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Effective strategies adopted by migrants to improve food security in Tasmania

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Abstract

Accessibility, affordability, availability, and sustainability of food are vital for all to achieve food security. Specifically, attention should be given to people of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities such as migrants who settle in a new country. When migrants first reach the host country, they may encounter different food security challenges. Thus, various strategies are required to promote greater food security among migrants. This study aims to investigate the acculturation strategies adopted by migrants to improve their food security in Tasmania. A mixed methods approach using questionnaire and semi-structured interview was used to gather data from 301 questionnaire participants and 33 interviewees. The data indicated that 42.2% of migrants replaced cultural ingredients with other locally sourced items and 25.8% of migrants went without, while, 46.0% of the participants received ongoing support from friends in terms of food access. These were three strategies that were utilised by many migrants in this study. Loglinear analysis and chi-square tests showed that region of origin and length of stay in Tasmania were factors that influenced migrants' attitudes in coping with food security issues. Interview data revealed six main acculturation strategies: access from other places; adaptation; home gardening; equipping self with food knowledge; support from social networks; and access to technology. In addition, social and cultural capital was also vital in improving migrants' food security. Overall, migrants employed different strategies for food security while acculturating into the new environment. These strategies employed may guide policy among various government or private sector organisations that seek to address food security issues and enhance migrants' food security.

Keywords: *Strategies, Migrants, Food Security*

Introduction

The multicultural society of Australia is comprised of people from many diverse cultural backgrounds from across the world. In the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of people migrating to and settling in Australia. In 2013, Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) reported that there were 237,300 people who migrated and settled in Australia and forecasts that the migrant population will increase to over 250,000 in 2017 (DIAC, 2013). Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) also indicated that net overseas migration (NOM), which

refers to the net gain or loss of population through immigration to Australia and emigration from Australia, contributed 60% to total population growth whereas the natural increase, which made up of births less deaths, contributed only 40% in 2012 (ABS, 2013). The growth of the migrant population in Australia has prompted government, society and communities to devote more attention to migrants' health including food security which is a major determinant of health among migrants.

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines food security as a phenomenon "that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2003, p. 28). Food security remains an issue from the national to the individual level (Power, 2005). Food availability, accessibility and utilisation are the three main pillars of food security that are considered when assessing the food quantity and quality to ensure a satisfactory nutritious diet (Gill et al., 2003; Krishnaraj, 2005; Maxwell & Smith, 1992). Thus, a nutritious diet is the foundation for healthy body and lifestyle.

The social and cultural challenges, including food security issues among migrants may be exacerbated in rural areas of Australia where cultural awareness, sensitivity and specific cultural foods may be limited. Thus, attention should be given to migrants with different cultural backgrounds who bring along their food cultures and traditions to Australia. Furthermore, due to the limited knowledge regarding food culture in Australia, migrants have higher risk in food insecurity which can undermine their health (Hadley, Zoghbiates, & Sellen, 2007). In this sense, migrants are one of the more vulnerable groups in Australia who are at particular risk of experiencing food insecurity (Burns, 2004; Rosier, 2011). These immigrants tend to experience food insecurity that renders them susceptible to physical diseases and psychological issues that arise from linguistic, cultural and religious barriers caused by environmental transition. Changes in culture and diet can have a significant impact on migrants' health in their new environment.

The integration and contact that migrants have with the host population is likely to impact, challenge and change the attitude and behaviour of many migrants about various things, including food (Abraído-Lanza et al., 2006). Migrants bring different cultural practices to their new environment that may not be accepted by the local people. Thus, migrants have a propensity to acculturate themselves to the new culture and adapt to the new country (Longhurst, Johnston, & Ho, 2009). In order to improve migrants' food security, cultural and social capital are two essential elements.

Cultural capital is defined as the forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which gives him or her a higher status in society (Bourdieu, 1986). Knowledge about diet and nutrition is important in assisting migrants to adapt more quickly to the new food culture (Kruger et al., 2012). Furthermore, social networks and relationships that exist within the communities migrants live in provide support and benefits their long term acculturation and health (Putnam, 1995). Social strategies such as sharing food within the community can help prevent food insecurity. For example, community gardening not only provides food, but also allows adequate space and time to form social networks and social bonds between migrants and members of the host community (Carney et al., 2012).

The aim of this research was to identify what acculturation strategies are used by migrants to enhance their approach to food security in Tasmania. By identifying migrants' health and perceptions about food security, the outcomes of the study may contribute towards insightful information and guidance not only for all migrants in Tasmania, but also for relevant government and non-government organisations (NGOs) that are concerned with matters related to food security and migrants' health and well-being.

Methods

A mixed methods design was employed in this study where a quantitative approach was used to gather statistical data by means a questionnaire and the qualitative approach was utilised to enrich the collected questionnaire data using semi-structured interviews. A concurrent triangulation mixed methods design was used in this study where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed concurrently but separately, after which the results of both data sets were integrated during the interpretation and discussion phase (Creswell, 2003).

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the University of Tasmania's Social Sciences Ethics Committee (H0012622). Informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

Study population and settings

Tasmania is situated on the south-east coast of mainland Australia with a population of 495,354 people (ABS, 2012). Within this largely homogenous population, 16.4% were born overseas. Among those individuals born overseas, 46.6% resided in Hobart the capital city, 15.8% in Launceston the largest regional centre, 7.2% in Devonport and 3.3% in Burnie. In each of these major centres, there was a dense population of migrants compared to other areas of Tasmania. As such, the Migrant Resource Centres located in each of these major centres assisted with participant recruitment. The selection criteria included migrants from any cultural background who are living in Tasmania, age 18 years and older, and have a reasonable understanding of English.

Design of questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 49 questions, which included demographic questions (gender, age, marital status, highest educational level, etc.) and included one open-ended question that allowed participants to provide comments and suggestions regarding improving food security in Tasmania. The 11 Likert scale questions in the questionnaire were tested for internal reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was a score of 0.81, which demonstrates an acceptable level of internal reliability (Munro, 2005; Pallant, 2011).

Quantitative data collection and analysis

Hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 600 migrants in Tasmania with the assistance of the two Migrant Resource Centres in Hobart and Launceston, and various cultural associations (e.g. Filipino Association of Tasmania, Chinese Community Association of Tasmania, Indian Cultural society). There were 119 hard copy questionnaires returned which represents 19.8% of response rate. In addition to the hard copy version, the questionnaire was also made available in online format using the Survey Monkey®. Participants were recruited via social networking websites such as Facebook or Twitter. Using this method there were 182 online questionnaires completed. Overall 301 questionnaires were completed by migrants in Tasmania.

Data analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistics using the SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were principally used to analyse the data. Inferential non-parametric tests such as Chi-square test of independence and loglinear analysis were also performed to determine the associations between different social-demographic factors (such as income, length of stay and region of origin) and attitudes towards food security (dependent variables). Specifically, loglinear analysis was employed when dealing with three or more categorical variables while a chi-square test for independence was conducted with two variables. Results are only reported where there was statistical significance at $p \leq 0.05$.

Qualitative data collection and analysis

The qualitative aspect of this study focused on the insights, meaning and experience of migrants and on the richness and depth rather than the breadth of information (Bernard, 2000). Participants were recruited from those who completed the questionnaire and expressed interests in participating in the follow-up interviews. Additional interviews were conducted by direct recruitment through Migrant Resource Centres or cultural associations. Thus, a convenience sample of 33 migrants was interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis with the assistance of NVivo 10 software.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics

Questionnaire participants

There were 301 migrants who completed the questionnaire. Female participants constituted approximately 60% of the questionnaire participants, while male accounted 40%. It was shown that 75.1% of the participants were from Asia; however, those from Europe, Africa, Middle East and North America were also represented. Within the sample, 66.1% of the participants spoke other language at home, whereas 33.9% only spoke English. The majority (72.8%) of the migrants were married; 22.3% were single; 2.7% were widowed; and 2.3% were divorced or separated. All socio-demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1- Demographic of questionnaire participants

Characteristics (N = 301)	n(%)
Gender	
- Male	122(40.5)
- Female	179(59.5)
Age group (years)	
- 18-24	46(15.3)
- 25-34	78(26.0)
- 35-44	70(23.3)
- 45-54	47(15.6)
- 55-64	37(12.3)
- 65 and above	23(7.6)
English language proficiency	
- Excellent	94(31.2)
- Good	133(44.2)
- Fine	74(24.6)
Places of stay in Tasmania	
- Launceston (Northern areas)	162(53.8)
- Hobart (Southern areas)	112(37.2)
- Devonport (North West areas)	15(5.0)
- Burnie (North West areas)	7(2.3)
- Others	5(1.6)
Length of stay in Tasmania	
- Less than 1 year	43(14.3)
- 1-2years	35(11.6)
- Over 2-3 years	38(12.6)
- Over 3 years	185(61.5)
Educational level	
- No formal education	2(0.7)
- Completed primary education	10(3.3)
- Completed secondary school	44(14.6)
- Some training (TAFE courses etc.)	49(16.3)
- University qualification	196(65.1)
Employment status	
- Full time job	103(34.2)
- Part time job	41(13.6)
- Casual job	47(15.6)

Coping strategies

In addition to the socio-demographic data, there were a number of questions which pertained to the acculturation strategies that migrants used to improve their food access. The analysis demonstrated that there were five methods which migrants used to overcome the inability to obtain foods they required that were not available from local shops. Nearly 70% of the participants replaced the ingredients they required with other ingredients or went without the ingredients that they were unable to purchase. There were very few participants that chose to grow their own food, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – The methods ingredients are obtained other than being purchased from local shops

Beyond how and where specific food ingredients were obtained, participants demonstrated that they sought assistance and support concerning improved food access in their new environment from a number of avenues. These support methods included migrants receiving support from friends, family and relatives (71.1%), while the remainder used other alternatives to get supports or did not seek or receive any support as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Where support was received to improve food access in Tasmania

Associations between demographic and food security – factors

Associations between region of origin, length of stay, and support to improve food access

A three-way loglinear analysis was performed to determine a hierarchical unsaturated model for the associations between region of origin, length of stay in Tasmania, and family and relatives that support to improve food access. There were 301 participants who responded with all cells having greater than five expected frequencies. The likelihood ratio of this model was $\chi^2=9.522$, $df=7$, $p=0.217$. This produced a model that included main effects of one two-way association of (length of stay in Tasmania)*(family and relatives as support to improve food access). Partial likelihood ratio χ^2 are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2 – Partial associations for region of origin, length of stay in Tasmania, and family and relatives as support to improve food access

Effect	df	Partial Chi-square	p
Region of origin*length of stay in Tasmania	3	2.320	.509
Region of origin*family and relatives as support to improve food access	1	0.577	.448
Length of stay in Tasmania*family and relatives as support to improve food access	3	10.834	.013
Region of origin	1	79.299	.000
Length of stay in Tasmania	3	179.195	.000
Family and relatives as support to improve food access	1	17.882	.000

As shown in Table 2, a significant correlations was found between the participants' length of stay in Tasmania and family and relatives as support to improve food access ($\chi^2 = 10.834$, $df=3$, $p < 0.05$).

To break down the effect, separate Chi-square tests were performed on each pair of length of stay in Tasmania groups and family and relatives as support to improve food access variables. Accordingly, the groups of participants who stayed in Tasmania over three years were found to be less likely to get support from family and relatives to improve their food access compared to the groups of respondent who stayed in Tasmania less than three years (p values < 0.05). Odd ratios indicated that the odds of getting support from family and relatives of participants who stayed less than one year in Tasmania was 0.36 higher respectively compared to participants who stayed over three years.

Associations between region of origin, length of stay, and going without ingredients

In a comparable analysis of region of origin, length of stay in Tasmania and go without food ingredients that are unable to be purchased from local shops, the three-way loglinear analysis produced a final model that included main effects of one two-way associations of (country of origin)*(go without food ingredients that cannot buy from shops). The likelihood ratio of this model was $\chi^2=7.405$, $df=7$, $p=0.388$. Partial likelihood ratio χ^2 are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3 – Partial associations for region of origin, length of stay in Tasmania, and going without ingredients

Effect	df	Partial Chi-square	p
Length of stay in Tasmania*region of origin	3	2.168	.538
Length of stay in Tasmania*going without ingredients	3	2.241	.524
Region of origin*going without ingredients	1	3.860	.049
Length of stay in Tasmania	3	179.195	.000
Region of origin	1	79.299	.000
Going without ingredients	1	3.198	.074

Table 3 indicates that there are significant correlations between the participants' region of origin and their attitude on going without food ingredients that cannot buy from shops ($\chi^2=3.860$, $df=1$, $p < 0.05$).

These effects were broken down using separate Chi-square tests at different levels of each variable. Accordingly, participants from Asia countries was found to be less likely to go without food ingredients that cannot purchase from local shops than participants from non-Asia countries ($\chi^2=3.891$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). Odd ratios indicated that participants from non-Asia countries were 1.7 more likely to go without ingredients that are not available in shops compared to participants from Asia countries.

Associations between region of origin, length of stay, and receiving assistance

In a comparable analysis of region of origin, length of stay in Tasmania and experience in receiving assistance for adaptation to food practice, the three-way loglinear analysis produced a final model that included main effects of one two-way associations of (country of origin)*(experience in receiving assistance for adaptation to food practice). The likelihood ratio of this model was $\chi^2=10.643$, $df=9$, $p=0.301$. Partial likelihood ratio χ^2 are presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4 – Partial associations for region of origin, length of stay in Tasmania, and experience in receiving assistance for adaptation to food practice

Effect	df	Partial Chi-square	p
Region of origin*experience in receiving assistance for adaptation to food practice	1	9.762	.002
Region of origin*length of stay in Tasmania	3	1.560	.669
Experience in receiving assistance for adaptation to food practice*length of stay in Tasmania	3	4.674	.197
Length of stay in Tasmania	1	79.299	.000
Region of origin	1	57.116	.000
Experience in receiving assistance for adaptation to food practice	3	179.195	.000

Table 4 shows that there were significant correlations between the participants' region of origin and their experience in receiving assistance for adaptation to food practice ($\chi^2=9.762$, $df=1$, $p < 0.05$).

Separate Chi-square tests were used to test the effects at different levels. Accordingly, participants from Asia countries were less likely to receive assistance for adaptation to food practice compared to participants from non-Asia countries ($\chi^2 = 9.463$, $df = 1$, $p\text{-value} = 0.002 < 0.05$). Odd ratios illustrated that the odds of receiving assistance for adaptation to food practice of participants from non-Asia countries was 0.35 higher than participants from Asia countries.

Interview participants

In this study, there were 33 interviewees from Asia, Europe, North America and Africa. Most lived in Launceston for more than three years, had university qualification and spoke languages other than English at home. Six themes emerged from the interview data that pertained to coping, integration and acculturation strategies related to food security.

Accessing food from other places

The first strategy was obtaining access to food from other places. Most interviewees indicated that they imported or brought food products from other places that were not available in Tasmania, such as Melbourne or their home country.

Last week, I purchased \$300 food from Melbourne and brought them back to Launceston. The reasons I do so: First, the food in Indian shop is expensive; second, there is no Nepali shop or restaurant in Launceston. (Migrant 25)

Modifying cooking practices

Migrants also indicated that they have learned to adapt to the new food environment using different strategies. For example, they changed or modified a recipe if there was a lack of ingredients they needed. In other cases, migrants stated they will just not cook certain foods.

I probably won't cook it. However sometimes, when you walk around, then you will find the ingredients. Oh, it is an ingredient to do something. I will buy and cook. (Migrant 6)

Home gardening

Another strategy was home gardening that was highly recommended by a number of migrants. Having their own garden was seen as a good practice where they could grow the food they preferred or ingredients that they were unable to purchase in the local stores. In addition, growing your own food and ingredients was observed to help reduce the food expenses.

I grow spring onions, because I use them all the time. And I have some fennel, because I love fennel, it is close to the flavour and texture of Chinese herbs... I grow my Chinese chai because sometimes you can't really get here... Mainly grow the one I like or what I use for cooking all the time or [as it is] expensive to buy. (Migrant 9)

Educational background

The following theme pertained to food related knowledge. The food or health knowledge a person possessed through their experiences or educational background played important role in food acculturation into a new environment. The greater the knowledge a person had equipped and helped them to acculturate into a new culture over a shorter period of time.

It is very common for the chicken, beef, pork, lamb... Then as far as the meat, fruits and vegetables, it is all the same things called by different names. If I went to a store, I knew it everything in it, what to do with it. (Migrant 18)

Support from social network

Support from social networks was one of the resources that migrants used to gain a lot of help to navigate the new food environment. Migrants obtained new information regarding food and health in Tasmania from their social networks including friends, family, relatives and neighbours. This led to an improvement in their understanding of and access to food.

My friends do tell me where to buy this food, where to buy that food. We share information. (Migrant 2)

Accessing technology

The final strategy that was used was using technology which included the internet and online social networking such as Facebook to obtain sufficient information about food, ingredients and how food was prepared in Tasmania. In addition, the internet provided a wide variety of information and discussion about food and health from a worldwide perspective.

Another alternative is through internet. Nowadays it is easy to find anything from internet. I search some cooking recipe to know the way to cook a dish. (Migrant 28)

Discussion

The present study had a number of findings. The first important finding was that the unavailability of certain foods was problematic and resulted in migrants who went without or replaced missing food or ingredients with other foods. In order to access food, friends were the main 'resources' where migrants obtained food information. In addition, it was shown that length of stay in Tasmania and region of origin were the most significant factors that influenced migrants' attitudes towards obtaining support to improve their food access in Tasmania. Migrants who stayed less than three years in Tasmania getting more supports in terms of food access from family and relatives than those who stayed over three years. This shows that the longer a migrant resides in the host country, the less support they may need, seek or receive. Migrants' region of origin also has an impact on receiving assistance to adapt to food practice in Tasmania. For example, Asian migrants were less likely to receive assistance than migrants from other regions.

The interview data further clarified and made sense of these findings. It was noted that there were six strategies that migrants employed to cope with food security issues. They included 'accessing food from other places', 'modifying cooking practices', 'home gardening', 'educational background', 'support from social network' and 'accessing technology'. Migrants normally brought traditional food that was not available in Tasmania from their home country or from other places. Adaptation to the food culture in Tasmania was one of the strategies employed to acculturate into the new food culture. Home gardening was highlighted by interviewees as a good method to solve the problem of food unavailability. While, food related knowledge equipped by migrants may eased them in adapting to the Tasmania's food culture. Supports from family, spouses, friends and community also played vital roles to improve migrants' food security. Finally, technology such as internet can be accessed in order to get information related to food locally or globally.

These findings are supported by the Tasmanian Food Security Council (2012), where 'substitution' and 'going without' strategies proved effectively to solve challenges in food security. Migrants replaced or substituted certain food ingredients that they could not find from local shops (Renzaho & Burns, 2006). Moreover, they changed the way of cooking to adapt the situation they encountered. Social networks and support play important roles in food security. Particularly, friends support was used as a medium to share information about food and diet of the host country (Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012). In addition, family and friends also play critical roles in providing transportation to food shopping or sharing foods with members in their networks (Green-LaPierre et al., 2012).

As a result, social capital underlies the interaction between people in groups that brings about better health and well-being (Smith, 2009). Results in Hadley and fellows' study (2007) identified the length of stay in the host country is a significant factor in influencing the attitude of immigrants in seeking support. In fact, the longer a person stays in a host country, the less support he or she needs. The longer time spent in a new country increased migrants exploration to host country, including their knowledge about access to local food and skills in meal preparation. Thus, migrants became independent and less support was required. Another recommended strategy was home gardening which practically contributed food supply to households. It has been shown to reduce the prevalence of food insecurity by providing a harvest of fruit and vegetable (Carney et al., 2012). In addition, the utilisation of technology has also been shown to facilitate and broaden a migrant's knowledge in accessing more information regarding food and diet in their new environment.

Conclusion

The contribution of this study is the improvement of food security through various effective strategies, including adaptation, home gardening, access from other places and technology. Vulnerable groups should equip themselves with coping strategies to enhance food practice. The importance of cultural and social capital also needs to be taken into consideration as knowledge and social networks were predominant in providing better food security among this cohort. Based on the findings, more resources or assistances should be made available to migrants to support them in long term. For instance, local community may offer activities such as cooking classes to teach and show migrants how to prepare the local food. Community kitchen is another alternative for local communities and new comers to share food together and prevent risk of food insecurity.

It is through these opportunities to share and learn from each other that greater social and cultural capital can be developed and provide relationships and knowledge that will benefit both short term food adaptation and long-term acculturation of both migrant and local communities. Effective acculturation strategies are important element in coping with the food security problems. Migrants adapt to the new food culture using different acculturation strategies. Social and cultural capital plays a large part in contributing to enhance migrants' food practice in new environment.

Limitations

There were two limitations within the study. First, the study was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal in approach due to time and financial constraints. This limited the understanding of the acculturation process and

casual relationships could not be determined among variables. Second limitation was that there was organisational structure change at one of the Migrant Resource Centres which meant that fewer participants were recruited from the North West areas.

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