

Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2020-2021

CHELSEY PURDY, MSC APPLIED HUMAN NUTRITION

Exploring food access for Indigenous Peoples living with HIV/AIDS in Nova Scotia: A photovoice project

Description of Research

Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island face systemic barriers to accessing adequate food and nutrition and are overrepresented in HIV/AIDS cases (1,2). Adequate nutrition is necessary for maintenance of the immune system and prevention of disease progression in people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). Additionally, risk of malnutrition is compounded in PLWHA who are insecure due to increased metabolic requirements (3). Understanding access to food for Indigenous Peoples requires an approach that considers unique experiences related to historical and ongoing colonization (4,5), and unique methodologies that center relationship building and community voice (6). Despite this, most research on access to food in Canada focuses on food security, often defined and measured in terms of financial and/or economic access (7). More recently, food sovereignty has emerged as a framework for understanding food access for Indigenous peoples, aiming to link food production to consumption, and recognizing the power and people inherent in food systems (8). Additionally, concepts and practices related to food access are imbedded within Indigenous (Mi'kmaw) languages and knowledges (e.g. netukulimk) and can inform research methodologies (9).

For these reasons, the purpose of my MSc research is to explore access to food for Indigenous Peoples living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in Nova Scotia (NS) using a participatory approach. The research question guiding this work is “How do Indigenous PLWHA understand past, present, and future access to food for their community?” and the method used will be photovoice (10). To do this work, Indigenous PLWHA over the age of 18 in NS (n=10) will be recruited in collaboration with Healing Our Nations (the only HIV/AIDS service organization in the Atlantic Provinces serving the on and off reserve Indigenous population). Interested participants will attend an information session to learn about the project and the consent process. Following this session, participants will be asked to capture photographs representing past, present and future access to food for their community, before returning to share context and stories behind their photos. At this session, participants will also engage in participatory thematic analysis using the medicine wheel as a framework (11). To do this, participants will be asked to identify and categorize themes from their photos by placing them in the mental (behaviors used to get access to food), spiritual (values, cultural concepts, or beliefs surrounding food), physical (physical symptoms or health outcomes related to accessing food), or emotional (feelings associated with

accessing food) quadrants of the medicine wheel. Teachings of the medicine wheel will be shared by an Elder during the information session.

Research Outcomes

This research will provide a deeper understanding of the barriers and strengths that Indigenous PLWHA in Nova Scotia face in accessing food. In addition, because this project is participatory in nature, it has the opportunity for participants to reflect on community strengths/issues and share stories associated with them. From an Indigenous perspective, stories (including personal experiences) can act as a philosophical guide for change, asking the listener to deconstruct meaning and apply it in the context of their own life (12). These stories (in the form of photos) will be shared with the public (with participant consent) in the form of an art gallery, acting as a form of public pedagogy. Though the above outlined work will be outside of the requirements of my MSc degree, dissemination will be done under an existing project exploring food for PLWHA funded by Research NS at Mount Saint Vincent University, which I hope to participate in.

Knowledge Sharing

- September 29, 2021: Guest Speaker GAHN 6617: Issues in Food Security. Title: *Food security and Indigenous communities: Understanding historical and ongoing context*
- October 14, 2021: MSc Research Proposal defense. Title: *Exploring Food access for Indigenous Peoples living with HIV/AIDS in Nova Scotia: A photovoice project*
- October 27, 2021: Guest Speaker GAHN 6617: Issues in Food Security. Title: *Food sovereignty as a concept and practice: Considering treaty fisheries in Mi'kma'ki*

Completed Project Deliverables

- MSc Research Proposal accepted with minor revisions (October 14, 2021)
- University Research Ethics Board application and Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch application submitted (Submitted September 2021, approval expected before January 2022).

Forthcoming Project Deliverables

- Ethical approval (Anticipated before January 2022)
- Participant recruitment (January 2022)
- Participant Information session (February 2022)
- Focus group and participatory thematic analysis (March 2022)
- Report writing and defense preparation (March-June 2022)
- MSc Defense (June 2022)

Activities Outside of Your Research

- PT Program Coordinator, NSERC Promo-Science Two-Eyed Seeing Camp (May 2021-present)
- PT Facilitator, Canadian Roots Exchange Indigenous Youth Policy School Easy Coast Cohort (December 2020- September 2021)
- Committee Member, Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission Quality Assurance Committee (September 2020- present)
- Graduate Student Representative, Department of Applied Human Nutrition Student Caucus (December 2020-present)
- Reviewer, Canadian Roots Exchange CREation Community Grants Program, Land and Food Sovereignty Stream (August 2021)
- Advisory Circle Member, Canadian Roots Exchange CREation Community Advisory Circle (September 2021-present).

Future Research Plans

After completing the research project described above, I hope to plan and implement an art gallery to display photos in collaboration with Healing Our Nations and participants, funded through a Research NS grant held by my co-supervisors. After wrapping up this program, I plan to spend 1-2 years working in community and building new relationships with community members. My interest in doing this is related to improving cultural grounding and deepening relationships in community. After this, I hope to return to research for a PhD in Health or Interdisciplinary Studies at Dalhousie University to continue exploring Indigenous food sovereignty and food access generally. I see this research intersecting with education in some form, providing opportunities for community education centered on land and food and informed by critical and Indigenous pedagogies (e.g. participatory action research, storywork). I hope to develop a more concrete research question through work with the Mi'kmaq community over the next 1-2 years, building on the methodologies informing my MSc project.

References

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