



# FOOD FOR THOUGHT



This Research Study aimed to answer:

**How do Muslim women navigate systemic and interpersonal barriers to accessing food support services in Ontario?**



## RESEARCHER

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## BACKGROUND

The purpose of this research was to gather information on the experiences of accessing food support in Ontario. This study aimed to identify underlying issues to improve current practices and better access to food support. It helped to understand systemic and interpersonal barriers within Ontario. "Household food insecurity is inextricably linked to socio-economic disadvantage, and it is often attributed to social policy reforms that have diminished publicly funded supports for low-income households. Recent research suggests that rising food and fuel costs are also contributing factors" (Tarasuk et al., 2014, p. 1). This research provides further knowledge of the challenges experienced within a specific community.

## METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted with five respondents, who had low-income, or difficulty meeting basic needs. They were recruited through the distribution of a recruitment poster through the following networks; professional contacts, organizations that worked with the population, and various platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom, and LinkedIn. The 5 respondents completed an online survey, which began with an online anonymous consent form, created on Microsoft Forms. The survey consisted of twenty closed and open-ended questions. The data was grouped by observing tables and graphs for similarities, differences, or patterns. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and data protection policies.

## KEY FINDINGS

The answers to open-ended questions revealed a need for more access closer to the neighborhoods, with a need for financial assistance or budgeting. All 5 participants mentioned that not all food was affordable or within budget, and it affected their food choices due to high costs, and low income. Lastly, there was a need for alternative food strategies as all participants proposed alternative food strategies so that food for those in need was less visible but more accessible. It also mentioned the feelings around getting food support which affected their ability to access these resources. Key findings included financial constraints and a need to adopt alternative strategies to secure sufficient food. "Every grocery store should have designated food banks they can give to at the end of EVERY DAY to ensure there is no food waste and work to remove the stigma of "food banks" - Survey participant.

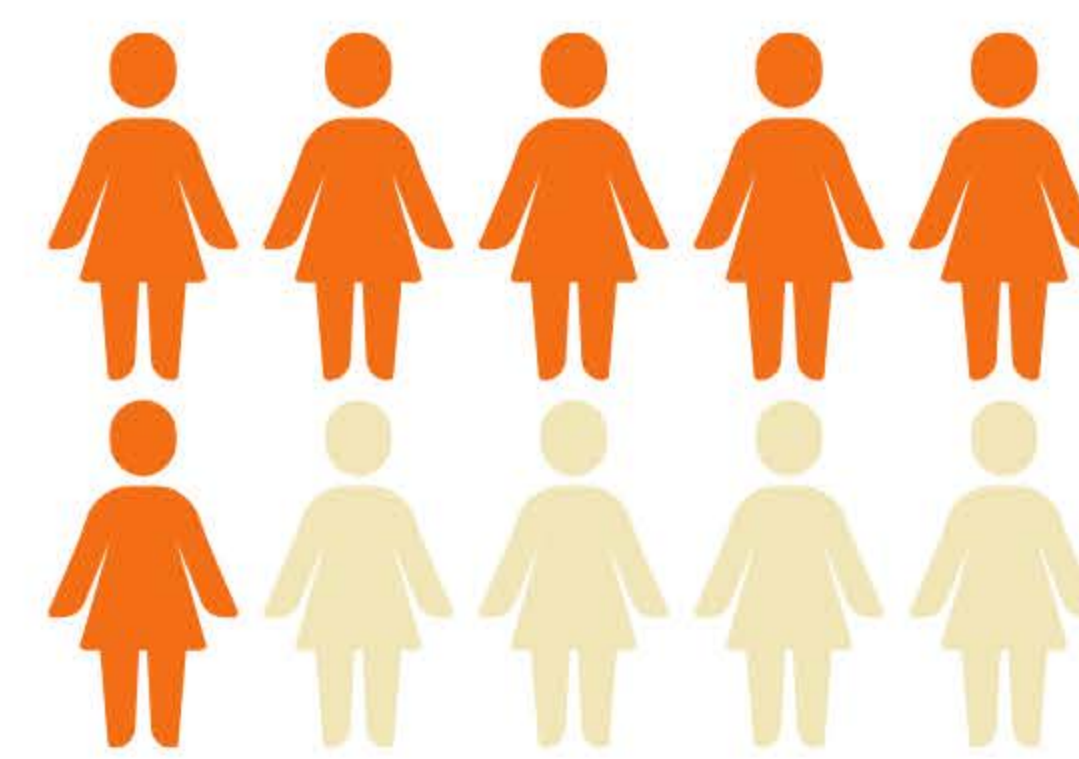
## IMPLICATIONS

This data may be used to create more inclusive practices, and a supportive environment for all in the provision of food support services. It can be used to enhance existing services, and create policy improvements.

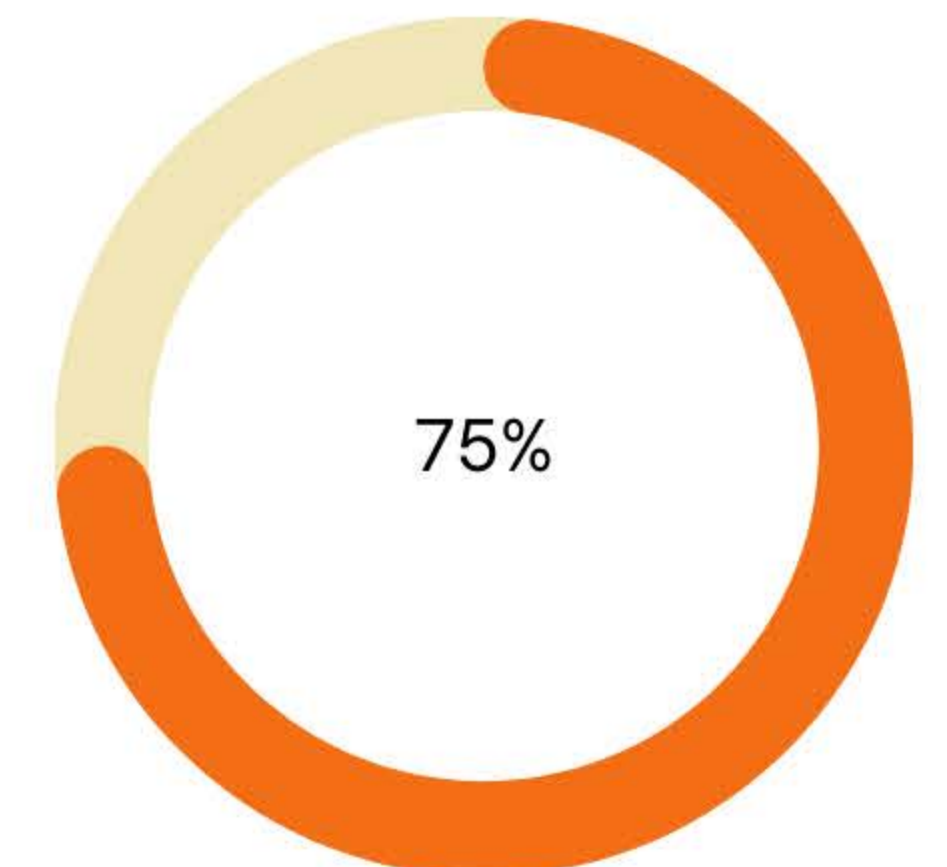
- Grocery stores can provide space for foods they may throw away and offer them at a lower cost, so those in need or on a tight budget, can purchase. This can address cultural or personal stigma in registering and physically going to food banks.
- Food banks can provide a registration form or educational pamphlets at grocery stores to be more accessible and comfortable to access.
- The government can approve programs for grocery stores to sign onto digital applications, where they can post their food items at a lower cost, versus disposing of it.



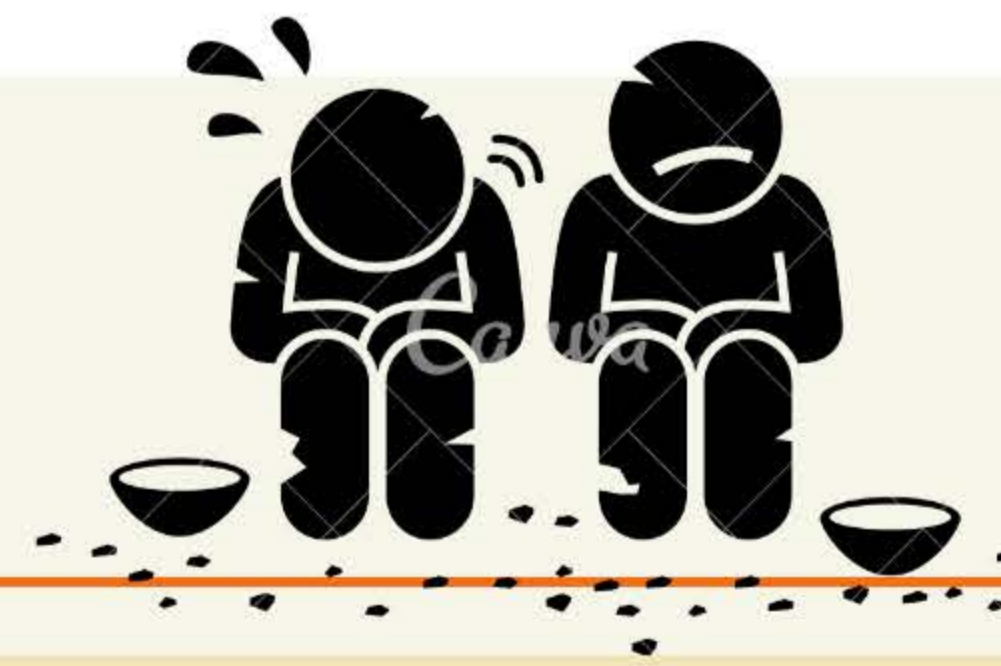
All participants demonstrated a need to find other food supports to support their needs



A level 6 average was given for comfort in accessing food support when needed



75% of participants had little or no access to food needed due to increased food costs



## DISCUSSION

These findings support data demonstrating food banks need more availability, and tailored-diverse options in communities with different needs, which include organizations to alter existing policies to address this need. These discoveries bring up important concerns about whether food banks can effectively meet the needs of those seeking assistance. Any efforts to increase food bank services should come with steps to assess how these programs truly impact and address the issue of food insecurity. (BMC Public Health, 2014) The study discovered that issues like money, budgeting, and accessibility create challenges for participants. It emphasized the importance of having a wider variety of food assistance in communities with diverse populations. Significantly, this research provided valuable insights into a specific group of Muslim women and families, filling a gap in existing research on barriers to food support in this situation. This shows the importance of conducting separate studies for different communities with food support needs. Then, by combining this data, we can identify common issues across Ontario. This information can help create future policies or practices that address the needs of both the overall population and specific communities facing food insecurity.

## Related literature

Tarasuk, V., Dachner, N., Hamelin, A.-M., Ostry, A., Williams, P., Bosckei, E., Poland, B., & Raine, K. (2014). A survey of food bank operations in five Canadian cities. *BMC Public Health*, 14(1), 1234–1234. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-1234>.

