

PRESENTING AUTHOR'S NAME & RESEARCH TITLE

Ruby Fried, PhD

A novel Alaska Native traditional food security tool developed through Tribally-driven community-based participatory action research

PURPOSE/BACKGROUND

Although consumption of protein-rich and nutrient-dense traditional Alaska Native (AN) foods and participation in traditional activities are associated with positive dietary quality, physical and mental health outcomes, disruptions in social and environmental conditions threaten the continuation of harvesting, eating, and sharing traditional foods (TFs) within AN communities. Given the social and ecological changes occurring in the circumpolar north, the relationship between TFS diet quality, and physical and mental health outcomes among Indigenous populations requires examination. As such, this project aimed to validate a novel TFS assessment tool focusing on the impact of altered hunting, harvesting, and consumption patterns and conditions due to social and ecological change on TFS.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The TFS assessment tool was developed by the PI through collection and analysis of in-depth interview data from 29 St. Paul residents. The research aims were fulfilled through an active and equitable partnership with the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island Tribal Government, community members, and a 6-member community advisory board using a community- and Tribally-based participatory research approach. Validation of the questionnaire was conducted with 36 community members. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the timeline of grant activities was significantly delayed, and therefore analyses are ongoing.

RESULTS

Although analyses regarding validation are ongoing, themes that have emerged from preliminary analyses indicate the following regarding traditional food security in St. Paul: sharing, access to/relationships with hunters/fishers, access to land and water transportation, the Community Northern Fur Seal Harvest, and traditional knowledge are the primary drivers of traditional food security on St. Paul. Barriers include lack of supplies, time/work conflict, fewer animals and fish readily available, and poor weather conditions for hunting and fishing. The desire for traditional foods remains, with community members citing that these foods are healthier, fresh, organic, and not processed compared to store-bought foods, and also are high in iron and other vitamins.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

There are various aspects of traditional food security that may impact overall health outcomes. This development grant has allowed for the validation of a traditional food security assessment tool. Pending additional funding, this tool will now be used to examine the relationships between TFS and health outcomes among Alaska Native people. In addition, this tool can be adapted for other communities to assess TFS in a cross-sectional or longitudinal manner, and can provide foundational data for climate change adaptation planning and/or working toward greater traditional food security.