Infant Feeding Practices of Grandparents

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Overview

- Rationale
- Research objectives
- Methods
- Research findings
- Conclusion
- Acknowledgements
Rationale for this research

- An area that has never been researched before
- The significant role of nutrition and feeding practices for infants and young children.
- Changing demographics in New Zealand
- The need for an equity focus on the less advantaged age group in society
- Nutrition background, interest and experience
Research objectives

- To explore the infant and young child feeding practices of grandparents.
- To find the key factors that facilitate ideal infant and young child feeding practices.
- To understand the barriers encountered by grandparents that influences their infant and young child feeding practices.
- To establish grandparents’ knowledge of healthy infant and young child feeding practices.
Methods

- Research site was a ‘deprived’ suburb in Auckland [using to the NZDep].
- Participants were recruited through the local marae and a grandparents’ support group.
- Seven semi structured interviews were conducted.
- All the participants were female.
- Kaupapa Māori consistent research.
- Guided by an adapted version of Williams’ model (Mills, 2010) illustrating the basic causes of health inequities.
Methods

- This version of the Williams’ model that has been adapted by Dr. Rhys Jones to make it more applicable to the New Zealand context and the adapted model has been published by Dr. Clair Mills.
Research findings
Financial struggles and unemployment

- Financial struggles – unemployment, insufficient benefit to meet basic living requirements affect feeding practices.
- Financial deprivation related to lack of resources in other areas of life [housing, transport, educational attainment]
- Relationship between ethnicity and socioeconomic position has a bearing on feeding practices.
- Failure to secure paid employment due to various reasons – institutional discrimination based on age, gender and ethnicity.
Financial struggles and unemployment

- “... uuum, because now I am on the benefit I you know, I watch my pennies, know how I spend my money because I want to [have] the food to last until the next you know, pay day, you know.” (Participant seven)

- “It is hard but you have to know, to do what you can to survive you know; these days it’s not like before. When we just saw that things are very dire, hardly any work, I have been trying to get [a] job but I can't find any job.” (Participant seven)
Financial struggles and unemployment

“The other thing being financial struggles. But I don't see it as a struggle because it’s out there people are talking about bla bla bla bla. It may be so but there's nothing we can do about it. So for me I would like to have a little bit more because I worked and so it was hard for me when I stopped working. All the things weren't there anymore and we used to fill up all these cupboards, but I don't need all these cupboards now. I had to train myself again to have just the little that I have, and it’s very hard, but what I had I will still share with the kids.” (Participant four)
Cost of food

- High food prices major barrier for grandparents struggling to balance a restricted income.
- Healthier food options like fruits, vegetables and fresh meats more expensive than less healthy options.
- New Zealand food very expensive in comparison to other developed countries.
- Food expenditure the most flexible item to be tampered with on a household’s budget.
- Cost is the main predictor for dietary practices.
“The government could do a hell of a lot better aaah, you know, instead of putting all the prices up, which they do aaah, seems our system is all about making money and not really not looking after the people aaah so the government could, should, I should say should do something about the prices.” (Participant two)
Cost of food

- “Well, I wish the food are cheaper in the shop, (laughing), you know, the food is cheaper at the shop you know, because, you know you go today and the food is like 10 cents cheaper and then you go the next week and it’s about 20 cents more than what you paid the last time you paid. Yeah and you know.” (Participant seven)

- “Back to the jobs again. We are angry at the government. Everybody wants to kill John Key but that's only a figure of speech I think. And, okay, I think we are all in the same boat where we, I suppose our finances concerned. Food is gone up in the last how many years and we haven’t even had a raise of three cents or anything. They [the government] give us another five bucks it would make a big difference. We haven't had any, so that is how sad, long faces, many of us here. Look down the street, you ask them a question they all got the same story.” (Participant four)
Cost of food

“Well because of the cost of food today, specially here in New Zealand, it’s unreal, it’s unreal, aaah ... it’s just (pause) a lot of families can't afford it honestly, especially when it comes to the healthy food, they can’t afford it. They rather go to aaah, go to McDonald’s, go to get fish and chips, it’s cheaper, it is I tell you. It’s cheaper if you go there rather than this healthy food aaah, I should put it very expensive, New Zealand it is.”

(Participant two)
Effect of the built environment

- Using NZDep, all the participants lived in a neighbourhood defined as ‘deprived’.
- Housing a key determinant of health.
- The feeding practices of individuals in poor housing are compromised, studies suggest that a lower income was associated with poorer dietary quality.
- Deprived residential areas have a high density of fast food outlets, reduced access to green/play areas, increased traffic, creating obesogenic food environments.
Effect of the built environment

“...like [mentioned suburb name], now I know what the town is like, but every other shop there's a fish takeaway shop. Every other shop there's always takeaways and it’s full of takeaways. Well that’s not giving a good impression on the town itself for a start as far as I am concerned. They say, ‘it’s healthy kai,’ it’s not! Its fatty foods because they cook in all those fish and chips and they sell many of it down there, it’s terrible. For myself that is an eye opening at [mentioned suburb name] shopping centre, there's too many takeaways, too many and there's nothing, nothing healthy about the food, healthy about it.” (Participant three)
Culture and customary norms

- Culture, customary norms and tradition emerged as strong drivers for feeding practices.
- Grandparents had pride in their culture, beliefs, values.
- Customary norms are the defining aspect of cultural identity. These are social or environmental conditions or facilities that are approved, acknowledged and encouraged by a society to which individuals belong (Townsend, 1979).
- The influence of political, social and economic contexts through history.
- Changes in policy and structural elements drive dynamics in culture and ultimately feeding practices.
- Inclination towards traditional foods, delicacies and recipes.
Culture and customary norms

- “... It’s just that I sort of followed how I was brought up. I sort of tried to instil that to my children and that’s how I want my children ... “(Participant three)

- I don't like it [fast food] at all because I don’t teach my, try to avoid my children, my grandchildren from having. Cause I was never brought up on greasy food anyhow, I was brought up on boiled food.” (Participant three)

- “Now I’m one that believed in natural foods from the garden. My favourite and I am not too sure whether the whole of New Zealand are aware that in the gardens, usually a weed called sow thistle, to Māori it’s a delicacy, and it’s called puha, p-u-h-a, puha. “(Participant five)
Essence of family

- The value of family was reiterated throughout the study.
- More Māori grandparents actively involved in caring for grandchildren as compared to New Zealand Europeans (Min. of Social Development, 2010).
- The kaitiaki [guardianship] role of the elderly was recognised in this study.
- Grandparents informed the family dietary environment.
- They imparted eating attitudes, values and beliefs through generations.
- Positive influence of grandparents in other areas [psychological wellbeing, social adaptability]
Essence of family

“Because I always have you know, my family comes first. But when I have a spare money, I always buy something, when I see something very cheap, I just buy them and put them in the freezer because my kids always come running, ‘oh mum have you got any meat’ or (laughing) you know and I will be very happy to say, ‘oh yes, I got some.’ But if I don’t have something, I feel very sad. You know like I can't look after them.” (Participant seven)
Feeding practices in the context of human rights

- The right to **adequate food** and the right to be **free from hunger** to all human beings regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religious or political opinion.

- It is the right to feed oneself in dignity, within an environment conducive for one to produce one’s own food or to buy it (United Nations Human Rights, 2010).

- Clearly this right is being infringed – food insecurity, financial hardship, expensive food.
Feeding practices in the context of human rights

- “But I try my very best to because three times a week or maybe two, twice a week or three times my three other grandchildren lives down the road because the school is down this way and their house is down the other way. They come here and stay here for two days or three days and then I said, ‘okay, you have to go home now because I am running out of food.’ I don't tell them I haven't got any food, I don't like telling them that, I just say, ‘oh well, after school you guys go home, because I am doing something’ or you know ...” (Participant seven)

- “You know some days we might not have much here in the house but I can make a meal out of whatever I have got in my cupboards and in my fridge and they [grandchildren] will sit and just eat it.” (Participant one)
Conclusion

- Feeding practices were found to be an accumulation of exposures not just familial and intergenerational but also social, political and economic factors.
- A voice has been given to older people caring for our young.
- A rights based research approach that has shown that the basic food requirements for grandparents not being met.
- Kaupapa Māori Research can be successfully implemented by tauiwi (non-Māori) researchers – a prerequisite is to uphold, endorse and acknowledge Māori culture and values.
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