

Fact Sheet # 10

Understanding the Racialization of Poverty in Ontario In Food (In)security in 2007

How does racialized poverty influence food (in)security ?

Food security means that all people in society have access to food they can afford and that is:

- * healthy and safe
- * enough for their families
- * from local stores (instead of food banks and shelters)
- * grown in ways that are safe for the environment
- * culturally appropriate, familiar and suitable

Not surprisingly, people who live in poverty often do not have food security. This is true in over 11% of Ontario households.

Poor and racialized people often have trouble finding affordable food stores in their own neighbourhoods.

One study revealed that being unable to find food from their own cultures contributed to people's experience of poverty.

Almost 20% of low income parents and 13% of recent immigrant parents in Toronto report being unable to provide their children with a healthy meal. Similar rates were found in a Northern Ontario study.

43% of children living in poverty in Ontario are from racialized groups.

Between 1989 and 2004, the number of Canadians who used food banks increased by 123%. Even so, research tells us that most food-insecure households do not use food banks.

Many studies show that people living on social assistance and minimum wage cannot afford a healthy diet.

Mothers in low income homes suffer extra stress, as they worry about not having enough food and how to plan and prepare cheap meals. They sometimes go hungry themselves so that their children can eat.

Quick Notes

- * Ontario's growing racialized communities face a disproportionate, ongoing, & increasing risk of being poor.
- * **Racialized** persons refers to people of colour who are Canadian-born & to newcomer communities of colour.
- * By **racism**, we mean both the individual attitudes and behaviours as well as the built-in ways in which social policies and societal institutions discriminate.
- * Households that fall below Canada's **low income cut-off (LICO)** measure, spend a much larger percent of their income on basic necessities like food and shelter than the average family.
- * Racialized families are from 2 to 4 times more likely than white families to fall below the LICO.
- * Individual and systemic racism have clear & negative impacts on life chances for people of colour in Ontario.

Food eaten at home costs average Canadians about 14% of their incomes. Low income Canadians spend about 30% of their incomes on food.

People living in food insecure homes in Canada are more likely to have diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and food allergies.

Children living with food insecurity are more likely to have: low iron, low energy, more hospital visits, slower progress in school, anxiety, headaches, and difficulty getting along with other children.

What can be done, and examples of who is doing it ?

Access Alliance works with food banks and advocates to increase newcomer access to food banks and to develop culturally appropriate service delivery models.

Contact : www.accessalliance.ca or Phone - 416-324-8677

Afri-Can Food Basket is a community-based, not-for-profit cooperative community development movement that is committed to meeting the nutrition, health and employment needs of members of the African Canadian community, in particular those who are economically and socially vulnerable.

Contact - www.africanfoodbasket.com or Ph. - 416-248-5639

Foodshare suggests many policy changes and actions to promote food security such as setting basic minimum income standards and policies that promote equality in work, and making food a basic human right.

Contact : www.foodshare.net or Phone - 416-363-6441

Toronto Food Policy Council suggests that food security should be part of the city's plans for growth and that cities should support local, community based economic development for people in marginalized neighbourhoods.

Contact : www.toronto.ca/health/tfpc_index.htm

For Further Information, Action Ideas & Advocacy Tools please go to -

The Colour of Poverty Campaign -

www.colourofpoverty.ca

Everyday Lives

“I was buying two bags of milk every week because that is how much my kids needed. I started buying one bag a week. Half a cup a day for each one.”
(immigrant man, working for less than minimum wage)

“I put on a lot of weight... That was because I was living in a shelter at the time. So the doctor told me that I got a high cholesterol level. I've got sleep apnea because of the food I was eating.”
(former shelter resident)

“Health food stores are extra trips. If you don't have the motivation ... to really search them out, you have to rely on what you can get from the grocery. But if you're... on a budget, that means another (public transit token)...or two.”
(immigrant woman with cancer)

“I'm Muslim and sometimes at lunch they serve pork.”
(shelter resident)

“Somebody... who's living a very modest life and especially is short of cash ... [and] new in Canada, has no idea about the system, and no idea about the western food, would just say, oh, this is so privileged.”
(immigrant woman, about a nutrition pamphlet for cancer patients)

Being poor means...
... “not being able to have friends sleep over”
... “pretending you forgot your lunch”
(children from North Bay, ON)