Author's response to reviews

Title: Perspectives on food insecurity from a remote indigenous community in sub-arctic Ontario, Canada.

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Ms Audrey Ann Reyes, Dr. Kawika Liu and the BMC Public Health Editorial Board,

Please find the attached revised manuscript with the revised title “Perspectives on food insecurity from a remote indigenous community in sub-arctic Ontario, Canada” for publication consideration in the journal BMC Public Health. Each author has seen and approved the contents of the revised manuscript. The authors declare that they have no competing interests. We have consulted the RATS guidelines and revised the manuscript so that it now adheres to these guidelines. Revisions have been made according to the RATS guidelines in the following areas:

- Details of who chose not to participate and why have been included in the Results section
- Anonymity and confidentiality of participants has been described in the Methods section
- Strengths and limitations are described and discussed in the last paragraph of the Discussion section

We appreciate the reviewer comments and the opportunity to resubmit this manuscript. The comments below provide an explanation of how we addressed each of the revisions requested. In this response, we have included original comments from the reviewers verbatim and provided a RESPONSE for specific points.

Reviewers' Comments and RESPONSE:

REVIEWER #1: Elaine M Power

Discretionary Revisions

1. The HFSSM differentiates between the experiences of adults and children, and the authors mention that food insecurity was raised as a barrier to healthy eating in their earlier research. Was there any discussion of how strategies to manage food insecurity differentially affected children? For example, there is considerable research in southern, urban food insecure households that shows that mothers protect their children from experiences of hunger to the extent possible.

RESPONSE: This is a good point for consideration with this research. We are aware of the literature that shows mothers protecting their children from being hungry by compromising their own intake. A few participants in this study discussed three areas that might be related to this: (1) that many children were not as keen to consume traditional foods (there is also documentation in the literature of this), even though traditional foods were seen as a possible coping strategy for
food insecurity; (2) provision of food through the school snack program was seen as a way to help children who were hungry; and (3) at least one participant mentioned “a lot of days I would not eat just to feed my children”. The qualitative analysis was conducted in a manner where themes emerging from the transcripts and the resulting higher level codes were a reflection of the experience of food insecurity across many of the interviews, not just specific comments made by one or two participants. Therefore, with the exception of the school snack program, these particular points were not reflected in the overall themes and subthemes in the manuscript.

2. I find the inclusion of the data codes distracting and unnecessary.

**RESPONSE:** The data codes from the text of the Results section have been removed.

3. I like the conviction in the last sentence, and the call for government action but since the participants did not use the language of food sovereignty, it seems jarring to use it in the concluding sentence of a qualitative manuscript. I wonder if this is more appropriately framed as another aspect of “self-determination”? (I don’t know)

**RESPONSE:** One sentence in the Discussion has been revised slightly to say “Fort Albany residents did not use the exact term food sovereignty during their interview dialogue, but food sovereignty was, in essence, what they were describing; they expressed a desire and suggested strategies to enhance their independence, self-sufficiency and acquisition of new skills, in addition to advocating for better food security.” The reader may become confused by adding in the term self-determination. The authors believe that the term food sovereignty should remain in the paper. It was illustrated through the words of the participants what food sovereignty means to them in terms of the strategies they would like to put in place to start making changes in their community. The term food sovereignty was used in the Discussion to highlight and summarize the interpretation of the analysis. The Fort Albany participants in this study were in tune with, and integrated with, their traditional food environment. Since their food traditions no longer exist to the degree that they have in the past, they were coming up with new strategies for food sovereignty. This was a sign of creativity and resilience. They were also determined to increase independence and self-sufficiency which are important characteristics of food sovereignty. The fact that the Fort Albany chief used the words “food sovereignty” at the conference underscores the appropriateness of using the term in the paper.
REVIEWER #2: Avita Usfar

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

Specific comments:

• Title. The title should give the reader general information of the paper. Maybe the authors can use other words than “First Nations” because it is not understandable globally – maybe indigenous population or tribe in Canada; specification of the place would be good. It may be better not to put the quote as the title, because it limits the perspective put forward by the authors.

RESPONSE: The title has been changed to: “Perspectives on food insecurity from a remote indigenous community from sub-arctic Ontario, Canada”.

• Terminology used. There are some points in the Background that should be defined. The authors used the term “Aboriginal people” at the beginning. However, the focus of the study is only on the “First Nations” community, as they are part of the Aboriginal people. However, in the Methods section, the authors introduced the word “Cree people” and on p. 7 Question development, the authors mentioned “the off-reserve Canadian population”. I think the authors should make clear to the reader, the differences or similarities of all these groups; and which group that they are studying; why do you focus only on FN? Please keep in mind that the reader may originate from other parts of the world, who may not know the names of the indigenous population living in Canada, nor their situation.

RESPONSE: Sentences have been added to the first paragraph of the Background section to provide more clarity on the population, beginning with the term indigenous, then describing the three groups of Aboriginal people in Canada and then a few characteristics about First Nations and the proportion living off-reserve lands (page 4). The term Cree has been removed from the methods to reduce confusion for the reader. The word Canadian has been removed from “the off-reserve Canadian population” on page 7.

• Background.

  o Comparison to the other aboriginal/indigenous community in other parts of the world would be helpful to put perspectives on the importance to focus on these communities
The authors feel that it is beyond the scope of this manuscript to provide comparisons to other Aboriginal or indigenous communities in other parts of the world. In order to still provide perspective, we have included much more detail in the community profile section so that the reader can develop a better understanding of the lives of these people and the food system in the community.

The reader could also give more background information of the population group studied, e.g. the total number of the aboriginal people, the proportion of FN? How are they placed in the socio-economic and food security scale within Canada?

**RESPONSE:** “On-reserve” means lands designated for exclusive use by First Nations communities. Therefore, all of the approximately 850 people living in Fort Albany are First Nations people. There are a few non-First Nations people living in the community, but they are very much the minority and are not included in the number 850. The few non-First Nations residents of the community are health care professionals (nurses) or teachers. We have also added a sentence in the Background section that states “Food insecurity in Aboriginal households in Canada is associated with high levels of poverty, multi-child households, low levels of education attainment and labour force participation, reliance on social assistance/welfare, and female lone-parent households.” For levels of food security, comparisons of First Nations to the rest of Canada were made in the first paragraph of the Background section.

Information on the community profile, geographical location in the Methods section can be moved to the Background section. How far is it from the capital?; from the main market?

**RESPONSE:** The community profile paragraph has been moved from the Methods section into the Background section. Detail has been added to provide information about the geographical location of the community and its distance from larger centres.

Please describe on their typical living environment, food, daily activities, yearly routine; number of household member, how are they living? – nuclear or extended family, what is a community – is it several families together?

**RESPONSE:** Details have been added in the Background section to provide context regarding the food environment and living conditions.

- P. 5 Background last paragraph. What is the standard instrument? The authors may want to state on the instrument used; especially if this instrument was used as the basis to develop the two research questions used for this study. Is it the HFSSM mentioned in the Methods section?

**RESPONSE:** Yes the standard instrument is the HFSSM. This has been added to the Background section where indicated.

- P. 7 Question development, 1st paragraph.
How is the result of the HFSSM? It would help if the authors share with the reader some of the important results, so that the reader understands the food insecurity situation of the FN or the off-reserve Canadian population. What was the sample size?

**RESPONSE:** It was the same sample – the interviewed participants described in this paper were initially asked to answer the 18 HFSSM questions before proceeding with their interview. The prevalence of food insecurity is now included in this section.

It is not clear, are you interviewing all aboriginal for the qualitative interview or the food insecure ones only?

**RESPONSE:** All respondents from the community were interviewed whether or not their household had been categorized as food secure or food insecure. Table 2 shows the number and percentage of households that were food secure, moderately food insecure, or severely food insecure. A sentence has been added to the Methods section to clarify this.

**• P. 7 Question development, 3rd paragraph**

1st sentence, “The intention of this study …. should be in the Background section.

**RESPONSE:** This sentence has been moved from the Methods section to the Background section.

The authors should describe more of the development of the questions. What were the original 9 questions tested?

**RESPONSE:** Eight of the nine original questions were still represented in some way by the 3 final questions or the probes. Therefore there would be considerable overlap if the original nine questions were listed in the paper.

How was the testing done, to how many people? What was the result? This is to support that the 3 selected questions were valid and cover all necessary information needed.

**RESPONSE:** “Tested” was not a very accurate word to describe the process. The word “tested” has been replaced with “reviewed”. The number of people involved in reviewing the questions has been added: members of the CAC (n=3) and investigators (n=3).

**• P. 8. The final 3 questions should be written here, not referred to the table. The table can have other additional information such as probing used etc.**

**RESPONSE:** The 3 questions have been added to the text of the Methods section.
• P. 9. Was the interviews recorded using tape recorder?

**RESPONSE:** No, the interviews were not audio-recorded. Food insecurity is a very sensitive topic and it was decided by members of the community advisory committee that audio-recording of the interviews was not appropriate for this study. As stated in the manuscript, “The community research assistant took verbatim handwritten notes during interviews.” And the following sentence has been added “The CAC decided that due to the sensitive nature of the topic of food insecurity it was not appropriate to audio-record the interviews.”

• P. 9 Data Management and analysis; 1st paragraph can be reduced

**RESPONSE:** The detail in this section is required by qualitative manuscripts submitted to BMC Public Health and provides evidence that the study has “soundness of interpretive approach” and that the analytic approach has been described in depth and justified according to the Qualitative Research Review Guidelines (RATS).

• P. 10

O paragraph 2 can be reduced. I don’t think the explanation “the lead author who has academic training and research experience … “ and subsequently “independent analyst who had advanced training …” are necessary.

**RESPONSE:** These sentences have been shortened as suggested.

O Paragraph 3. Not necessary to mention specifically that the lead author was sharing the result with the participants

**RESPONSE:** When working with indigenous populations in Canada it is very important to return to communities and verify results with participants. This was also a form of member checking, which is a form of validity of the interpretation of data. This type of information is a part of the Qualitative Research Review Guidelines (RATS) required by BMC Public Health for qualitative manuscripts. That is why this is necessary and was mentioned in the manuscript.

O Number of people interviewed should be clear in the method; including number of male, female, their age groups can be mentioned in general. Specific information can be referred to the table.

**RESPONSE:** These details have been added in the text of the results and then specific details are referred to in Table 2.

• Results 1st paragraph. It would help to understand better the meaning of “salary” here, when the authors already described the type of work employed by FN at the beginning.

**RESPONSE:** The text at the beginning of the Results and in Table 2 now state “salary from employment” to provide clarity.
It is better to present the titles (no. 1, 2, 3) in the form of sentences, not as questions

RESPONSE: The question marks have been removed and they are now in the form of sentences.

You do not need to write the sub-titles within the titles, just blend it into the result. The sub-titles do not correspond to the items mentioned in the 3 questions anyway, thus confuses the reader.

RESPONSE: The sub-titles in the Results section do correspond to the 3 questions as these were the main themes that emerged from the participants during each of these questions in the interviews. These sub-titles introduce the following paragraphs and quotes and also help the reader to correspond the text to the Figure.

P. 12 bottom. The authors mentioned about “other employment”. It would help if the authors described more of the employment taken by some of the participants.

RESPONSE: The term “other” has been removed from that sentence and it now just says “…due to employment”. Participating in hunting, fishing and cooking of traditional food is not a form of employment. However, community members who were employed had less time to be able to participate in hunting, fishing and cooking of traditional food.

It may be good to mention the sex and age of the interviewee behind the quotes, not the interview number

RESPONSE: The interview number was provided to show that the quotes came from many different interviews and not just a few of the interviewed participants. The sex has been added behind the quotes. However we feel that because this is a small sample, including the age of the participant may breech some confidentiality of the individuals who participated in the study.

P. 13 no. 2. The authors mentioned traditional food acquisition and traditional food practices several times. It would help if the authors describe these two terms first at the beginning

RESPONSE: This sentence has been added to the 2nd paragraph of the Background section: “Food harvested from the wild by First Nations people is called “traditional food” while the Inuit call wild-harvested food “country food”.” The following sentences have been added to the community profile: “Community members participated in traditional harvesting activities (also referred to as traditional food acquisition) including hunting, fishing, and gathering food from the land.” After the term traditional food practices is introduced in the Results, “food practices” was added to this sentence to help define what was meant by that term: “In addition to describing their access of traditional food from hunting, fishing, and gathering for themselves, the
participants also mentioned accessing food from other people and the importance of food practices such as storing and preserving traditional food for future consumption.”

o P. 15. What type of welfare is given, who were the recipients? How many of the interviewee were welfare recipients?

RESPONSE: Welfare is another term for social assistance and is financial assistance provided by the government. As shown in Table 2, 23.5% were social assistance (welfare) recipients. The term welfare has been added in brackets in the text after social assistance on P.15 so that the quote from the interview makes sense. The term social assistance/welfare has also been included in the Background.

o P. 17 & 18. How far is it to fly the food to the community? This information may be added to the background. How far is it to the southern stores, with or without the year-round road access?

RESPONSE: A few sentences have been added to the Background to describe the distance that food is flown from the nearest city (Timmins, Ontario) with road access and the nearest location accessible by the winter ice road (Moosonee, Ontario) that has train access.

o P. 18. The store is too small for the size of the population. What is the population? What population do the authors mean? – FN, aborigin in general?

RESPONSE: For this sentence, “the population” has been changed to “Fort Albany” to clarify what population was being referred to by the authors.

o P. 18. How long could the green house supply the people? For how many people?

RESPONSE: The greenhouse is small and only 5 by 6 meters in size and could not supply many people with food. However it is a project that has been helping community members to realize that it is possible to grow food in their northern, extreme climate. The greenhouse is also being used as a teaching tool for students at the school to learn about gardening. The greenhouse was mentioned in the manuscript to explain where the participants may have gotten the idea about building more greenhouses as a way to improve food security.

o P. 19 & 24. There is no need to repeat the goal/objective of the study in the Discussion and the Conclusion sessions

RESPONSE: The sentence in the Discussion that re-iterates the goal of the study is a joining sentence that helps to situate this study within the larger context of food security issues that are understudied. The sentence with the study objective has been removed from the Conclusion section.

o Discussion. The authors should compare their results to the results of other similar studies; not only discussing their particular study. They should also add other experiences (if any) in improving food security in other indigenous community globally.
RESPONSE: In the first 5 paragraphs of the Discussion the results of this study were compared to many other similar studies (see references 47-77) using a subtle approach. Paragraphs 6 and 7 focus specifically on the results of this study because they represent unique suggestions for improving food security made by community members. To our knowledge, these specific suggestions have not been covered in the literature and this is why they are only discussed as they relate to this study within this community. The context of northern and remote food systems for Aboriginal people in Canada is unique and it would be beyond the scope of this manuscript to describe and compare the food security experiences in improving food security in other indigenous communities outside of the country.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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