

# Food Insecurity among Elderly in The GTA

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## Background

### Research Questions

- To what extent do the elderly believe the Canadian government has been successful in mitigating the effects of food insecurity during the current recession?
- How is the elderly population dealing with food insecurity amid global and Canadian recessions?

This study addresses significant gaps in many previous research by focusing on the lived experiences of the specific group under consideration. While previous research has focused on the consequences of food insecurity, such as death rates (Men & Tarasuk, 2020), as well as its link with mental health illnesses, this study seeks to reveal the target population's direct experiences and subjective narratives (Kumar et al., 2021).

## Methods

- The research employed a semi-structured, in-depth approach to gather data from 5 participants registered with food banks in the Greater Toronto Area, via in-person interviews.
- The study used purposive sampling for relevance and specifically focused on the elderly population confronting food insecurity during the economic recession.
- Participants aged 55 and above were selected from local food banks. Their experiences were documented using Otter.ai. The data will be stored securely for a two-year duration before destruction.
- To uphold confidentiality, a voluntary informed consent form was obtained from the participants before participation.
- The researcher excluded family and friends from the study, informed participants of their rights, and conducted data collection in secure locations.

## Key Findings

The analysis of the transcript identified seven themes:

### •Challenges in obtaining quality food

Participants discussed the financial struggles of low-income individuals, including high food costs, limited employment, and medication expenses.

*“My doctor recommended me always to use vegetables and fruit. But you know, if I spend this limited budget on vegetables, it's very expensive here in Canada”*.P1

### •Food inflation consequences

Financial constraints and inflation often lead to people sacrificing essentials, causing depression, missed social activities, increased stress, and affecting both physical and mental health.

*“I am mentally affected as previously I used to go out a lot with friends but now, I always apologize with multiple excuses and not go out with them”* P5.

### •Recommendations

Participants suggested increasing seniors' tax returns, improving workplaces, enhancing industries, encouraging wealthy support, coordinating with NGOs, and lowering taxes to address food insecurity in Canada.

### •Recommendations to Foodbanks

Respondents highlighted the scarcity of fresh food, the need for higher quality, delivery possibilities, feelings of humiliation, satisfaction with food bank services, and a preference for cash for shopping.

*“This food bank service is really good. I'm not saying it's not good, but the thing is, if they asked us what we want to add to certain foods, like for me for example, like I have diabetes I would focus more on green vegetables and more healthy foods, as my doctor suggested, but here when we come like it's more like white bread, all those things we can do”* P2.

### •Perceptions of the inflation problem

The pandemic has significantly impacted businesses, agriculture, politics, and global issues, particularly in food systems, causing disruptions, increased government responsibilities, and widespread food production and distribution issues.

### •Government response

Critics argue that the government's insufficient efforts to address issues are a result of insufficient updates, strategies, and policies, necessitating a stronger commitment to people's concerns.

*“I think like lack of proper strategy and policy. That's something missing”* P1.

### •Future concerns

Health and financial issues, such as disease fear, limited resources, and mobility restrictions, are prevalent among individuals, potentially affecting their well-being and prospects.

*“Actually, I am afraid of diseases as I do not have enough money to buy healthy food, also I am afraid of whether it restricts my mobility and prevents me from going out”* P5.

## Discussion

The study looks at food insecurity among seniors in Canada, emphasizing missed meals, limited transportation options, and financial hardships. Similar findings were also observed in other research where chronic illnesses and those without insurance are more likely to face food insecurity (Alipour, 2021). Unlike previous studies, this study utilized a qualitative approach to understand the food crisis's impact on the elderly, allowing them to express their experiences and suggestions, and fostering a dynamic exchange of insights.

## Implications for policy/practice

This research suggests that Canadian policy should focus on more inclusive and effective methods to combat food insecurity among the elderly. Strategies like subsidized meal vouchers and drop-in food programs could improve senior food security. Governments should also involve the impacted population in policy-making for targeted responses.

## References

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