Food Deserts: Toronto

**Introduction**

In recent history, there has been a growing correlation between having lower wages and a higher likelihood of weight problems, such as obesity (Dyson 2018). Seeing as urban areas typically are home to lower wage citizens, we would also expect to see higher instances of health issues due to weight.

Indeed, this is the case in Toronto, but the cause of this correlation might not be readily apparent. According to the Toronto Food Policy Council, there are a multitude of neighborhoods in Toronto that classify as “food deserts” (Martin Prosperity Institute 2010). Food deserts are localities where there is difficult access to quality food. This means that, while there may be small corner or convenience stores, there is a lack of proper grocery stores, and therefore less access to quality nutrition.

My study will aim to leverage Foursquare data to see what boroughs of Toronto are lacking in access to proper food. I expect my stakeholders to be the citizenry itself, government at local, provincial, and national level, as well as any advocacy groups involved in nutrition in this region. This study should be considered important as it could help to better target funds aimed at mitigating the problem of food deserts.

**Data**

For my data, I will use several Foursquare venues for what will count as a proper source of food. Foursquare has venue categories for “Grocery Store” and “Supermarket”, however, I will also be using “Health Food Store”, “Farmers Market”, “Fruit and Vegetable Store”, and “Organic Grocery”. I have decided not to add “Bakery” and “Butcher” as there is not a guarantee that either place meets a standard of proper nutrition. For example, a bakery could specialize only in cakes or a butcher could sell low quality meats. It is difficult to be certain I have chosen the correct data points, but this should present a reasonable overview of the situation.

This data can be clustered at the Neighborhood level, allowing me to utilize the Toronto Borough data from our previous workshops. I will be studying only the boroughs that include “Toronto” in their name as one of my principle stakeholders should be the Toronto Food Policy Council. Furthermore, this should help target the most urban areas, where food deserts are most common. I should not need additional data sources besides Foursquare, which allows for uniformity in the study.

This study could be further expanded upon by further leveraging Foursquare “Tips” data. The quality of the above food retailers can be assessed to further stratify the data in the study. This would further assist the study’s stakeholders. However, this requires an upgraded Foursquare account, so I will refrain from including that data, at least for now.

Dyson, T. (2018, December 11). Relationship Between Low Income and Obesity is Relatively New. Retrieved April 2, 2020, from https://news.utk.edu/2018/12/11/relationship-between-low-income-and-obesity-is-relatively-new/

Martin Prosperity Institute. “Food Deserts and Priority Neighbourhoods in Toronto” Martin Prosperity Institute Insights. Toronto, ON: Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, June 15, 2010.