

The Pathway Study: Commonalities Across New Food Bank Users in Rural, Suburban and Urban Areas

Federico Roncarolo

F Roncarolo¹, G Mercille², J O'Loughlin³, M Riva⁴, MP Sylvestre³, EJ Perez³, L Potvin¹

¹Centre de recherche en santé publique, Université de Montréal et CIUSS du Centre Sud-de l'Île de Montréal, Montreal, Canada

²Department de Nutrition, Université de Montréal, Montreal, Canada

³École de Santé Publique, Université de Montréal, Montreal, Canada

⁴Department of Geography, McGill University, Montreal, Canada

Contact: federico.roncarolo@umontreal.ca

Background:

Few studies investigate long-term effects of food donation programs on food insecurity, diet, social integration or health. We describe household food insecurity (HFI), health, social integration and sociodemographic characteristics of 1003 new food banks users in rural, suburban and urban areas in Quebec, Canada.

Methods:

Adults requesting food aid for the first time in the past 6 months were recruited in 117 food aid organizations (32 in rural, 35 in suburban, 50 in urban areas) using a nested sampling technique. Baseline data were collected from Sept 2018 to Jan 2020 in computer-assisted face-to-face interviews. Participants will be followed biennially. HFI was assessed with the 18-item Household Food Security Survey Module. Perceived physical and mental health scores were assessed with the SF12V2 module. Psychological distress and social integration were assessed with the Kessler scale K6+ and a modified version of MSPSS Scale. Differences across groups were tested with Chi square, ANOVA and post-hoc tests.

Results:

Most participants reported high levels of material deprivation, with some variability across settings. Severe HFI was more prevalent in rural (51%) and urban (47%) areas than in suburbs (38%). More urban participants reported <20000 CAN\$/yr (79% vs 74% in suburbs and 69% in rural) although low education level was more prevalent in rural areas (82% reported <12th grade education vs. 67% in suburban and 64% in urban areas). Psychological distress was higher in the suburbs (28%) compared to urban (21%) or rural areas (22%). No differences were detected across settings in social integration or physical or mental health scores.

Conclusions:

New users of food banks report markedly high levels of material, social and health-related deprivation. In-depth analyses will permit more meaningful interpretation of these differences. The Pathways Study will permit better understanding of the life experience of persons requesting food assistance.

Key messages:

- People demanding food aid for the first time reported high levels of material deprivation, with some variability across settings.
- Severe household insecurity is around 50% among new food aid demanders in rural and urban settings.