ABSTRACT

Background (Background, Rationale, Prior Research, and/or Theory): To improve food access in underserved neighborhoods, it is crucial to incorporate community voices in neighborhood development planning. Addressing issues recognized in their neighborhoods has the potential to reduce barriers to get healthy foods, thereby, increase food access.

Objective: To understand community residents’ perspectives on food access and barriers to get healthy and nutritious foods in underserved neighborhoods in East Tampa, Florida.

Study Design, Setting, Participants: A qualitative study utilizing focus group discussions. Community residents in low-income, predominantly African American neighborhoods in Tampa, Florida participated. Forty-eight participants attended 9 focus group sessions with 3-9 people in each session.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis: Focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded for priori and emergent themes using NVivo software.

Results: Participants identified where they shopped for the majority of their foods. Most participants indicated that they drive to get to major grocery stores, but many also indicated that they use public transportation. Most people go to multiple stores indicated price is the main reason. “You go where it’s – the value for the money like in reference to if you have buy one get one free, it’s better quality when you’re living on a fixed income to stretch your money from month to month.” Another reason was “convenience,” and some people mentioned that they go to an alternative store to get better quality foods. “I have to say since I’ve been doing the garden here that, at [OOO], I have to say that’s a freshest parsley I ever had, fresh, best greatest, the cucumbers are fresh, delicious is that honestly not even one not even... You can’t even get that Whole Foods, you know what I mean.”

Conclusion(s): Community residents recognized barriers to getting healthy and fresh foods in the target neighborhoods. Based on the findings, short- and long-term solutions have been discussed among community residents, leaders, and stakeholders.

METHODS

- To get more in-depth information about grocery shopping patterns and barriers to get quality food in the neighborhoods, focus groups were conducted at community centers in East Tampa.
- Forty-eight participants attended focus group sessions with 3-9 people in each session.
- Reasons of using major and secondary grocery stores; food assistance programs; barriers of getting healthy fresh foods; and suggestions for improving food assess and environment in the neighborhoods were discussed.
- Focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded for priori and emergent themes using NVivo software.

RESULTS

- “Better quality”
  - Reasons of using the major grocery store
    - “So I kind of have no choice but to go to [store name], I would never go to [store name] it’s honestly it’s the only choice and because I take public transportation and it’s all the way up the street, I have to, it takes longer to get there.”
    - “Yeah depending on what you’re getting it might be cheaper just say at Save-A-Lot to get you know certain things than it is at Winn-Dixie”
  - “Going to multiple stores for better price
    - “You go where it’s – the value for the money like in reference to if you have buy one get one free, it’s better quality when you’re living on a fixed income to stretch your money from month to month.”
    - “I have to say since I’ve been doing the garden here that, at [OOO], I have to say that’s a freshest parsley I ever had, fresh, best greatest, the cucumbers are fresh, delicious is that honestly not even one not even... You can’t even get that Whole Foods, you know what I mean.”

Food Assistance Programs

- “Okay, I get food stamps which is $15 a month and there’s a lot of things that $15 don’t get, so I got to substitute, it might not be nutritious but that’s what that price pay and that’s what I got to do, and that’s not healthy for you because I have high blood and other things that require healthy food to get better, so that’s one.”

- “some of the food are outdated and I would say that 70 percent of the rest of it, it’s good.”

Suggestions

- “More grocery stores”; “Better public transportation”; “Better fresh options in existing stores”; “Fruit and vegetable trucks and vans”; “New farmers market”; “Cooking classes”

CONCLUSIONS

- Community residents shared their perspectives on food access in the neighborhoods, barriers in grocery shopping and eating healthfully, and potential solutions to improve food environment in East Tampa.
- There are tangible solutions such as adding a new grocery store or farmers market in the neighborhoods, nutrition education, and improving food options in existing stores.
- The findings of this study were shared with community residents, leaders, and partners.