phone
Urban	43.40	36.51	42.56	33.71
Suburban	45.19	34.41	31.88	30.55
Rural	34.22	24.25	24.09	18.47
	NS	p.<.05	p.<.01	p.<.05

Note: Not controlling for age, race, education, home Internet access, etc.

# Rural/urban differences in online health activities

Weighted % of women who have used the Internet

<b>Residence</b>	<b>Buy drugs or vitamins</b>	<b>Participate in an online support group</b>	<b>Contact a doctor or doctor's office</b>
<b>Urban</b>	15.27	4.99	14.92
<b>Suburban</b>	10.84	6.75	11.34
<b>Rural</b>	14.22	10.90	7.37
	p.<.05	p.=.067	p.<.05

# Trust in online health information

- No statistically significant differences in levels of trust for online health information, regardless of where women live.

# Conclusions & Implications

- Increasing home Internet access is crucial.
- Age still makes a difference, but probably will decline as an influence.
- Online support groups may be particularly important for rural women.
- More in-depth research is needed about how women use the Internet.
  - ▣ Details about search strategies, evaluation, response.