

What are hunger and food insecurity to Canadian adolescents?

Qualitative perspectives of youth and content validity of a national survey item

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Background

- Hunger and food insecurity adversely affect physical, behavioural and psychosocial developments in children
- Although these two concepts are associated, food insecurity is conceptually defined and consists of four components: food quantity, quality, consistent access and preference. Hunger lacks consensus on its definition and the type of indicators used to measure it
- The hunger item on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey directly relates to experience of hunger. This has not been formally validated as a proxy for food insecurity, although some researchers have used it in this way. If the hunger item is, indeed interpreted as food insecurity by adolescents, it can be useful for cross-country comparisons

Objectives

- To qualitatively assess content validity of the hunger item in the Canadian HBSC survey
- To understand Canadian adolescents' perspectives on hunger and food insecurity

Methods

- Data collection:** Seven focus groups were conducted across Ontario, consisting of 6-8 adolescents aged 11-15 years (N=44). Participants discussed their experience and understanding of hunger while responding to and explaining their interpretation of the HBSC hunger item:

"Some children go to school or bed hungry because there is not enough food at home, how often does this happen to you?"

- Analysis:** Qualitative exploratory approach was taken for a three stage, line by line coding process. First, a theory-based template of 'parent codes' was applied to tag quotations related to the four components of food insecurity. Materials outside these four categories were classified in a fifth category. In second stage, all parent codes were collated, examined and coded with any second order, emerging themes. Lastly, associations between themes were examined and two higher order concepts were generated

Results

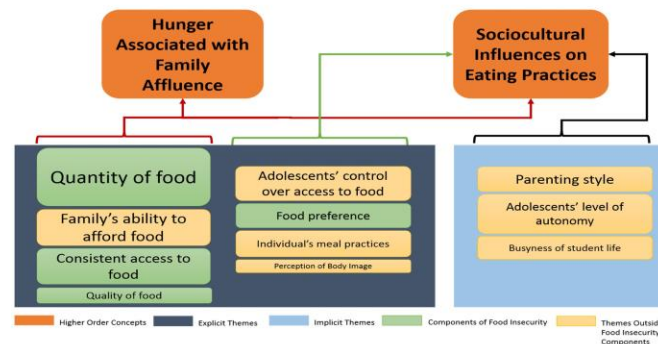
Content validity assessment revealed that when answering the HBSC hunger item adolescents considered quantity, consistent access and preference of food but not as strongly its quality. Code cloud was generated based on the frequency and depth of discussion of the four components of food insecurity

Strength of Representation of the Four Components of Food Insecurity



Adolescents' Perspectives on Hunger and Food Insecurity when interpreting the HBSC Hunger Item

Apart from the four key components of food insecurity, participants also considered a number of other themes such as family's ability to afford food, adolescents' level of control over access to food, the variability in individual meal practices and parenting style etc. Two overarching conceptual areas emerged: hunger associated with family affluence and sociocultural influences on eating practices



Sample Quotes

"I feel like it's the parent's choice (to provide food); or maybe, they can't get food for whatever reason and it's out of the kid's control. And so they feel insecure and can't control it. They try to stay happy but it's also a scary thing too."



"(I thought of) just not having enough money to have food in your fridge for your whole family to eat a good amount every day."



"(When answering the question) I thought of my parents. They make me eat before I go to school and they won't let me leave until I finish my dinner."



Conclusions

- Content validity analysis confirmed that the HBSC hunger item does not equally represent the four components of food insecurity; particularly, it under-represents food quality. If the item is intended for use as a proxy for food insecurity, modifications to the question or addition of new items should be considered to capture food quality specifically
- This study contributes to existing literature on Canadian adolescents' understanding of hunger and food insecurity. Furthermore, it highlights other potentially associated factors including parenting style, adolescents' level of autonomy and busyness of student life



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