Food insecurity: A Photovoice project with users of community food programs in Iqaluit, Nunavut

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Abstract

This study explores through a mixed methods approach some of the determinants of food insecurity amongst users of 3 community food programs in Iqaluit, Nunavut. Important issues affecting the food status of participants (n=8) were identified through Photovoice workshops. Findings suggest that factors improving food security status include sharing of traditional foods and the presence of community food programs as a support mechanism. Factors identified by the group as negatively affecting food security were the high cost of food in the Arctic and substance abuse.

Background

Iqaluit, the regional center of Nunavut, is a growing Inuit community undergoing rapid modernization with a population of 6,184 (58% Inuit). Despite improved economic circumstances for some, food insecurity remains high in Nunavut communities, and demands on the Iqaluit food bank have increased significantly in recent years. Some have suggested that food bank use provides no protective effect against food insecurity. Little is known on the coping strategies employed by Inuit households and how community food programs alleviate food insecurity, which is becoming a growing concern in the context of climate change and the loss of traditional livelihoods.

Objective

To gain in-depth information on food security circumstances from users of community food programs in Iqaluit by evaluating:

1. How such services are perceived by their users.
2. If they reduce food insecurity for those users
3. The reasons that lead some to use these services
4. Other strategies employed in response to food shortages by these users
5. Elements of the Inuit culture that have traditionally improved food insecuri
6. The interaction of food insecure individuals with the food system to examine vulnerability to climate change.

Method

Mixed methods: Photovoice and in-depth interviews. Photovoice, a participatory action approach in which individuals use photography to identify issues in their community, was conducted in February 2010 with 8 participants who were regular users of community food programs. They were asked to answer the question "What aspects of your everyday life affect what you eat and how much you have to eat?" through photography. In-depth interviews will be conducted over the spring 2010 with 1) the users of these services (self-identified Inuit) and 2) the ones who run these organizations.

Conclusions

Conclusion: As a first step in the research process, Photovoice documented important issues affecting food security in this particular group and participants indicated the necessity of having food support mechanisms in the community. By continuing with in-depth interviews, this study will allow for a better understanding of the way in which community food programs can alleviate food insecurity, will give the opportunity to evaluate the most important drivers of food insecurity in this vulnerable population and evaluate the risk climate change poses to their precarious situation.

This project was funded by SSHRC and Nasivvik. We would like to thank Tukisigiarvik, the Food bank and the Soup Kitchen for supporting the project. The authors express their gratitude to the participants of the Photovoice project, who also gave their consent to the diffusion of these images: Eva Geetah, Anu Micheal, Adamie Pitseulak, Malaya Eeseemailee, Olooriat Mike, Johnny Mangitak, Appa Kelly, Lucy Angnakok. The research was conducted under Nunavut Research License # 0104810N-A.

What aspects of your everyday life affect what you eat and how much you eat?

The importance of Community Programs in Iqaluit to help access food

"Those of us who don't have skidoo's, we come here to get our country food...This is where we get the most."

"We always come here because we feel accepted, good and safe here...and we can eat country foods"

Sharing country foods at Tukisigiarvik

Cooking caribou stew at Tukisigiarvik:

"It's essential to have it here in Iqaluit, it would be better if we had it every week."

"It's good for a few days. We would like to get some fresh foods also sometimes."

"I feel better when I eat country food. I like coming here because I can eat country food....I don't like eating only store food."

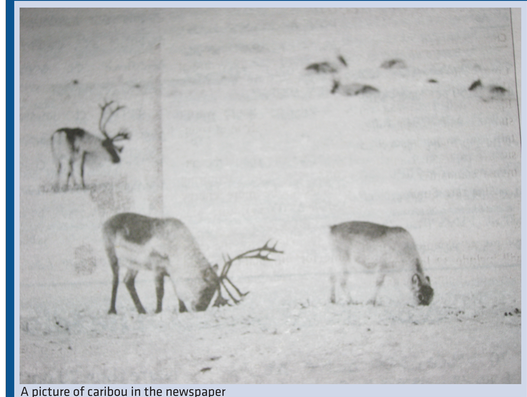
Iqaluit community programs

Food Bank: Opens every 2 weeks and receives an average 1062 visits per year. This represents an average of 300 households per year, of which 50% come only once, while the other 50% come on multiple occasion over the course of the year.

Tukisigiarvik: Drop-in center providing counseling, healing programs and cultural skills training, particularly to those who are homeless or marginalized. Hunters participating in the Land Skills program provide country foods on a daily basis. The center gets 3500 visits per year.

Soup Kitchen: Run through the Anglican Church and provides an average of 9 900 meals per year to a majority of adults (92%) and children (8%)

The importance of country foods and sharing practices to distribute country foods within and between families



A picture of caribou in the newspaper

"It's one of our favourite country food. I feel better when I eat country food"

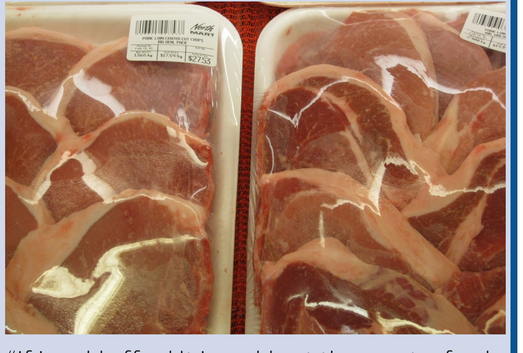
An elder preparing country food brought to her by her family. They come by regularly with country food and there is a hunter in this family.

"I'm already getting hungry..."
"Makes me want to go hunting!"

The Cost of food in the Arctic and the frustration caused by the limit it imposes on the choice of foods

"It's worse in other communities...But it's already too expensive compared to the South"

"The high cost of living here is crazy..."



"If I could afford it I would get the country food at the store instead of these."

Addictions and the difficulty budgeting to make food a priority

"Sometimes it comes first, before food..."

"It was happening when I was growing up and it still happens now "

"Tobacco....and a sheet to sign up for housing..."