

# **Food Access and Insecurity in Adults with Mobility Disabilities by Dr.**

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## **Executive Summary**

People with disabilities experience greater risk of food insecurity compared to people without disabilities. The major causes of this inequality are often understood as lower incomes and higher expenses related to disability. Some scholars have also suggested that people with mobility disabilities experience greater difficulty procuring or preparing food.

However, limited research examines upstream factors related to food insecurity risk, lived experiences of food access, or environments that present access barriers among people with mobility disabilities.

Responding to these knowledge gaps, this work seeks to examine place-based influences on the relationship between mobility disability

and food insecurity. In doing so, my research questions environmental, political, and institutional contexts that impact economic and physical access to food for people with mobility disabilities.

Throughout this work, I use different theoretical approaches to conceptualize disability including, the social model, a critical ableist perspective, and an assemblage perspective. In adopting these perspectives, I challenge how bodies and mobility are typically understood in the food access literature by focusing on material and social barriers related to disability rather than the role of the impaired body.

This dissertation uses a mixed-methods research design including both an analysis of Canadian survey data and mobile interviews with people with mobility disabilities in Toronto, Canada.

## **Disability and food access and insecurity: A scoping review of the literature**

- In an initial scoping review, I discovered an important and widespread association between disability and food insecurity in the literature, with few studies conducted in Canada.

## **Mobility impairments and geographic variation in vulnerability to household food insecurity**

- In an analysis of national survey data from the Canadian Community Health Survey, I examined sociodemographic and geographic risk factors for food insecurity among people with mobility impairments. Across Canada, I found an important inequality in food insecurity between people with and without mobility impairment, with odds 3.85 higher for people with mobility impairments when controlling for age and sex. Province of

residence was associated with risk of food insecurity among people with mobility impairments, potentially reflecting different political and institutional contexts. People with mobility impairments living in provinces with higher disability income sources, like Alberta and Saskatchewan or with population-wide poverty reduction strategies, like Newfoundland and Quebec had lower odds of food insecurity compared to Ontario.

### **Experiences of food access among adults with mobility disabilities in Toronto, Canada.**

- I conducted a qualitative study, using mobile go-along interviews with people with mobility disabilities in Toronto, Canada, to understand lived experiences of food access. I found that places of food access, including on food trips, at home, and within food destinations contain many access barriers, including small-scale

barriers that over time contribute to fear, risks to safety, or inconsistent access. Further, different systems (e.g., social assistance, paratransit services) often include unnecessary restrictions relative to normative access, demonstrating ableism in many systems and places of food access.

## **Assemblages of enablement/disablement in accessing food: the role of housing and the home**

- Analyzing qualitative interviews, I further show how the home acts as an important site shaping physical, social, and economic access to food. This chapter highlights the long waiting lists to access adequate subsidized housing and, for many, the inadequacy of care in assisting with food-related tasks.
- **Conclusion** Food insecurity represents an important material hardship as well as a potential cause of health inequalities,

contributing to increased risk of a number of chronic diseases, mental illness, and mortality. My dissertation suggests the need for poverty reduction strategies which could improve outcomes of food insecurity across the population. Disability social assistance was seen as inadequate for many to avoid food insecurity, and in Ontario, these benefits have not kept up with inflation. Raising disability assistance benefits could importantly reduce food insecurity in adults with mobility disabilities. Further, my findings suggest the need to address disabling contexts that limit access to functional housing, outdoor environments, transport systems, and food destinations. **Naomi Schwartz, PhD MPH, University of Toronto Mississauga, Department of Geography and Planning,** [naomir.schwartz@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:naomir.schwartz@mail.utoronto.ca)