

Abstract

Māmā ki Tama: Feeding Families in a Food Insecure Environment: A Qualitative Study [†]

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Abstract: More than one in five children in New Zealand live in food poverty, meaning that they live without access to sufficient wholesome food for good health. Evidence suggests that Māori mothers are more likely to experience food insecurity due to inequities in income, education, employment, and housing security. The aim of the study was to explore the perspectives, experiences, and strategies employed by Māori mothers to meet food access needs for their whānau. In-depth unstructured interviews were conducted with twenty Māori mothers living in Kaitia in the far north of New Zealand who had at least one child aged two years or younger. An inductive approach was undertaken to allow findings to emerge from the data. Interviews investigated dietary habits and routines, methods of food procurement, nutrition knowledge, skills, and perceptions towards healthy food. Recorded interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis using NVivo was undertaken to identify, analyse, and report themes. Three key themes were identified. Firstly, ensuring whānau are fed using inexpensive but less nutritious foods, they reported missing meals, and feeding tamariki was prioritised. Secondly, accessing food from multiple avenues is a time-consuming journey. Participants reported accessing food grants and food banks to ensure adequate food for the household, which required time and effort, increasing stress and anxiety. Finally, the need to cope with the unexpected and unplanned, such as health and housing issues, influenced food access needs. Being well-connected to whānau, community groups, support services, and online digital access was pivotal for Māori mothers to meet whānau food needs. Māori mothers placed priority on ensuring that their whānau were fed, despite understanding healthy food choices, cost, and taste of food were driving factors in food purchase decisions. Connections were key to navigating multiple avenues to access food and cope with unexpected and unplanned circumstances.

Keywords: food security; Māori mothers; food access

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