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ENG1121

April 16,2022

Word count: 1860

How are food deserts and food insecurity affecting health?

Introduction

How is a country with a statistic of 1 in 8 Americans being food insecure also be a place where 1 in 3 citizens are obese? A modern day paradox were the amount of calories consumed is higher than ever but not enough nutritious food is being consumed. Many may blame lack of education, culture, money and irresponsibility as the root of the problem. While these issues can all contribute to the problem their is no denying the impacts it has had to the effecting population. Food deserts, places were the access to fresh produce is hard to come by, contributing to the ever growing health pandemic. These communities that are taken up mostly by low-income groups of minorities have had significant health repercussions that will affected them for years to come because of lack of fresh, healthy and nutritious foods. The areas where these people reside in have no local supermarkets close to them and only give easy access to grocery stores that sell highly processed food. It will be ignorant to think that these citizens choose to live in this manner. The reality for many people is they don't have the ability to purchase produce due to the distance of these markets. In some states like Tennesse, their exists communities of people who have to travel 2 hours on public transportation to even step food in a market.

I became interested in this topic many years ago after researching "Living on Minimum Wage" and went down the rabbit hole. I would watch interviews and documentaries about people being impacted by this issue. These same people were being berated for "complaining" about lack to fresh foods when they were a bigger size. I won't deny that at a young age I wondered how they can be bigger while struggling to eat. I later found out that most of these people only have access to processed, high in sugar and fats food instead of local markets and farmer markets resulting in their weight gain. I expect to see research papers and graphs demonstrating the health effects that food deserts and food insecurity has had on it's victims. I expect to see a correlation to living in these saturated fast food restaurants on it's residents.

Citation #1

Brian Gordon. "Food deserts in the Port City: Limited access endangers health, and this town is fed up". Star-News (Wilmington, NC), August 23, 2021 Monday.

advance-lexis-com.citytech.ezproxy.cuny.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63FG-D7D1-DXVP-V272-00000-00&context=1516831. Accessed April 18, 2022.

Summary

In this article Brian goes to speak about the food deserts in Port City and the toll it's taken on it's residence. There once existed a super market in the neighborhood that was burned down 5 years ago and had no markets to replace it. Due to that many people have now lost access to fresh foods and the community fights for easy access produce. It follows several people and shows their struggle to get food and eat healthy. People who have been living in this community have seen the affects of a dip in their local community be a direct corelation to markets not entering their neighborhoods. While this particular community is suffering there is a tourist destination filled with markets restaurant and a great amount of food that neighboring communities only wish to have. Instead they have bodegas with quick unhealthy foods and a pitiful shelf of half browning and rotten produce like potatoes, tomatoes and lemons. While the community is putting their efforts into establishing a supermarket businesses like dollar general are establishing locations in these communities that provide no fresh produce and instead highly processed canned goods that local citizens can afford. The only seeming hope for these citizens is mobile food pantry and the inevitable gentrification increasing the median household and therefore increasing the possibility of having a market. These mobile pantries are allowing citizens to introduce healthy produce into their diets and the possibility of students learning about eating healthier and overall giving the citizens a healthier lifestyle.

Reflection

This last article brought the negative emotions that most residents in food deserts feel. For the most part many videos and articles that I have consumed always leave with a positive note on how the issue is slowly being resolved and the quality of life increasing. This article though was realistic and did not sugar coat the negatives of food insecurity. Many in the end of this article believing that they will not see the change they wish in their lifetime. Many thought have settled for the little change that has already been shown and are navigating their lives to fit these updates. They

await for higher ups. While traditional markets may not see profits being made in these communities the people living their still deserve to eat. Eating healthy foods should not be a luxury but a right.

Quotation

"Forty years is a long time to be talking about this," said Sonya Green, 75, a lifelong Northside resident. "We've been trying forever to get a real-life grocery store. I'm mystified why nothing's come."

Within this vacuum, local officials, advocates and ordinary residents like Green strive to solve an intractable reality: that a person's race, income or zip code predicts their likelihood of getting diabetes, heart disease, and living a shorter life."

Citation #2

BRITTANY MCGEE, Ledger-Enquirer. "Here's who is helping Columbus residents in the food desert". *Associated Press State & Local*, February 19, 2022 Saturday.
[advance-lexis-com.citytech.ezproxy.cuny.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64TK-6H51-DYMD-624F-00000-00&context=1516831](https://advance.lexis-com.citytech.ezproxy.cuny.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64TK-6H51-DYMD-624F-00000-00&context=1516831). Accessed April 18, 2022.

Summary

In this article the author goes in to detail of how the community of Columbus, GA has been affected by a food desert in a pandemic. A new mobile program giving more people access to produce being on the rise to help those who struggle to access food. Many of the people struggling to put food on the table resorting to going to food banks to fill in were food stamps can't. The mayor has taken notice and is putting in place a possible solution to some problems. His plan is to reach citizens that can't access markets or clinics and provide children with activities. While food banks have helped those in need many can't get to them because of mobility issues or lack of

transportation. Many of these affected resorting to eating foods that aren't best for them as to not go hungry. The article also shows statistics on health issues these residents face compared to other counties that have food that is easily accessible to them. The county is trying to find solutions to this problem and give them a chance for success in the future. They end the article acknowledging that this plan may take years to truly improve the lives of it's residents but are looking forward to when the problem is obsolete.

Reflection

After reading this article I see there is a deeper problem than just not having enough money to eat healthy foods. The access to healthy foods is hard to come by for many residents in lower income communities and brings on more problems in the future. It's frustrating to see how many people have to knowingly sacrifice a healthy body and cleaner food because they can't realistically purchase these foods. Many facing heart conditions, diabetes and obesity which can lead to a shorter life just because they don't have stores providing them with better options. Although as an outsider it seems to be easier to blame the affected, looking in you realize it's more complicated than just laziness and lack of self restraint. It's survival, it's needing anything in your system because something, even if not good for you, is better than nothing. Some of these affected are children, kids who have no choice but to eat what their guardian can provide for them.

Quotation

"There's a correlation between living in an area with high food insecurity and high rates of obesity, says Sheppard. "They're going to get a hold of some food, but it's probably not going to be the food that's very healthy for them."

Columbus has a higher rate of diabetes, stroke, heart disease and cancer than other metropolitan areas, also announced during the press conference."

Citation #3

Second Thought- The truth about food insecurity. YouTube, from
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j08ND3_PNgs&t=211s

Summary

In this video essay about food insecurity the speaker talks about the causes and problems associated with hunger. He speaks on how some people may think the root of the problem is there being too many mouths to feed and not enough food to go around. The reason why it's a growing problem is because there isn't enough resources to feed the people all over the world. He questions this belief by going on to say that while hunger is a leading cause of death so is heart disease and obesity caused by over food consumption or bad eating practices. A new question coming into play, how are people dying of hunger when there are people dying from overeating? In the later portion of the video he goes to blame the capitalist society we live in as the true problem. While the belief of us having too many mouths to feed may have been true in earlier civilization times we now live in a world where we have become more efficient in the way we produce. We treat animals inhumanly with the intention of producing more food from them and are overfishing. The old ideals don't match up with more recent technological advanced times. He introduces statistics such as a quarter of the food waste from America, UK and EU can be used to feed all the world's hungry. He ends by saying a possible solution is having the right people in government so then food insecurity can be a thing of the past.

Reflection

There are many layers to this video that made me want to peel off to reveal another layer of problems involving food insecurity. While living in a capitalist society isn't brand news to me, it saddens me to see how some people's selfishness has led to world hunger and increases in heart problems. The amount of food waste is insanely high while there's people struggling to put food on their table. Some communities are being targeted by surges of fast food companies targeting lower income groups in hopes of profiting. Seemingly no big company is worried about the level of food waste they produce or what neighborhoods they target as long as they are profitable.

Quotation

“In a world where hunger is the leading cause of death from heart disease and cancer, the top killers in the U.S., how is it that we have more than 9 million people dying of hunger every year. To put that

number in perspective, every year hunger kills more people than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.”

Conclusion

Overall these articles have done nothing but show the negative side effects of food deserts and insecurities. I've learned from first hand accounts of the victims how they cope and how they hope for a better future for themselves and generations to come. Seeing food insecurity as not something as black and white as people not being able to eat. It's also people resorting to lower quality fast foods that shorten their lifespans and increase health conditions. We need to do more than just berate these victims in their choices in lives and help them by simply giving them access to the healthy fresh produce we are given. To say that their isn't enough resources needs to end, the amount of food being wasted is shameful when that same waste can eliminate said problem. For this generation and next we must understand that eating fresh foods is not a luxury but a basic human right.