Food Insecurity & Pregnancy: A Theoretical Critique of Food Support

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Evaluation of a Food Support Program

Healthy Mother Healthy Baby (HMHB) offers support services to pregnant women living in socially disadvantaged conditions within Saskatoon Health Region.

To improve client's economic access to fresh vegetables, HMHB ran a voucher-based food support initiative from 2014 - 2016.

Five dollar vouchers were distributed every two weeks and were redeemable at neighborhood markets that offer fresh produce at a reduced price through wholesale purchasing.

Study Objectives

1) Characterize diets of disadvantaged pregnant women
2) Evaluate efficacy of food support on improving vegetable and fruit consumption and food security status of disadvantaged pregnant women

Methods

HMHB clients (n=91) were recruited at intake to the program.

Data collection was conducted by public health nurses and prenatal outreach workers (trained by the research team).

Pre- and post-intervention measures included:
- Two 24-hour food recalls
- Adapted Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM)
- Adapted Behavioural Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) six-item fruit and vegetable module
- Demographic survey

Data Analysis

Preliminary results from the adapted HFSSM, adapted six-item fruit and vegetable module and demographic survey are available.

Data is incomplete for 18 participants.

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Phenomenological Study of Women’s Experiences of Food Insecurity during Pregnancy

Social expectations dictate women to be responsible for feeding their family, with low-income women in Canada found to compromise their own diets in order to feed their children. The perspectives of the women served by food support programs is missing from current literature.

Study Objectives

1) Explore the experiences of pregnant women living in food insecure households, including eating well, feeding their family, and the role of gender, race and social class in shaping these experiences
2) Explore the role of supplemental foods, received through HMHB, in eating well and feeding a family

Methods

Interpretive phenomenology as a research methodology aims to elicit narratives from participants in order to uncover meanings and experiences of human phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews will be used to collect participant narratives.

Study Participants

Participants will be women who:
1) Participated in the pre-post evaluation
2) Consented to follow-up
3) Were food insecure at intake to HMHB
4) Did not live alone at intake to HMHB

Indigenous Informed Research Approach

To ensure the study is conducted in a respectful way which gains the trust of First Nations and Métis women, the support of an Indigenous Elder was sought. Tobacco and gifts were offered to the Elder in exchange for knowledge on how best to approach potential participants of this study who are First Nations or Métis.

As part of the recruitment process, a meal will be shared with potential participants, the Elder, HMHB staff and the researcher. The Elder will offer a prayer and will be available throughout the meal event. Potential participants will be able to engage with the Elder and researcher in discussions, including the research process and how best to share results back to the community.

Study Impact

This study will provide valuable data regarding the lived realities of food insecurity and the role of food support from the perspective of those who experience the phenomenon on a daily basis.

A Theoretical Critique of Food Support Programs

The aim of the critique is to provide a theoretical framework for discussing the effectiveness of prenatal nutrition programs targeting socially disadvantaged pregnant women. The critique will compare programs' common guiding theory and objectives to the values, experiences and viewpoints of the women these programs serve.

How do the program and policy responses to food insecurity during pregnancy compare to the lived experiences of these women?

Framework

Visually the proposed framework is depicted as a Venn diagram, with the overlap of program theory and women's perspectives representing the components of the program which are effective from both standpoints.

Methods

Data will be collected from results of:
1) The pre-post evaluation
2) The phenomenological study
3) The literature reviews conducted for both studies

Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed by the framework, with the overarching paradigms of feminism and health equity guiding analysis. These theoretical positions frame the discourse of food as a social need and human right.

Through grounding in the theories of health equity and feminism this critique will be a unique research project which hopes to motivate future studies to re-examine how they define and evaluate effectiveness.

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References