

DISMANTLING RACISM

IN

VANCOUVER'S FOOD SYSTEM

UNDER COVID-19



A
50%
Increase

in VPD hate crime investigations has been reported during COVID-19

(Crawford 2020)



30% less people are able to **risk** seeking food support in-person under **COVID-19** (Doering and Hall, 2020)



In other parts of Canada, rates of **food insecurity** in Black households **matches** rates for Aboriginal groups - B.C. has **no data** (Dhunna and Tarasuk, 2020)



Food security is **not related** to individual cooking skill, meal planning, or food buying **responsibility** (Huisken and Tarasuk 2016)

Aboriginal Households experience

2x higher

rates of food insecurity than any other group in B.C.

(Li et al, 2016)



Households experiencing **food insecurity** report significantly **lower rates** of positive mental and physical health (Li et al., 2016)



Lockdown and COVID-19 prevention measures **exacerbate** the effects of the **Poverty Trap** and **Systemic Inequality** (Mallet, 2020)



YOU CAN HELP BY:

- Volunteering your time with charitable organizations
- Donating (donations accepted in the form of credit, cheques, or stocks)
- Educating yourself on the effects of systemic racism

FOOD INSECURITY INCREASES INEQUALITY,
damages mental/physical health, and weakens public health in
the face of COVID-19



F O O D
S T A S H
F O U N D A T I O N

Dismantling Racism in Canada's Food System

SOCI 410C 901

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It is no revelation that we require food to survive—food is one of our few physiological needs. Despite this truth, one in eight households in Canada, comprising a total of 4.4 million people, are food insecure (Statistics Canada, 2018). Food security, defined as the ability to access quality, sufficient and nutritious food that meets our physical and dietary requirements, is necessary for a long and healthy life. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented rates of unemployment, reduced income, and the closure of food banks and soup kitchens, leaving more Canadians hungry than ever before. The majority of those affected are people of colour, and in particular, those of Indigenous ancestry. In fact, 29.4% of Indigenous peoples in BC have experienced food insecurity despite making up only 5.9% of the population (Li et al., 2016). This racial disparity, and how it negatively impacts the ability to fulfill even this basic need, is what led us to pursue this topic, inciting our goal of bringing light to this critical issue. As such, this paper aims to examine how COVID-19 and racism have intersected to cause increased food insecurity for minority groups, with particular deference to Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Organizational Context

Upon recognizing that certain racial groups were disproportionately affected by the economical and social crises brought by the pandemic, we chose to partner with FoodStash Foundation to address how food insecurity has been exacerbated as a result of COVID-19. We believe that it is important to raise awareness about how all humans should be able to have physical, social, and economic access to food, regardless of financial and racial status. Foodstash strives to provide relief for food-insecure households by rescuing surplus food from suppliers and redistributing food packages to families in need. With “...nearly 40% of all food produced

[ending] up in a landfill or compost” in Canada, Foodstash promotes sustainability in the food industry by redirecting food to families across the lower mainland (Carolsfeld & Erikson, 2013).

Our infographic was created to exhibit Canada’s issues with racism, which are often not recognized by the media and the public. Additionally, we illustrate the relationship between race and food insecurity by analyzing how the lack of sufficient food and nutrition contributes to the division of social classes based on racial background, with a focus on Canada’s Indigenous population. The intended audience of our infographic is the general public and organizations that focus on the issue of food insecurity such as FoodStash. It is important for Canadians to understand that Canada’s racial issues need to be recognized in order to achieve positive change. One way this could be done is to start obligating the collection of race-based data on important social issues.

Historical Context

Just as most things in society are, food security is contingent on wealth. Put simply, you will have enough to eat, so long as you have enough money. Why, then, do ethnic minority groups constitute a disproportionate percentage of food insecure households? Addressing this inequity goes beyond economic matters—it requires a delve into history.

The dark history of Canada is most notoriously recognized through the extensive marginalization and displacement of Indigenous peoples. The intergenerational effects of government-sponsored residential schools and similar assimilation policies have culminated in adverse inequalities, limiting Indigenous propensity in realms such as education, health, employment, and financial stability (Wilk et al., 2017). These factors are the embodiment of the

social determinants of health (SDH)—the social and economic factors that impact an individual or group’s levels of health and well-being.

Canada has had a long timeline of racist acts, as evidenced by a series of exclusionary legislation, including the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, Black slavery in British North America, and the ensuing racial segregation laws that excessively discriminated against Black people. But racism did not end with the 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act. There is a concrete link established between structural racism against Black people and increased food insecurity. Research has found that the greatest determinant of household food insecurity for Black people is simply being racialized as Black, resulting in Black households being 3.56 times more likely to be food insecure than their White counterparts (Dhunna & Tarasuk, 2020). It is thus essential to examine how historical events have aggravated the already adverse effects of the pandemic for certain racial groups.

The historical eradication of Indigenous culture and the forceful appropriation of their lands has resulted in pervasive disadvantages for Indigenous people, which have only been exacerbated under the COVID-19 pandemic. Certain health and social characteristics, such as living in rural areas, having pre-existing health conditions and being food insecure make some populations more vulnerable to infection as well as serious complications upon contracting COVID-19. The loss of their traditional lands and territories has resulted in Indigenous individuals being disproportionately represented in all the aforementioned categories (Statistics Canada, 2020). By highlighting this intersection of history with the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, we gain a deeper understanding of how the detrimental effects of the past have amassed generations, impinging precariously on racialized individuals today.

Analysis

Under the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic, the causes and impacts of food insecurity have been exacerbated, especially for minority groups in the Greater Vancouver area. In support of social distancing guidelines and regulations, many social support structures that have previously been available to the public are now closed or operate under reduced capacity.

In the midst of these conditions is Vancouver's Indigenous population. According to an infographic from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the prevalence of food insecurity is 2.7 times higher in First Nations adults living off-reserve than non-Aboriginal adults in Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018). In B.C., 29.4% of Aboriginal households experienced some form of food insecurity from 2011 to 2012—more than double the rate of households of other ethnicities (Li et al., 2016). This reveals a massive pre-existing disparity in food security as a social determinant of health in B.C.

These statistics are only worsened by the pandemic crisis. Even as food drive organizations such as FoodStash continue to operate, they and the clients who rely on them face challenges daily. Food banks lose donation sources as supermarkets sell out to the more economically advantaged attempting to stock up. Although organizations such as the Greater Vancouver Food Bank, which combats food insecurity, have seen up to a 20% increase in new clients since the pandemic started, in-person visits to distribution centers have decreased (Doering and Hall, 2020).

As the demographic with the highest rates of food insecurity as a pre-existing condition, Aboriginal residents of B.C. are the most widely impacted by further disruptions to food services. However, they are not the only minority demographic affected by the crisis. The

pandemic has affected the food sector in a way that indirectly targets Black households. The recent implementation of mandated safety protocols (e.g., personal protective equipment; stringent sanitation measures) coupled with the closure of the border, and the sinking Canadian dollar have all contributed to rising food costs in supermarkets (Saba, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, Black Canadians already had the highest unemployment rate, and a larger wage gap than the average of all visible minorities in Canada (Block et al., 2019). As a result, Black Canadians are expected to experience excessive and unrivalled barriers to accessing fresh and nutritious food. On the other hand, while Asian-Canadians experience the lowest rates of household food insecurity, they have been subjected to heightened levels of racism and hate crimes under COVID-19 (Liew, 2020). In the summer of 2020, the Vancouver Police Department has been actively investigating 77 reports of hate crimes—26 more cases than were active during the same time last year (Crawford, 2020). Those racialized individuals who do struggle with food security may fear leaving their homes due to the threat of violence, thereby creating an unprecedented food crisis based on race.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the repercussions of COVID-19 have aggravated the problem of food insecurity amongst Canadians. The disproportionate impact on minority groups brings the country's issues with systemic racism to the forefront of public discourse, stimulating the need for change. Evidently, the minority groups that we have examined are not the only ones facing increased levels of food insecurity in Canada under COVID-19. We chose groups that we felt were the most pertinent to the current context, and it is not our intent to disregard or diminish the obstacles faced by other groups. Furthermore, the scarcity of race-based data collected in Canada

during the pandemic has caused us to make a few generalizations based on dated statistics and data. Nonetheless, upon investigating the catalytic interactions of the COVID-19 crisis and racism in intensifying food insecurity amongst minority groups, we conclude that racial discrimination, racial income gaps, and historical events have all contributed to this disproportionality. To develop an effective solution to this problem, Canada must tackle its deep-rooted issues of systemic racism that too often sentences our minority population towards the devitalizing battle against food insecurity.

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