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CAN SOCIAL WORKERS PROVIDE ACCESS TO HEALTHIER FOOD CHOICES TO LOW-INCOME FAMILIES WITH URBAN FARMING

Nayely Chairez

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CAN SOCIAL WORKERS PROVIDE ACCESS TO HEALTHIER FOOD
CHOICES TO LOW-INCOME FAMILIES WITH URBAN FARMING

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Nayely Chairez
May 2022

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ABSTRACT

Background: Low-income communities have higher rates of being food insecure at some point in their lives which can lead to chronic illnesses and have an impact on mental health. *Objectives:* This research aimed to explore the following: (1) the impact of urban farming in low-income communities and (2) the roles social workers have in addressing food insecurity through urban farming.

Methods: This study utilized a qualitative method of collecting data. Data was collected through one-on-one interviews with board members, volunteers, and community members from an urban farm organization. Interviews were conducted and recorded through the online platform ZOOM. Interviews were transcribed into written format then coded themes into categories.

Results: The findings of this study added to research of how urban farms benefit individuals by improving overall health and decrease food insecurity. This study gives an understanding of what role social workers hold in urban farming to help low-income communities. These roles include community organizers, advocates, educator, and brokers.

Conclusion: The findings presented in this study support the need for urban farms and social work involvement in low-income communities to decrease food-insecurity. Social workers can be involved in a variety of ways especially by helping the community organize a project such as urban farming and advocate to implement more of them throughout low-income neighborhoods. However, further research is recommended for more knowledge on this topic.

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I would like to acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Caroline Lim, for supporting me in completing this work. I would also like to acknowledge the participants of this study, thank you for your contribution. I would like to say thank you to all of the people I met along the way, I am grateful to have experienced this journey with you.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family. They were there for me every step of the way and I could have never done this without them.

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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM FORMULATION

Problem Statement

Food security means having access to food that will fulfill all nutrition requirements to live a healthy, well-balanced life. Families that are constantly struggling with hunger because they don't have the financial means to afford it are experiencing food insecurity (Gunderson et al., 2011). Food insecurity can lead individuals to deterioration in physical and mental health which can quickly cause serious health problems. Populations in the United States that are likely to be living with food insecurity tend to be low-income, immigrant families, ethnic minorities, single mothers, the elderly, and the homeless (Gucciardri, et al., 2014). This means that low-income families and marginalized groups facing this challenge are more vulnerable to develop health problems (Gucciardri, et al., 2014). Possible health issues these populations are at risk for due to food insecurity include diabetes, heart disease, substance abuse, mental health problems, chronic stress, feelings of inequality, and much more (Besthorn, 2013). Living with food insecurity can lead individuals to be dealing with high levels of stress and feelings of constant worry for themselves and their families (Martin, et al., 2016). The negative effects in these aspects of one's life will cause other parts such as their family function, work, education, and social life start to feel the impacts due to poor health. Food insecurity is an issue to be addressed in order

to improve the quality of life for individuals that are not financially stable enough to have access to fresh healthy food.

This is an issue that will only keep on increasing as the population increases. There has been research that estimates 70% of the world's population will be living in urban communities by the year 2050 (Besthorn, 2013). The importance of this is that there will continue to be a high demand for accessible healthy resources, it's already difficult for vulnerable and low-income populations to obtain this.

Current research shows that vulnerable populations living with food insecurity would benefit from resources and new programs implemented in the community such as urban farming (Besthorn, 2013). Urban farming can decrease food insecurity from a macro perspective by involving the community with their own food production, providing many employment opportunities, educational opportunities, and give residents better quality lifestyles knowing that they have access to affordable locally grown food year-round (Besthorn, 2013).

Poulson (2016) discovered that projects such as urban farming tend to have low participation from marginalized populations. There are racial inequities in urban farming that may contradict the implementation of this approach to low-income neighborhoods (Poulson, 2016). Participation from all members of a community is needed in order for urban farming to really benefit those struggling with food insecurity. If there is no participation from these groups of people, it's possible that urban farming may end up excluding the same low-income

populations and be taken over by more privileged individuals that are not living with food insecurity (Poulson, 2016). This issue can further be studied and can be addressed by social workers that are concerned with human rights and economic equality.

Purpose of Study

The goal of this study are two folds: to explore the uptake and effects of urban farming in low-income communities, and the role social workers can take on in addressing food insecurity with urban farming. There are benefits and possible challenges that occur in developing a project such as an urban farm, this study researched these areas. The method that was used is a qualitative design that consist of interviews. A strength of using interviews to gather data is having a broad range of responses from participants unique to their perspective.

Significance for Social Work Practice

This study will benefit social work practice by exploring how urban farming can be used to decrease food insecurity in low-income communities. The findings from this study can help advocate to add more urban farms in low-income communities given reported benefits of urban farming. With an increase of knowledge on how urban farms benefit communities, there can be more social work involvement in this area.

Social workers contribution to the development of urban farming would be significant because they are capable of effectively determining community needs, strengths, and solutions. Social workers are advocates for vulnerable populations

and have the ability to really get people involved in programs that will positively impact their lifestyles. (Besthorn, 2013). The implications of this study can better expand on what roles social workers could take on in urban farming to help communities living with food insecurity.

Findings from this study can contribute to profession of social work by expanding social workers' ability to help individuals improve their lifestyles from an ecological systems perspective (Besthorn, 2013). There is little research on social workers' history and current contributions to the development of urban farming for the purpose of improving quality of life. However, this study can push for concerns from social work on bringing awareness on the importance of how the natural environment affects people.

The question this research will examine is as follows: What role do social workers have in decreasing food insecurity by implementing urban farming in low-income communities?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter defines food security and discuss the health challenges that low-income populations struggle with when living with lack of access to nutritious food. This chapter also discussed how nutrition affects mental and physical health. Chapter two will explore the idea of urban farming being implemented in low-income communities as a way of increasing access to affordable healthy food and improving overall health. This chapter will also identify the theory of conceptualization that guided this research.

Food Insecurity

Definition

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2019) defines food security as consistently having physical and economic access to enough food to meet all basic nutritional needs in order to live a healthy lifestyle. Families that are living with food insecurity live in fear or worry regarding their access to food and whether they will struggle with hunger (USAID, 2019). Hunger is when one is experiencing discomfort because they are not consuming enough food for their biological needs for long periods of time. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) expanded the definition of food security to include the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and the ability to

be able to acquire these foods without having to resort to emergency food supplies (Besthorn, 2013).

Prevalence

In 2018, there was 14.3 million households that lived with food insecurity at some point throughout the year (Banerjee et al., 2020). Among these households the majority of the population is marginalized groups of people such as ethnic minorities, low-income families, single parent households, recent immigrants, and the elderly (Banerjee et al., 2020). This is an issue because certain populations are being given no choice but to live with food insecurity and the choices they have are not high in nutritional value.

Consequences

Arguably, lack of access to nutritious and fresh food can lead to serious health problems. There are long term health effects that impact individuals that are constantly hungry or don't have access to good quality food. Lack of access to nutritious food can lead to many negative health outcomes both physically and mentally. Low nutrition can cause stunt growth, shorten life span, chronic health problems, depression, and other mental illnesses (Elgar et al., 2021). This is due to the stressors that come with being unsure whether a person can afford to feed themselves or even their families a well-balanced diet. The issue of food insecurity causes families to worry and depend on food programs or donations for their meals, this causes significant distress especially if meals are being skipped frequently (Elgar et al., 2021).

Nutrition and Mental Health. There has been past research conducted that explores the relationship between food insecurity and depression. In general, this body of research found that...

Leung et al. (2014) conducted a study on people who fall under the poverty line and that are eligible to qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This research used a nationally representative low-income adult population to analyze their mental health and whether they live with food insecurity. The results of this research discovered that low-food secure adults experience lethargy, trouble sleeping, and feelings of hopelessness or depression (Leung et al., 2014). In this study the results showed that food-insecure adults were primarily non-white, had lower educational achievement, were current smokers, and participated in SNAP (Leung et al., 2014). These findings are a great contribution to help understand how nutrition and living with food insecurity impacts low-income individuals' mental health. This can be due to the stigma that comes with depending on food assistance programs or distress from constant worry about meeting nutritional needs (Leung et al., 2014).

A study that consists of a community sample of young adults living with food insecurity, found that there is an increased risk of suicidal ideation, depression and substance use (Pryor et al., 2016). Struggling financially is described as being stressful and depressing especially when worrying about being able to afford nutritious food. This constant worry along with the stigma of poverty can really affect an individual's self-worth and dignity (Pryor et al., 2016).

Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that there is a link between poverty and chronic stress which has a detrimental impact on mental health.

Martinez et al., (2018) conducted a study that links food insecurity to mental health among college students in California Public Universities. This study found that poor mental health among college students is associated with lower academic achievement and a lower grade point average. This study also indicates that the Black and Hispanic population are at a higher risk than the White population in experiencing food insecurity while being a student at a university (Martinez et al., 2018). The results from this study support that hunger affects an individual's physiological state and causes an impairment in ability to focus and impacts concentration. Higher education is already a stressful environment, college students living with food insecurity are experiencing added stress and anxiety which is ultimately affecting their academic work. Martinez et al., (2018) contributed great findings by highlighting the importance of nutrition among students in higher education. This gives us a better understanding of the relation between food insecurity and mental health among college students and their academic performance.

Nutrition and Physical Health. Davis et al. (2012) conducted a study with parents of preschool children to get some data on nutrition related issues that low-income families face. This study found that that populations in the U.S are affected by risk factors that make them more prone to obesity and being overweight. Individuals and families with a lower socioeconomic class and non-white

demographics tend to have higher rates of obesity (Davis et al., 2012). According to this study, children in the U.S have obesity rates as follows; 33% of Non-Hispanic whites are overweight and 16% obese, Non-Hispanic blacks are 35% are overweight and 20% obese, Mexican Americans are 37% overweight and 19% obese. These numbers show that ethnic minority families have higher rates of obesity in the U.S. compared to non-ethnic populations. Some of the barriers that parents reported having are cost of time, dislike of exercise, desiring unhealthy food, fatigue, living in chaotic conditions, and financial issues. This helps us understand that vulnerable and low-income families may benefit from having affordable food options that are accessible in their community as well as being educated on the impact of nutrition and health.

A study conducted by Banjeree et al., (2020) found that food insecurity is linked to 58% higher probability of mortality compared to individuals that were not reported as food insecure. This research contributes findings that show food insecurity leads to higher mortality and higher levels of cardiovascular mortality even though preexisting cardiovascular conditions were assessed and controlled. Banjeree et al., (2020) defined cardiovascular mortality as death due to heart disease, essential hypertension and hypertensive kidney disease, cerebrovascular disease, atherosclerosis, and other disorders of the circulatory system. An important finding from this study is that racial minorities had an increased presence of food insecurity, this is significant for social work due to the economic disproportionate hardships that this population faces. Minorities face

chronic stress from discrimination and social inequality, this along with food insecurity leads to poor health outcomes (Banjeree et al., 2020).

Food Assistance Programs

The U.S has food assistance programs as an approach to help families and individuals in need of extra help. Anderson (2013) discusses the five largest program which include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the National School Lunch Program (NSLP); the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC); the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP); and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). These programs require participants to be eligible which means there are requirements to meet as well as limitations, families have to go through a process and get approved to receive the benefits.

Anderson (2013) argues that these programs don't address the actual causes of hunger and they don't help eliminate hunger. Some of the issues that prevent these programs from really helping everyone are that there may be insufficient funds, they may not provide families with sufficient food, and they may not accommodate all nutritional needs or the right to choose fresh healthy foods. Another issue is that food assistance programs have a stigma of being labeled as poor and personal failure which makes society view it as an individual problem rather than a social problem (Anderson, 2013). Although food assistance programs are implemented to help those in need of extra support, there are limitations and requirements to be able to participate.

Bovell-Ammon et al., (2019) conducted a study that focused on participation of the SNAP program by immigrant families. These researchers found that within the last ten years, food insecurity doubled in families with immigrant mothers and their US born children (Bovell-Ammon et al., 2019). This is of importance due to the fact that food insecurity is associated with poor physical and mental health for children and adults, immigrant families are at a disadvantage. Although SNAP has been shown to be effective, this program is underutilized by immigrant families, this means that children of non-citizen parents will not participate in SNAP and experience higher rates of food insecurity (Bovell-Ammon et al., 2019). Immigrant families that are eligible to receive assistance may be stopped by fear of deportation and impact on future immigration status. Immigrant families are a vulnerable population that are in need of support and advocacy to improve quality of life for their families. Education on application of food assistance programs or other organizations such as urban farming is a method of providing extra support and increasing food security within this population.

Urban Farming

Urban agriculture is the process of growing and distributing food in urban cities. Urban farming is a method of using urban agriculture in cities to produce nutritious food to its community. Eigenbrod and Gruda (2014) conducted research that explains how urban farming can improve food security by contributing accessible good quality food. The findings from this research show

that that 56% of the people living in poverty in the entire world live in cities and urban areas. The importance of urban agriculture is to help the individuals and families living in urban poverty which also often live with food insecurity and malnutrition (Eigenbrod & Gruda, 2014). Along with improving food security by implementing urban farming, low-income families can benefit by participating in their local food production and feel a sense of social belonging. As stated earlier, low-income families tend to be vulnerable groups of people such as ethnic minorities, the elderly, immigrants, single parent households, and single mothers. Urban farming can improve health and lifestyles as well as provide a sense of belonging and create jobs for these populations.

Poulson (2013) compared an urban farm with a community farm and focused on the outcomes of community engagement and job creations, this study supported that urban farming needs to be all inclusive for it to benefit everyone. Activities such as urban agriculture and urban farming tend to exclude those living in poverty which means they face greater challenges of food insecurity and have very little access to healthier food choices (Poulson 2013). In 2013 low-income households in the U.S had the highest rates of food insecurity; the rates were also higher for blacks and Hispanics compared to non-whites (Poulson 2013). Further research on urban farming can help us determine how to help low-income populations participate and benefit from local food production.

Another study looks into urban agriculture and the benefits that accompany it including an improvement in sustainability and local ecology,

assisting with food insecurity, and contributing to a healthy diet (Grebitus et al., 2020). This study aims to understand consumer's perspective on urban farming to determine whether it will be a successful. Grebitus et al., (2020) discusses impact on consumer's health as an outcome of urban farms providing more fruits, vegetables, and tree nuts which are essential for an ideal health. Environmental impact is also discussed, Grebitus et al., (2020) argues that urban farming can improve environmental quality by a reduction in food miles and in mitigation effects by urban heat islands. The findings from this study had both positive perceptions along with few negative associations from the consumers. According to the researchers, some of the emerging positive themes include the idea of local, fresh and green production of food. By focusing on the positive, it can encourage willingness and acceptance of urban farming (Grebitus et al., 2020). However, negative perceptions should also be addressed and be further studied for the development of urban agriculture.

Relevance to Social Work

The social work profession is about advocating and equally including all people in a community especially those that are underrepresented. Addressing racial and economic inequalities is significant for social workers, it's worth advocating for those that are impacted by food insecurity to improve their health and overall lifestyles. Urban agriculture is a way to support low-income individuals and households by providing accessible fresh foods; however, research has shown that interest and participation from members of a community

are essential for these projects to thrive. This is also why social work plays in important factors in getting urban farming to succeed, for the purpose of getting community members together and creating an inclusive environment. Community engagement is a skill that many social workers practice, individuals from low-income families will greatly benefit by having support and motivation from social workers that want to implement urban farming in their neighborhoods.

Social workers are strong in cultural competence and have great skills in building relationships within a community including all diverse groups (Besthorn, 2013). For sustainable agriculture to benefit individuals, these types of projects would need social workers contribution for the purpose of completing assessments for community needs, resources, and determining their strengths (Besthorn, 2013). With this information urban farming can really thrive, especially by having social workers get specific information from the members on what changes they really want to see in their community. With social workers involved there could be great collaborations and most importantly major health improvements among low-income families.

Theory Guiding Conceptualization

A theory that will guide this research is the person-in-environment theory which is a concept that explains how people are influenced by their environment. A person's natural and social environment influences many aspects of their life and their way of thinking. It would be a great contribution for social workers to address environmental difficulties such as living with food insecurity because of

their impact on mental and physical health. More research can be done by social workers to focus on human rights by advocating for people's right to accessible, affordable healthy food especially because it is vulnerable individuals that get impacted the worse with food insecurity. It is important for social workers to acknowledge the changing environment and how it affects people's lives. (Green & McDermott, 2010). The population will only keep on increasing which will cause more demand for nutritious foods, and there will likely be an increase of people that live in poverty that will not have access to this right. The person-in-environment theory focuses on environmental changes, which ultimately change the way people live, and this is an issue for social workers to address to support those vulnerable groups of people (Green & McDermott, 2010).

Summary

This chapter provided a discussion on low-income individuals struggling with food insecurity. The definition of food insecurity includes not having access to fresh, affordable, nutritious food along with constant worry and stress about having access to any food. This chapter explained the mental and physical effects of living with food insecurely and how a low nutrient diet affects the body. An explanation of the limitations of food assistance programs were given along with an introduction to a project to decrease food insecurity known as urban farming. This chapter explored the reasons as to why social work is relevant and would be significant to this study. This chapter concluded with a social work theory that will help guide this research.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter consists of the methodology used in this study to explore the benefits and challenges of urban farming for low-income individuals. This study aimed to explore whether social workers can improve quality of life by being involved in the implementation of urban farming. This chapter discusses the study design, the sampling process, procedures, and data analysis. This chapter also includes a discussion on protection of human subjects.

Study Design

This research utilized a qualitative approach to explore the benefits and challenges of urban farming and the roles social workers have in urban farming. This study is exploratory due to limited amount of research done on the topic of social workers being involved with urban farming.

There are strengths and limitations to such a research design. The strength of a qualitative collection method is being able to ask open-ended questions to gather detailed information and gain insight on the topic. With one-on-one interviews participants will be able to answer open-ended questions and expand on their experiences with the researcher.

Some limitations included the researcher's limited capacity to recruit a large sample size for generalizability of findings and limited amount of time to

complete the research. At the time of this research there are COVID-19 restrictions that may limit the number of participants that can be interviewed online. However social distancing will have the least amount of risk to both the participants and researcher.

Sampling

Participants were recruited using non-probability purposive sampling method. Prospective participants were recruited from an urban garden organization. The urban garden has four locations within the Inland Empire area. There was a total of five participants that were part of this study.

Recruitment

This study interviewed adult participants of age 18 years or older who were associated with the chosen urban garden. The population participated in this study included employees, volunteers, and supporters that are involved in the urban farm. Prospective participants were informed of the study opportunity by communication with an employee of the organization. A flyer was created and shared with the members of the urban garden. The flyer included an explanation of the study along with eligibility requirements. Participants that were interested in the study contacted the researcher to schedule an online interview.

Study Procedure

The participants were given informed consent and asked permission to be audio recorder before beginning the interview. Due to a COVID-19 pandemic, one-on-one interviews were conducted online through a video conferencing

platform called Zoom. This was the safest option for the participants and researcher by maintaining the least amount of contact. The researcher was flexible with dates and time to meet with the participants online to best fit their schedule, the researcher communicated with participants through phone or email. Before beginning the interview, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants. At the end of the interview the participants were thanked for their contribution to the study.

The purpose of the interviews was to gather a greater understanding of the development and purpose of the organization's urban garden. The interview questions focused on challenges and benefits of running an urban garden. There were questions pertaining to whether there is a need for social workers to help communities expand the idea of urban farms and gardens for the purpose of food insecurity. To assess for face validity, the interview questions were formed informed through literature. The questions were discussed with an instructor and research advisor to ensure validity.

Protection of Human Subjects

The confidentiality and anonymity of the voluntary participants have been protected throughout the entire process. The researcher only began collecting data once the project got approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB took the proper steps to ensure protection of rights and welfare of human participants. The participants read and signed an informed consent before beginning the interview and they were informed of the purpose of the study.

While facilitating online interviews, the researcher was in a safe environment where confidentiality and anonymity of the participants has been ensured. Participants were notified of their right to discontinue at any given moment without any consequences. The audio recordings will be kept in a file in the researcher's password protected personal computer and deleted after the research has been completed. To protect the identity of the participants, personal information such as their names has not been identified or shared.

Data Analysis

The interviews conducted through Zoom were audio recorder and then transcribed. The transcribed interviews were written on a document on the researcher's computer. Each recording has been given an identifier in order to differentiate the speakers while maintaining confidentiality. Upon reading the interviews, the researcher identified themes and patterns from the responses. Using thematic analysis, coding was used to organize the themes into categories. Once the data analysis was completed, the researcher reported the findings in the following chapter.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology to be conducted in the study. The qualitative research consisting of interviews allowed for the researcher to collect data with the participants real life experience and thoughts on the topic. Also discussed in this chapter was the study design, the sampling process, procedures, data collection instruments, and the protection of human subjects.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative data collected through one-on-one interviews with five participants. The chapter begins by describing the demographics of the participants then a description of themes related to benefits and challenges of urban farming, and social workers roles in promoting urban farming in low-income communities.

Demographics

This study consisted of five participants recruited from Huerta Del Valle. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the participants. Most of the participants were female (60%). Ages ranged between 38 and 57, the mean age of the participants was 47.8 years old (SD = 6.87). Of the sample, all the participants identified as Hispanic (80%) with the exception of one who identified as Indigenous (20%). Concerning participants' role in the organization, three of the participants (60%) reported being employees and another two reported being supporters (40%). Three of the participants (60%) shared that they relied on the urban farm as an only means of fresh, organic food, whereas the other two participants (40%) reported that they have other means of obtaining fresh organic food.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=5)

Variables	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>n(%)</i>
Age in years	47.80(6.87)	
Sex		
Men		2 (40)
Women		3 (60)
Race		
Hispanic		4 (80)
Indigenous		1(20)
Food Security		
Depended on HDV ^a for food		3(60)
Don't depend on HDV for food		2(40)
Participant Role		
Employees		3(60)
Supporters		2(40)

^aHDV = Huerta Del Valle

Themes

The following themes will be presented; income levels, benefits and challenges of urban farming, social work roles in urban farming, and food security.

Income

The researcher asked participants what is the estimated income level of the community that participates in Huerta Del Valle. Four out of the five participants reported the community being low-income families and individuals.

I am not exactly sure but if I had to guess I think that people that have a garden space probably earn around 1,500 monthly. (Participant 1, 2022)

The majority of the population that is part of this community is low-income. (Participant 4, 2022)

The income of the majority of the community we attend is a community of low-income where their earning is minimum, it could be between 15,000 and 25,00 annually. (Participant 5, 2022).

Benefits of Urban Farming

The researcher asked participants what some benefits are of participating in an urban farm. Two of the participants answered this by stating that participating in an urban farm has improved their overall health by increasing their access to organic produce. Below are some responses that are within the theme of health being a benefit.

For me, it's having more organic fruits and vegetables available year-round that provide me with healthier options. (Participant 1, 2022).

I would consider eating healthier a benefit, getting more nutritious fresh food that is easily accessible in my community. And mentally I feel better knowing exactly what I am consuming and where it was grown.

(Participant 4, 2022)

One of the participants answered that an urban farm benefits the community by having affordable produce available. “Opportunities for low-income individuals to obtain their produce at a low price or practically free sometimes,” (Participant 5, 2022). One participant shared that a benefit for them is being able to educate their kids on the process of growing food.

Being able to educate my kids and myself on how to grow produce and take care of it. Learning about the hard work that goes into growing food. Because every day we learn something different from the plants. For example, here I can teach my kids how pumpkins grow, how tomatoes grow, how cucumbers grow, how avocados grow, and how other vegetables grow. It's good for them to know the difference in growing and harvesting produce. (Participant 5, 2022)

Challenges of Urban Farming

Participants were asked about what are some of the challenges in urban farming. The responses varied among participants, two answered similarly with challenges in maintaining crops. Participant one mentioned that the produce could get ruined due weather circumstances. “A challenge is when the harvest doesn’t grow, it could freeze in the cold and get ruined,” (Participant 1, 2022). Similarly, participant four stated, “A challenge would be if the crops don’t harvest so there could be losses instead of gains.” Participant two stated that there are multiple challenges that arise in an urban farm, “It’s just hard work, it can be complicated working in the field, there are many things that can go wrong and it

can become frustrating” (Participant 2, 2022). Two participants responded by stating limited supplies and limited time are challenges for maintaining an urban farm.

A challenge for those who have a garden would be having enough money to go toward the garden supplies and water. (Participant 2, 2022)

Time is a challenge because many of the people work full time, they are parents and have families, so they work long hours. This could be one of the biggest challenges here because people need to attend to their garden space. (Participant 3, 2022)

Social Work Roles in Urban Farming

The participants were asked what role they would consider for a social worker to have in urban farming, which forms the main research question of this study. Responses were varied and included the roles of being community organizers, advocacy, educators, and a broker. Concerning the role of being a community organizer, a participant shared the following:

I think a good position for them is to help organize and to find more garden space available in the city. They could help connect families with available community gardens to purchase organic products from because they have pretty good prices and can maybe even get some donations if needed. And spreading more awareness about the benefits of urban agriculture. (Participant 1, 2022)

Concerning the role of advocacy...

I would think it's important for them to get involved because a social worker would have information on how to better manage the garden and workload. It would give the community a chance to report the needs to someone that will actually respond and be proactive. (Participant 4, 2022)

About the role of an educator...

The role I would consider for a social worker is to build relationships with families, intervene and help people with their well-being and health, and to inform them of the benefits of agriculture. (Participant 5, 2022)

Educating the community on suicide. I would like to see social workers talk to us about the topic of suicide. For example, it would be beneficial for us to have a meeting at the garden, and have a discussion on suicide, I mean why not? I would like to learn more about that, I wouldn't want anyone I know to die by suicide, but I don't know how to dig them out of that hole where they feel unvalued. If someone told me there was going to be a meeting on the topic of suicide, I would make an effort to attend it, that would interest me. (Participant 2, 2022)

Food Security

Participants were asked whether they depended on the urban farm as the only means of obtaining healthy food. Two participants shared that they use other sources such as grocery stores to get healthy food. While the three other participants stated that they rely on Huerta del Valle as their only source of obtaining healthy food.

For example, in my space at the garden I plant garlic, so I'll have garlic year round, so that's already a win right there I don't have to buy any from the store. When it's cactus season or strawberry season there will be plenty of those. I know it's not a large quantity but it's good quality and I don't have to buy them at an expensive price. I produce them myself, I take care of them, and I learn a lot from the experience. Thanks to my garden space, I have food to eat year-round, if it's not celery then it'll be cabbage and if it's not cabbages it'll be onion, garlic. (Participant 2, 2022)

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of a qualitative study conducted through one-on-one interviews. The demographics of participants and major themes were identified using thematic analysis. Major themes included benefits and challenges of urban farming, and social workers roles in promoting urban farming in low-income communities.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results that were presented in the previous chapter. This chapter includes limitations and strengths of this research. This chapter ends with recommendations for future research and for the social work profession, followed by a conclusion of the findings.

Discussion

This research aimed to explore the benefits of urban farming and roles social workers have in urban farming to decrease food insecurity in low-income communities. Data was gathered from five participants who were employees and supporters of Huerta Del Valle. According to participants, the majority of the people who make use or participate in urban farming are low income individuals who depend on Huerta Del Valle as an only means of obtaining healthy food. This finding is aligned with that of other research that suggest low-income individuals and families tend to experience food insecurity more commonly than higher-income individuals (Besthorn 2013). Most of the participants described improved health as a benefit of urban farming. The roles reported for social workers in urban farming were community organizers, advocates, educators, and brokers.

Income & Food Insecurity

The purpose of identifying income and food security is to determine whether low-income populations will benefit from the use of urban farms in their community. The majority of the participants reported that the members of Huerta Del Valle are low-income. Three out of the five participants stated that they rely on Huerta Del Valle as an only means of obtaining healthy food. These results are similar to other research that suggest low-income individuals and families tend to experience food insecurity more commonly than higher-income individuals (Besthorn, 2013). These findings help us understand that lower-income communities would benefit from having urban farming as a source of obtaining healthy food at an affordable price. Participant 5 stated in their interview that urban farming gives individuals an opportunity to “obtain their produce at a low price or practically frees sometimes.” This supports previous research that suggests encouragement of local farming and production is a way of ensuring access to healthy food (Besthorn, 2013).

Benefits of Urban Farming

This study sought to identify the benefits of urban farming. Benefits were identified on a micro level and the macro level. The most salient micro-level benefit was availability to healthy food for individuals and families. This aligns with the purpose of the study which is to understand whether urban farming can improve quality of life by providing healthier food options. As stated by Participant one, “I feel more secure knowing that I have access to organic products that are locally grown from community members, and I know that my health is benefiting

from consuming organic fruits and vegetables,” (Participant 1, 2020). This provided insight of how urban farming has the potential to benefit individuals, families, and communities.

The above findings support previous research that identified several benefits of urban farming that include decrease food insecurity by involving the community with their own food production and educational opportunities (Besthorn, 2013). Ultimately, the findings from this research support that low-income communities do have added health benefits with the help of an urban farm that provides affordable healthy food.

Challenges of Urban Farming

In addition to benefits, participants were also asked about challenges in urban farming. Challenges with urban farming got a variety of answers from the participants. The challenges reported included, limited time to attend the garden, limited supplies, limited skills in gardening, and difficulty in maintaining crops due to bad weather. Past research has discovered that in order for an urban farm to thrive in a low-income community there has to be participation from the community members (Poulson, 2016). Poulson (2016) argues that if there is no participation from low-income community members then urban farming can end up excluding those who really depend on it and instead target more advantaged populations. However, the limited availability of community members was a barrier to more participation. Participant five disclosed that community members involved in Huerta Del Valle are busy and have limited time devoted to attend to

their garden over time. Limited time is a challenge that has been identified in this research and aligns to previous research on how participation is needed for an urban farm to actually benefit the community.

Another challenge identified in this research was difficulty in maintaining crops in bad weather. Weather such as extreme cold can cause the crops to freeze leading to a loss of product. Unforeseen weather is challenging to individuals that are trying to grow produce that may not be able to handle certain climate or temperatures. Another challenge identified in this study was the limited supplies including general garden supplies or water. In this study, it was shared by participant four that it is difficult to maintain a garden such as Huerta Del Valle if there is limited gardening tools or limited resources such as land and water. Water and land are essential to make an effective urban farm, difficulty obtaining farmland or paying for water will lead to challenges in maintaining it.

Social Work Roles

It was an aim to understand how social work practice can contribute to decreasing food insecurity in low-income communities with the use of urban farms. Therefore, participants were asked what role they would consider for a social worker. Besthorn's (2013) study indicates that social workers historically have a role in advocating for policy change in community practice. This supports the findings from this study it seems as if the roles that were commonly reported were advocacy and community organizing. Some of the participants reported that they would consider a role for a social work in urban farming to inform the

community and spread awareness on the health benefits of agriculture. This aligns with Besthorn's (2013) study that suggest social workers have the necessary skills of educating and advocating to address issues of food access in low-income communities. Social workers cultural competency is important to take into consideration in a project such as this one for the purpose of getting minority groups involved for an urban farm to thrive in their communities (Besthorn, 2013). Participant 4 reported that having a social worker involved can give the community a chance to report the needs to someone that will know how to respond to those needs and provide assistance. Besthorn (2013) also mentions the contribution that social work can make by effectively assessing the needs of a community and get a deeper understating of what they want out of an urban farm.

An unanticipated response in this study for the role of a social worker was to educate the community on suicide. Participant two reported that they would be interested in seeing a social worker involved by educating the community on suicide. This gives insight to how social workers can have multiple roles in the community where they can apply knowledge on mental health and provide educational opportunities for those that are interested.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the small sample size. The sample size of five participants is not a representative sample of the community. For future research, a larger, more diverse sample in gender, race, or age would strengthen the

study. More diversity in location of participant recruitment as well as inclusion of higher socioeconomic status can impact the results. This research was limited to participants from Huerta Del Valle, where there could be biases due to involvement in the organization. Participants may have answered in a way that speaks only positively in their experience with urban farming. Future research can focus gathering data from individuals unassociated in an urban farm to get unbiased responses. Another limitation present in this study was the interview guide created by the researcher. The topic of discussions was limited to the nature of the questions asked. This limited the participants responses to be related to the topic of the questions which focused on benefits/challenges of urban farming and the roles of social work. Future research can expand on the depth of the questions and have more follow up questions to the ones in the interview guide.

Future Research Recommendations

Future research can conduct studies with a larger sample size and more diversity in participants. A larger sample size can decrease biased results from and gain different perspectives from individuals that are not involved in an urban farm. Future research can ask more follow up questions to gain a better understanding in how social workers can begin advocacy for urban farms in low-income communities. Future research can benefit from having social workers input in their own experience or knowledge in addressing food insecurity with projects such as urban farms or community gardens.

Social work research can benefit from a better understanding of how urban farms address food insecurity. Social work can be involved in policy changes in communities to receive funding that is specifically for food resources such as gardens and urban farms. This would especially benefit low-income communities that are struggling with means to find affordable healthy food in their own neighborhoods. Based on the presented findings, social workers can begin addressing food insecurity by informing the public on the importance of healthy food. Overall health is greatly affected by an individual's diet, access to healthy food is a right that social workers should fight for. Social worker can advocate for access to land for agricultural purposes and promote the benefits of urban farming. Social workers can become involved by engaging community members and assist in organizing urban farming, as well as providing continuous support in organizations like Huerta Del Valle by referring families that may not have been aware that it's an option in their community. Being aware of challenges that arise in urban farming is also beneficial for social workers to be prepared helping communities tackle those challenges when they come.

Conclusion

This research aimed to examine what role do social workers have in decreasing food insecurity by implementing urban farming in low-income communities. This research has aligned with past studies in finding that low-income individuals rely on an urban farm as an only means of obtaining healthy food in their community. This research has given us a better understanding that

urban farming is a method of providing extra support and increasing food security within a low-income population. There is more research needed on the involvement of social work practice in addressing the challenge of food insecurity and how to advocate for urban farms to help low-income individuals.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE CREATED BY NAYELY CAHIREZ

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
4. What is the income level of individuals/families that participate in the garden?
5. What are some benefits of urban farming?
6. What are some challenges that occur in working/participating in an urban farm?
7. What role would you consider for a social worker in urban farming?
8. From your experience, how has urban farming affected your mental and physical health?
9. Have you relied on an urban farm as an only means to obtain nutritional food?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the role that social workers have in decreasing food insecurity and improving quality of life for low-income communities. The study is being conducted by Nayely Chairez, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Caroline Lim, Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Work-Sub-Committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine the role that social workers have in implementing urban farms in low-income communities to improve quality of life.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked a few demographic questions in the beginning following by questions on the benefits and challenges of urban farming, level of income from members of an urban farm, what role social workers have in urban farm organizations, impact on physical and mental health, and experience with food insecurity.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is totally voluntary and anonymous. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain confidential, there will be no identifiable information shared.

DURATION: The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, findings from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Lim at (909-537-5184).

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library Scholar Works database at California State University after June 2022.

I agree to have this interview be audio recorded: _____ YES _____ NO

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

APPENDIX C
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



December 18, 2021

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2022-34

Caroline Lim Nayely Chairez
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Caroline Lim Nayely Chairez:

Your application to use human subjects, titled “The Involvement of Social Workers with Urban Farming to Address Food Insecurity ” has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's [COVID-19 Prevention Plan](#) for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of

Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.

Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.

Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.

Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2022-34 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Nicole Dabbs

Nicole Dabbs, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board
ND/MG

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