Household Food Insecurity in Canada: Problem Definition and Potential Solutions in the Public Policy Domain

LYNN MCINTYRE
Department of Community Health Sciences, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta

PATRICK B. PATTERSON
Department of Community Health Sciences, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta

LAURA C. ANDERSON
Department of Community Health Sciences, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta

CATHERINE L. MAH
Division of Community Health and Humanities, Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland

L'objectif de cette étude était de mettre en lumière la façon dont les législateurs définissent l'insécurité alimentaire des ménages ; pour cela, nous avons examiné un ensemble de données tirées du hansard de quatre gouvernements canadiens et couvrant en gros les 20 dernières années. Nous montrons que les législateurs posent et analysent la problématique de l'insécurité alimentaire comme un effet de l'insuffisance de revenu, mais que, sur le plan des politiques publiques, certaines parties de la population retiennent plus que d'autres l'importance politique. Des propositions concernant l'insécurité alimentaire ont mené à des perceptions différentes des causes de ce problème chez les législateurs. L'établissement d'un consensus sur des stratégies structurelles de réduction de l'insécurité alimentaire des ménages exigera donc probablement un changement dans l'imagerie symbolique dont découle la définition des groupes qui doivent recevoir le plus d'attention.

Mots clés : insécurité alimentaire, législateurs, politiques publiques, Canada, hansard

The objective of this study was to bring to light legislators' construction of household food insecurity using a data set of debate texts from the Hansard records of four Canadian jurisdictions over approximately the last two decades. We found that legislators' fundamental problematization of food insecurity was one of insufficient income but that certain groups were of greater policy concern than others. Proposals to address food insecurity linked to legislators' differing perceptions of underlying cause. Consensual agreement on structural mitigation strategies for household food insecurity is likely to require a shift in symbolism of who is deserving of attention.

Keywords: food insecurity, legislators, policy, Canada, Hansard

Food insecurity occurs when people have inadequate resources to ensure that they are able to access adequate food in socially acceptable ways (Anderson 1990, 1576). Analysts have long recognized that amid a growing demand for charitable food assistance in the 1980s recession era, the problem of household-level food insecurity in high-income countries, such as Canada, represented a fundamentally economic problem (Riches 1986; Riches 1996; Riches 2002; Tarasuk and MacLean 1990; Tarasuk and Davis 1996). In other words, although other factors such as gender and social position can influence access to food, food insecurity at the household level can be understood primarily as a problem of economic access to food, transcending how individuals and households

doi:10.3138/cpp.2015-066

manage their food expenditures and make dietary choices. Household food insecurity has been shown to be a strong determinant of health among children and adults (Bhattacharya, Currie, and Haider 2004; Galesloot et al. 2012; Gucciardi et al. 2009; Kirkpatrick, McIntyre, and Potestio 2010; McIntyre et al. 2013; Perez-Escamilla and Pinheiro de Toledo Vianna 2012) and is thus an issue of importance to public health.

In Canada, since 2004 food insecurity monitoring has been regularized through the nationally representative Canadian Community Health Survey, which uses the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM), a standardized instrument adopted from the US HFSSM, to measure household food insecurity. In the HFSSM, food insecurity is understood as inadequate access to food because of financial constraints (Health Canada 2015). The prevalence of household food insecurity, according to most recent estimates, is 12.6%, and overall the prevalence is increasing in most Canadian jurisdictions (Tarasuk, Mitchell, and Dachner 2014). The body of literature analyzing the Canadian Community Health Survey to date has consistently documented that food insecurity occurs most frequently among low-income households, particularly those reliant on social assistance, welfare, or low wages; households with children; lone mother-led families; off-reserve Aboriginal peoples (the survey excludes First Nations people living on reserves); and recently arrived immigrants and refugees (Che and Chen 2001; Ledrou and Gervais 2005; Health Canada 2007; Tarasuk, Dachner, and Loopstra 2014; McIntyre, Bartoo, and Emery 2014). Recent research indicates that household-level food insecurity is linked to income and may respond to poverty reduction initiatives (Loopstra, Dachner, and Tarasuk 2015).

Canadian governments have recognized that food and income are important determinants of health (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 1998; British Columbia, Provincial Health Officer 2006; Province of Nova Scotia 2009). Canada participated in the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, which aimed to eradicate hunger and poverty globally (FAO 1996), and later drafted an *Action Plan for Food Security* (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 1998). Despite the compelling evidence on the consequences of household food insecurity at the population level, and public statements by Canadian political leaders about the importance of adequate food for health, there has been little advancement of effective public policy proposals to mitigate household food insecurity (Mah et al. 2014).

To advocate more effectively for public policies to address household food insecurity, it is important to better understand the political construction of household food insecurity as an issue within Canadian policy agendas. John Kingdon's (1984) work on processes of public policy-making provides concepts that are useful in analyses of policy problem definition and agenda setting. Kingdon identifies three processes, or "streams," that may provide impetus, or may constrain, movement of issues on policy agendas: problem definition, policy proposal formation, and politics (Kingdon 1984, 92–3). In his view, these three processes operate largely independently from each other, and policy initiatives are most likely to succeed during policy windows, periods where conditions in all three streams favour the proposed changes (Kingdon 1984, 174). Although Kingdon developed his concepts to describe processes in the United States, his ideas have been employed by researchers working in a variety of countries (e.g., Cairney and Jones 2015; Jones et al. 2015).

In this paper, we draw on Kingdon's (1984) insights around problem definition and proposal formation to help provide a descriptive analysis of debates related to household food insecurity that are recorded in the Hansard archives of the Canadian parliament, and the provincial legislatures of Ontario, Nova Scotia, and British Columbia between 1995 and 2012.

Methods

The construction of household food insecurity as a policy issue in Canada was examined using data that revealed how elected members of the federal parliament and provincial legislatures—whom we refer to collectively as *legislators*—defined the problem and formulated solutions. Public policy researchers in Canada who are interested in the content of legislative session debates have ready access to publicly available Hansard records, near-verbatim records of parliamentary sessions (Ward 1980). Unlike bills, legislation, or reports of standing committees, the Hansard record represents documentary evidence of debates, where policy actors exercise and create a mutual understanding through dialogue within a specific policy forum. This type of analysis is not unique to Canada; for example, analysis of Australian Hansard records has been used to study the construction of specific policy issues (Neff 2012; Quinlan 2012) and legislators' argumentation techniques (Fenton-Smith, 2008). Penner and colleagues note that in the Canadian parliamentary tradition, Question Period—time set aside daily for opposition members to question the government about its actions—provides insight into legislators' political and legislative priorities (Penner, Blidook, and Soroka 2006, 1009).

In our examination, we analyzed a data set of debate texts of legislative argumentation about household food insecurity from the Hansard records at the federal level and in three provincial jurisdictions—Ontario, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia—over approximately the last two decades. We chose 1995 for the start of the analysis

Table 1: Search Parameters Used in Canadian Hansards 1995–2012

Food Related	Food-Insecurity Related	Verbs
Food	Hunger	Starve
Diet	Hungry	Feed
Meal	Low income, low-income, lower income, lowest income, family income, household income	Cook*
Grocery	Family/household budget	Eat
Dish*	Poor	
Nutrition	Poverty	
Breakfast*		
Lunch		
Dinner*		
Fresh produce*		
Fruit*		
Vegetable*		
Supermarket*		
Store*		
Soup kitchen		
Community garden*		
Community kitchen*		

Note: Searching for "food" essentially searches for these terms: household food insecurity, food insecurity, urban food insecurity, food banks; searching for "hunger" essentially searches for these terms: household hunger; and searching for "hungry" essentially searches for these terms: hungry families, hungry children.

* These terms did not return relevant results in the pilot and were excluded from subsequent searches.

because it is one year before the World Summit on Food Security (FAO 1996); hence, we expected to capture discussions immediately leading up to the Summit when the issue might have been of greater political import. We chose 2012 as the end of the study period because it was the last year that complete data were available before we initiated data collection in 2013.

The federal and provincial jurisdictions we included for analysis were chosen for their differing approaches to social policy formation around household food insecurity. The federal government represented policy debates at the national level. British Columbia was selected because of its engagement of public health actors and local food system discussion in its governmental reports over the period (British Columbia, Provincial Health Officer 2006; Ostry 2010). Ontario was chosen because it is the largest province with the highest absolute number of food-insecure households, and for its changes in government over the time period of interest, accompanied by radical alterations in social welfare policy (Lankin and Sheikh 2012; Matthews 2004). Nova Scotia, a consistent "have-not" province with high rates of food insecurity, was chosen for its deliberate attention to food insecurity as part of poverty reduction discussions (Policy Working Group of the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects 2006; Province of Nova Scotia 2009). The selection of jurisdictions was not intended to be a sample for a comparative analysis—i.e., to distinguish among policy constructions emerging from these jurisdictions—but rather to examine across-jurisdictional definitions of the problem and its potential solutions. In other words, we were looking for representativeness of a breadth of Canadian debate, not representation of specific jurisdictional debates. Similarly, although legislators' comments arose from within government and in opposition across a range of political parties over the period, the purpose of this paper is not to examine problem definition and preferred solutions according to political affiliation, but rather to present a range of views. As a guide to readers' interpretation, however, we indicate in each extract particulars for each legislator.[1]

The focal point of the study was household-level food insecurity as it is defined in the HFSSM (Health Canada 2015), which, as noted earlier, is understood to be insecure access to adequate food because of financial constraint. To compile our data set, we defined search parameters to draw out Hansard text extracts that were likely to be related to food insecurity (see Table 1)—recognizing that the social and economic dimensions of this problem at the household level lie beyond "food"

Table 2: Selected Hansard Coding Categories and Extract Frequencies

Process	Category	Sub-Category	Extracts % (number) [Total $n = 1{,}899$]
Problem definition	Definition	Poverty	32.7 (621)
		Consequences	8.6 (163)
		Access to food	3.5 (66)
	Causes	Government failures	29.5 (561)
		Economy/Unemployment	3.5 (66)
		Insufficient food production	2.1 (39)
	Axis of stratification	Families and children	9.3 (176)
		Poor people	7.8 (148)
		Seniors	6.8 (129)
		Vulnerable or needy	5.3 (100)
		Unemployed /on Social Assistance	4.9 (93)
		Disabled	2.3 (43)
	Food bank as problem	Food bank use indicates problem	8.1 (154)
		Increasing dependence on food banks	2.6 (50)
		Food banks cannot meet demand	1.6 (31)
Solution	Income supports	Poverty reduction strategy	11.3 (214)
		Minimum wage or basic Income	5.1 (97)
		Employment or job creation	3.2 (60)
		Affordable housing	3.0 (57)
	Food provision	Food banks are a solution	17.5 (333)
		Child feeding programs	2.2 (42)
		Community gardens	2.1 (39)
		Food bank donation tax credit	1.2 (22)

Note: The categories listed in the table had the largest proportions of Hansard extracts coded to them.

per se. We excluded extracts focusing on food production or supply chains, including food safety and agri-food policy. We also excluded extracts focused on food insecurity in non-Canadian contexts (such as international aid), and among indigenous populations in Canadian northern regions or on-reserve because physical access to food is often constrained in addition to financial constraints (Willows et al. 2009). Finally, because of our emphasis on social and economic policy to address financial constraints to food access, we excluded extracts that referred to the aspirational construct of "community food security" defined as "a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice" (Bellows and Hamm 2003, 37) when they occurred without an associated focus on household-level social and economic conditions. Pragmatically, included extracts had to be more than three sentences in length to allow us to assess whether or not the speaker was commenting on a policy issue.

We adjusted the search protocol where necessary to accommodate differences between jurisdictional Hansard archival systems. We examined extracts from the different Hansard archives to ensure that they were each suitable for our intended qualitative analysis methods. Although the federal, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia Hansard records include statements provided by people who were not legislators, such as witnesses in parliamentary committee meetings, we present findings here from our analysis of legislators' arguments only. We analyzed data using conventional qualitative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). We downloaded Hansard extracts and used NVivo 10 software for coding. In our coding we initially used a small number of categories that we derived from Kingdon's policy process model. Later coding incorporated inductively derived categories based on the topics individuals addressed (see Table 2). As analysis progressed, the members of the research team met to revisit the coding framework and to discuss the preliminary results. We then read through each sub-category and divided it by theme into additional sub-categories until we reached saturation and did not identify any new topics.

Findings

The final sample analyzed here consists of 1,899 Hansard extracts that included 1,396 from the federal Hansard, 91 from British Columbia, 222 from Nova Scotia, and 190 from Ontario. The federal Hansard record search returned

a larger number of extracts than the provincial searches, in part because federal legislators were in session for a greater number of days during the study period: 2,048 federal, 1,092 British Columbia, 1,036 Nova Scotia, and 1,486 Ontario (Parliament of Canada 2014a; Parliament of Canada 2014b). The proportions also differ because of search engine variation between jurisdictions and because of our inclusion of federal legislators speaking within parliamentary committees.

Problem Definition

Political language characterizing "food insecurity": Throughout the 1995–2012 period legislators typically used the term *hunger* when they referred to problems accessing food because of financial constraint. The term *food insecurity,* which we use henceforth in this article, first appeared in 1999 when a speaker from a non-governmental organization presented evidence to a finance committee hearing (federal Hansard, 1999: Ms. Pamela Heneault, Canadian Living Foundation). Legislators slowly adopted the term over the following decade, initially in the Nova Scotia Hansard in 2003, followed by a federal politician in 2004, in the British Columbia Hansard in 2007, and in Ontario in 2012. *Starvation* was a powerful term that some legislators used when talking about food insecurity. For example:

> If the government had not made such drastic cuts to employment insurance, there would be fewer children starving. (Yvon Godin, NDP, opposition, federal Hansard, 2001)

When framing food insecurity in terms of suffering, shame, or marginalization, legislators also drew on terms that conveyed that people were being forced to live on the street, beg, or go to the food bank.

Food banks equate with food insecurity: In statements about food insecurity, legislators consistently used imagery around the use of food banks. For example:

> I can't help but feel that it's no coincidence that the food bank's goal of increasing their donations by 20% mirrors the 21% decrease in welfare benefits that you introduced yesterday. (Lyn McLeod, LIB, opposition, Ontario Hansard, 1995)

The Canadian national association for food banks publishes an annual HungerCount, which documents use of food banks, by province and other demographic characteristics (Food Banks Canada 2013). Legislators often cited the annual HungerCount reports as indicators of the extent of food insecurity in particular jurisdictions. Legislators also sometimes commented on the inability of food banks to meet the rising demand for their services.

Characterizing the food insecure: Legislators often characterized food insecure people as needy or vulnerable. For example:

> The most vulnerable are the kids who go to bed hungry. Many of their parents right now earn less than $20,000.... If the kids are in families that earn less than $20,000 are not the most vulnerable, who are the most vulnerable? (Olivia Chow, NDP, opposition, federal Hansard, 2009)

Legislators also identified specific social categories in their comments and typically described the people in them as deserving aid, or as not at fault. Children or families with children, and senior citizens, are social categories that legislators most often identified as being vulnerable to food insecurity. When legislators spoke about child poverty and food insecurity they placed less emphasis on the parents and sometimes did not mention them at all.

Legislators also characterized people with physical or mental health issues as facing food insecurity. For example:

> I want to address the question of hunger, the special diet allowance [a supplement for social assistance recipients with chronic health conditions] is going to be cut ... my constituents have contacted me, people with heart problems, coupled with mental health problems ... other long-term debilitating diseases and don't know how they will be able to make their lives work without a proper diet. (Peter Tabuns, NDP, opposition, Ontario Hansard, 2010)

Canadian Armed Forces personnel, post-secondary students, women, people living in rental accommodation, and the homeless population were also described by legislators as facing food insecurity, but they received less consistent attention than children or seniors.

Members of another group at high risk of household food insecurity—those dependent on social assistance (Tarasuk, Mitchell, and Dachner 2014)—were usually characterized by legislators as wanting to work, or as hard workers caught in difficult circumstances. For example:

> The use of food banks is way up.... Unlike the mean stereotypes this government paints, these people don't want to be on welfare. They want a job.... You haven't created the jobs you said you would. (Dwight Duncan, LIB, opposition, Ontario Hansard, 1997)

Similar statements became more common during the 2008 recession, as legislators described the large numbers of people who previously were steadily employed and lost their jobs.

Impacts of food insecurity: One prominent theme around the problematization of food insecurity was its

potential impact on health. Legislators usually spoke in general terms about how poor nutrition causes poor health. In the later Hansard records, starting in 2006 in British Columbia, legislators extrapolated further and identified obesity as a consequence of poor-quality diets. For example:

> Passing the bill, the Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating Act, would be a step in the right direction. Looking at food insecurity—like the health unit says, put food into the budget—could go a long way toward fighting children's obesity. (France Gélinas, NDP, opposition, Ontario Hansard, 2012)

Legislators also sometimes described consequences of food insecurity in terms of social impacts. For example:

> If a child is hungry because the welfare support to his parents is cut, that's immediate pain.... I suggest that is very immediate pain to a young child. But the long-term cost of hunger and family tension and social isolation is indeed harder to measure, and 500,000 children have been hurt by this government's cuts to welfare. (Lyn McLeod, LIB, opposition, Ontario Hansard, 1995)

Food insecurity was also cited as contributing to crime:

> Hungry people with no housing get sick, and they get sick more often. They have more encounters with police and with the judicial system. It's obvious that people cannot survive on the kinds of supports that you are willing to provide. (Andrea Horwath, NDP, opposition, Ontario Hansard, 2004)

In similar statements, legislators attributed a range of individual impacts to food insecurity, such as physical and mental suffering, and shame, and described it as a factor in social marginalization.

Proposal Formulation

We identified three major causal pathways that legislators used to generate solutions to household food insecurity. These were problems in global and local food systems, external economic factors, and government failure to protect vulnerable people. Table 2 presents the frequency of specific policy solutions proposed by legislators under these themes.

Improve food systems and nutrition: Given our exclusion criteria related to community-level food security and agri-food interventions, legislators' statements needed to link income-related food insecurity to global and local food supply systems issues to be excerpted. One such analysis came from the "Eat Local" strategy proposed in Ontario:

> Eat Local is a win-win scenario: It supports local farmers, it reduces the impact on the environment of transporting food, and it encourages consumption of healthy, fresh produce.... An important part of any strategy to promote fresh and local food is a strategy to end hunger in a wealthy province such as Ontario. (France Gélinas, NDP, opposition, Ontario Hansard, 2008)

Federal NDP politicians proposed a similarly justified national food strategy to support farmers in 2011.

Health promotion initiatives directed at healthy food were also touted in the name of food insecurity. For example in 2004 when the Nova Scotia government established the Office of Health Promotion, the government specifically identified nutrition as a factor in health. Some legislators focused on solutions meant to alleviate health impacts of food insecurity by providing food supplements for high-risk segments of the population, and in particular school-based meal programs for children, such as school-based provision programs developed by Ontario legislators:

> It is with pleasure I rise in the Legislature today to officially launch our government's child nutrition partnership, Ontario Breakfast for Learning.... We all know that when children go to school hungry, they are not good learners, and that's why in our very first budget our government committed up to $5 million to help parents and communities set up and expand local nutrition programs. (Mike Harris, PC, government, Ontario Hansard, 1996)

Federal legislators also sometimes proposed feeding programs for children and from 2007 to 2012 repeatedly proposed the establishment of a national school nutrition program.

Address economic factors: Many legislators discerned food insecurity as an economic problem associated with insufficient household or individual budgets and suggested income and/or employment as a remedy. For example:

> We cannot put groceries on the table with headlines and budget speeches. We cannot put more money on people's kitchen tables with Liberal Party economics. Personal relief is what Canadians really want and need. They want more money left in their hands for economic freedom. They want more groceries. (Paul Forseth, Canadian Alliance, opposition, federal Hansard, 2000)

In keeping with identifying unemployment as an important factor in food insecurity, legislators in all of the jurisdictions sometimes recommended job creation or employment programs or education/training programs as solutions.

In their discussions of economic causes of food insecurity, legislators also characterized other basic needs as competing with food for the money available within the household. For example:

> Seniors have been forced into making choices that they never thought would happen. They do not know whether to pay for their prescription drugs this month or to pay the gas bill to keep the gas on in their homes. They do not know whether they should buy groceries or pay the electric bill. (Jeff Watson, CPC, opposition, federal Hansard, 2006)

Images of people sacrificing food for medicine, or to maintain their housing, were the predominant focal points in discussions of household budgetary trade-offs. A range of competing needs was also identified, including vehicle insurance or fuel, and clothing.

One policy solution legislators touted to address competing financial needs was to reduce the gap between the prices of essential goods and the economic resources available to people facing food insecurity. For example:

> Men and women working in the city as couples, if they are at minimum wage, cannot afford things. They have to make decisions. "Do we pay our rent or do we buy food?" they have to ask. The only way we will be able to deal in a sensible and civilized way with people like that who are working hard is to have some kind of rent supplement program like other industrial countries have. (Ed Broadbent, NDP, opposition, federal Hansard, 2004)

Proposals meant to address prices for essential goods or services included publicly funded housing, publicly funded child care, and re-instituting price controls on rent. Some legislators also focused on changing taxation rates to reduce the cost of living for food-insecure people. For example:

> The federal government as well [is] making significant improvements in taxation levels for low-income earners.... This is a group that is a great concern to us because this is a very difficult trend to see: individuals like this who are increasingly using food banks. (Sandra Pupatello, LIB, government, Ontario Hansard, 2005)

These proposals typically consisted of calls to reduce the taxes paid by the segments of the population that are most vulnerable to food insecurity caused by poverty.

Another prominent set of policy proposals related to competing demands on limited income was to encourage the provision of food through the charitable sector at no cost to the recipient. Legislators suggested ways for governments to work with food banks, such as offering the public or businesses tax incentives to support food banks. In 2009 in Ontario an NDP opposition member suggested giving farmers a tax credit for donating surplus produce to food banks. The following year, Robert Bailey, a Progressive Conservative opposition member, tabled a private member's bill to establish that policy. Similarly, in Nova Scotia in 2011, a Progressive Conservative member suggested a tax credit for farmers, and in 2012 a federal NDP party member suggested changing the existing charitable donation tax credit system to help fund food banks.

Rectify government failures: Legislators often identified failures by governments as causes of food insecurity resulting from reckless or misguided government policies and/or erosion of social security programs. Such characterizations were common during periods when governments imposed austerity measures. For example:

> Well, this is just another example of this government blaming the victim. You know, one thing after another. "Give them choice." What choice—to feed their children or pay their rent? To live under a bridge? I mean, talk about social housing. We have had virtually no additions to social housing since this government came into power in 2001. (Dianne Thorne, NDP, opposition, British Columbia Hansard, 2008)

The federal, Ontario, and British Columbia governments all implemented budget limits or reductions during the study period; opposition politicians consistently linked these broader fiscal measures with increased poverty and food insecurity.

With their emphasis on inadequate social programs as a cause of food insecurity, legislators often suggested increasing funding for social safety net programs such as welfare or Employment Insurance, or through the establishment of poverty reduction strategies. For example:

> Every major economist in this country has said paying employment insurance benefits to those who are laid off is the quickest stimulus package we can get out the door.... They would get paid and we would not have folks facing foreclosure and losing their homes. We would not have folks lined up at food banks. (Malcolm Allen, NDP, opposition, federal Hansard, 2009)

Legislators sometimes advocated indexing social support payments to inflation to help deal with cost of living increases. Legislators also suggested indexing minimum wage levels to inflation rates. Provincial governments set minimum wage levels; most of the references to changing minimum wages occurred in the provincial Hansard records.

Discussion

In this article we present a descriptive analysis of Canadian parliamentary and legislature debates related to food insecurity, to offer readers a high-level overview of how elected legislators have defined the policy problem to date and what policy solutions they promoted or sought to enact between 1995 and 2012, contextualized within our current scientific understanding of this policy issue. We drew our data from publicly accessible Hansard records and limited the scope of our analysis to correspond with the definition of household food insecurity used in the HFSSM in the Canadian Community Health Survey, a federal monitoring instrument (Health Canada 2015). As a result, our findings are applicable primarily to the debates around policies aimed at the household level in the general population of Canada. We recognize that conditions in the Canadian north and for on-reserve Aboriginal populations diverge significantly from those faced in the rest of Canada, and as a consequence the insights from this study may not reflect food insecurity policy in those areas. In addition, our data set is not intended to be

generalizable to the breadth of policy issues related to food systems and food supply chains. The type of data captured in Hansard records also imposes some limitations on this analysis. Text analysis presents the potential methodological limitation that it does not fully capture actors' lived experiences, or at least captures them differently (Wagenaar 2011, 80–1). Nevertheless, texts remain valuable for hypothesis generation, and text analysis can offer the added benefit of making sense "out of the conversation of multiple voices … [that] can help generate new ideas for policy action" (Yanow 2000, 19).

With the limitations of this study in mind, the descriptive analysis presented here nonetheless provides important insights into several aspects of how household food insecurity public policy construction unfolded in Canada over a period of nearly 20 years. First, we found that for legislators, images of hungry children or senior citizens and people lining up at food banks were the dominant symbols of food insecurity. Some of the groups that legislators characterized as being vulnerable to food insecurity corresponded with the categories identified in scientific studies. Households, including children, whose major source of income is social assistance; individuals suffering from physical or mental illness; women; students; individuals renting their homes; and the homeless are in fact at a higher risk of household food insecurity (Dachner and Tarasuk 2002; Gucciardi et al. 2009; Muldoon et al. 2012; Tarasuk, Mitchell, and Dachner 2014). However, legislators' discussions overlooked several groups that are also at high risk of household food insecurity, including Aboriginal and Black populations living in urban areas, recently arrived immigrants, and households headed by lone mothers (Health Canada 2007; McIntyre et al. 2002; Tarasuk, Mitchell, and Dachner 2014; Vahabi et al. 2011). Although senior citizens were often a rhetorical focus of legislators' food insecurity concerns, in Canada seniors' rates of food insecurity have consistently been among the lowest of all demographics (Che and Chen 2001; Ledrou and Gervais 2005; Tarasuk, Mitchell, and Dachner 2014), attributable largely to the anti-poverty effect of seniors' pensions (Emery, Fleisch, and McIntyre 2013). Clearly, in Canada from 1995 to 2012, the power of imagery around food insecurity did not depend on scientific accuracy.

Along the same lines, legislators emphasized certain indicators in constructing food insecurity as a policy problem. Kingdon (1984, 95–6) describes indicators as information generated through monitoring and studies, such as statistics and academic reports. In the Hansard extracts we examined, legislators often described the "use of food banks" as an indicator of food insecurity caused by poverty and they consistently cited the annual HungerCount reports as evidence. In contrast, legislators put much less emphasis on scientific studies and reports, only occasionally citing academic journal articles or research results that were based on the more robust measure of the problem using the Canadian Community Health Survey. Legislators' choices about indicators are important. Interpretation of indicators becomes an important focus of debate (Kingdon 1984, 98–9) and problem definition is always linked to practical imperatives: how policy actors represent a problem is also how they normatively position themselves to intervene in a problem (Wagenaar 2011, 224).

Our second insight is that although Canadian legislators did not often use the term *food insecurity* in their statements, they constructed the problem in ways that corresponded broadly with definitions used for surveillance of the problem and in other academic work (Anderson 1990; Health Canada 2015; Riches 1986, 1996, 2002; Tarasuk, Mitchell, and Dachner 2014). Throughout the 1995 to 2012 period, Canadian legislators identified food insecurity as occurring when household incomes are insufficient to meet food costs. This suggests a foundational awareness of the social and economic underpinnings of the issue as a problem of inadequate income. Legislators also stated or implied that food insecurity leads to a variety of negative social outcomes, and that stress is a moderating factor in this relationship. In fact, food insecurity has been well-documented to be a source of high levels of stress (Carter et al. 2011; Hadley and Crooks 2012), which has attendant consequences.

Our third insight into the construction of food insecurity as a policy problem by Canadian legislators is that they considered a range of aspects of the problem. Kingdon (1984, 131–133) points out that policy formation is not simply a matter of effective lobbying: ideas guide what is seen as possible and play a central role when policy-makers consider options before arriving at alternatives. We found that in Canadian government food insecurity public policy debates, ideas around the issue are manifested in a strikingly broad range of potential policy alternatives. Legislators made suggestions ranging from context-level initiatives, such as "Eat Local" campaigns, to health and nutrition interventions (including meal supplement programs), to economic interventions such as price controls targeting essential goods, as well as more general social welfare initiatives. While not all of these policy alternatives were developed for implementation, the Hansard extracts indicate that a variety of options were proposed and debated.

Finally, in our analysis of Hansard records we found that legislators linked strong imagery and symbols of food insecurity with policies that were not linked to economic remedies. Such policies included providing support for food provision by food banks or meal supplement programs for children, or encouraging healthy eating among populations who are unable to afford

healthy foods. As Kingdon (1984, 102–3) points out, symbolism is important in policy formation in that it reinforces movement on a policy rather than provides the original impetus for action. The emphasis on emotionally charged imagery in the political rhetoric found in the Hansard record suggests that policy adoption may most easily achieve consensus around charitable food provision for certain vulnerable groups.

The findings from this descriptive analysis suggest several potential areas for future research related to food insecurity in Canada. One such area is public policy around food insecurity in the Aboriginal population and in northern regions. These topics, as well as other policy issues that determine physical access to food in other settings itself, fell outside the remit of this project. They constitute distinctive topics where a similar approach to analysis of Hansard archives could provide valuable insight into public policy debates. In addition, some aspects of the data set analyzed here were beyond the scope of this analysis and are the subject of future study. Given that the prevalence of household food insecurity in Canada has continued to increase over the past several decades, it is clear that Kingdon's third stream of the policy process—namely politics—needs additional study to understand why policy action to date has been inadequate. Such an analysis might yield valuable insights to help improve advocacy around this important topic.

Conclusions

Although Hansard records capture only part of the political dynamic in each of the jurisdictions we studied, our descriptive analysis of the Canadian federal, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Ontario Hansard records from 1995 to 2012 indicates that legislators' construction of the issue corresponds broadly with scholarly definitions of food insecurity as a problem of inadequate income. That finding is hopeful and suggests that there is a common point of understanding for building dialogue among Canadian public policy-makers around income-related interventions. A less promising finding is that the legislators' constructions of household-level food insecurity are also a mix of accurate and erroneous details with solutions put forward often lacking coherence between our current scientific monitoring and causal understanding of the issue, and intended outcome.

Acknowledgements

This study was funded by a Programmatic Grant in Health and Health Equity from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) (grant no. FRN 115208).

Note

1 At the federal level and in all three provinces, the New Democratic party (NDP) consistently represented the left of the political spectrum (Cross and Young 2002). In most of the jurisdictions in the study, the Liberal party (LIB) was the main centrist party. The exception was British Columbia, where there was effectively no centrist party and the BC Liberal party (BC Lib) represented the right. The political right was more complex, due to a split at the federal level from 1993 to 2003. The federal Progressive Conservative party, along with the more ideological Reform party and its successor, the Canadian Alliance party, were active until they amalgamated as the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) in 2003. In Ontario and Nova Scotia, provincial branches of the Progressive Conservative party represented the political right. Finally, the sovereigntist movement in Quebec was active and was represented in the federal government by the left-leaning Bloc Québécois. Overall, during the study period, parties on the political right most often formed the governments in these four jurisdictions, followed by parties from the centre. The NDP only formed governments on two occasions: in British Columbia and in Nova Scotia.

References

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. 1998. *Canada's Action Plan for Food Security*. Ottawa: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Anderson, S. 1990. "Core indicators of nutritional state for difficult-to-sample populations." *Journal of Nutrition* 120:1559–1600.

Bellows, A.C., and M.W. Hamm. 2003. "International Effects On and Inspiration for Community Food Security Policies and Practices in the USA." *Critical Public Health* 13(2):107–23. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0958159031000097652.

Bhattacharya, J., J. Currie, and S. Haider. 2004. "Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Nutritional Outcomes in Children and Adults." *Journal of Health Economics* 23(4):839–62. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2003.12.008.

British Columbia, Provincial Health Officer. 2006. *Food, Health and Well-Being in British Columbia: Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report 2005*. Victoria: Ministry of Health.

Cairney, P., and M.D. Jones. 2015. "Kingdon's Multiple Streams Approach: What is the Empirical Impact of this Universal Theory?" *Policy Studies Journal*. Advance online publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/psj.12111.

Carter, K., K. Kruse, T. Blakely, and S. Collings. 2011. "The Association of Food Security with Psychological Distress in New Zealand and any Gender Differences." *Social Science & Medicine* 72(9):1463–71. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.03.009.

Che, J., and J. Chen. 2001. "Food Insecurity in Canadian Households." *Health Reports* 12(4):11–22.

Cross, W., and L. Young. 2002. "Policy Attitudes of Party Members in Canada: Evidence of Ideological politics." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 35(4):859–80. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0008423902778475.

Dachner, N., and V. Tarasuk. 2002. "Homeless "Squeege Kids": Food Insecurity and Daily Survival." *Social Science & Medicine* 54(7):1039–49. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(01)00079-X.

Emery, H., V. Fleisch, and L. McIntyre. 2013. "Legislated Changes to Federal Pension Income in Canada Will Adversely Affect Low-Income Seniors' Health." *Preventive Medicine* 57(6):963–6. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2013.09.004.

FAO. 1996. *Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action.* UN Declaration, Rome. Accessed 3 January 2016 at http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm.

Fenton-Smith, K. 2008. "Discourse Structure and Political Performance in Adversarial Parliamentary Questioning." *Journal of Language and Politics* 7(1):97–118. http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/jlp.7.1.05smi.

Food Banks Canada. 2013. HungerCount 2013. Accessed 3 January 2016 at http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/FoodBanks/MediaLibrary/HungerCount/HungerCount2013.pdf

Galesloot, S., L. McIntyre, T. Fenton, and S. Tyminski. 2012. "Food Insecurity in Canadian Adults Receiving Diabetes Care." *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Researc* 73(3):e261–e266. http://dx.doi.org/10.3148/73.3.2012.e261.

Gucciardi, E. , J.A. Vogt, M. DeMelo, and D.E. Stewart. 2009. "Exploration of the Relationship Between Household Food Insecurity and Diabetes in Canada." *Diabetes Care* 32(12):2218–24. http://dx.doi.org/10.2337/dc09-0823.

Hadley, C., and D.L. Crooks. 2012. "Coping and the Biosocial Consequences of Food Insecurity in the 21st Century." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 149(S55):72–94. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.22161.

Health Canada. 2007. *Income-Related Household Food Insecurity in Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, Cycle 2.2 Nutrition (2004)*. Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion, Health Products and Food Branch. Cat. No. H164–42/2007E-PDF, HC Pub. No. 4696.

Health Canada. 2015. *The Household Food Security Survey Module*. At. http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/surveill/nutrition/commun/insecurit/hfssm-mesam-eng.php

Hsieh, H.-F., and S.E. Shannon. 2005. "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis." *Qualitative Health Research* 15(9):1277–88. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687.

Jones, M.D., H.L. Peterson, J.J. Pierce, N. Herweg, A. Bernal, H. Lamberta Raney, and N. Zahariadis. 2015. "A River Runs Through It: A Multiple Streams Meta-Review." *Policy Studies Journal*. Advance online publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/psj.12115.

Kingdon, J.W. 1984. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Kirkpatrick, S.I., L. McIntyre, and M.L. Potestio. 2010. "Child Hunger and Long-Term Adverse Consequences for Health." *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 164(8):754–62. http://dx.doi.org/10.1001/archpediatrics.2010.117.

Lankin, F., and M.A. Sheikh. 2012. *Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario*. Toronto: Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario.

Ledrou, I., and J. Gervais. 2005. "Food Insecurity." *Health Reports* 16:47–50.

Loopstra, R., N. Dachner, and V. Tarasuk. 2015. "An Exploration of the Unprecedented Decline in the Prevalence of Household Food Insecurity in Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007-2012." *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de politiques* 41(3):191–206. http://dx.doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2014-080.

Mah, C.L., C. Hamill, K. Rondeau, and L. McIntyre. 2014. "A Frame-Critical Policy Analysis of Canada's response to the World Food Summit 1998-2008." *Archives of Public Health* 72(1):41–47. http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/2049-3258-72-41.

Matthews, D. 2004. *Review of Employment Assistance Programs in Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program*. Toronto: Ministry of Community and Social Services.

McIntyre, L., A. Bartoo, and J.C.H. Emery. 2014. "When Working Is not Enough: Food Insecurity in the Canadian Labour Force." *Public Health Nutrition* 17(1):49–57. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1368980012004053.

McIntyre, L., N.T. Glanville, S. Officer, B. Anderson, K.D. Raine, and J.B. Dayle. 2002. "Food Insecurity of Low-Income Lone Mothers and Their Children in Atlantic Canada." *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 93(6): 411–5.

McIntyre, L., J. Williams, D. Lavorato, and S. Patten. 2013. "Depression and Suicide Ideation in Late Adolescence and Early Adulthood Are an Outcome of Child Hunger." *Journal of Affective Disorders* 150(1): 123–9. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2012.11.029.

Muldoon, K., P. Duff, S. Fielden, and A. Anema. 2012. "Food Insufficiency Is Associated with Psychiatric Morbidity in a Nationally Representative Study of Mental Illness among Food Insecure Canadians." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 8(5):795–803.

Neff, C. 2012. "Australian Beach Safety and the Politics of Shark Attacks." *Coastal Management* 40(1):88–106. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08920753.2011.639867.

Ostry, A. 2010. *Food for Thought: The Issues and Challenges of Food Security*. Vancouver: Provincial Health Services Authority.

Parliament of Canada. 2014a. *Sitting Days of the House of Commons by Calendar Year 1968 to Date.* http://www.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseofCommons/SittingDays.aspx?Chamber=03d93c58-f843-49b3-9653-84275c23f3fb&Menu=HOC-Procedure.

Parliament of Canada. 2014b. *Sitting Days of the Provincial and Territorial Legislatures by Calendar Year 1987 to Date.* http://www.parl.gc.ca/ParlInfo/compilations/ProvinceTerritory/SittingDays.aspx?Language=E.

Penner, E., K. Blidook, and S. Soroka. 2006. "Legislative Priorities and Public Opinion: Representation of Partisan Agendas in the Canadian House of Commons." *Journal of European Public Policy* 13(7):1006–20. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350176060023979.

Perez-Escamilla, R., and R. Pinheiro de Toledo Vianna. 2012. "Food Insecurity and the Behavioral and Intellectual Development of Children: A Review of the Evidence." *Journal of Applied Research on Children* 3(1):1–16.

Policy Working Group of the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects. 2006. *Thought About Food? Understanding the Relationship Between Public Policy and Food Security in Nova Scotia: A Background Paper and Policy Lens*. Halifax:

Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, Nova Scotia Nutrition Council and Collaborating Family Resource Centres/Projects.

Province of Nova Scotia. 2009. *Preventing Poverty, Promoting Prosperity: Nova Scotia's Poverty Reduction Strategy*. Halifax: Province of Nova Scotia.

Quinlan, M. 2012. "The 'Pre-Invention' of Precarious Employment: The Changing World of Work in Context." *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 23(4):3–24. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/103530461202300402.

Riches, G. 1986. *Food Banks and the Welfare Crisis*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development.

Riches, G. 1996. *First World Hunger: Food Security and Welfare Politics*. London: Macmillan Press.

Riches, G., and the Lessons from Canada. 2002. "Food Banks and Food Security: Welfare Reform, Human Rights and Social Policy. Lessons from Canada?" *Social Policy and Administration* 36(6):648–63. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9515.00309.

Tarasuk, V., N. Dachner, and R. Loopstra. 2014. "Food Banks, Welfare and Food Insecurity in Canada." *British Food Journal* 116(9):1405–17. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-02-2014-0077.

Tarasuk, V., and B. Davis. 1996. "Responses to Food Insecurity in the Changing Canadian Welfare State." *Journal of Nutrition Education* 28(2):71–5. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3182(96)70029-8.

Tarasuk, V., and H. MacLean. 1990. "The Institutionalization of Food Banks in Canada: A Public Health Concern." *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 81(4):331–2.

Tarasuk, V., A. Mitchell, and N. Dachner. 2014. *Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2012*. Toronto: Research to Identify Policy Options to Reduce Food Insecurity (PROOF). Accessed 3 January 2016 at http://nutritionalsciences.lamp.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Household_Food_Insecurity_in_Canada-2012_ENG.pdf.

Vahabi, M., C. Damba, C. Rocha, and E. Montoya. 2011. "Food insecurity among Latin American Recent Immigrants in Toronto." *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 13(5):929–39. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10903-010-9384-y.

Wagenaar, H. 2011. *Meaning in Action: Interpretation and Dialogue in Policy Analysis*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.

Ward, J. 1980. *The Hansard chronicles: A Celebration of the First Hundred Years of Hansard in Canada's Parliament*. Toronto: Deneau and Greenberg.

Willows, N.D., P. Veugelers, K. Raine, and S. Kuhle. 2009. "Prevalence and Sociodemographic Risk Factors Related to Household Food Security in Aboriginal peoples in Canada." *Public Health Nutrition* 12(8):1150–6. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1368980008004345.

Yanow, D. 2000. *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis*. Vol. 47. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412983747.