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.

Method
A mixed methods study was conducted in February 2010 with 8 participants who were regular users of community food programs. They were asked to answer the following questions: “What aspects of your everyday life affect what you eat and how much you eat?”. 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
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.

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