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Food Insecurity: Bringing Awareness of Food Insecurity in Sioux County

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Food Insecurity:
Bringing Awareness of Food Insecurity in Sioux County

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Northwestern College Social Work Department

Community Systems: Theory/Practice

Dr. Valerie Stokes

December 14, 2023

Table of Contents

Literature Review.....	4
Statistics	4
Characteristics	8
Misperceptions and Stereotypes of Latinx Community	9
Barriers and Risk Factors	9
Major Concerns/Problems for this Population	11
Engagement.....	12
Terminology	12
Current Events.....	13
Framework	14
Method of Outreach	16
Type of Community Project.....	16
Intervention Goals and Objectives	16
Method of Engagement	18
Method of Strategy.....	19
Method of Organizing	20
Methodological Choices.....	21
Evaluation Impact	22
Results	22
Goals and Objectives.....	24
Successes and Failures	25
Reflection	27
Community Action Plan	29
Appendix.....	33
Figure 1	33
Figure 2	33
Figure 3	34
Figure 4	34

Abstract

Food is crucial to survival and maintaining a healthy lifestyle; however, not everyone can access and afford food. People may have difficulty due to poverty, location of grocery stores, or societal issues. Research was conducted to understand the numerous aspects of food insecurity in adults, children, and families across America. It was also intended to create awareness of food insecurity in Sioux County.

Keywords: food anxiety, food deserts, food insecurity, hunger, nutritious/healthy food, poverty

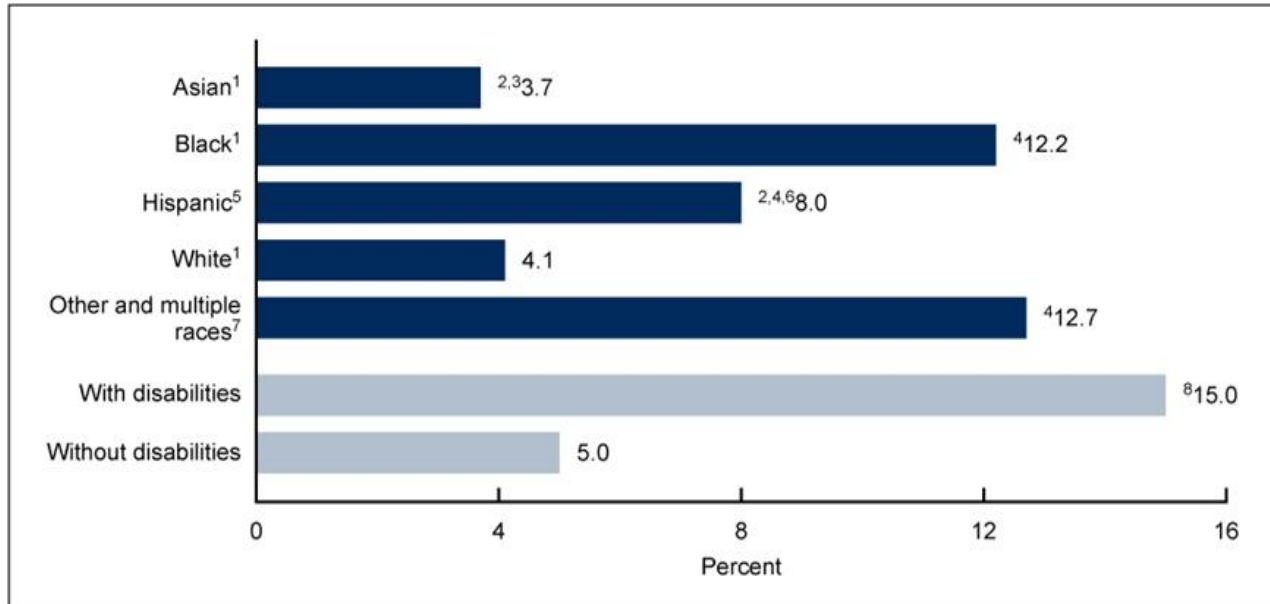
Literature Review

Statistics

Across the United States, families have struggled with food insecurity, whether it is short or long-term. Food insecurity rates have soared to unprecedented heights within the past few years, becoming one of the most critical and high-profile public health issues in the United States (Gundersen et al., 2014). Food insecurity is the state of low household-level economic and social conditions of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Within the United States, over 44.2 million people live in households struggling with food insecurity (USDA, 2023). Out of those dealing with food insecurity, 56% are women, and 44% are men. Furthermore, women are 40% times more likely to experience food insecurity at one point in their lifetime than men (Jung et al., 2017).

Although there is a great deal of heterogeneity among individuals who struggle with food insecurity, vulnerable people groups are statically more likely to be affected (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015). Over the past twenty years, both Black and Hispanic households have consistently been at least twice as likely as white households to experience food insecurity (Haider & Roque, 2021). As depicted in the graph below, the highest rates of food insecurity within the United States have been found in black families and individuals with disabilities.

Figure 2. Percentage of adults who lived in families experiencing food insecurity in the past 30 days, by race and Hispanic origin and disability status: United States, 2021

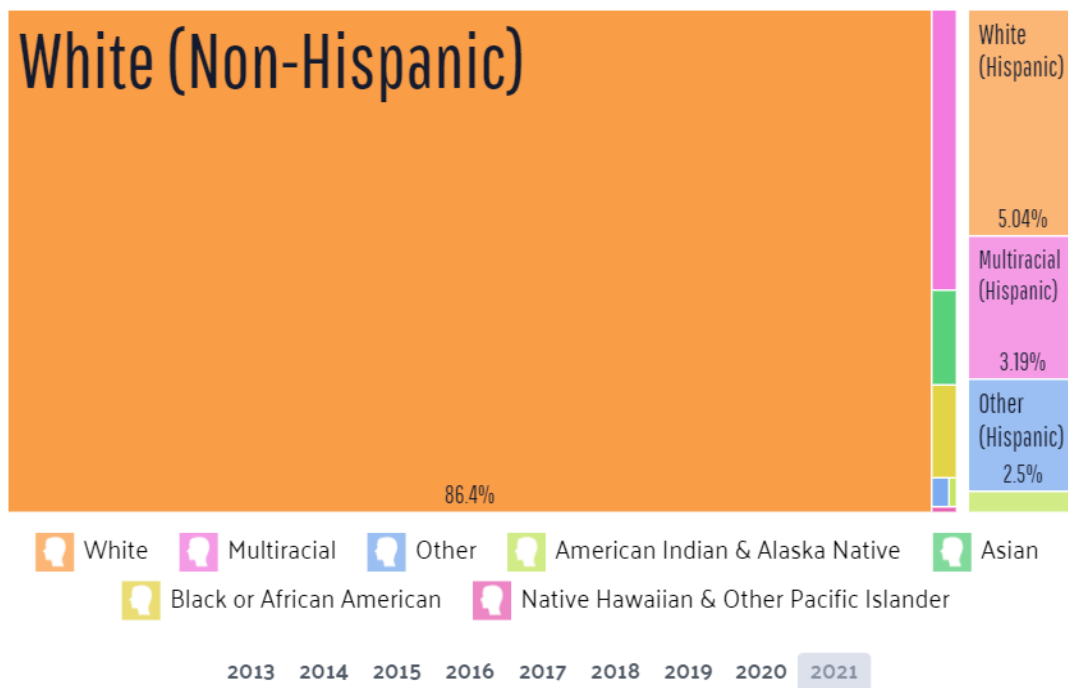


¹Race groups are non-Hispanic.
²Significantly different from Black adults ($p < 0.05$).
³Significantly different from adults of other races ($p < 0.05$).
⁴Significantly different from White adults ($p < 0.05$).
⁵People of Hispanic origin may be of any race.
⁶Significantly different from Asian adults ($p < 0.05$).
⁷Non-Hispanic adults of races other than White, Black, or Asian, and those of multiple races.
⁸Significantly different from adults with without disabilities ($p < 0.05$).
 NOTES: Family food insecurity was determined based on a composite recode of responses to 10 questions developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to measure if adults had problems with eating patterns or access, quality, variety, and quantity of food in the past 30 days. In the National Health Interview Survey, food insecurity was calculated at the family level, and families that reported six or more problems were considered food insecure. Estimates are based on household interviews of a sample of the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population. Access data table for Figure 2 at: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db465-tables.pdf#2>.
 SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey, 2021.

Another vital factor is the effect of one's environment and access to resources. In the United States, rural areas have consistently higher food insecurity rates than the overall population. Rates sit at 12.1% in rural communities compared to 10.5% of all households (Shanks, 2022). The higher rates of food insecurity and poverty within rural areas have been linked to a lack of resources, transportation, and employment opportunities often found in rural communities. In 2020, around one-third of Iowa's population lived in areas classified as rural (*Strategic Area: Rural Health*, 2022). The diminishing number of stores means more distance between stores in rural areas, creating “food deserts.” (Piontak & Schulman, 2014). A food desert is a community with a poverty rate greater than 10% and is further than ten miles from a grocery or whole foods store (excluding gas stations, fast food, etc.). These communities struggle

with low income, inadequate transportation, and limited food retailers and grocery stores (Ghosh-Dastidar et al., 2017). Throughout Iowa, one hundred eleven communities met the criteria to be classified as a food desert (Burrows, 2022). In Iowa, 12.6% of Iowans were living in food insecurity, and the rates have continued to rise over the past years, which may be due to the vast number of Iowans living in rural areas and food deserts (Schanzenbach & Pitts, 2020).

The researchers focused on food insecurity within the population of Orange City and Sioux County in Iowa. In 2020, the population of Iowa was 3.163 million people, with a steady projected increase rate (Iowa Dept. of Public Health, 2021). According to the American Census, the population of Sioux County is estimated to be 36,050, with an increasing rise in the Latinx population (Census, 2021). As shown in the graph below, the five largest ethnic groups in Sioux County, IA, are the following: White (Non-Hispanic) (86.4%), White (Hispanic) (5.04%), Two+ (Hispanic) (3.19%), Other (Hispanic) (2.5%), and Two+ (Non-Hispanic) (1.32%) (Data USA,2022).



Source: https://datausa.io/profile/geo/sioux-county-ia#population_and_diversity

It is estimated that out of the 36,050 people living in Sioux County, 5% of adults and 8.8% of children are affected by food insecurity (Feeding American, 2021). However, these rates may be higher due to the lack of participation and cultural variables of government studies.

Food insecurity has been linked to an increased probability of negative short-term and long-term effects on individual's lives. It is associated with an increased risk for multiple chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, mental health disorders, and other chronic diseases. (Arenas, 2018). The evidence also suggests that food insecurity has a significant effect on the likelihood of experiencing anxiety and depression. Individuals struggling with food insecurity have about a 257% higher risk of having an anxiety disorder and/or a 253% higher risk of having a depression disorder (Pourmotabbed, 2020).

Regardless of government and community food benefit programs, the food insecurity rate has continued to rise throughout Iowa and America. The overall food insecurity rate in Sioux County is 5.9%, with a food budget shortfall of \$1,040,000 (Feeding America, 2022). Although there are SNAP benefits and other food assistance programs, many individuals are not eligible or have continuous needs that surpass these benefits, leaving many hungry. The shift and increase in need and use of food assistance programs throughout Iowa is problematic due to the current lack of resources and funds (Bazerghi et. al., 2016). The increasing numbers of those struggling with food insecurity also point to underlying and systematic issues, displaying a felt need throughout the country and calling for systematic and economic transformation to aid these families.

Characteristics

There are many common characteristics among those who deal with food insecurity. First, some families live in poverty. According to research in the Sioux County area, 4.7% of food-insecure individuals in Sioux County are below the 185% poverty threshold. Of those individuals, around 25.2% were families with children under eighteen years old living under the 185% poverty threshold (Greder & Eathington, 2018). Another common characteristic among people who struggle with food insecurity is the utilization of programs and governmental resources. The government and other agencies provide programs intended to alleviate the stress of food insecurity by providing resources free of charge to the family. In Sioux County, about 1,485 people participate monthly in food assistance programs, 700 children qualify for WIC, and 1,859 students are eligible for free or reduced lunch prices (Greder & Eathington, 2018). In this community, people are reliant on these programs.

Other characteristics fit those who struggle with food insecurity as well. Zepeda conducted a study about food insecurity in America and why people are food insecure. She says, "the participants identified [different factors] contributing to their food insecurity: reduced labor opportunities... planned investments in human capital, the desire to protect productive assets, lack of or vulnerabilities in household relations, and lack of social capital" (Zepeda, 2018, p. 251). There are many different struggles that people who have food insecurity deal with compared to others who do not struggle with finances. These issues come with a lack of funding and are not necessarily limited to a lack of food. They may include wanting to obtain a higher education, paying for college rather than buying groceries, being forced to choose between a car or a house payment, and lacking a community of people who can support them. Living with less money can have more effects than just food insecurity.

Misperceptions and Stereotypes of Latinx Community

In Sioux County, there has been a correlation between the rise of the need for food pantries and a rise in the local Latinx population. Many misperceptions have appeared about this population because of this fact. It is important to note that these misperceptions can impact the functioning of people, especially children. It has been found that "perceiving ethnic discrimination at school is associated with a host of negative physical, psychological, and academic outcomes" (Brown et al., 2022). This is important in this community because if children feel as though they are being stereotyped, they may not be successful. However, discrimination is not just limited to children. Surveys given by the Pew Research Center state that approximately half of the Latinx adult population reported that they experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity in the last year (Brown et al., 2022). It is evident that this population has been stereotyped and discriminated against all over the United States, and it is evident that this is the case in this local community as well. It is important to understand these biases when working in this community as the researchers interacted with all ethnic populations.

Barriers and Risk Factors

There are multiple barriers and risks to a population who struggles with food insecurity. One factor to consider is the barrier of the government and the policies implemented for those who are food insecure. Since the pandemic, there has been an increase in demand for food assistance and decreased donations for non-profits. The government, however, has not advanced its action. Hunter and McGrath state that for years, Republicans have passed bills that have undermined access to SNAP by imposing punitive work requirements and restricting personal choice in buying food by replacing traditional benefits with 'government-purchased non-perishable food boxes' (Hunter & McGrath, 2020). The government serves a risk to food-

insecure people as they limit the programs that try to help. In addition to governmental programs decreasing, donations from non-profits are dwindling. There is not enough money going toward governmental food assistance programs to account for the increase in population struggling with food insecurity.

Another barrier that people face is employment. As of 2017, 2.0% of Sioux County were unemployed (Greder & Eathington, 2018). Under-employment creates risks for these families as they do not have money coming into the household and therefore cannot buy food or other essential needs. Hunter and McGrath argue that “Congress needs to act to protect the most vulnerable among us, from children to people with disabilities to communities of color” (Hunter & McGrath, 2020, p. 7). There needs to be a change to reduce the number of people in food insecurity and the risks that come with it.

Then why has nothing changed to help those who are food insecure? Firstly, many do not see how the requirements and restrictions of government programs are hurting people who need help. Zepeda states that “part of the problem is the way the federal food assistance eligibility and hence poverty is calculated” (Zepeda, 2018, p. 244). The poverty line does not accurately represent who needs assistance when it comes to food. One may make too much money to qualify for assistance but not enough to afford food for their family. Secondly, a lot of these families who are food insecure face shame from the community. Zepeda revealed that “the perception of societal shaming and blaming was the chief obstacle for participants when asked why they did not use food pantries” (Zepeda, 2018, p. 252). There is a significant amount of shame for these families who feel like they cannot support themselves and that everyone is judging them. This shame keeps them from getting the help they need and getting food to support themselves and their family.

Major Concerns/Problems for this Population

There are quite a few problems for people who live with food insecurity. One of them is that low-income individuals often cannot afford healthy food, or it is not made available to them with the resources they are given. Research said that “part of the problem is the cost of healthy food and that the price of fresh fruits and vegetables is high (and rising) relative to high-calorie processed foods” (Dimitri & Rogus, 2014). People are forced to purchase these processed foods because they cannot afford the more expensive and healthy options. This leads to many issues, as “people experiencing food insecurity frequently consume a nutrient-poor diet, which may contribute to the development of obesity, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and other chronic diseases” (Murthy, 2016). When they are forced to seek medical help for these issues, they are spending more money on healthcare than they would otherwise be using for food and other basic necessities.

Further complication arises when, instead of seeking medical help in place of food, they “postpone needed medical care to buy food or might underuse medicine because of budget constraints” (Murthy, 2016). Because medical care is not made a priority, the medical needs keep piling up. That means a greater hospital bill when it cannot be avoided anymore. The cycle continues, costing low-income households more and forcing them deeper into debt. Food insecurity is especially concerning in households with children “because children in food-insecure households have diminished physical and mental health, longer recoveries, higher hospitalization rates, and a greater incidence of developmental and educational delays” (Murthy, 2016). Food insecurity has more influence than simply immediate impacts as these children will grow up and continue to suffer the consequences.

Engagement

There are a few different issues in engaging with this population, and social workers need to be intentional with their actions to avoid these issues. For one thing, “there is a high incidence of trauma among people living in poverty, [and social workers] should be familiar with trauma-informed care” (Tardieu et al., 2023). Social workers must remember the social work value of competence. When engaging in this population, they should always be prepared and properly trained in any area they encounter. Social workers should also be confident in “the choice of appropriate words – especially around people who live in extreme poverty and who might suffer from low self-esteem and repeated humiliations” (Tardieu et al., 2023). Awareness of any situation that a person living with low income or food insecurity may face is incredibly important when engaging with this population.

Another influential factor to consider is that individuals who live in poverty or with low incomes are “experts on their own lives. Hence, there should be no ‘other,’ no divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Tardieu et al., 2023). Social workers should not elevate themselves above the population they are working with. They should keep in mind that if they have not personally experienced food insecurity, they are not experts on what it is like to live with it. There is a “need to cultivate an environment of mutual respect” in which social workers and members of this population respect one another for their position (Tardieu et al., 2023). All of these factors are important to remember when working with a population that struggles with food insecurity.

Terminology

When researching specific topics, it is essential to understand certain terminology related to the chosen topic. Regarding food insecurity, food anxiety is the first indicator that a family might become food insecure. Food anxiety is “when an individual or household is concerned

about adequate food supply” (Coleman-Jensen, 2010). If people who experience food anxiety continue to struggle, they will likely become food insecure. Individuals or families are food insecure “whenever the availability for nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire socially acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain” (Coleman-Jensen, 2010). The opposite of food insecurity is food security, when all household members have enough access to food at all times to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle (Coleman-Jensen, 2010).

Other similar words that must be differentiated are hunger and appetite. Hunger is a bodily state manifesting itself through hungry behavior and sensations due to food deprivation. On the other hand, appetite is a conditioned sensational response that gives rise to a person's desire to eat (Janowitz, 1949). Researchers cannot help those in need without initially developing competence in the topic and related terminology.

Current Events

In addition to understanding specific terms, researchers must be aware of current events relating to their research topic. Across the United States, poverty and food insecurity are problems, especially since the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic started a domino effect on poverty and food insecurity as hunger rates tripled in households with children (Hollis-Hansen, 2022). The increase in hunger rates was caused by food production slowing down, millions of people losing their jobs, and rising unemployment rates. Each of these aspects contributed to decreased family wages and disrupted family's access to food as food insecurity increased from 32% to 80% compared to previous years (Hollis-Hansen, 2022). Currently, people continue to struggle due to the pandemic as federal programs and government assistance programs provided during the pandemic are expiring. These programs provided income to families by enhancing

unemployment and nutrition benefits and providing rental assistance (Casselmann, 2023). Without assistance, families continue to struggle financially and are unable to provide food for their families.

In addition to assistance programs expiring, living costs in America have also risen. This increase has contributed to food insecurity as some families must choose between their homes or food. The largest one-year increase in poverty in America was not during the pandemic; however, it was between 2021 and 2022. The poverty percentage rose from 7.8% to 12.4% between 2021 and 2022 (Casselmann, 2023). Overall, poverty rates and food insecurity are related as both are affected by current events happening in the economy.

Framework

There are several frameworks and theories helpful to social workers who work with people who are food insecure. For instance, the person-in-environment framework strives to understand an individual and their behavior considering the environmental contexts in which they live (Kondrat, 2013). Social workers and other practitioners should use this perspective to be aware of how food insecurity affects the emotional and physical well-being of food-insecure families. Regarding mental health, experiencing hunger can cause negative emotions like depression, sadness, and stress. Experiencing sensations of hunger can also lead to physical or somatic symptoms (Kondrat, 2013). The social workers' awareness of the emotional and physical effects of a person's environment is beneficial in assisting families with food insecurity.

The ecological systems model also considers how an individual's environment is interconnected by environmental systems such as immediate surroundings to broader societal structures (Guy-Evans, 2023). There are five distinct levels of distinction: the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Guy-Evans, 2023). Each level affects

one another and can help social workers understand why families experience food insecurity. For example, if one were to look at children of families who deal with food insecurity, one could look at the mesosystem, which consists of people in an individual's environment like parents, school, and the grocery store or food pantry. If the child's food needs are not initially met, they will likely not be met at the other system levels. As a result, social workers should prioritize meeting individual needs in their mesosystems before addressing the macrosystems and chronosystems.

Another framework is sociocultural theory. In this theory, “the human mind and its constituents – self, cognition, motivation, emotion, agency, and self-determination – are formed within and by the sociocultural communal environment in which people live and function” (Chirkov, 2020). How the community interacts with people affects how they think. For example, many people think poorly of those who utilize food pantries. They believe they are lazy and do not do enough to provide for their family. This leads to the feelings of shame that people feel when using food pantries. How the community interacts with individuals affects how they think and function. Sociocultural theory is the practice of a holistic approach to a person to create social change (Chirkov, 2020). Not only does one have to look at the person's mind and what they think about food insecurity, but they also need to examine what the community thinks and acts towards the individuals as that affects why the individual thinks the way they do.

When looking at individuals dealing with food insecurity, it is important to look at them through the strengths perspective model. The strengths perspective is the idea that the social work field "must look at clients 'in the light of their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, and hopes'" (Norman, 2000). This is necessary because so many people tend to view people with food insecurity negatively. In reality, most people with this issue

are strong, resilient, resourceful, and courageous to take the steps that they need to help their family. Instead of looking at dysfunction, deficit, and disease, people need to look at the positive aspects of human beings (Norman, 2000). It is important to use the strengths perspective model, especially when dealing with misconceptions or negative beliefs that others have.

Method of Outreach

Type of Community Project

This community project involved creating an awareness video that included interviews with local leaders serving the food pantries in the area. Educational videos “are a powerful tool for raising awareness and promoting understanding of a wide range of social and political issues, and can help to create informed, engaged citizens and a more just and equitable society” (Goodspero, 2023). This type of video was important because it raised awareness by bringing new ideas to a community that has grown comfortable with what they “know.” This is the structure that the video followed as it hoped to showcase the prominent issue of food insecurity, educate the community, and inspire them to act. The researchers partnered with two organizations in the community: the Trinity Church food pantry and the Orange City Emergency Food Pantry, hosted by American Reformed Church. These two churches had many leaders in the community who shared valuable information about the needs that surround the area. The hope was that the people in Orange City would become aware of the food insecurity needs around them that are usually hidden.

Intervention Goals and Objectives

After interviewing different leaders of organizations who deal with food insecurity and attending a community meeting about food insecurity, it became evident that there was a significant need for food as the use of the food pantry had increased greatly over the past few

years. While many of the local food pantries were in a stable position short-term, steps needed to be taken to ensure they could provide for all families in the future. Many ideas for longevity had been suggested, such as restriction of usage, less food per distribution, or a different distribution system. The food pantry's previous and current success was a solid foundation for continuing to help others since they already had a place in the community. It simply needed to continue growing with the increasing need, which was made possible through community intervention.

The project's goals were as follows:

Goal 1: Practice advocacy for the marginalized by producing awareness of food insecurity in the local community.

Objective 1: Obtain knowledge about the community's needs through members and leaders of food pantries in the area.

Objective 2: Utilizing resources, create an awareness video specific to this community to show how food insecurity exists.

Goal 2: Reach out to the community by distributing the video to reach community members in the area.

Objective 1: Reach out to the food pantry committee to attend a meeting to watch the video. Then, after the presentation of information, the members will be asked to show the video to their congregation and community.

Objective 2: Propose ideas about how to contribute to the issue in the community.

Method of Engagement

The first method that began this project started when the researchers went to a community meeting to assess the need for food security in the area. They attended a meeting for the Orange City Emergency Food Pantry hosted by the American Reformed Church. At this meeting, many statistics were shared about the tremendous growth that this food pantry had encountered for the past few years and how it was not easy to keep up with the growing need in the community. There was discussion about what the food pantry had for immediate needs, such as Spanish translators to ensure everyone who utilized it could understand its boundaries. There were also suggestions for the future of the Orange City Emergency Food Pantry and how it could best serve the people who utilize it.

The researchers also engaged with the community in other ways, such as door-to-door surveying. Around forty households in the area were surveyed about what they thought were the community's needs. One of the questions asked was if the homeowners believed that food insecurity existed in Orange City. Due to the information gained from this survey, the researchers realized that the project should be intended to raise awareness that food insecurity exists everywhere, even in a rural community such as Sioux County.

Additionally, the researchers engaged in the community by directly contacting the people who attended the Trinity Food Pantry on October 19 and 21. The people who volunteered at the food pantry agreed to ask for a prepared list of the people utilizing the pantry on these nights. The list of questions was as follows: *a) Are you a member of the local community? b) How does the food pantry benefit you? c) How would your life be different if you did not have this food pantry? d) How do you think people view the food pantry and the people who utilize it? e) What do you wish people knew about you, and why do you use the food pantry?* The volunteers were

instructed to ask any of these questions as any data collected was important. There were also Spanish translations available. After receiving consent, the volunteers were able to get answers to these questions, which allowed the researchers to obtain information from direct sources who used the food pantry.

A final method of engagement involved talking to leaders who work with organizations that deal with food insecurity. The researchers talked with two people: one who worked for the Orange City Emergency Food Pantry and the other who is the director of the Sack Pack Program in Orange City. An abundance of information came to light when meeting with these local leaders. For one thing, it was confirmed that food insecurity was a problem that not many people are aware of in this area. The person who worked at the Orange City Emergency Food Pantry stressed that they need resources to provide them. She shared how they are running low on funds now since they are at the highest rate of usage that they have seen. She also discussed that people are willing to give but don't know what is needed. For example, she emphasized that they are grateful when people donate cans of food, but their immediate needs may lie elsewhere, such as needing bags of flour. Talking to these leaders in the community helped to confirm that this project was needed and would be beneficial to the area.

Method of Strategy

First, the researchers recognized that they would need help putting together this type of video as none of them had experience creating media before. One of the first tasks they did to remediate this was reaching out to the college's Audio-Visual Services to see if they could utilize their camera and microphones for the footage in the video. After a few emails back and forth, they were able to meet with AV Services and discuss the project and what was needed. Then, they contacted a student on campus who interned at the intercultural office as a media resource.

They knew that she had experience putting together media such as this. She agreed to help and told the researchers to let her know when they had all the footage they needed.

Finally, the researchers had to reach out to everyone they wanted to interview for the video. After explaining the purpose to them, all three original interviewees agreed to be on film for this video. Two of them were from the Orange City Emergency Food Pantry, the coordinator and the receptionist, and one from the Trinity Church food pantry. The researchers chose these people because of their influence and knowledge of the pantries in the community. After receiving consent from all of them, they were sent a list of questions the researchers put together before their interview. These questions included facts about the usage of the food pantry, the current needs, and the need for increased awareness in the community.

Method of Organizing

The plan was carefully considered with regard to how the highest number of people would see the video. The researchers decided that when it was complete, they would reach out to the different church leaders who were involved in the food pantry committee. They learned at the meeting that fourteen area churches served on the committee, though not all were actively involved. The researchers chose these churches intentionally because they had a previous or current connection with the food pantry. These churches also had congregations that could consist of hundreds of people in the local community. The researchers recalled that many of the community members surveyed during the door-to-door knocking mentioned that they appreciated the large number of churches in the area. From this information, the researchers deduced that many people who do not believe there is food insecurity in Orange City and the surrounding community likely attend one of the fourteen churches. Therefore, the best method would be to reach out to the fourteen churches who are already a part of the Orange City Food

Pantry committee, as they were likely to accept the proposal to show the awareness video during their service. The researchers asked the food pantry director if she would be willing to set up a meeting where the researchers could present information to the committee and show the awareness video. This video would then be shared with the committee members so they could show it in their churches, allowing more people to learn about food insecurity in the area.

The researchers did take into consideration mitigation measures for each participant's safety. There was no direct risk for people watching the video as no graphic content was included. However, there was a risk for those interviewed who used the food pantry. Because of this, the researchers decided not to include any video footage of those who use the food pantry. Full confidentiality was necessary to ensure a lack of judgment and safety for each participant. The overall focus was on respecting the vulnerability of the participants while spreading as much truth as possible.

Methodological Choices

One thing to consider was why it was important for the church to be involved with food insecurity. Many believe it is the individual's responsibility to obtain food; if they cannot, that is their fault. However, Dowler and O'Connor talk about international human rights obligations, which looked at the perspective of food insecurity differently. Instead of food being the individual's responsibility, it is the person's right (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012). When looking at bringing awareness to people in the church, it is important for people to see that it is not solely the responsibility of the individual to get food. It is also the church's responsibility to help the individual because every person has a right to have food. Churches believe in helping those in need, so following that belief with the human rights approach can help change the perspective of the church and the community.

An issue considered when devising the plan was how to address the stigma around food insecurity and food pantries. A constant issue undermining any aid when it comes to food insecurity is the stigma around those living in food insecurity. Many individuals believe in the stigma that those with food insecurity are lazy and are just benefitting from the government when they do not need it. These stigmas create barriers to awareness and aid for those struggling to feed their families. Valerie Earnshaw and Allison Karpyn discuss the lack of confrontation regarding the stigma around individuals struggling with food insecurity. They propose that people must address and challenge the said stigma to create lasting change because otherwise, it reinforces negative and false beliefs about a struggling population. The researchers created a framework for questions in the video that would challenge individuals' false beliefs about food insecurity. The stigma would be addressed by asking certain interview questions that would lead individuals to a sympathetic response and challenge the stigma (Earnshaw & Karpyn, 2023).

The final issue was the relationship between exclusion and access to basic needs such as food. The social inclusion framework analyzes how social exclusion affects an individual's access to rights, resources, and capabilities (Adam, 2017). Studies show that insecurity can manifest in different structural exclusion mechanisms, causing limited access to rights and resources (Adam, 2017). To address this social exclusion in the video, the researchers contacted numerous groups of people, inviting them to share their role in improving food insecurity in Sioux County.

Evaluation Impact

Results

Food insecurity was advocated for and recognition of this issue was brought to the community through the creation of the awareness video. The results of this community project

were successful overall, as approximately twelve to fifteen community members viewed the video at the food pantry meeting. The members were encouraged to share the video within their social circles and were not opposed to this idea. Multiple theories were used during the creation of the awareness video. The first one utilized was the *person-in-environment* theory, which is used to understand an individual by looking at where they live (Kondrat, 2013). It was important to understand the environment of Sioux County and the level of awareness around food insecurity within the community. If people want change to occur regarding food insecurity, it is important to create change in the environment. This is why the video was so essential to this project.

The next theory that was used was the ecological systems theory. The ecological systems theory is similar to the *person-in-environment* theory in that it looks at an environment around a person; however, it looks at different levels, from the micro level of the family to broader levels of schools and cultural values (Guy-Evans, 2023). In Sioux County, religion, especially Christianity, is an integral part of the community and can be one of the levels that children facing food insecurity are part of. By showing local church representatives the video and encouraging them to share it with their churches and community, it created change on one of the levels in the ecological system.

Finally, sociocultural theory was used to examine the world's influence on the individual (Medical College of Wisconsin, 2022). Many people who use the food pantry feel shame and judgment from others who assume they are lazy and not good enough to support their families. When they feel this judgment from others, the sociocultural theory shows how isolation and barriers are created when they utilize the available resources. By generating awareness in the

community, the goal is to reduce the stigma of shame around those who use the food pantry and, therefore, create a community of belonging that can help them during this time of difficulty.

Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of this change effort were met throughout the semester. The first goal that the researchers had was to (1) practice advocacy for the marginalized by producing awareness of food insecurity in the local community. It was to be accomplished through two objectives: (a) obtaining knowledge about the community needs through members and leaders of food pantries in the area, and (b) utilizing the group's resources to create an awareness video specific to this community to demonstrate how food insecurity exists.

The group members acquired basic knowledge of how food insecurity exists in Sioux County by attending a community food pantry board meeting and hearing how they have operated and grown throughout the year. They also sat down with leaders in the community who have worked for other food insecurity-related causes in the area, such as the director for the Orange City Snack Pack program. From this interaction, the group members learned about how food insecurity was prevalent. The second objective was accomplished through the help of many different people. First, three community members agreed to be interviewed for the video and met with the group on separate days. The group members did not have experience using a professional camera, lights, and microphones, so they asked the college's audio-visual department to help with the interview process. Finally, the group reached out to a student on campus known for their media skills to put the video together, and she agreed to help. The link to this video can be found in Figure 4.

The group members' second goal was to accomplish (2) community outreach by distributing the video to local pastors to reach community members in the area. The group would

do this in two ways: (a) reaching out to the food pantry leadership committee to attend a meeting to view the video. Following the presentation of information, the members would be asked to show the video to the people in the community around them. The second objective would be done by (b) proposing ideas at this meeting for how the people in attendance can contribute to resolving this issue in the community.

The first objective for this goal was accomplished by reaching out to the Orange City Emergency Food Pantry coordinator, who set up a meeting on Thursday, December 8, at 8:00 pm. The presentation of information can be seen in Figure 2. The members were asked before playing the video if they would share the video in their churches and communities, and plans were set to share the link to the video and the presentation. The second objective was accomplished by including an area for suggestions to make a difference in the community in both the video and the in-person presentation. The people in attendance were also given time to ask the group questions about anything they saw in the video or presentation.

Successes and Failures

Overall, the researchers felt that the social change effort was a success. There were some setbacks along the way, such as difficulty with scheduling interviews that everyone would be able to attend: the four group members, the person being interviewed, and a representative from the audio-visual department to help with cameras, lights, and microphones. The group also found some difficulty with technology during the community food pantry board meeting, as seen in Figure 1. Since the church was only unlocked fifteen minutes before the meeting, they did not anticipate that they would not have the right computer factors and details to connect it to the screen to present. While it was a success eventually, except for the video sound, the meeting did

begin late because of these difficulties. The researchers felt as though this may have started them off on the wrong foot.

However, the presentation and video overall succeeded in the researchers' eyes. The researchers decided to incorporate a qualitative evaluation to assess the successful outcomes. Everyone who attended the meeting seemed engaged and actively listened to the presentation and video. They asked meaningful questions that the group was able to answer at the end. The group was also encouraged by being informed that numerous churches would be showing the video they had created to their congregations. Many people in attendance also asked for the final report to be sent to them once it was completed as they wanted to share some of the information and data they had heard. The researchers felt they did a successful job of bringing awareness to the issue of food insecurity in Sioux County. They can be seen pictured with their professor following the meeting in Figure 3.

Throughout this project, the researchers used several effective strategies to gather people to create a successful awareness video. Firstly, the researchers discovered local organizations addressing food insecurity and contacted them to learn more about the prevalence of food insecurity in Sioux County. After gaining more information about the area's needs, the researchers contacted food pantry leaders to inquire about interviewing them for the awareness video. As the researchers waited to hear back from their contacts, they got in touch with Northwestern College's AV department to ask for their assistance in providing video and lighting for the video. After obtaining the video content and interviews, the researchers communicated with a Northwestern College student to turn the video clips and interviews into a five-to-six-minute awareness video. Overall, the researchers' social skills were an effective tactic when bringing community awareness of food insecurity.

Despite their success, the researchers could have used other tactics that may have worked better. For instance, moving the videos from a flash drive to a One Drive account was difficult as most of their laptops could not download files from a flash drive. Once the researchers could download the videos, it took several hours to complete as the interviews were long. If the researchers had more time, it would have helped to separate the videos into shorter clips. Doing so would have helped the videos download quicker, and the researchers could sort through the videos faster. Also, the researchers could have initiated a larger meeting to reach more of the community. They could have done so by advertising the meeting and inviting Northwestern students and facilities. Expanding the group's audience would have made a greater impact as more people would view the video and share it with others.

Overall, the video was effective in creating awareness about food insecurity. It was meaningful as it provided real-life examples and facts about the food pantry. In addition, it was easy to share with others and created a ripple effect of advocating for those who deal with food insecurity by asking the members to share it in different circles around them.

Reflection

The researchers saw the importance of using the action-social model to create change in a community. Walter Brueggeman talks about this, saying, "the action-social perspective 'provides a consistent conceptual underpinning for the assertion that human beings who are active agents, capable of self-transformation'" (Brueggeman, 2014, p. 27). People must know that they have the power to create the change they desire to see. The researchers saw this as they took the initiative to create the awareness video and advocate for those who deal with food insecurity. They also saw how they could not do it on their own. They needed help from the community members who

understood the situation to talk about food insecurity and multiple people to help create the video.

At the beginning of the project, many meetings were held with different organizations trying to understand what food insecurity looked like in the Sioux County community. The researchers used active reflection to understand what was happening with food insecurity, the needs for organizations, and possible solutions that would lead to the best result. They thought of multiple projects, such as having a food drive, cooperating with a grocery store for funding, or doing an event on the Northwestern campus. However, they decided to create an awareness video because they saw the need was not to provide short-term funding, but long-term awareness that could lead to a change in perspective.

Relationships were extremely important when it came to the food pantry. The researchers understood this when they went to the food pantry meeting and saw the members work together to find a solution for the upcoming year. In addition, the researchers saw relationships between the different pantries. The food pantry and the Trinity food pantry worked together to help those who needed food. This shows why relational community is important. Relational community "exists because of values, sentiments, and feelings of shared identification and commitment that are held in common by a group of individuals" (Brueggeman, 2016). Those who were part of the food pantry wanted to help those in their community and worked together to find the best solution to this growing problem.

Along with the relational community, social networking was important. The social network is a connection where a group of individuals has common interactions (Brueggeman, 2016). This was seen with the food pantry as there was a network with the churches in the area. The churches referred people to the food pantry if they needed food for the month. This helped

the food pantry know who needed immediate help, and for others, they could let them know that they would have a distribution at the end of the month. The churches would also volunteer on distribution days with the food pantry. There was one member of the food pantry leadership committee who worked at a local grocery store and assisted with knowledge of food prices and what to give to the food pantry. Networking is important to help organizations like the food pantry function effectively. By using the church and its influence in the community, the food pantry could help make a difference.

Finally, when creating the video, it was important to use a modified strengths-based approach. This approach "balances community problems and needs with community resources, assets, and people's strengths" (Brueggemann, 2016). The researchers wanted to acknowledge that there is a problem as food insecurity is prevalent in Sioux County due to different barriers and problems. However, they also wanted to look at their resources and strengths, such as people being resilient and having organizations like the food pantry that they could use to help get through the month.

Community Action Plan

For the short-term future, the intent is that the community members at the food pantry meeting will share the video in their churches. In addition to showing the video, the group also hopes that the leaders would find a way to set up a system to donate to the food pantry, whether it be donating money, food, or even people's time for volunteering. The video gave suggestions that people can do to help out and made it clear what the food pantry needs regarding resources and volunteers. This way not only is awareness created for the reality of food insecurity in Sioux County, but people can also help with the immediate needs of the food pantry to help others in their community.

One step that individuals can take in the future is to advocate for the existence of food insecurity in Sioux County, as many still do not think food insecurity is a problem. As individuals watch the video and become aware, the hope is that they will help others become aware. There are multiple steps they could take, such as

- Talking to their families at dinner about how not everyone gets to have a meal at the end of the day
- Keeping up to date on current events that affect food programs like SNAP and WIC
- Being politically involved to help create more food programs and resources for those who struggle with food insecurity
- Talking to their neighbors and people around them and seeing if they have some food or money they would want to donate

One step that groups could take is to volunteer and help raise donations for the food pantry. The churches have done a great job of volunteering on distribution days for the food pantry, but it would be amazing to see more community members involved. This can create a relational community not only with the church leaders, but also among other members of the community. Some different things that could happen here are

- Having a group from a workplace sign up to volunteer one Saturday morning
- Setting up a food drive in the grocery stores so people can buy food for the food pantry as they buy food for themselves
- Hosting a drive at school so kids can be involved as well, whether it is a food, clothing, or toy drive, as multiple needs could be met

- Having a bake sale in churches or in organizations with a free will donation that can go to the food pantry

One step that the community can take is to create a social event for those who are part of the food pantry and for those who use the food pantry. Research shows that some who struggle with food insecurity lack community. Having a community is essential because it can provide emotional support and help physically with needs such as bringing a meal when you are feeling sick, watching the kids for a night, or helping with yard work. While the food pantry helps people's immediate physical needs, it would be ideal if the community could also meet the social needs. The following steps could be taken:

- An event besides the distribution of the food pantry where those who volunteer get to interact with those who use the food pantry
- Game night for the kids of both the volunteers and the participants for the children to get to know each other. This could also serve as a respite night for the parents to have time without their children
- Game night for the adults, for instance, get-to-know-you games, as well as activities of learning both English and Spanish to lessen the language barrier
- A night of cooking where families will come with their favorite recipes, the ingredients will be provided, and people will learn about other cultures and traditions

These are just a few suggestions of what could be done. Overall, the long-term goal is to create awareness about food insecurity in the community and advocate for those who are food insecure to reduce the stereotypes and stigmas they face. The desire is to increase donations, as the hope is that the food pantry can be around for many years and help as many people as

possible without having to turn them away. Finally, a goal is to build a relational community within the volunteers and with those who use the food pantry to get to know the people and understand each other's story better.

Appendix

Figure 1

Setting up the presentation at American Reformed Church in Orange City, IA



Figure 2

Presenting the research for the leadership team at the Orange City Food Pantry

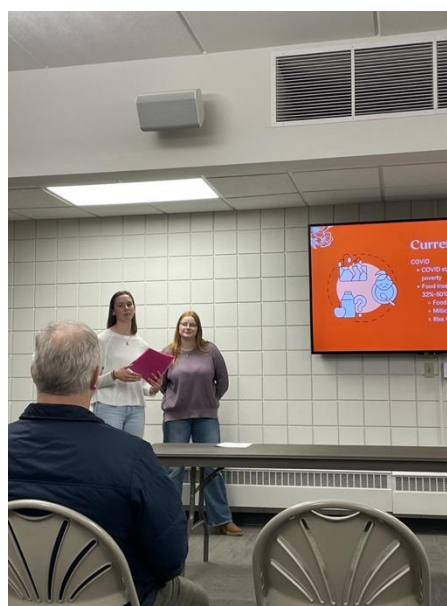
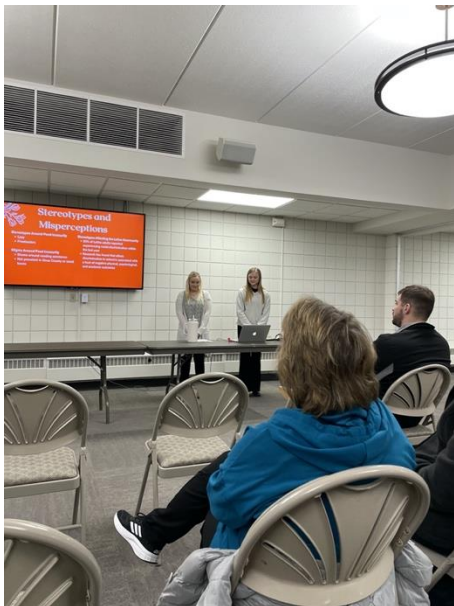


Figure 3

The research group and their professor Dr. Valerie Stokes after the meeting had finished



Figure 4

Link to the final product – Food Insecurity in Sioux County

<https://youtu.be/T81s4RBCzxc>

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