

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS NOT AN
ESSENTIAL SERVICE

- *ROADS* • *SCHOOLS* • *FOOD ACCESS:*
EXPLORING FOOD SECURITY
WITH YOUNG ABORIGINAL MOMS

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BACKGROUND: WHY THIS PROJECT?

- My past research with Aboriginal youth showed me that they can comprehend their life experiences within the realities of colonization and oppression
- I was encouraged from this research as youth want to make positive change for *all* Aboriginal children through legislative and social policy reforms
- Young mothers were struggling financially but found the strength to do the best they could for their children
- I decided to use food security as an entry point into the daily lives of young Aboriginal mothers

BACKGROUND: WHAT I WANTED TO KNOW

- What young mothers and their children need to be healthy
- What factors are related to determinants of food choice and food access
- What the relationship is between food insecurity, housing costs and child welfare involvement
- How food related policies impact upon food security for young mothers and their children
- How we can advocate for changes to food related policies at the local and national levels

BACKGROUND: LITERATURE REVIEW

- Ryerson University's Centre for Studies in Food Security
- defines food security as:
 - Availability – sufficient food for all at all times
 - Accessibility – physical economic access
 - Adequacy – food that is nutritious, safe and produced in environmentally sustainable ways
 - Acceptability – culturally appropriate food which does not compromise peoples' dignity, self-respect or human rights
 - Agency – policies and processes that enable the achievement of food security

BACKGROUND: LITERATURE REVIEW

- Lack of affordable housing means Aboriginal mothers are spending a majority of their income on housing which causes financial shortages and therefore food insecurity
- Employment is a struggle particularly as 75% of these mothers have children under 6
- Aboriginal peoples do not have the same level of overall health and well being as other Canadians – it is much lower
- Help: food banks, children eating elsewhere, delaying payment of bills, forgoing services such as telephones, selling or pawning possessions

BACKGROUND: LITERATURE REVIEW

- Aboriginal women's organizations are taking the lead: helping women and their families to overcome historical trauma
- Toronto Food Charter (2001): everyone should have access to nutritious, affordable and culturally-appropriate food
- Toronto Public Health's *The state of Toronto's food: Discussion paper for a Toronto food strategy* (2007): asked for feedback and future planning to improve health, economic development and social justice while protecting the environment and celebrating community diversity

METHODOLOGY: ABORIGINAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

- The limited literature available on conducting research with Aboriginal peoples is consistent regarding the privileging of Aboriginal knowledges, ethics, cultural guidelines and protocols when working on projects with Aboriginal peoples. It is crucial that the meanings and experiences of events within the lives of Aboriginal peoples are framed within their histories and world views.

METHODOLOGY: ABORIGINAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Researchers must also be diligent about:

- explaining their projects in a manner that ensures fully informed consent on the part of Aboriginal participants;
- ensuring that they present cultural information within context so that they draw accurate conclusions;
- raising structural problems and individual struggles while seeing the positives within peoples and communities; and
- guaranteeing that benefits from the research are returned to communities (American Indian Law Center, 1999; RCAP, 1997; Schnarch, 2004).

STORYTELLING

CIRCLES/COMPUER ENTRIES

- Keeping Aboriginal knowledge's, ethical guidelines and cultural protocols in mind, this research project implemented an innovative methodology which combined three stages to gathering data:
 - 1) Participants were invited to share their stories about food security within a storytelling circle which included spiritual/cultural practices.
 - 2) As some participants might be uncomfortable sharing some information related to food security they were able to do so anonymously through access to a secure internet site created solely for this project.
 - 3) The researcher team hoped to incorporate visual creativity into the project. A "future visioning art mural workshop" was set up. In this workshop, participants were asked to imagine a future food secure Aboriginal community and, with the help of a young female Aboriginal artist, create a mural that represented this community.

METHODOLOGY: ART MURAL

- Met with artist for an orientation to our project
- Artist did background painting of the mural
- Mothers and children painted what they imagined a food secure Aboriginal community in Toronto would look like
- Team did not impose our ideas
- Research assistants took notes throughout

Summary of Demographics

Number of Participants	Ages of Moms	Number of Children /Mom	Ages of Children	Residence of Children	Aboriginal Status	Income	Housing
16	One @ 20	8 Moms have 1 Child	7 children under 1 yr	2 Moms have children in care	14 of the Moms are "Registered Indians"	12 Moms and their children on OW	12 women rent an apartment
	Two @21	5 Moms have 2 children	1 child 1yr-2yrs	3 Moms have children living with others	1 Mom is non-Status	1 Mom and children are on ODSP	2 women share an apt or house
	Three @ 23	3 Moms have 3 children	4 children 3 yrs	2 Moms have one child with them and one child living elsewhere	1 Mom is Inuit	1 Family on Band education funding	1 woman staying with someone else
	Four @24		4 children 4 yrs	9 Moms have children with them		2 Moms work part time	1 woman in a shelter
	Four @ 25		1 child 5 yrs			4 women with out children on OW	
	One @ 27		3 children 6 yrs				
	One @ 30		1 child 8 yrs				
				1 child 12 yrs			
			1 child 13 yrs				

FINDINGS: FOOD BANKS

- Almost all of the research participants discussed the use of food banks by framing them as either non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal.
- They emphasized that these food banks did not give the necessary foods to prepare a whole meal or fresh fruit and vegetables.

FINDINGS: FOOD BANKS

“I think all food banks should give out food that has all four of the food groups. That would be a start to helping the children get proper nutritional meals and also teach children to eat healthy.”

“I think it would be a great idea for some of these food banks to deliver food to parents who do not have a vehicle or childcare.”

FINDINGS: FOOD CHOICES

One area that the young women spoke about was “fast food.”

- These women explained that they tended to eat these foods when they are busy, stressed or depressed.
- As mothers, they feed it to their children because they love both the food and the toys that come with the meals and are heavily influenced by all the advertisement of fast foods.
- They are aware that these foods are “not healthy”, “addictive”, “make us feel blah” and “not cheap for every day eating.”

FINDINGS: TRADITIONAL FOOD ACCESS

Accessing Aboriginal traditional food while living in Toronto is difficult:

- “other cultures have [specific] neighborhoods or special stores, but aboriginal peoples do not have that.”
- “you have to wait for a Pow wow [to happen here] to get traditional foods.”
- “we could grow traditional food in the city; after all it's not like our food isn't native to the area.”
- Lack of access to traditional foods was concerning to these young mothers as they tied their Aboriginal cultures to such foods and wanted to be able to pass this knowledge on to their children.

FINDINGS: FOOD WITHIN AN URBAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

- Negatively impacted on an emotional level when they do not have enough food
- On a psychological level, healthy food affects the brain and “makes people smarter” so is important for growing children.
- On a spiritual level, traditional foods are connected to Ceremonies, all cultures have their own special foods but Aboriginal peoples are not eating enough of these foods.
- Help from their mothers, extended family members, friends and Aboriginal agencies. However, other women do not receive much help as they do not have family members in the city and they do not know where to go for assistance.
- Cautious about receiving help from extended family members, in-laws and the fathers of their children. They feared that such help could be withdrawn at any time and then what would they do?

FINDINGS: FOOD WITHIN AN URBAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

- They were able to quickly point out all the services and programs they accessed at Aboriginal agencies
- Aboriginal agencies are also helpful in providing “treats” for their children such as March break day camps and summer camps.
- More Aboriginal agencies should give out food vouchers for families without insisting on daytime program participation. “It would be nice if we helped support our working mothers.”
- Need for Aboriginal peoples in Toronto to address the loss of cultures and become more “culturally aware.”
- “No Community, No unity”

FINDINGS: RESPONSIBILITY

“Aboriginal families are two to four times more likely to experience food insecurity in Toronto than the rest of the people here.”
(Toronto Food Charter, 2001.)

- “There is an assumption that if you are brown and do not have enough money you must be drinking or getting high.”
- “I think it's very unfair to all women or families to say it's their own fault to not have; the cards are stacked against us (minorities, single parent families, Aboriginal peoples)”

“Food prices in Toronto are lower than in most other countries, but low wages, low assistance rates and the high costs of housing still cause many people to go hungry.” (Toronto Food Charter, 2001.)

- “The government is changing Acts like the Landlord and Tenant Act which does not help low income people with rent controls.”
- “The majority of low wage earners do not vote because all there is, is evil number one and evil number two [to choose from.] Who do we vote for?”

FINDINGS: ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S STRENGTHS

- Dealing with the system, educating themselves on what their rights are, advocating for what they are entitled to
- Initiating change within agencies/programs by joining parent councils, etc.
- Helping one another: shopping together at wholesale stores, sharing taxis, having meals together
- Strategy: working together towards social change as “20 voices are stronger than 1”
- Strength can be a down fall as women find it difficult to ask for help and so do everything on their own

FINDINGS: ART MURAL

- Woman nursing a baby: nurturer
- Aboriginal grocery store
- Truck: delivering traditional foods to Toronto
- Traditional vegetables, fruits and medicines grown in community gardens which make people strong and healthy
- Lodge: where women eat traditional feasts

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEEDED CHANGES

When it comes to child welfare, research participants are certain that the vast majority of young Aboriginal mothers come into contact with CAS because of poverty.

Recommendation:

- Develop an Aboriginal Family Services Act which addresses the impacts of colonization and Aboriginal world views about the family
- Change the focus of child welfare to prevention

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEEDED CHANGES

As some of the participants in this project viewed food insecurity as an individual concern, further awareness on structural issues may be helpful for a wider understanding. However, this applies to all Canadians, not only young Aboriginal mothers.

Recommendation:

- Public education, including within the educational system, on colonization, structural issues, poverty and racism
- Include racism as one of Canada's social (structural) determinants of health

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEEDED CHANGES

There is no doubt that young Aboriginal women have many ideas on how to improve their lives and that of their children. They are strong, resourceful and capable of making diverse contributions to both this city and country. We who are the current leaders and mentors need to nurture these young women so that they can work towards social change.

Recommendation:

- Aboriginal agencies, political leadership, researchers, etc. need to bring young mothers together to prepare presentations to policy makers and government representatives.
- Aboriginal agencies need to recruit young mothers for their committees, boards of directors, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEEDED CHANGES

- Spread out food banks and other services so that there are sites other than in downtown Toronto, and offer a service so that food can be delivered to young mothers.
- Some of the young mothers complained about the high cost of baby formula, so it is clear that they are not breast feeding.
 - Conduct research on why young mothers are not breast feeding their babies.
- Ensure that young mothers can access baby formula from food banks and other services

LIMITATIONS /CHALLENGES */REWARDS*

- 16 participants, so not generalizable
- Partner agency faced situations which caused delays
- Struggle for young Aboriginal mothers to conduct research in the midst of all the challenges they faced
- Valuable information
- Aboriginal research methodologies work
- These methodologies can be combined with other methods such as the use of computer technology and the arts
- Rewarding to watch research assistants learning how to conduct research, conducting research, mastering challenges and making important contributions
- Like the actor, Denzel Washington, I am happy watching young people succeed

FUTURE WORK

- Dissemination of findings
- Contribute to the development of a Toronto Food Strategy
- More research