

**The Tale of the 'Forgotten': Urban Food Insecurity and Scarborough's Racialized Youth**

Bavan Pushpalingam, Principal Investigator

Laidlaw Leadership and Research Scholarship Programme

University of Toronto

Research Supervisor: Dr. Jayeeta Sharma

September 2023



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

### ***Acknowledgement***

*I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Laidlaw Foundation for developing the Laidlaw Leadership and Research Scholarship Programme. This programme provides students and emerging global leaders with a platform to grow their knowledge, confidence, global citizenship, and integrity. I would also like to thank the University of Toronto's Laidlaw Scholars Programme and its coordinators, Shraddha Prasad, Tanya Udartseva, and Yvonne Yang, for their unwavering support and guidance in making this research project a success. I would like to thank my research supervisor, Dr. Jayeeta Sharma, for mentoring me through this challenging and rewarding experience. I would also like to acknowledge two community organizations, Feed Scarborough and the Scarborough Campus Union's Food Centre, that granted me the opportunity to survey their customers and allow me to conduct my research; without their support, this project would not be possible. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant encouragement and support to complete this research project successfully.*



## Introduction

Food insecurity is a pressing and multifaceted issue that has garnered increasing attention in the public eye in recent years. Despite popular belief that as a prosperous and developed nation, Canada 'could never experience food insecurity', Canada is not immune to the challenges of ensuring that all its citizens have reliable access to adequate, nutritious, and affordable food. In 2021, according to Statistics Canada's Canadian Income Survey (representative of ten Canadian provinces), 18.4% or 6.9 million Canadians lived in households that experienced moderate, marginal, or severe food insecurity (Statistics Canada, 2023). This value is a significant increase from Statistics Canada's findings in 2020. This rising trend of food insecurity in Canada is only growing as the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation of food costs, and other structural barriers to access adequate and nutritious foods are expanding. The problem of food insecurity extends beyond the peripheral understanding that this issue is just a mere lack of access to food and hunger; it encompasses complex socio-economic, geographical, and political factors that contribute to an ongoing struggle for many Canadians to put food on their tables. This research paper presents the findings from the research study, "*Urban Food Insecurity and Scarborough's Racialized Youth*." This research study sought to answer the following question: How does the socio-economic stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with rising inflation of food costs, impact the food security of racialized youth aged 18-24 in Scarborough?

Firstly, this study examines food insecurity from the particular positionality of household food insecurity. This positionality was taken to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Scarborough's racialized youth from within their immediate homes and beyond. To contextualize this research focus, household food insecurity is the term used to describe a situation in which a household experiences insufficient or uncertain access to food as a

result of financial limitations (Tarasuk et al., 2019). This emphasis on financial limitation is a novel but more accurate approach to examining the issue of household food insecurity. This approach not only acknowledges the inadequate financial resources that people face, but the greater issue of material deprivation. For the context of this research study, material deprivation refers to the inability to access the basic necessities and resources needed to survive as a result of financial constraints.

In addition, this study employs a systematic approach to understanding household food insecurity with a specific emphasis on the socio-economic stress of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising inflation of food costs. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened food insecurity in Canada as it presented significant challenges to accessing food, from physical barriers due to public health restrictions, to financial barriers from employment disruption (Bené, 2020). Moreover, apart from these obstacles, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the entire food system from food supply chains and food distribution networks, causing shortages, price fluctuations, and distribution difficulties (Hasan, 2023). Subsequently, during this time period (late 2021 to early 2022), food prices began to increase steadily in Canada. This inflation of food prices has burdened Canadians and their options to access nutritious and culturally relevant foods. According to a Statistics Canada Special Household survey in 2022 examining Canadians' response to higher living costs, approximately two-thirds of Canadians expressed significant apprehension about the escalating prices of groceries (Clarke et al., 2023). Additionally, 40% of respondents noted that, when considering the comparison with price hikes in other aspects of life, such as housing and transportation, they were particularly affected by the rising food costs. The rising inflation of food costs is attributed to a multitude of factors, including the COVID-19

pandemic. Hence, this research study employs these two key factors, the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising inflation of food costs, to examine their impacts on Scarborough's racialized youth.

Finally, this research project focuses on two of Canada's forgotten communities: Scarborough and its population of racialized youth. Scarborough is an urban community that is a part of the city of Toronto. This community is home to some of Canada's most diverse populations and cultures. One of these key populations is racialized youth. This research focus stems from the fact that racialized individuals, specifically racialized youth, are at greater risk of being food insecure as they live in households that experience moderate to severe food insecurity (Tarasuk, 2023; Bhawra et al., 2021). This heightened risk is a product of perilous income, significant transitions in life, educational pressures and stressors, increased mental health, and other crucial factors. In addition, the social location of being a racialized youth within the geo-social environment of Scarborough presents unique challenges. Scarborough encompasses a myriad of structural challenges that present its racialized youth with several challenges to attaining food security. For instance, Scarborough is not only a transportation desert, but it is also a food desert - a concept further explored in Case Study: Food Desert in Scarborough Southwest. This detrimental reality of living in a transit and food desert not only presents significant barriers to accessing adequate, nutritious, and culturally relevant foods, but also hinders racialized youth's opportunities for education, employment, and greater health outcomes. This circumstance continues to perpetuate and reinforce oppressive and harmful social structures that impact the well-being and future of Scarborough's racialized youth. It is essential to address the root causes of this issue and investigate the severity of food insecurity in Scarborough in relation to the role of food support aids/assistance in the greater context of this issue. Thus, this research paper investigates the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising inflation of

food costs on the household food security of Scarborough's racialized youth using the results from the survey research study.

### **Significance of Research**

The significance and impact of this research study is targeted at increasing awareness about urban food insecurity in Scarborough and in other racialized and marginalized communities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rising inflation of food prices, and other systemic factors that have been exacerbated in recent years. This project employs a community-engaged research focus that highlights the challenges and resiliency of the youth in Scarborough experiencing food insecurity and its impacts on their well-being and livelihood. Most importantly, this research study addresses a key literature gap by focusing on Scarborough's racialized youth, an under-researched geographic and diverse socio-cultural community. In addition, this study in the academic realms of food studies and public policy scholarship will spark critical conversations about urban food insecurity and its effect on Scarborough's racialized youth among community members, those in academic spaces, and policymakers to understand the severity of this issue and engender sustainable and meaningful change through legislated policies and transformative development projects.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Period**

The research study, Urban Food Insecurity and Scarborough's Racialized Youth, was conducted over a time frame of six weeks from June 6th, 2023, to July 19th, 2023. To conduct this study, the Principal Investigator employed a survey research methodology as the primary approach.

**Reference/Target Population**

The reference population of this study is youth aged 18 to 24 who self-identify as a racialized person and live in the geographic area of Scarborough. This includes the electoral districts of Scarborough Southwest, Scarborough Guildwood, Scarborough Centre, Scarborough Rouge-Park and Scarborough North.

**Survey Development**

The survey was developed through an extensive and systematic literature review of existing research, data, and information on the topic of food insecurity, food policy, urban food systems, the COVID-19 pandemic, rising food inflation, and income security in the Canadian context pertaining to racialized youth. This theoretical framework of the topic area, coupled with the Principal Investigator's consultations with community partners and organizations who work on mitigating this issue on the frontlines in Scarborough, provided the practical dimension to formulate meaningful and effective questions. Jointly, these two processes support the foundational development of the survey and its questions.

The research survey was developed using Google Forms as it is a reliable and user-friendly application. It consists of twelve questions and is divided into two portions: demographic identifiers and relative variable identifiers. The first portion, social identifiers, comprised of six questions exploring the participants' various social locations, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, geographic location, and education [See Appendix A]. This data is designed to understand the demography of Scarborough's racialized youth, specifically the youth that rely on food assistance such as food banks. This information is imperative to examine whether there is a relationship between higher levels of food insecurity and food assistance dependency in racialized and marginalized youth in Scarborough as a result of the COVID-19

pandemic and the rising inflation of food costs. The second portion, relative variable identifiers, comprised of six questions, four Likert scale and two dichotomous questions, directly investigating three key themes: food banks and assistance programs, the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising inflation of food costs. This information is critical in analyzing and drawing conclusions on the severity of impacts on the food security of Scarborough's racialized youth as it assessed the changes in food availability, accessibility, adequacy, and acceptability.

### **Participant Recruitment and Survey Distribution**

The participants for this study were recruited by the Principal Investigator, who worked with two community partners: Feed Scarborough and the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus Union's Food Centre. Through the support of these partners, the Principal Investigator visited four food bank locations, three of which are run and operated by Feed Scarborough: Clairlea Food Bank, Rouge Park Food Bank, Oakridge Food Bank, and the Scarborough Campus Union's Food Centre, over a span of two weeks to conduct this study. At these food bank locations, the Principal Investigator recruited racialized youth aged 18 to 24 from Scarborough to participate in this study. After the initial recruitment conversation outlining the details of the study and the receiving consent from the participants, the Principal Investigator distributed the surveys by presenting a QR code of the Google Form for the participants to access and complete on their own devices. However, if the participants did not have a cellular phone or experienced connectivity issues with internet or cellular data, the Principal Investigator presented their device for the participants to fill out the form. After the submission of the Google form, the Principal Investigator collected the emails of all participants to provide them an honoraria for their participation in this study. The honoraria included a \$10 Walmart gift card to provide participants with small assistance to access grocery, food, and hygienic products. Walmart was chosen as the

preferred store to receive gift cards from the participants due to the store's accessibility, affordability, and versatility in products.

## **Results**

This research study received 100 participants (n=100) who are youth aged 18 to 24 in Scarborough who self-identify as a racialized person. The results section is thematically divided into 6 subcategories: Demographic Identifiers, Food Support Aids/Assistance, COVID-19 Pandemic, Rising Inflation of Food Costs, Affordability and Accessibility. The purpose of this categorization is to effectively understand if there is a relationship between the socio-economic stress of the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with rising inflation of food costs impacting the food security of racialized youth aged 18 to 24 in Scarborough. This understanding will lend to a comprehensive analysis that will follow in the discussion that will underscore key findings to illustrate the dire situation that exists in Scarborough.

### **Demographic Identifiers**

The demographic identifiers in the result section are directed to illustrate the diverse social locations of Scarborough's racialized youth. The majority of the sample population that was surveyed, 55% of participants ethnically identified as South Asian (India, Pakistani, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar) [See Appendix B]. This demographic value was followed by 20% of participants ethnically identifying as Southeast and East Asian (China, Japan, Korea, Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia) and 8% of participants ethnically identifying as Black/African-American/Caribbean (Somalia, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Guyana, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda) [See Appendix B]. The participants of this study were predominantly confined to the age range of 19-21, with 65% of participants (23% of participants identified as 19, 26% of participants identified as 20, and 16% of participants

identified as 21) being within this range. More than half of the participants, 61% of respondents identified as female, 31% of participants identified as male, 2% identified as non-binary, 2% identified as two-spirit, while 4% of participants preferred not to say. Among the 100 participants, 97% of the participants are currently students enrolled in high school, college, or university [See Appendix C]. Of these 97% of students, 56% of the participants are domestic students and 44% are international students [See Appendix D].

### **Food Support Aids/Assistance**

The research subcategory of *Food Support Aids/Assistance* is targeted to assess the usage of Scarborough racialized youth on food assistance services and programs as it is a key indicator of examining the severity of food insecurity. 63% of participants recorded they accessed food support aids/assistance services once a week, while 7% of participants recorded they accessed food support aids/assistance services twice a week [See Appendix E]. In contrast, 20% of participants recorded they rarely accessed food support aids/assistance services [See Appendix E].

### **COVID-19 Pandemic**

The *COVID-19 pandemic* research subcategory is aimed at investigating the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on Scarborough's racialized youth's food security. For instance, this purview included, but was not limited to, examining access to food, buying groceries, and eating three meals per day. To this question, 36% of participants reported that their food security was either severely (16%) or very (20%) impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic [See Appendix F]. 32% of participants reported their food security was moderately impacted while the other 32% of participants reported that their food security was slightly (20%) or not at all (12%) impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic [Appendix F].

Another dimension to examine the COVID-19 pandemic and food security is that it is critical to investigate the emerging effects of rising prices of food costs during this time period. The majority of participants (67%) noted that the rising prices of food costs during the COVID-19 pandemic has severely (37%) or very (30%) impacted their food security [See Appendix G]. 17% of participants noted that the rising prices of food costs during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted them moderately, while 16% of participants noted that the rising prices of food costs during the COVID-19 pandemic slightly or not at all impacted their food security [See Appendix G].

### **Rising Inflation of Food Costs**

The purpose of the research subcategory of *Rising Inflation of Food Costs* is to understand the impacts of the current rising inflation of food costs on the food security of Scarborough's racialized youth. Similar to the subcategory above, this scope included, but was not limited to, examining access to food, buying groceries and eating three meals per day. Among the 100 participants of this study, 52% of participants recorded they have been severely (31%) or very (21%) impacted by the rising inflation of food costs [Figure 7]. 31% of participants recorded they have been moderately impacted by the rising inflation of food costs, while the other 17% of participants recorded they have been slightly (11%) or not at all (6%) impacted by the rising inflation of food costs [See Appendix H].

### **Affordability**

The *Affordability* research subcategory focused on simultaneously exploring the byproducts of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising inflation of food costs. This section investigated the impacts on the quality or quantity of the food products purchased by youth and their families. 77% of participants reported "Yes," the quality or quantity of food

products purchased by them and their families has changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and rising inflation of food costs, while the other 23% reported “No,” there has been no change [See Appendix I].

### **Accessibility**

The final research subcategory, *Accessibility*, specifically examined Scarborough's racialized youth's access to culturally appropriate food products (e.g. spices). Among the 100 participants, 66% of participants reported “Yes,” they had access to culturally-appropriate food products, while 34% of participants reported “No,” they did not have access to culturally appropriate food products [See Appendix J].

### **Discussion**

This findings of this study addresses a critical literature gap by focusing on urban household food insecurity among Scarborough's racialized youth and provides essential insights to the severity of this dire situation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising inflation of food costs. A range of factors were explored from demographic identifiers to determinants of availability, accessibility, adequacy, and acceptability. Moreover, the findings of the research study were consistent with existing literature in the study of food insecurity in relation to racialized children and young adults in Canada. These values are higher than the estimates of the overall value of racialized Canadians who experience household insecurity as the socio-geographic parameters of Scarborough differ from that of the general Canadian context.

One of the major findings from this research study is the prevalence of food bank usage by racialized youth in Scarborough amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the current rising inflation of food costs. This alarming value of 69% of respondents presents a potential correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising inflation of food costs on the

staggering dependence of racialized youth on food banks to combat their household food insecurity. This trend deviates from existing literature on examining the relationship between food bank usage and food insecurity as the majority of food bank users are individuals who are severely food-insecure and resort to accessing food banks as they are in critical circumstances that force them to use these aids (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). While the majority of individuals who are food-insecure do not access food assistance like food banks as a result of resistance, accessibility barriers, and the deployment of the other strategies. For instance, food-insecure individuals employ other approaches such as delaying bill payments or requesting for support from family and friends. The usage of food banks was seen in the literature as a desperate measure. However, the findings of this study suggest that individuals' experiencing household food insecurity are accessing these services in greater volumes. One of the community partners, Scarborough Food Security Initiative, commonly known as Feed Scarborough, that collaborated on this research study revealed in their annual report that there has been a 112.6% increase in visits to their food bank sites in Scarborough from June 2022 to June 2023 (Hasan, 2023). This value has exponentially increased in the span of one year, which clearly demonstrates this pivotal switch from food bank usage being used only in desperate measures to being a more 'normalized' measure in the livelihoods of many Scarborough residents and the greater Canadian population.

To examine this change more critically, it is imperative to investigate cultural shifts on food bank usage, specifically in the context of age. This research study focused on racialized youth in Scarborough, while the current literature broadly looks at adults and households as focal points of examination. There could be cultural shifts in using food banks as a result of the greater de-stigmatization and acceptance of this agency amongst the youth population. On the

other hand, this cultural shift could be a result of food banks more widely adopting a choice-model that mimics a grocery store layout (Rizvi, 2021). Traditionally, food banks and other assistance mechanisms prepare pre-packed hampers that typically do not meet the cultural or nutritional needs of the individuals and their families. This physical change within the infrastructure of food banks and other food assistance networks plays a significant role in how users of these services approach these various food support aids. Individuals accessing these necessary services feel more empowered and dignified in approaching these spaces as they have autonomy and most importantly choice to make decisions that are inclusive of their needs. This transformation has been implemented in both of the community partners, Feed Scarborough and the Scarborough Campus Union's Food Centre, in this research study. For example, Feed Scarborough would have culturally-appropriate spices that are widely used by its South Asian customer base. These progressive changes could have resulted in the greater percentage of respondents, 66% of participants, stating that they had access to culturally-appropriate food products. Hence, these cultural developments must be investigated further to draw significant conclusions to the relationship between food bank usage and food insecurity.

However, while these cultural developments are positively re-innovating the food support spaces in breaking barriers for individuals to access the needed assistance, these aids were developed to serve as short-term, temporary relief for people experiencing food insecurity (Tarasuk et al., 2019). However, these band-aid solutions have become entrenched as vital support systems that have been prescribed as the primary responsibility to tackle the growing issue of food insecurity in Canada and other liberal democracies like Australia. While these food support systems provide assistance to the community they are serving, it is failing to address the

overarching of material deprivation that was explored earlier in this research paper. Existing literature on this topic reveals that there is no substantive evidence that demonstrates food banks are the solution to this issue (Tarasuk et al., 2019). This understanding is critical in examining this issue as from the peripheral overview, food banks present itself as a perfect solution as it is community-oriented, responsive and easily accessible. Conversely, this band-aid solution fails to address the systemic issues associated with material deprivation. Research and the literature illustrate the role increased economic resources could have on mitigating food insecurity. This avenue of socio-economic development into the key infrastructure areas of Canadians' lives can play a critical role in ensuring they have adequate economic resources to meet their needs to ensure they can access healthy, nutritious and culturally-relevant foods.

Furthermore, the implications of food insecurity on Scarborough's racialized youth are closely associated with the material deprivation they experience. One of the root causes of this scarcity of economic resources is directly related to labour and employment. To contextualize this argument, 97% of participants are students enrolled in high school, college or university; of this 97% of respondents, 56% are domestic students and 44% are international. This figure is consequential as being a student can present challenges to employment and income adequacy. Income adequacy is a metric that reflects a more accurate reality for students as it assesses whether an individual's income is sufficiently aligned with their essential needs in comparison to their overall income (Bhawra 2021). This approach is critical to investigate as students typically face financial insecurity as a result of the barriers associated with being a student such as having a limited income, rising tuition and housing expenses, dependence on credit cards and loans, and inadequate financial management abilities (Gaines et al., 2014). Nonetheless, this investigation underscores the significance of income adequacy as a robust determinant of household food

security status as the ability to afford and access an ample food supply is profoundly influenced by one's adequate income.

More importantly, the concepts outlined above orient the precarious nature youth who are students must navigate to ensure they can adequately support themselves. These students must ensure they can succeed in their studies while ensuring they can meet their basic needs by working a job or two. This insurmountable pressure continues to burden students, specifically racialized youth. Systemic racism and discrimination in employment is a prevalent issue in Canada and impacts the daily lives of racialized individuals. From overt racism to name-based discrimination, racialized people face significant challenges when seeking employment (Ng & Gagnon, 2020). For instance, Black Canadians experience approximately four times as many reported microaggressions as their white counterparts, and 50% of them report encountering discrimination during promotional evaluations (Cuckier et al., 2023). In addition to this statistic, candidates with “foreign-sounding” are 20% to 40% less likely to receive a job interview invitation (Ng & Gagnon, 2020). Immigrants and individuals from racialized backgrounds, particularly women within these demographics, encounter these obstacles, seemingly irrespective of their qualifications. These realities are highlighted to portray how racialized individuals and youth are barred by a glass ceiling. They are hurdled with significant barriers to even reach the first step to ensure income security to mitigate the extent of their food insecurity. This fact demonstrates the pervasive nature of racism and discrimination in employment and food spaces as they systematically oppress racialized individuals and youth.

Nonetheless, the next area of investigation in relation to these two variables was understanding if employment ensures food security. However, past literature and the findings from this research study concludes that is not the case. One study presents the finding that

exclusively depending on income derived from employment does not suffice to eradicate food insecurity in a significant portion of households, particularly those who are racialized minority workers (McIntyre et al., 2012). This actuality is perplexing as one would assume having sufficient employment should equate to food security. Despite this hope, employment does not guarantee food security. This realization was also observed through interactions with food bank coordinators and staff as many stated most food bank users have a full-time or part-time job (Hasan, 2023). Regardless of this employment, these individuals are still forced into a position where they do not have access to adequate, nutritious and culturally-relevant foods. The alternatives in this situation to better support the clients of these services is through social assistance, but that safety net is not sufficient to aid people experiencing food insecurity. Furthermore, a spike in work-related stress could potentially heighten the vulnerability to negative health consequences among workers who reside in households experiencing food insecurity. The stress of work and the stress associated with sourcing food are detrimental to one's well-being as the experience can be draining and exhausting. This struggle was brought to the frontlines during the COVID-19 pandemic as there were considerable labour market disruptions. One of these major labour market disruptions were temporary layoffs that were given during the first-phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (Schieman et al., 2023; Lemieux et al., 2020; Grekou, 2021). These initial impacts disproportionately affected Canadians aged to 20 to 64, specifically those who worked in the service or entertainment sectors (Lemieux et al., 2020; Grekou, 2021). These immediate impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic became prolonged realities for working youth (Elmi & Deller, 2022). The existing precarious nature of youth employment linked with COVID-19 pandemic intensifies the financial barriers racialized youth

face. This income insecurity is a critical factor in exacerbating or leading to the food insecurity of racialized youth.

However, this circumstance does not only present financial challenges for youth but it impacts their mental health as there are long-term ramifications of this situation (Schieman et al., 2023). This situation has been analyzed by researchers examining the factors of household food insecurity and its correlation to the mental health of youth and children in Canada. Findings from a recent study discovered that the adverse mental health effects of food insecurity are not a product of a compromise in the diet of youth, but, these repercussions are a result of the financial strain that exists to achieve food security (McIntyre, 2023). This result provides critical insight on the varied complexities that the issue of household food insecurity encompasses as it is not an issue of merely accessing food, but it is also a consequence of the associated financial barriers that exist. This study emphasized that household food insecurity is an issue that is racialized and continues to impact racialized communities who are often burdened with other systemic and socio-economic challenges (McIntyre, 2023). These uncoverings demonstrate that there must be greater income support in place to protect vulnerable Canadians, specifically racialized youth who are at a higher risk to face socio-economic disadvantages to provide them the right to food and food security. Therefore, these critical angles of examination reveal the ubiquitous nature of material deprivation in context to employment, income insecurity and food insecurity from the perspective of youth in Canada, specifically racialized youth while underscoring the detrimental outcomes on their mental health and well-being.

While this research study possesses certain limitations such as restrictive time constraints and insufficient sample size, this discussion portion comprehensively examines the multi-dimensional issues that are complexly interweaved within the overarching and systemic

issue of household food insecurity from the perspective of Scarborough's racialized youth. This examination of these associated factors are intended to demonstrate the severity of household food insecurity and its detrimental implications on the lives of racialized youth in Canada in relation to their precarious employment to their mental health and well-being. It is imperative that policymakers and other stakeholders who are working towards mitigating this issue take these determinants into consideration to provide a meaningful and transformative solution.

### **Case Study: Emerging Food Desert in Scarborough Southwest**

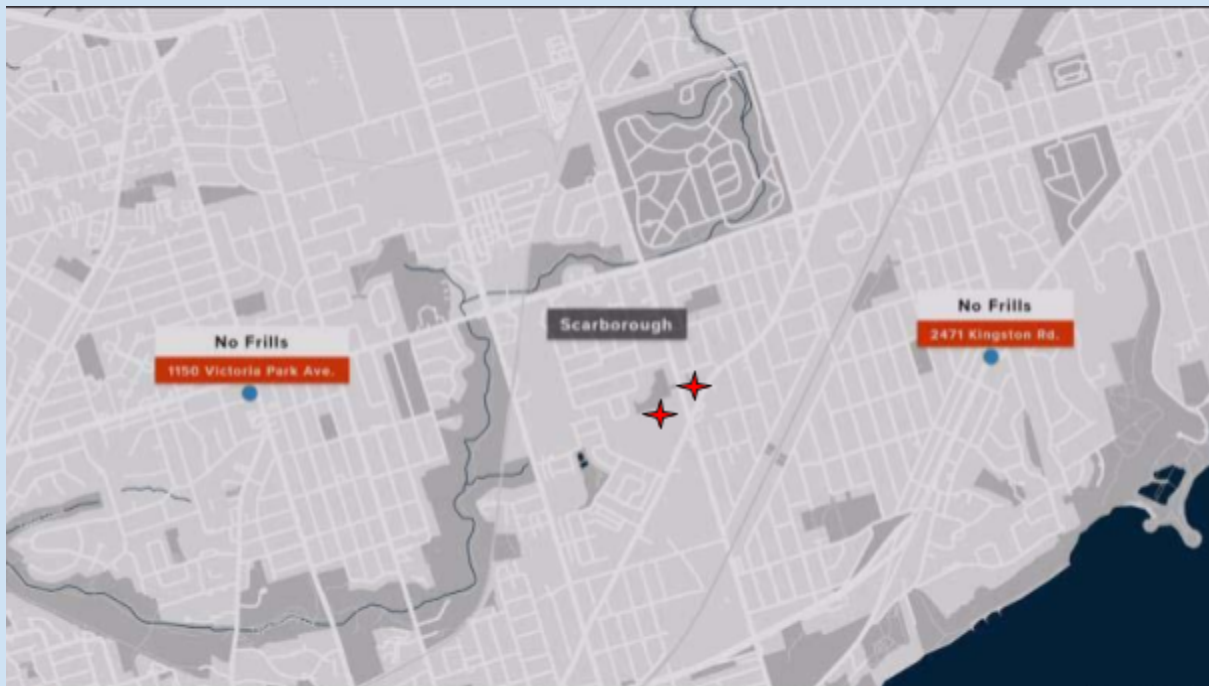
To put this issue into perspective with a real-life example, it is imperative to explore the case study of a new emerging food desert in Scarborough southwest. In August of 2023, two independent grocery stores in the community of Scarborough southwest were forced to shut down. Sun Valley Supermarket closed down as it was sold to developers to build a 12-storey apartment (Yazdani, 2023). Tasteco Supermarket was forcibly shut down as a result of not being able to pay the lease for two consecutive months. These two local, independent grocers were integral components of this community's well-being and livelihood. Sun Valley Supermarket and Tasteco Supermarket sold produce and household products that were easily accessible to the residents of the community. These two supermarkets sold culturally relevant and appropriate foods that catered to the diverse cultural diets of the community, from Mediterranean staples to Southeast Asian delicacies.

To further analyze this case study, it is critical to comprehend the theoretical notion of food deserts. Food deserts are areas within urban environments and geographic spaces where residents with limited income lack convenient access to affordable and nutritious retail food establishments offering a variety of food options (Joyce et al., 2017). This theoretical

understanding can be applied to the context of Scarborough Southwest as the closure of these two vital grocery stores (denoted by the annotated map below with the red stars representing the stores) present significant barriers for residents of this community to access affordable and nutritious food and food products. To provide a visual understanding of this situation, the map below clearly outlines the concentration of these two grocery stores in the centre of the community in walking distance from major residential areas in direct comparison to the two next closest grocery stores. This comparison is provided in this analysis to ensure the reader comprehends the great distance and barriers this emerging food desert has created for its local community members.

The challenges of food deserts are complex as they are not a mere issue of a lack of food resources or outlets to access these food resources. It is an issue of scarce, underinvested and underdeveloped critical infrastructures. For instance, this food desert in Scarborough Southwest is also riddled with transportation barriers as there are four routes in this community and all four routes are under-resourced as bus wait times have increased and the frequency of the buses have decreased. These convoluted challenges present further barriers for this community's residents as they are forced to provision food and food products outside of their immediate community. More importantly, individuals who do not have access to cars, individuals with young children, individuals who have to buy large quantities of groceries, individuals with accessibility challenges, seniors and other vulnerable populations have significant barriers to even access a grocery store. Food deserts are emerging across communities in Scarborough as a result of the lack of invested and developed community infrastructures. This pressing issue of food insecurity continues to manifest itself in various

capacities in Scarborough, exacerbating this crisis and impacting a disproportionate amount of racialized and marginalized individuals.



*Photo Credits: CITYNEWS*

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research study provides a nuanced viewpoint of the issue of household food insecurity from the perspective of Scarborough's racialized youth. The findings of this research study reveal the stark reality of Scarborough's racialized youth and the challenges that impede their prosperity and well-being. These critical considerations must be of the utmost importance to stakeholders as they detrimentally impact these youth and their future. Most importantly, Scarborough cannot be 'forgotten' anymore, and this study aims to bridge this literature gap to demonstrate to policymakers, government officials, public health specialists and other stakeholders that this issue is pressing and there must be sustainable and transformative

action taken to mitigate this chronic and systemic issue. The Canadian government and other stakeholders cannot use food banks and other food support assistance systems as band-aid solutions to resolve this issue. The solution must be comprehensive and tackle the root cause of household food insecurity, material deprivation and its associated implications. The Canadian government needs to strengthen and revise its current policy infrastructure, *The Food Policy for Canada*, to ensure it effectively engages with communities to tackle these issues on the front lines. This policy framework must be re-innovated to ensure the diverse experiences of Canadians like Scarborough's racialized youth are reflected in these initiatives. This study's primary findings aim to address the literature gap to ensure policymakers and other professionals can use evidence-based policy-making strategies to ensure their programs and activities are inclusive of the community's concerns and needs. Public policy has the power to engender actionable change and engage in transformative dialogue to mitigate issues like household food insecurity impacting Scarborough's racialized youth.

## References

- Bains, C. (2023, July 25). Youth in food-insecure homes made more visits to doctors for mental health: Study. CP24.  
<https://www.cp24.com/news/youth-in-food-insecure-homes-made-more-visits-to-doctors-for-mental-health-study-1.6493248>
- Bhawra, J., Kirkpatrick, S. I., & Hammond, D. (2021). Food insecurity among Canadian youth and Young Adults: Insights from the Canada Food Study. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 112(4), 663–675. <https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-020-00469-1>
- Bond, M. (2023, August 4). Scarborough neighbourhood becomes food desert after closure of grocery stores. *CityNews Toronto*.  
<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2023/08/04/scarborough-neighbourhood-becomes-food-desert-after-closure-of-grocery-stores/>
- Béné, C. (2020). Resilience of local food systems and links to Food Security - A review of some important concepts in the context of COVID-19 and other shocks. *Food Security*, 12(4), 805–822. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-020-01076-1>
- Clarke, S., Lehto, R., & Sheldrick, S. (2023, July 26). Switching stores to cope with high inflation: Food sales at food and beverage stores and general merchandise stores. *Statistics Canada*. <https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202300700005-eng>
- Cukier, W., Mo, G. Y., Karajovic, S., Blanchette, S., Hassannezhad, Z., Elmi, M., & Higazy, A. (2023, March). *Labour market implications for racialized youth*. Future Skills Centre.  
<https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/labour-market-implications-for-racialized-youth/>

- Dale, B., & Sharma, J. (2021). Feeding the city, pandemic and beyond. *Gastronomica*, 21(1), 86–91. <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2021.21.1.86>
- Deaton, J., & Scholz, A. (2022). Food security, food insecurity, and Canada's national food policy: Meaning, measures, and assessment. *Outlook on Agriculture*, 51(3), 303–312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00307270221113601>
- Elmi, M., & Deller, F. (2022, April 12). *COVID was harmful for youth employment*. Policy Options. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/april-2022/youth-employment-training/>
- Gaines, A., Robb, C. A., Knol, L. L., & Sickler, S. (2014). Examining the role of financial factors, resources and skills in predicting food security status among college students. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 38(4), 374–384. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12110>
- Grekou, D. (2021). How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the hours worked in Canada? An analysis by industry, province, and firm size. Statistics Canada. <https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202100100005-eng>
- Hassan, D. (2023). Sustenance beyond the surface. Scarborough Food Security Initiative. <https://scarboroughfoodsecurityinitiative.com/reports>
- Hill-Tout, K., Hirtenfelder, C., McMaster, K. E., & Herod, M. (2022). Who Eats, Where, What, and How? COVID-19, Food Security, and Canadian Foodscapes. *Gastronomica*, 22(1), 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2022.22.1.11>
- Kirkpatrick, S. I., & Tarasuk, V. (2011). Housing circumstances are associated with household food access among low-income urban families. *Journal of Urban Health*, 88(2), 284–296. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-010-9535-4>

- Lemieux, T., Milligan, K., Schirle, T., & Skuterud, M. (2020). Initial Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Canadian Labour Market. *Canadian Public Policy*, 46(S1).  
<https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2020-049>
- Loopstra, R., & Tarasuk, V. (2012). The relationship between food banks and household food insecurity among low-income Toronto families. *Canadian Public Policy*, 38(4), 497–514.  
<https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.38.4.497>
- Macdonell, B. (2020, April 7). More than 40 percent of food bank programs close amid pandemic, city says. Toronto.  
<https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/more-than-40-per-cent-of-food-bank-programs-close-amid-pandemic-city-says-1.4885396>
- McIntyre, L. (2023). Tackling household food insecurity to protect the mental health of children and Youth in Canada. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 195(28).  
<https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.230849>
- McIntyre, L., Bartoo, A. C., & Emery, J. H. (2012). When working is not enough: Food insecurity in the Canadian labour force. *Public Health Nutrition*, 17(1), 49–57.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s1368980012004053>
- Men, F., & Tarasuk, V. (2021). Food insecurity amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Food Charity, government assistance, and Employment. *Canadian Public Policy*, 47(2), 202–230.  
<https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2021-001>
- Ng, E., & Gagnon, S. (2021, April 14). Employment gaps and underemployment for racialized groups and immigrants in Canada. *Public Policy Forum*.

<https://ppforum.ca/publications/underemployment-for-racialized-groups-and-immigrants-in-canada/>

Rizvi, A., Wasfi, R., Enns, A., & Kristjansson, E. (2021). The impact of novel and traditional food bank approaches on food insecurity: A longitudinal study in Ottawa, Canada. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10841-6>

Schieman, S., Mai, Q., Badawy, P., & Kang, R. W. (2022). A Forced Vacation? The Stress of Being Temporarily Laid Off During A Pandemic. *Work and Occupations*, 50(2), 255–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07308884221129520>

Tarasuk, V., Fafard St-Germain, A.-A., & Loopstra, R. (2019). The relationship between food banks and food insecurity: Insights from Canada. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 31(5), 841–852. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-019-00092-w>

Tarasuk, V., Fafard St-Germain, A.-A., & Mitchell, A. (2019). Geographic and socio-demographic predictors of household food insecurity in Canada, 2011–12. *BMC Public Health*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-6344-2>

Tarasuk, V., Li, T., & Fafard St-Germain, A.-A. (2023, February 1). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. PROOF: Food Insecurity Policy Research. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/resource/household-food-insecurity-in-canada-2021/>

**Appendix A**

## Sample Survey Questions

## 1. Ethnicity

- South Asian (India, Pakistani, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar)
- Southeast and East Asian (China, Japan, Korea, Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia)
- Arab/West Asian (Armenia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia)
- Black/African-American/Caribbean (Somalia, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Guyana, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda)
- Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit and Metis)
- White (Caucasian, European)
- Other...

## 2. Age

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24

## 3. Gender-Orientation

- Male

- Female
- Non-binary
- Two-spirit
- Other
- Prefer not to say

4. Do you live in Scarborough?

- Yes
- No

5. Are you a student (high-school, university and college)?

- Yes
- No

6. Are you an international student?

- Yes
- No

7. How often do you use food support aids/assistance (e.g food banks)?

- Once a week
- Twice a week
- Once a month
- Twice a month
- Rarely
- Other...

8. To what degree has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your food security (access to foods, buying groceries, eating 3 meals etc.)?

- Severely
- Very
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all

9. To what degree has the current economic inflation impacted your food security (access to foods, buying groceries, eating 3 meals etc.)?

- Severely
- Very
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all

10. To what extent has the increase in prices of food products at the grocery store during the pandemic impact your food security?

- Severely
- Very
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all

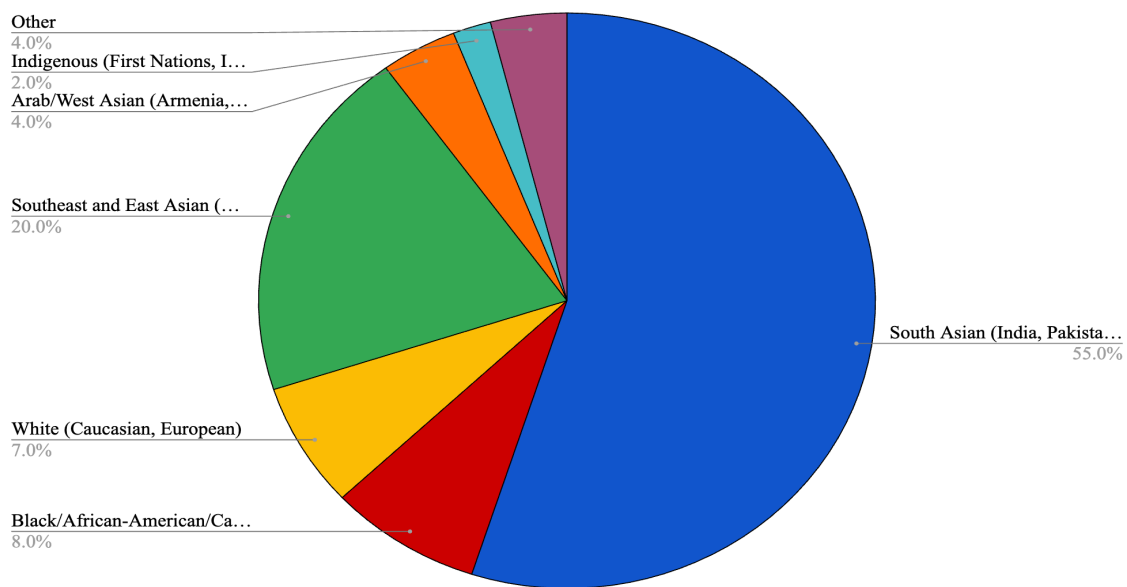
11. Has the quality or quantity of food product you or your family are buying as a result of inflation and the pandemic?

- Yes
- No
- Other...

12. Do you have access to culturally-appropriate foods (ex. spices)?

- Yes
- No
- Other...

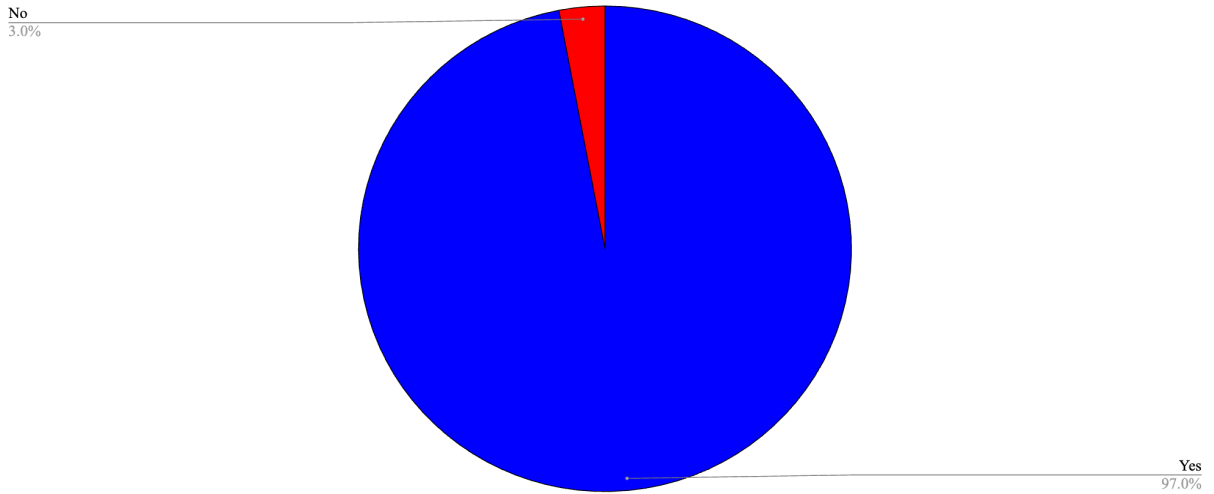
**Appendix B**  
Ethnic Breakdown of Participants



*Note: South Asian (India, Pakistani, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, etc.) = 55.0%, Black/African-American/Caribbean (Somalia, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Guyana, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda) = 8.0%, Southeast and East Asian (China, Japan, Korea, Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia, etc.) = 20.0%, White (Caucasian, European, etc.) = 7.0%, Arab/West Asian (Armenia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, etc.) = 4.0%, Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit and Metis) = 2.0%, Other = 4.0%. The*

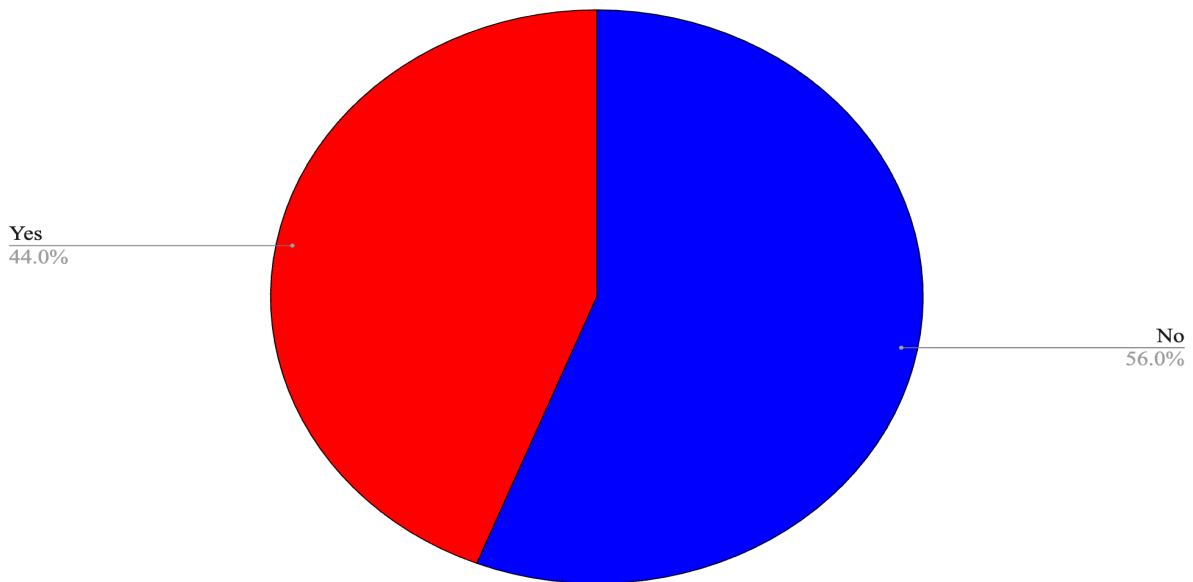
participants who selected the option "Other" did not specify their ethnicity in the section provided in the survey.

**Appendix C**  
Educational Status



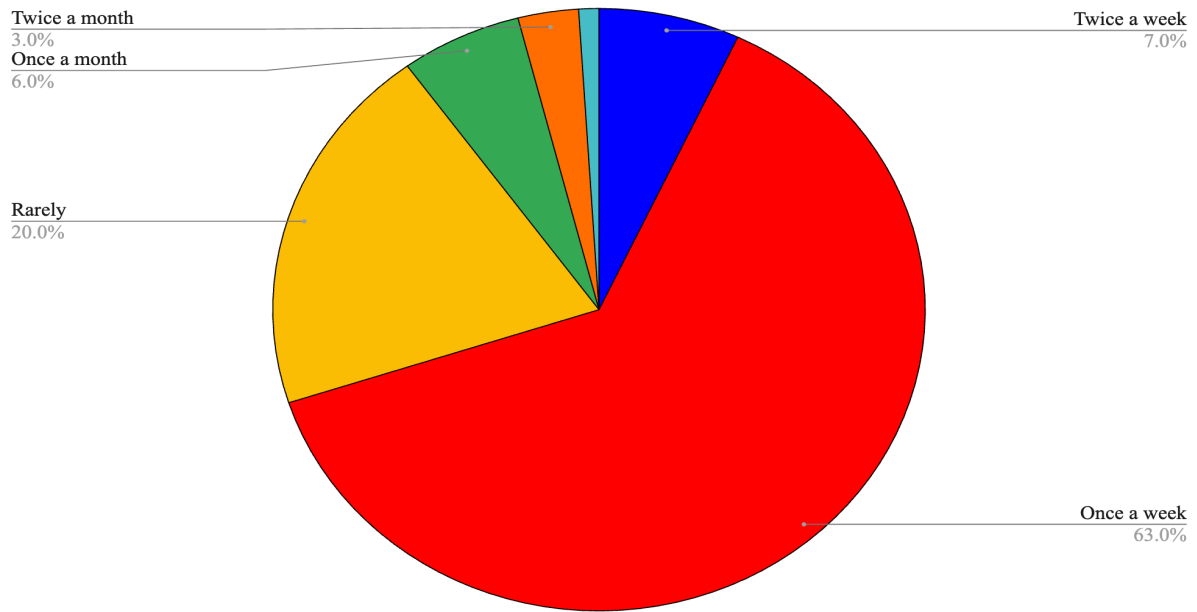
Note: Yes = 97, No = 3

**Appendix D**  
Domestic or International Student Designation



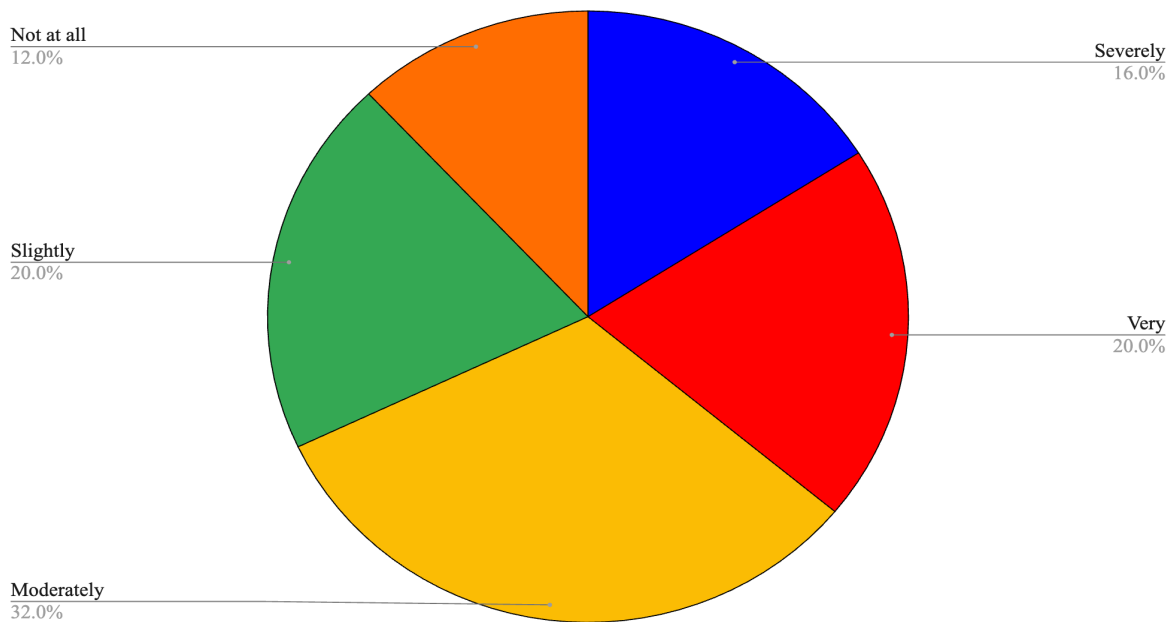
Note: Yes = 44.0%, No = 56%

**Appendix E**  
Frequency of Accessing Food Support Aids/Assistance



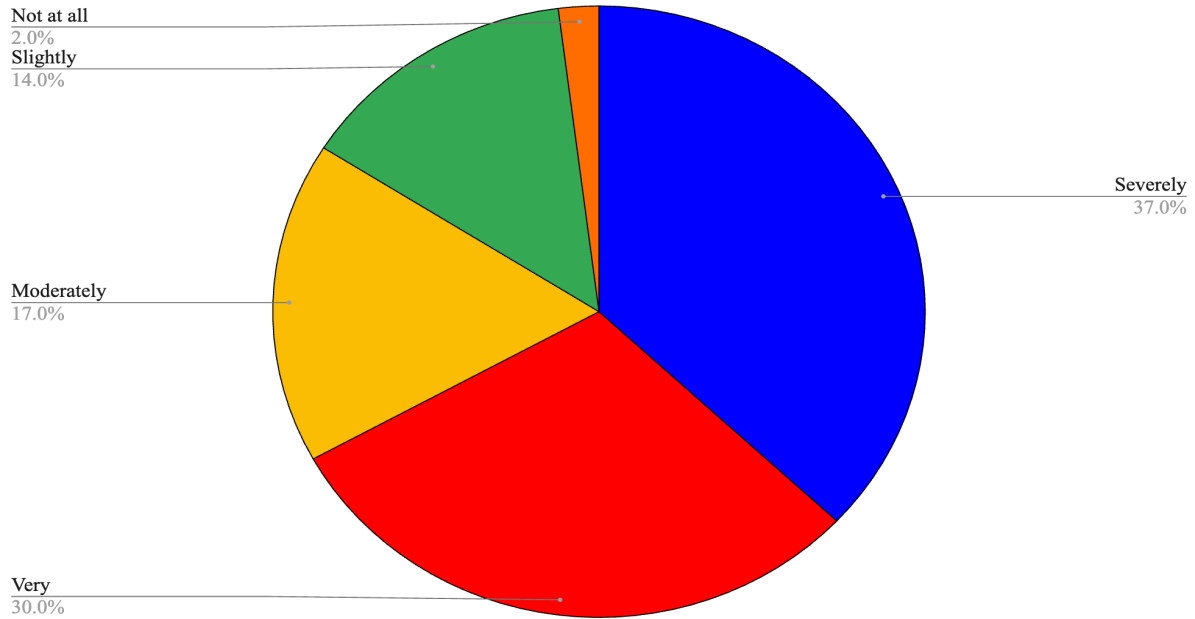
*Note: Once a week = 63.0%, Twice a week = 7.0%, Twice a month = 3.0%, Once a month = 6.0%, Rarely = 20.0%*

**Appendix F**  
Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic



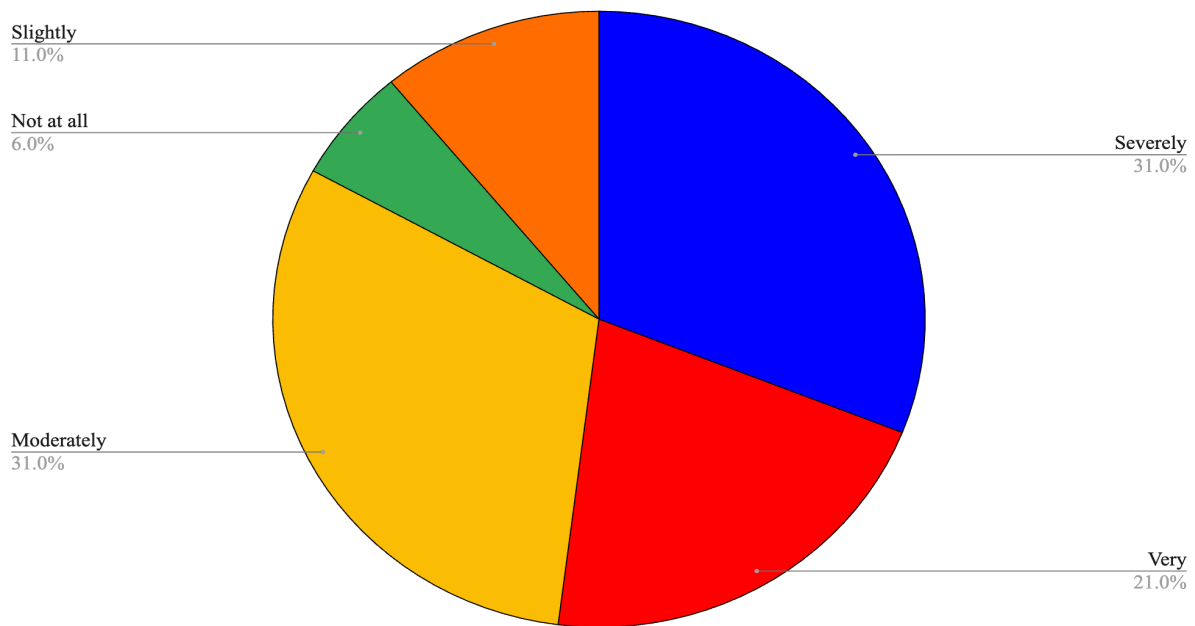
*Note: Severely - 16.0%. Very = 20.0%, Moderately = 32.0%, Slightly = 20.0%, Not at all = 12.0%*

**Appendix G**  
Inflation During the COVID-19 Pandemic



*Note: Severely = 37.0%, Very = 30.0%, Moderately = 17.0%, Slightly = 14.0%, Not at all = 2.0%*

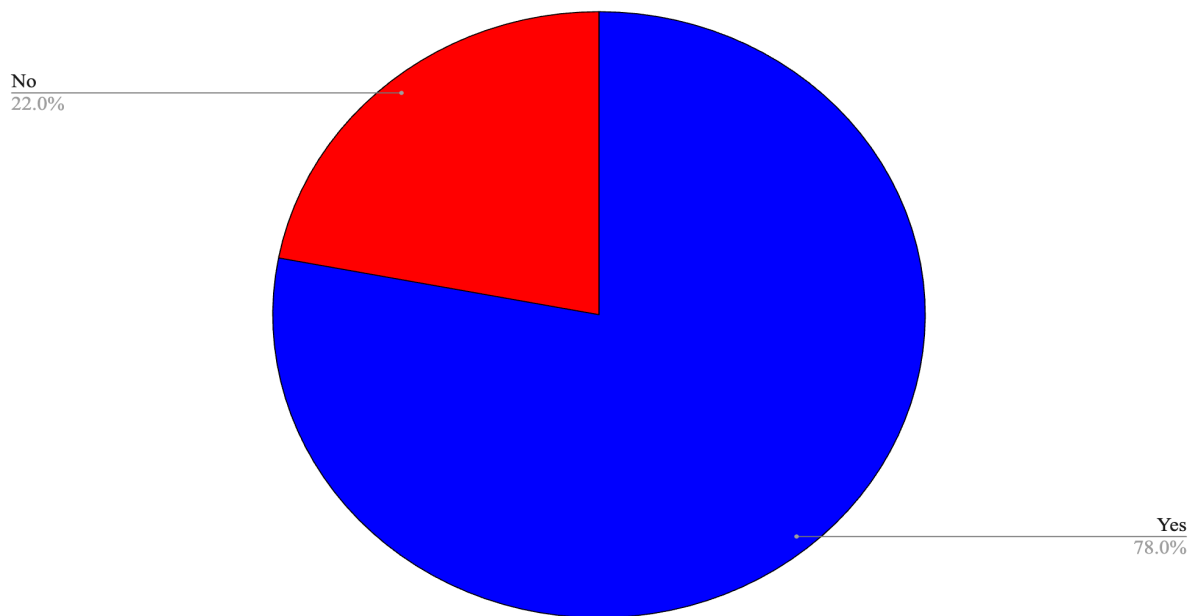
**Appendix H**  
Rising Inflation of Food Costs



*Note: Severely = 31.0%, Very = 21.0%, Moderately = 31.0%, Slightly = 11.0%, Not at all = 6.0%*

**Appendix I**

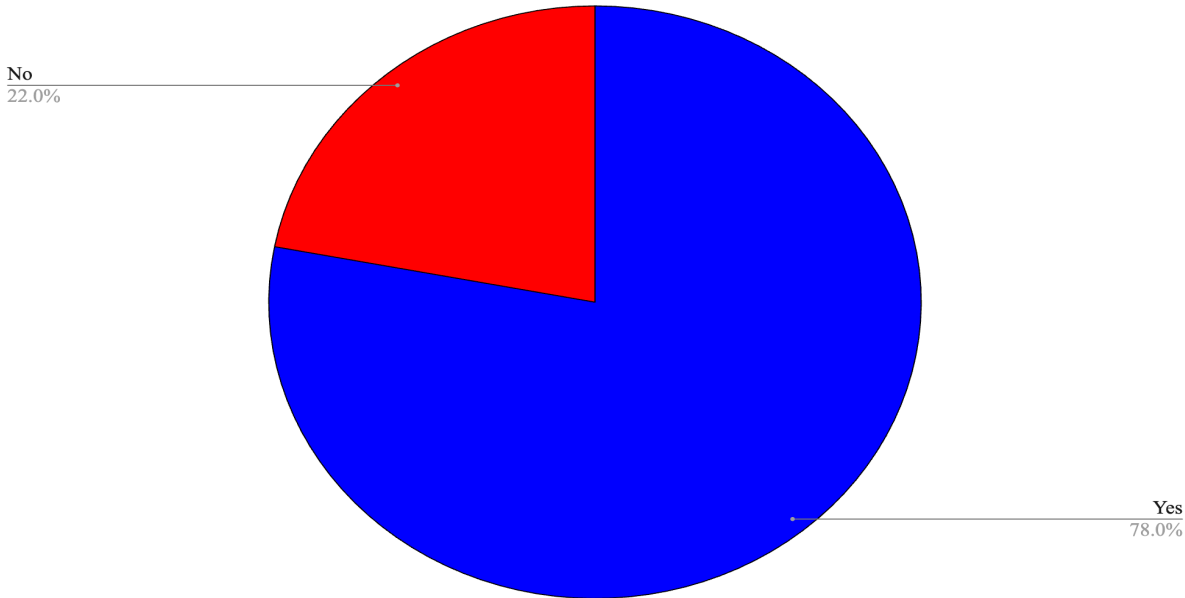
Quality and Quantity of Food Purchases



*Note: Yes = 78.0%, No = 22.0%*

**Appendix J**

Culturally-Appropriate Foods



*Note: Yes = 78.0%, No = 22.0%*