

Inuit Food Security in Nunatsiavut: The community-specific nature of a widespread public health issue

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Measuring household food security is a way to understand the ability of all people in a household to afford enough of the foods they need, want and prefer to eat on a regular basis to be healthy and active.

Background

Food insecurity is a persistent problem in Canada. From 2008 to 2012, the proportion of households that reported experiences of food insecurity increased from 11.3% to 12.7%.

The 2007-2008 Inuit Health Survey drew particular attention to the seriousness of this issue in Inuit regions in Canada, where food insecurity levels ranged from 44.2% in Nunatsiavut, to 70.2% in Nunavut.

The Inuit health survey used sampling methods that produced regional but not community scale prevalence estimates of food security status.

These regional numbers are very useful for comparison with other regions and the country as a whole, but give us little information on food insecurity at the community level.

Importance

Living in a household that is food insecure can have impacts on the health of children and adults in the home. Food insecurity has significant negative impacts on physical health as well as mental health and wellbeing.

Communities in Inuit regions face unique challenges in addressing food insecurity. The factors that influence food access can vary significantly from one community to the next.

In response to this need for local data, the Nunatsiavut Government partnered with Trent University, the University of Guelph, McGill University and Food First NL to conduct a large household survey in the 5 Nunatsiavut communities.

The objective of the study was to increase our understanding of community specific household food security by producing data for each Nunatsiavut community.

Methods

- Throughout 2014, local surveyors were recruited and trained by researchers from Trent University in Nain, Hopedale, Makkovik and Postville. Training covered topics such as research ethics, "What is Food Security?", and administering survey tools using iPads.
- The Universities of Guelph and McGill led data collection in Rigolet with local researchers from the "My Word": Digital Storytelling and Media Lab.
- Households were chosen randomly in Nain, Hopedale, Makkovik and Postville and invited to participate in the survey. The results represent a cross section of households in those 4 communities. In Rigolet a near census of all households was completed.
- The "head of household" which is the person in the household who makes most of the food decisions (buys groceries, cooks, etc.) was interviewed by a local surveyor.
- Participants were asked questions about the food situation in their household for the month prior to the conduct of the survey.
- Household food insecurity was assessed using the USDA 18 item Household Food Security Survey Module as part of a larger food related survey.
- A total of 537 households (out of a possible 722 households in all communities) responded to the survey's Food Security questions.
- The results from the survey represent the Nunatsiavut region with 99% confidence \pm 2.8%.

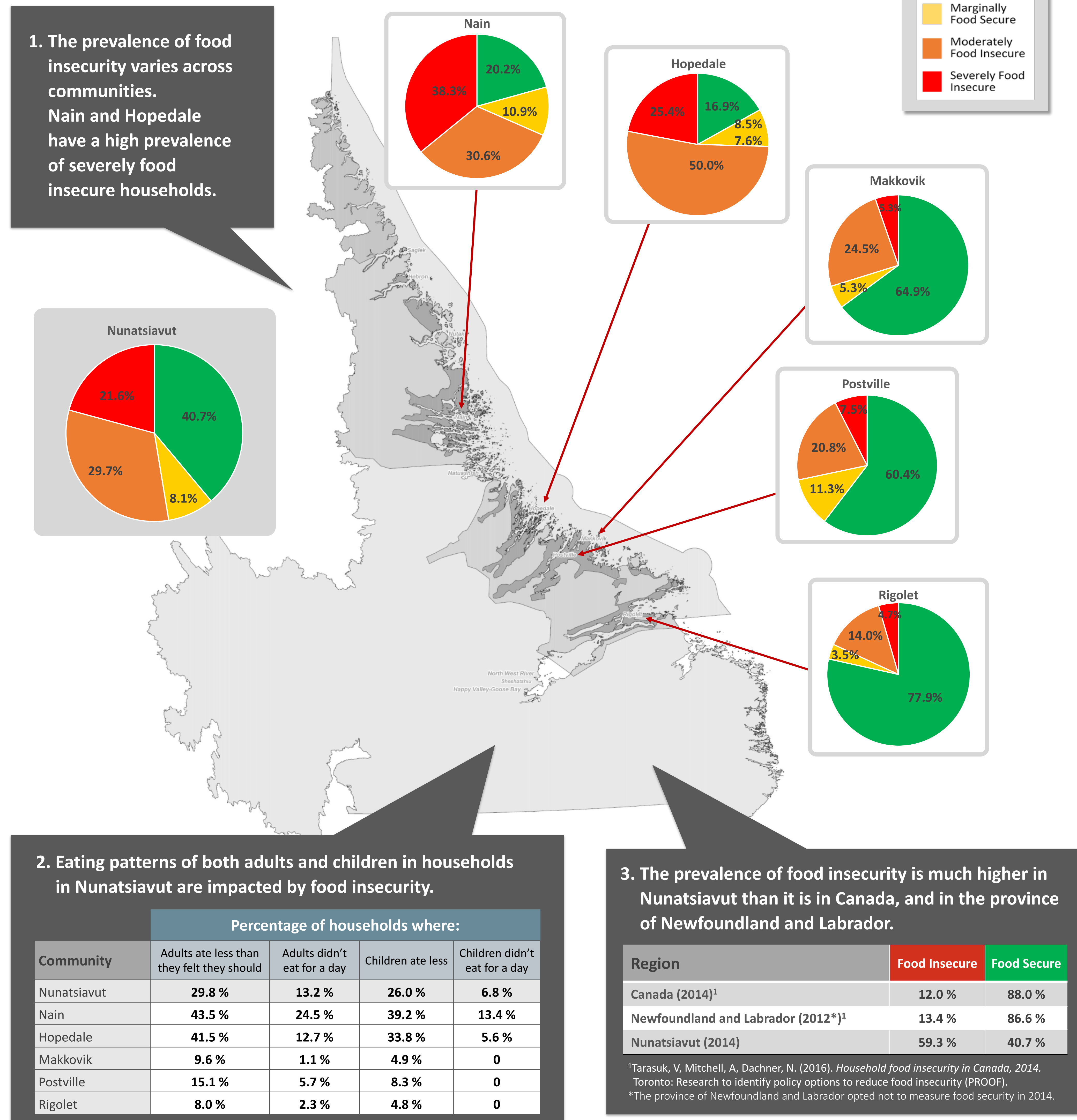
Household Food Security Status

The USDA Household Food Security Survey Module is the same standardized scale that was used in the Inuit Health Survey, and that is widely used across the country to measure food security status annually through the Canadian Community Health Survey. Based on the way participating households responded to the 18 questions in the module, each household was categorized into one of the following 4 categories:

Food Secure	Marginally Food Insecure	Moderately Food Insecure	Severely Food Insecure
(0 affirmative responses)	(1 affirmative response)	(2-5 affirmative response)	(2-5 affirmative response)
No difficulties accessing food in the previous month	Reported worry about running out of food OR limited their food selection in the previous month because of a lack of money	Adults and/or children compromised the quality and/or quantity of food eaten in the past month due to a lack of money	Adults and/or children in the household reduced the size of meals, skipped meals or gone a whole day(s) without eating in the past month due to a lack of money

Results

Analysis of the Nunatsiavut Household Food Security Survey data is ongoing, and a full report is being prepared by the research team. The following presents three key results already identified from the survey.



Discussion

Results from this survey demonstrated that food insecurity is a serious and immediate concern for Nunatsiavut. Food insecurity in Nunatsiavut has increased by 7% since the Inuit Health Survey in 2007-2008.

Food insecurity is complex, and is related to many factors: poverty, housing, access to country foods, chronic disease and addictions, and the high cost of living. Survey results illustrate the importance of community level data in creating a more accurate understanding of food security in a northern region.

While some similarities exist between communities in terms of factors influencing food access, the importance or nature of other factors are unique to the community level. The understanding of scale is critical when planning and resourcing response strategies.

Next Steps

Results have been shared with all the communities and the Nunatsiavut Government is working with community committees and community programs to prioritize and address immediate food needs.

Informed by these survey results, the Nunatsiavut Government is also working at a regional and policy level to implement long term programs and policies to sustainably address this issue, and will begin work on the creation of a Nunatsiavut Food Security Strategy in January 2018.