Policy framing of household food insecurity in Canada:

Why getting the problem wrong leads to faulty solutions

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A short tribute to Paul Bernard
Outline

- Food insecurity as an intractable policy problem
- Policy framing analysis
- Four examples
- Final words

Food Insecurity is defined as inadequate or insecure access to adequate food due to financial constraints
Food insecurity is an intractable policy problem

Household food security
Canada 2011

- Food secure: 87.7%
- Severe food insecurity: 2.5%
- Moderate food insecurity: 5.6%
- Marginal food insecurity: 4.1%

Source: Canadian Community Health Survey, 2011
It’s about income sort of...cchs 4.1

Drivers of Food Insecurity
- Low income as well as income shocks
- Workforce participation, and education, partially protect but labour market practices can perpetuate food insecurity
- Structural determinants that leave certain groups vulnerable

Linked policies
- Income support
- Income volatility protection
- Labour protection
- Social protection/transfers
- Higher education access
Dominant responses in the name of food (in)security

- Food banks
- Community gardens
- Farmers’ markets
- School food programs
- Community kitchens
- Community-supported agriculture
- Food-related community economic development
① Food insecurity is a population health problem
② Population problems need policy solutions
③ Policy arises from intervention theory (what should work), rationale (this is how it will work), and persuasion (let’s make it work)
Framing = problem definition

Framing is selective – it rules in at the same time as it rules out.

Each frame suggests a different causal pathway and proposes different actors as valid policy participants.

And problem definition is a key element in policy change
Framing analysis

- **What policy actors** are implicated and how are they assigned responsibility?
- **What is the problem and how is it defined** (need and rationale for action)?
- **How are solutions introduced and linked to the problems that they are supposed to solve (actions)?**

First Example: Canada's Response to the 1996 World Food Summit
World Food Summit Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame shifts</th>
<th>1. Frame shifts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The right to food emphasized in 1-3; absent from 4 and 5.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronic disease appears in 4 and 5 as a food security issue. Previously a factor in food insecurity vulnerability.</td>
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</table>

2. Frame blending

- Poverty is one of several factors that impede access to sufficient safe and nutritious food but not all the poor are food insecure.
- As interventions to address income security and poverty are deemphasized, complexity emerges.

3. Within-frame conflict: monitoring across jurisdictions
UN Food Envoy Provokes Ottawa with Findings on Hunger and Poor Diet in Canada

Heather Scoffield, The Canadian Press

UN Special Rapporteur's Report:

Food Availability (agricultural policies)
Food Accessibility: protecting access to food for the poorest (social protection, minimum wage, max resources)
Food Adequacy (obesity)
Food Aid and Development Cooperation; Indigenous Peoples


How is household food insecurity defined and socially constructed as a policy problem in Canada?
• Hansards & key government policy documents for NS, BC, ON, Fed since 1996
• NVivo document coding framework
• Refining interpretation through member checking, peer debriefing
• Synthesis and triangulation

Second Example: Harris Years in Ontario
Harris years analysis

- Charged socio-political environment reflected in ON Hansards of the Harris years (1995-2002) + editorials
- How food insecurity was framed during an era of severe government cutbacks
- How the public health sector reacted to calls for structural approaches to reduce inequities

Problem Identification

- Child Hunger
- Child Poverty
- Problem
- Crisis
- Families
- Food Bank Use
  - Shelter Use
    - By people who shouldn’t have to rely on them
- Seniors
- Children
- Adults with Jobs
Solutions supported by public health

Key findings:

Historical case for examining divergence in framing of policy action on household food insecurity (food-based vs income-based)

Lost opportunity for critical mobilization around structural change

The responses of public health during this era could explain public health’s current community- and food-based approaches to addressing household food insecurity in both programming and advocacy.
# Third Example: Food banks

## Framing of the “food bank problem”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poppendieck’s (1998) Seven Deadly ‘ins’ –</th>
<th>5 more ‘ins’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficiency</td>
<td>Invisibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inappropriateness</td>
<td>Invalidation of entitlements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inadequacy</td>
<td>Inequality</td>
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<td>Instability</td>
<td>Institutionalization</td>
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<td>Ineffectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inefficiency</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Indignity</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Solution</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Related “in”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy advocacy</td>
<td>Improve the food bank</td>
<td><strong>Lobby policymakers</strong> to increase funding to food banks &amp; similar charitable organizations (Frederick and Goddard, 2008)</td>
<td>Insufficiency Inadequacy Instability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alleviate poverty</td>
<td><strong>Lobby policymakers</strong> to fight welfare retrenchment** (Poppendieck, 1994) or to set a fair living wage (Thériault and Yadlowski, 2000)</td>
<td>Invalidation of entitlements Inequality Institutionaliz'n Ineffectiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FOOD BANK USE IS THE PROBLEM & THE SOLUTION IS TO BUILD BETTER FOOD BANKS**
Watching the faces of the families and children lining up for food at the door, she saw how undignified receiving emergency food hampers was for the people who needed to be there. So it was time to change the way the food bank regarded clients. From then on, clients were the food bank’s most valuable resource, to be treated as potential volunteers, future workers and supporters. …changing [its] name…. to reflect what [it] wanted to achieve: food action plans and food security in our community. (BC Hansard 2006)
**Who experiences it**

- Those who are not able to afford food because ....
- “The poor”
- “The vulnerable” but honest folk
- Children
- Hard-working citizens
- Surprising, not surprising (whomever)

**DON’T ASK WHY** (Social Determinants of Health)

**Ways to talk about food insecurity**

**Outcome-based frame (what the problem is)**

There is hunger in Merritt largely because a lot of people don’t have enough money in order to access food, and they can’t produce or gather enough food for themselves to supplement the incomes that they have in terms of buying their food. Access to food is not only money but also the knowledge of how to cook food, how to preserve food and how to grow and harvest food. (BC Hansard 1999)
Outcome-based frame (what the problem is)

The fact that the Dept. of Community Services supports the school breakfast program...is an admission of failure, of utter failure of the social safety net. The fact that the basic personal allowance in the social assistance system is not enough to feed people, that they also need to make use of food banks...is an acknowledgment of failure. (NS Hansard 2005)

Food insecurity is an EXAMPLE of the problem, a lens on unmet basic needs

Action-based frame (what needs to be done)

Mr Speaker...we need to look at minimum wage; we need to look at the social assistance rates; we need to look at the enforcement of maintenance; and we need to deal with community economic development in communities that have particularly high rates of unemployment and of child and family poverty. (NS Hansard 2000)

Structural problems require STRUCTURAL CHANGES (tax reform, social safety net)
Action-based frame (what needs to be done)

Many people who are currently accessing food banks and other handout-type programs would much rather be providing for themselves but lack the skills, training or knowledge to succeed. Support for community-based projects, which encourages self-sufficiency and increased self-confidence among participants, is crucial. (BC Hansard 1999)

Final Thoughts

- Food insecurity may be an intractable policy problem in Canada because policy actors are at an impasse on how to address it given they frame it divergently.

- In contradiction to the presentation title: Why getting the problem wrong leads to faulty solutions, different frames suggest different causal pathways for how food insecurity works in households, which may be more or less valid.

- Resolving the ‘framing problem’ is required to move forward on policies that might better address food insecurity at the household level in Canada.