

Describing impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on food access in Kanehsatà:ke Kanien'kehá:ka territory

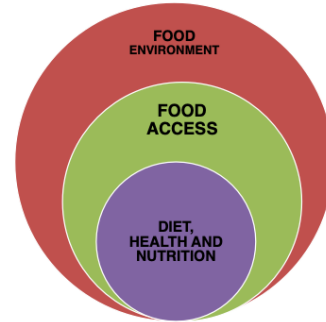
Revathi Sahajpal Ph.D. (C) , Treena Wasontio Delormier (Ph.D.) and Brittany Wenniseri:ioatha Jock (Ph.D.)

Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment (CINE), School of Human Nutrition, McGill University, Canada



- COVID-19 has affected everyone, but its impacts on Indigenous Peoples were markedly unequal (1).
- Pandemic-related protective measures have likely exacerbated food security and food access issues(2,3).
- Research lacks studying food environment as an experience (4,5).
- Taking a relational approach to First Nations' food access is essential to understand how communities are responding to the pandemic (figure 1).

Figure 1- Relational approach to food access (6-8)



To describe the impacts of COVID-19 on community food access in Kanehsatà:ke Kanien'kehá:ka territory

- This study is a part of Food, Environment, Health and Nutrition of First Nation Children and Youth (FEHNCY) study – cross-Canada research study that will looking at the nutrition, health and environment of First Nations children and youth aged 3-19.
- A Phenomenological analysis was used to provide a composite description focusing on community members' experiences of food access within their food environment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Data collection methods included
 - **In-depth interviews**
 - **Community food experts** (up to 15) : to understand policies and programs that were developed to promote food security
 - **Parents and caregivers** (up to 20): to help us understand their experiences and decisions about getting and preparing food during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **modified Talking Circles**
 - **Community Food Experts** (4 sessions, 6-8 participants per session): focused on member checking and consensus on preliminary findings

Table 1- Preliminary findings on community response to the pandemic

THEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTES
Community resilience and mobilizing community resources	<p>" when the pandemic hit, they created an emergency response unit (ERU) and hired cooks"</p> <p>"they [ERU] made sure everybody was taken care of. There were people on the road delivering meals and baskets"</p>
Contribution by local community members	<p>"And there was a garden that was created also to feed everyone with fresh vegetables throughout the summer"</p>
Response adapted to vulnerable groups	<p>"Everyday our Elders were getting a hot meal and also all the people on welfare"</p>
Anxiety and stress	<p>"It [COVID] was something really not ordinary. It's not something we live often"</p> <p>"I'd bring back my groceries and I'd be standing outside spraying it"</p>
Significance of traditional food practices	<p>"For us when the pandemic hit, I wasn't really nervous about food security, because I practice more traditional food practice, I engage in traditional food practices, we would have been okay"</p>
Access issues due to territorial restrictions	<p>"because of land dispossession here, hunting is challenging for us"</p> <p>"I was unfortunately restricted for at least one season that I couldn't hunt because of provincial [restrictions]"</p>
Concerns on food quality	<p>" I heard from a lot of elders that it [food supplies] was nothing healthy"</p> <p>"They purchased off the shelf foods, sometimes that was inappropriate for the actual individuals."</p>

- Initial reflections on participants food access experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic (Table-1) highlighted **community resilience** that meant swiftly taking control of the emergency situation that the pandemic imposed and working collaboratively.
- Food banks and **emergency food delivery services** were established including hot meals **prioritizing Elders and, families on social-assistance, children and single-parents.**
- There were **concerns around the quality of food** distributed and some reported it to be "off-the shelves food" and not conforming to the dietary requirements of different population groups
- Participants reported **anxiety and stress** around making grocery trips and contacting COVID
- **Going back to traditional food practices** like gardening and hunting were **associated with feelings of security** and pride for having more control over food consumption.

Results points out to communities' strength-based approach to handling the pandemic collaboratively alongside highlighting concerns on importance of local access to traditional foods/practices and have raised concerns about the increased cost of accessing food.

This research will contribute to

- Highlighting resilience of Indigenous communities to managing the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To reflect on the significance of traditional food practices and food sharing for Indigenous food security
- Emphasize on studying food environment as an experience as integrally related to context of community.

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