The dynamic food procurement strategies of women living in Cape Town's low-income areas

Robyn Bowden

Affiliated: School of Public Leadership, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch

Address: Carl Cronje Dr, Eikenbosch, Cape Town, 7530

Etai Even-Zahav

Affiliated: Food Systems Centre, Sustainability Institute, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch

Address: Sustainability Institute, Lynedoch Road, Lynedoch, South Africa, 7603

Candice Kelly

Affiliated: Food Systems Centre, Sustainability Institute, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch

Address: Sustainability Institute, Lynedoch Road, Lynedoch, South Africa, 7603

ORCID: 0000-0002-3512-4500

Contact: Robyn Bowden

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge research funding from the African Climate Change Adaptation Initiative (ACCAI) and thank the research participants for their willingness to participate in the study.

Abstract

The combination of persistent levels of inequality and poverty, alongside the advent of rapid urbanisation, mean urban food insecurity is set to be one of the biggest development challenges of this century. As women play a crucial role in the food security status of urban poor households, understanding and supporting the life-sustaining food procurement practices used by women ought to be a key strategy in addressing urban food insecurity. Particularly, the paper draws on primary qualitative research I conducted with women from Khayelitsha, Cape Town's largest informal settlement. This case study explored the beliefs, practices and preferences that govern women's food procurement choices. The study found that women adopt a range of innovative food procurement strategies, which significantly improve household food security prospects. These include buying in bulk, skilfully navigating the informal and the formal food economies, utilising their social networks and trading off food with other important non–food expenses. Understanding these practices can provide greater insight into how best to enhance urban food security. The implications are that women need to be better supported rather than, as most mainstream programmes suggest, encouraged to take on more work outside the household, whilst still faced with the lion's share of housework.

Keywords: urban foodways; food access; gender; Cape Town; women

Introduction

Food insecurity is one of South Africa's persistent development challenges. While previously the challenge appeared predominantly in rural areas, today it is fast shifting to an urban issue (Crush & Frayne 2011a). Those most affected are women living in low-income urban areas (Jacobs 2012; Shisana et al. 2014). Despite constraints, women actively adopt strategies to enhance access to food for their households (Cock 2016). This paper argues that these strategies need to be understood from the point of view of the women who adopt them in order to develop policies and development interventions that support, rather than further marginalise them. To support this argument, the paper explores the findings of a qualitative study conducted in Khayelitsha[1]. The study examined women's food procurement strategies, their preferences, beliefs and practices that govern food choices as they perceived and expressed them, and the important role the informal economy played in these strategies.

[1] Khayelitsha is an informal settlement situated on the South Eastern part of the city of Cape Town's municipal area, it has the largest concentration of poverty in the city (Smit et al. 2016).

This paper begins by exploring the background of South Africa's food system and the emerging challenge of urban food insecurity (with a focus on low-income areas/informal settlements and Khayelitsha in particular). Based on a review of relevant studies, it identifies two prescient factors for understanding urban food security. Firstly, that the informal economy plays an important role in ensuring food security for low-income urban settlements and, secondly, that women play a critical role in ensuring food security for their household, while having less access to income than men.

Drawing on ethnographic foodways literature, common social science methods such as participant observation and narrative inquiry were used. The research then explored women's food procurement strategies and the underlying reasons for their adoption. The findings from this research are presented through the key themes that emerged from a thematic analysis, which was conducted to make sense of the narratives. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for furthering this research agenda.

Contextualising the problem

South Africa suffers from an extremely unjust food system, with widespread hunger coexisting with overconsumption (Cock 2016). The country produces enough food to feed its population (Drimie & McLachlan 2013), yet, according to the South African Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (Shisana *et al*. 2014), of the 10 000 households sampled nearly half were food insecure (Shisana *et al*. 2014). Food insecurity is thus clearly not only an issue of availability but increasingly one of access, physical and economic (Crush & Frayne 2010b). A systematic review of food insecurity research in South Africa revealed that poverty is the principal underlying cause of food insecurity in the country (Misselhorn & Hendriks 2017). With more than half of South Africans suffering from poverty (Stats SA 2014), hunger remains a serious issue.

Those most dependent on income to access food are people living in urban areas (Battersby 2011b). At the same time, urbanisation coincides with what has been described as the 'nutrition transition' (Popkin 2012). This is a process that entails a radical dietary shift at a global scale from micronutrient rich whole foods, complex carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables to a more 'Western diet' consisting of more processed foods, fats and animal-derived foods (Popkin et al. 2012, p. 6). This shift has been closely associated with the "global pandemic of obesity" described by Popkin et al. (2012, p. 3), which took hold in the United States of America in the 1970s and since diffused to much of the world, with the global South starting to show rising overweight and obesity trends

from the 1990s. According to the largest systematic review of its kind, Ng et al. (2014) proposed that global overweight and obesity prevalence has grown by 27.5 % for adults and 47.1 % for children between 1980 and 2013. As opposed to the historical view of food insecurity being an issue of rural poverty and hunger (and obesity heuristically, if incorrectly, a problem of rapacious wealthy elites), this shift has called for a re-evaluation of the problem (Gomez et al. 2013). Several leading food security academics thus contend that these issues have to be approached systemically, arguing that a significant portion of humanity experiences a 'triple burden of malnutrition' – which includes undernourishment, micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition (Labadarios 2005; Pinstrup-Andersen 2007; Gómez et al. 2013). Thus the issue is not only about the quantity of food but increasingly the quality of food people are able to access.

South Africa represents this 'nutrition transition' and 'triple burden' starkly (Labadarios 2005; Shisana et al. 2014). Urbanisation in South Africa accelerated from 52 % in 1990 to 64 % by 2014, and is expected to rise to 77 % by 2050 (UNDESA 2014). And, while a quarter of the population was chronically hungry and the another quarter at risk of hunger[2], 65.1 % of South African women were overweight and obese (Shisana et al. 2014). The high rate of women affected is an indication of the gendered dimension of the 'nutrition transition' and the 'triple burden' (Ruiters & Wildschutt 2010). In the South African context, food insecurity ought to be conceived as a multidimensional issue, increasingly of a chronic struggle for physical and economic access, including key factors such as poverty (Battersby 2016), informal urbanisation (Robinson & Yoshida 2016), gender inequity, (Cock 2016), and move away from the narrow conception of food security as rural hunger.

Urban poverty and closely related food insecurity are prevalent on the outskirts of Cape Town in an informal settlement called Khayelitsha – the area chosen for this research. A survey conducted by African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) on the state of urban food insecurity in Southern Africa indicated that Khayelitsha suffers from high levels of it (with 89 % of the households sampled in Kuyasa and Enkanini experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity)[3] – despite South Africa being the wealthiest country in the region (Battersby 2011). The

[2]The validated Community Child Hunger Identification Project method was used to measure the level of food insecurity (Wehler et al. 1992). The method uses eight occurrence questions that represent a generally increasing level of food insecurity (Shisana et al. 2014).
[3] The survey (n=1,060 households) used the validated Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS). The HFIAS score is a continuous measure of the degree of food insecurity in the household in the previous month (Frayne et al. 2010).

same AFSUN survey exposed the important role the informal food economy plays in the food security strategies of the urban poor in Khayelitsha. It showed that, while most of the sampled households had used supermarkets to access food in the last month, they relied more heavily on the informal food economy to access food on a daily and/or weekly basis (Battersby 2011b). The more food insecure households were, the more likely they were to depend on the informal food economy (Battersby 2011b). The role of the informal economy is twofold, not only is it a key source of food for low-income households, but it is also an important source of employment for those excluded from formal employment, particularly for women (Skinner 2016). Despite South Africa's informal sector being smaller than elsewhere in Africa, it is still a significant source of income and food access in urban areas (Skinner and Haysom 2016).

Gender is a key determinant of access to food resources and so must be examined if food security is to be improved (Patel 2012). Women are not only pivotal in ensuring food security for the household (Dodson et al. 2012), they are also more likely to face food insecurity than men (Gething 2010; Dodson et al. 2012). According to Oxfam (2014), this is due to disparities in income, limited access to employment and cultural practices of women allocating the least amount of food to themselves in times of food insecurity. In addition, women disproportionately bear the burden of doing unpaid care work – such as caring for the young, the old and the sick, collecting resources such as water and fuel and preparing food (Cock 2016). The feminisation of poverty discourse, is the dominant discourse used to expose the unique experiences of poor women. However, while the discourse depicts important gender inequalities specifically with regards to income, it focuses on the deprivation of women and fails to highlight their agency despite deprivation. Women from low-income areas are not passive victims, but instead actively play a critical role in addressing hunger (Cock 2016), such as navigating various food retailers to locate the cheapest source of food or creating employment for themselves in the informal economy.

As Crush and Frayne (2011a, p. 528) state, "(t)he food security strategies of the urban poor, and how these are thwarted or enabled, are critical to the future stability of African cities and the residents' quality of life". Thus, in order to start tackling the challenge of urban food security, the role women are currently playing in addressing hunger needs to be recognised and further enabled. Similarly, the central role the informal food economy plays in these strategies calls for further investigation. While the AFSUN study draws attention to the key role women and the informal food economy play in curbing food insecurity (Crush & Frayne 2011b; Dodson et al. 2012), its

quantitative nature leaves a gap in our understanding of women's reasons for using specific strategies. It is for this purpose that this research takes a qualitative approach to understanding the food procurement strategies of urban women in low-income areas of Cape Town.

Methodology

For the purpose of understanding the lived experiences of women, the research used a case study approach looking into the experiences of a few women living in similar socio-economic areas in Cape Town. The research used a design influenced by ethnography and foodways in order to understand the beliefs, preferences and practices that influence food choices (Mintz & Du Bois 2002; Alkon et al. 2013; Young et al. 2015; Even-Zahav 2016). According to Camp (1982), foodways refers to the study of how culture shapes food choices and how food choices and preferences influence people. Ethnography studies beliefs, perceptions and behaviours of people's daily lives from their perspective (Reeves et al. 2013; Creswell 2014), so an ethnographic foodways design focuses on people's daily relations around food.

The methods used were narrative-based interviews and participant observation. Narrative research is the study of people's stories in order to gain an understanding of their experiences and attitudes (Creswell 2014). Thus within the ethnographic foodways design, the narrative-based research had a food focus and asked research participants to tell stories about their daily experiences with food. The interviews focused on how the research participants accessed food, used it throughout the month and distributed it within the household. Participant observation involves the researcher not only observing as an outsider, but participating in the day-to-day activities of the research participants in order to experience and gain deeper access to the environment, social relations, events and ideals of the research context (Yin 2011). I participated in actions relating to food such as procurement, storage, preparation and consumption. Observations noted were primarily actions that involved food choices such as the nature of sales interactions, cooking preferences, communal eating practices and kitchen stocks. However, neither narrative-based interviews nor participant observation occurred in a structured sense but emerged when deemed suitable.

The study interviewed eight women in total from two low-income areas of Cape Town: Khayelitsha (Site B and Site C) and Crossroads. These sites were selected because, of the three poor subareas the AFSUN study surveyed in Cape Town, Khayelitsha was the most food insecure (Battersby 2011a) and Crossroads is geographically near

to Khayelitsha with a similar socio-economic profile (City of Cape Town 2011a & b). The conditions under which the people from these low-income urban areas live are largely informed by South Africa's apartheid history (Viljoen & Sekhampu 2013). As segregation and racial discrimination were national policies, the effects were ubiquitous throughout the country, thus, today, many of South Africa's urban poor areas experience similar challenges (du Toit & Neves 2014). These similar challenges have been compounded, since then, with the post-independent economic choice to liberalise the economy, which in turn promoted the supermarket expansion and ambivalence towards (if not criminalisation) of informality (Peyton et al. 2015; Skinner & Haysom 2016), as well as food price hikes and volatility – all of which have played a major role in national food insecurity outcomes, especially in low-income urban areas.

Map

Figure 1: Map of Cape Town showing research areas – Khayelitsha and Crossroads.

Two women were involved in the in-depth ethnographic study and the other six were involved through two focus group sessions. Both focus groups were held at a non-governmental organisation in Gugulethu where they were a part of a support group, however, all the women came from Crossroads – which borders Khayelitsha. The research participants were selected on account of them expressing interest in being involved in the research and feeling at ease to tell their stories around food. For this reason, the two research participants involved in the in-depth ethnographic study were selected as they had an existing relationship and level of trust with the researcher, while the six women already discussed their food experiences within their support group and so felt comfortable sharing them in the focus group interview.

All the research participants spoke Xhosa as their first language. Of the two women involved in the in-depth ethnographic study, one was married with three older daughters and an adult stepson, while the other was a widow with two older sons. The six women involved in the focus groups were all young mothers, with young children. Their relationships varied, some had male representations in the household while others did not, nevertheless all the women involved in the research carried the bulk of the care work and food provision in the household.

In order to analyse the data collected through the participant observations and the narrative-based interviews, thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis uses the content of what is said to identify core themes in the

narratives (Riessman 2005). Themes were chosen on account of either repetition or if the research participants evoked strong emotion when talking about specific aspects of the narratives. Once strong themes were identified, they were then discussed with the research participants to ensure their validity. Lastly, the research analysed and synthesised the fieldwork findings and themes with the themes that appeared in the literature.

Findings

The findings are presented via the five key themes that were identified in the thematic analysis: hampers, grants[4] and steady income; cost, credit and quality; working in the informal economy; support from and for others and other priorities.

Hampers, grants and steady incomes

Almost all of the women in the study bought food in bulk on a monthly basis as a strategy to access food cheaply. They bought what they referred to as 'hampers', which generally contained 10 kilograms of rice, sugar, cake flour and maize meal as well as 2 litres of cooking oil. Some bought bigger hampers that would last them up to three months. In addition to being cheaper, the benefit of such hampers was that women could immediately spend their grant money or monthly salary on enough food to last them for the month, ensuring that other expenses incurred during the month would not hinder their household's access to a basic supply of food.

Some also mentioned buying other types of hampers, which comprised meat and vegetables. The meat hampers were bulk packages of meat and the vegetable hampers contained bulk quantities of long-shelf life vegetables such as carrots, potatoes and onions. These were not as commonly bought as the dry goods hamper because meat hampers were difficult to store if one did not have refrigeration and vegetable hampers were only bought by a few of the participants.

The buying of hampers coincides with the receiving of grants. The only research participant who did not have access to either a grant or a monthly salary was unable to access hampers due to not being able to save up enough

[4] Grants are income received by vulnerable groups from the South African government in order to mitigate the impact of poverty and redistribute wealth (Neves *et al*. 2009). The three main types of grants and the amounts received at the time of writing are child support grants (R330), disability grants (R1 415) and old-age pension (R1 415) (Satumba *et al*. 2017).

each month to afford one. This illustrates that while hampers provide a cheap source of staple foods for women and their households who have access to a monthly salary or a grant, for those who do not, this most basic resource is also inaccessible.

The research participant who was unable to access hampers would buy food daily from informal traders when she was able to find work. Though this was inconsistent, it was her only way to access food. This finding complements the literature, which illustrates that household food insecurity correlates with dependency on the informal food economy (Battersby 2011a). Thus, for those who have access to grants and monthly incomes, hampers played a key role, but for those who were severely income and food insecure the informal food economy was especially pivotal for smaller food items.

Cost, credit and quality

The research participants bought their food from both informal and formal food traders, in line with the AFSUN study (Battersby 2011b). Where they bought food and specifically their hampers depended primarily on price, and they sourced price information from advertising flyers, word of mouth and even traveling to different retailers to find the best deal.

Location also played an important factor in the decision making of the research participants; deciding where to shop depended on how far they had to travel to access the hamper. The distance added two factors: cost and time. The further away from their homes the more they would have to pay to transport the hamper. Transporting a 10 kilogram package of food in a taxi[5] cost around R5, making transporting a full hamper costly. The time it took to do a monthly shop was also highlighted as a concern as one women explained; "I cannot do the monthly shop because it takes too long with all the travel time and standing in queues, so I send my daughters to do it. Before when they were young it was a problem as I had no one to help me and the day would take too long." In some instances specific formal retailers were not located in the research participants' suburbs, in these cases the informal retailers were used out of necessity rather than choice indicating the vital role the informal sector plays when the formal sector falls short. As one research participant explained, "I used to shop at the Fruit & Veg City[6] in my

[5] A taxi in South Africa refers to a shared 16-seater minibus.
[6] Fruit & Veg City is a large retailer that focuses on the sale of fresh produce. The company's name has changed to Food Lover's Market.

area but now it has closed down so I only buy vegetables from the street traders."

The availability of credit was another important determinant in the choice of where to shop for food. Research participants would shop at the informal traders with whom they had relationships whereby they could buy food on credit if they did not have enough money on that specific day. Despite one research participant living less than 50 metres away from a branch of large supermarket chain Shoprite[7], she would travel far from her home to an informal trader. She stated "[the informal trader] knows I will always pay him back, if I do not have money one week, he will let me take what I need and I can pay him when I get money."

The last determinant was quality. Some research participants felt that fresh produce from informal traders was of better quality and worth investing more in. However, in the tradeoff between quality and price, price generally won, as one research participant explained "I buy my hamper from the Somali trader close to my house, sometimes the maize has insects in it, but I have to buy it as it would cost too much to buy the hamper from Shoprite and transport it back to my house."

Working in the informal economy

The research focused on the role of the informal food economy in women's consumption choices. However, it became apparent that the informal food economy played an important role not only in providing food but also in providing the income necessary to access it – a finding which appeared elsewhere in the literature (see Steyn & Labadarios 2011). All but one of the research participants used money to access all of their food. The women who was the exception had a small vegetable garden and received fresh produce from the young farmers in the school grounds next door to her house in exchange for meals that she cooked for them. She explained that neither of these strategies provided a considerable amount of food and so she still relied on income to access the majority of her food.

When asking the research participants prompting questions such as "how do you manage to get food?" or "how do you provide food for your family?" they would give answers that explained how they earned an income. This supports the evidence of a close link between food access and income in the urban setting indicated in the literature

[7] Shoprite is South Africa's largest retailer, which specifically targets price-sensitive customers.

(Altman & Ngandu 2010; Dodson et al. 2012). The research participants accessed income either through working in the informal economy, working minimum wage jobs in the formal economy, via grants or through a combination of these.

The research participants mentioned a number benefits of working in the informal economy. The first was the flexible hours. As one women, who had a mentally disabled sister living in her household explained, "I have to look after eight children, mine and my sister's, selling chickens allows me to work when I have the time and close to my house. Sometimes I cannot sell all the chickens and then I feed what I do not sell to the children." This is another important benefit of working in the informal food economy. Moreover, working in the informal economy meant that women could distribute their risk by having a number of income streams in case one failed. One research participant sold sweets and chips outside schools in the mornings, chickens in the afternoon, collected recycling for a small income and received a grant.

Support from others

Social networks played a complex role in the food access strategies of the research participants. Women did not receive much neighbourly support when it came to borrowing food or money for food. One research participant, a domestic worker, explained "if I need money for food I ask my boss for a loan, I will not ask my neighbours for food." Similarly, they avoided lending food or money to other households. According to a number of the research participants, some women will shop at night to avoid their neighbours from knowing they have food and thus asking to borrow some. The general feeling from the research participants was if someone asked to borrow money or food, they probably did not have an income or did not work hard enough to pay it back. As one research participant explained "I can only work two-days a week because of my health, but if I ask my neighbours to borrow food, they will tell me I am lazy and I need to work more days."

However, other social connections played a prominent role in improving food security for women. As one research participant stated "I cannot ask my neighbours to borrow food, if I need food, I go to my friend who lives a few blocks away and she will help me." Another research participant who rented a house on the property of another woman shared the cost of food and the unpaid labour of cooking with her property owner. A third research participant explained that her church provided a high degree of support for its congregation, encouraging other

members to lend or give to those people in the congregation that needed aid.

While neighbourly support was reportedly weak amongst the research participants, the role family connections played in their lives was strong. An elderly research participant relied on cash transfers from family members living elsewhere in South Africa. Other research participants explained that they were expected to look after family members who visited during the year and while some felt the financial and labour burden, they did not question their obligation to do so. The pressure of providing for one's household resulted in the women forgoing meals if there was not enough food, in order to ensure that the rest of the household was fed. Other research participants explained that they enjoyed looking after younger family members and their friends despite the fact that young people tended to consume high volumes of food. Although some enjoyed this responsibility, the pressure of spending money on their children fell primarily on the women in the study. Their children would go to them for things like school supplies, transport money or clothes and would not ask their fathers for support. A number of the research participants expressed frustration as men did not help to support the household. In their experience, men promise to help to pay for household expenses but then ignore their responsibilities, giving a false sense of financial support. As one research participant stated, "men do not help in the household, they spend their money on drinking and then expect to be fed. It is better if a mother has control of the money, and doesn't need the money of a man, then she can provide for her children."These findings draw attention to the supportive role women play in the community, caring for not only their nuclear family but for extended family members and members from different households all together.

Other priorities

While food played a key part in this inquiry, it has to be recognised that this is essentially a study about human beings who have many needs and that economic poverty cannot and should not be reduced to food alone. It must rather be understood, referring back to the foodways literature, that food is a social artefact, used as a conduit for conversation, and food access is inherently linked positively and negatively at times to other vital resources. Food security was a high priority for the women involved in the research, however, other non-food items were seen to be as important as food and so women regularly had to make trade-offs between food and non-food priorities. Research participants who were mothers of young children saw disposable nappies as a priority expense and experienced anxiety around being able to afford them. When asked why they did not use reusable nappies, they

explained that they were difficult to clean and indicated that reusable nappies were an outdated product that people in the city did not use. Clothes, especially for young children, were another priority expense and some women would buy new clothes each month when they bought their monthly hamper. One research participant would buy a larger hamper that would last her three months so that she could use her grant money to buy clothes the other two months. Another priority expense was funeral cover. One research participant explained that she spent a large portion of her monthly income on a number of funeral plans. To her, funeral cover was very important, since in the event of a death in the family, funeral costs were too high to afford. One research participant forewent purchasing a monthly food hamper in order to attend a funeral in Johannesburg. Fuel and energy costs were also a high priority for the research participants. One research participant explained that due to a lack of insulation, gas in winter was an essential household cost, while another participant was concerned that she would not be able to afford electricity that month. Energy costs directly affected women's ability to provide food for their households; as one women explained "sometimes I cannot feed the children as I do not have the money to buy the gas to cook. If I ask my neighbours to use their electric stoves, they say electricity is too expensive and they cannot let me. I would cook on the fire but there is no wood in this area and wood is too expensive to buy." Other research participants expressed the inability to store perishable foods as they did not have access to refrigeration facilities. Lastly, for one research participant the church was an important expense. She explained, "I pay 10% of what I earn to the church every month, and sometimes they need more money for extra things and so I pay more." Although it was a substantial portion of her income, she felt the value she received from the church and church community justified the expense. The lessons from these narratives indicate that food is not the only expense that women must take into account. However, what they also show is the intimate connections and the trade-offs between various basic needs.

Discussion

The informal food economy plays a key role in the food procurement strategies of women living in low-income urban areas of South Africa. This was illustrated in both the literature and the empirical research. According to the literature, this was because the informal food economy sells food in smaller quantities, enables food to be bought on credit and is distributed throughout low-income areas, as opposed to the formal economy which tends to sell bulk foods, without credit and is less accessible geographically (Crush & Frayne 2011a; Battersby & Crush

2014; Battersby & Peyton 2014; Peyton et al. 2015). Similarly, the one research participant who did not receive a monthly income nor had access to a grant, relied solely on the purchasing of small quantities of food on credit available at informal traders. The empirical research added further nuance to the current understanding as, for instance, one research participant bought fresh produce from an informal trader far from her home, rather than going to the supermarket that was closer, so that she could get food on credit if the need arose. Despite perceived inferior quality, another research participant bought her hamper from a local informal trader, to save money on transporting herself and her hamper from the nearest Shoprite. These two points indicate at once the limits of generalisation and the dynamism with which women negotiate structural barriers in a very restrictive food system.

The informal economy interacts in dynamic ways with the formal economy (Peyton et al. 2015; Robinson & Yoshida 2016). A qualitative study done by Peyton et al. (2015) showed that informal traders often trade close to supermarkets in order to capitalise on the foot traffic coming to the shopping centres. Similarly, the research participants in this study explained that they check the cost of hampers at both informal traders and Shoprite to see which is cheaper and then purchase accordingly. Evident in both the AFSUN study (Battersby 2011b) and this research is that people buy different types of food at informal food retailers than they do at supermarkets. People tend to buy their monthly hampers at supermarkets, but shop at informal traders for fresh produce or bread on a daily and/or monthly basis. An exception of this was the one participant who previously shopped at Fruit & Veg City but now brought her fresh produce from informal traders as the formal retail outlet closed down in her area. This finding links to the food deserts concept that looks at the lack of affordable nutritious food in an area (Battersby 2012; Peyton et al. 2015). However, as challenged by Battersby and Crush (2014), the concept's fixation with supermarkets neglects the role the informal food economy plays to enable food access where formal retailers fail. The AFSUN study (Battersby 2011b) emphasised the role that price, location and credit play in consumer food choices, however, this study showed that in addition to these, quality played a role in food choice. As with the findings of a study done by Pereira (2014) in Mitchell's Plain, a low-income area close to Khayelitsha, this research found that there was disagreement over whether food quality was better at the formal or the informal traders.

What emerged in the empirical research was the key role hampers played in providing food for those receiving monthly incomes or grants. Interestingly, despite the literature emphasising the importance of better understanding

how the poor access food in South Africa (Crush & Frayne 2011a; Dodson et al. 2012), a systematic review by Even-Zahav and Kelly (2016) found no research that investigated this element in detail. Hampers provide security to women in charge of providing food for their households, as it means that no matter what unexpected expenses arise during the month they are able to provide at least staple food for the household. The research participants experienced a great deal of pressure to spend money on their children and some found that the expensive habits, such as excessive drinking, of the men in their households threatened their ability to buy food throughout the month. This indicates that women are not only the food providers for the household but have the added burden of paying for other expenses of their household members. Thus, being able to purchase hampers enables women to secure staple foods as a priority expense for the month and therefore use hampers as a gendered strategy to control financial resources in the household. Hampers are a blessing and a curse as their affordability ensures stomachs are filled from day to day but have long-term costs of health and wellbeing due to their nutritional inadequacy. With many South Africans suffering from a deficiency in micronutrients, known as 'hidden hunger' (Hendriks 2014; Oxfam 2014), hampers consisting only of simple carbohydrates and oils are a cause for concern. The research participants who rely predominantly on hampers for food likely lack the dietary diversity necessary for a healthy diet (Labadarios et al 2011; Oldewage-Theron and Kruger 2011; Oldewage-Theron et al 2011; Drimie et al. 2013). For some, hampers are out of reach, which means they experience both a caloric insufficiency and a nutritional inadequacy. These are the people that policymakers, development agencies and civil society organisations need to work harder to identify and support as they are in the greatest most immediate need.

When it comes to gender, women play a disproportionately large role in household food security (Gething 2010; Dodson et al. 2012). This was apparent in the research as two research participants explained that they always look after not only their nuclear family members but also anyone who happened to be staying in their household, such as visiting extended family or friends. This, they explained, was expected of them but they also said that it gave them a sense of fulfilment. Some research participants explained that if they did not have enough food for everyone in the household they would be the first to give up a meal to ensure others receive food. This practice was also found in a study done in a low-income urban area of Johannesburg (Lakhani 2014). The literature on the feminisation of poverty states that female-headed households are poorer than male-headed ones (Rogan 2013). However Chant (2008) argues that men are an extra financial burden when it comes to providing for the household

and so women see themselves as better off without a male-head in the household. Similarly, the research participants expressed frustration with the lack of support they receive from the men in their households and stated that women were better off being the head of the household and thus having complete control of household finances. Through promoting female employment as a solution to the feminisation of poverty, the discourse advocates for this notion that women must have their own source of income (Casale & Posel 2002; Chant 2008). However, this notion is insensitive to the burden of unpaid care work that many women already struggle with, especially women caring for large families, as was the case for many of the research participants. In addition, the high rate of unemployment in South Africa (Stats SA 2014) makes it difficult for women to find formal employment; women excluded from formal employment create alternative, informal sources of employment.

Food in urban informal areas is predominantly purchased rather than produced (Frayne et al. 2009; Altman & Ngandu 2010; Battersby 2011b; Crush et al. 2012). With the exception of one research participant who had a small vegetable garden, the remaining research participants purchased all of their food. Thus, how women access income becomes key to unpacking food procurement strategies. The research draws attention to two predominant forms of income: government grants and work in the informal economy. Working in the informal food economy has the benefit of allowing women to access income while carrying their household responsibilities, as it enables women to work close to their homes, provides flexibility in working hours and, for some women, employ their cooking skills to earn an income (Groot et al. 2017). However, while there are benefits to informal work, there are also real problems. Informal work can be precarious due to a lack of formal protection, low wages and exposure to the elements, including weather and crime (Skinner & Haysom 2016). The other important income stream present in the research, grants, has also been well documented in the literature (Ruiters & Wildschutt 2010; Battersby 2011a; Crush & Frayne 2011b; Devereux 2016). Grants are the government and non-governmental organisations' solution to a lack of food access (Greenberg 2010) and while grants enhance urban food access, they fail to improve nutritional outcomes (Devereux 2016). The majority of the research participants had access to some sort of grant. Some received a monthly grant, which allowed for secure access to income each month. However, one woman only received a grant when her health deteriorated, and so could not rely on the grant for a secure income source.

Social networks play a pivotal role in the food procurement strategies of the urban poor. Massey (2017) explains

that for women in South African cities social networks are crucial for building sustainable livelihoods and resilient communities. For instance, as stated in the literature, establishing a relationship with informal traders enables people to buy food on credit if they do not have enough money to buy food that day (Battersby 2011b; Peyton et al. 2015). This empirical research showed that some women used social relations to share the burden of care work, for instance sharing the expense and labour of cooking with other women, and thus making both parties more resilient against sudden income shocks such as the cost of an unexpected funeral. Other research participants maintained social relations because of ethical and cultural reasons. One explained that her church promoted the support of one's neighbour, while the other stated that it is the way things were done in her childhood home in the Eastern Cape. However, a study done in Swedenville, a recently formed informal settlement in the Pretoria/Johannesburg city region, showed that South Africa's in-migration to cities has resulted in weaker social ties (Cross & Altman 2010). Similarly, the research participants who have migrated to Cape Town, maintain strong social ties to the Eastern Cape, but experience a lack of societal support from their urban neighbours. In some instances social relations are averted as a strategy to protect a household's food security. Some women will shop at night to avoid their neighbours knowing that they have food in the house so that they will not ask for food. This finding was echoed in Pereira's (2014) study in Mitchells Plain.

Food is the dominant expense for the urban poor in South Africa (Frayne et al. 2010). According to the AFSUN study, over half of household expenditure (55 %) in low income communities in Cape Town is spent on food (Frayne et al. 2010). However, while the research participants in this research spent a large portion of their income on food, other priority expenses often compromised the quantity and quality of the food bought. Thus as Barrett (2001) stressed, it is important to consider the trade-offs that people have to make between food and non-food necessities. While all the other priorities affected the amount spent on food, energy costs had the most direct impact on food security. As one research participant explained she was unable to feed her household due to lack of access to energy for cooking. Other research participants expressed the inability to store perishable foods as they did not have access to refrigeration. Groot et al. (2017) argue that a lack of access to energy for cooking and refrigeration also influences women's ability to grow informal food enterprises. As a result, a lack of access to energy impacts on the amount of money women are able to earn through the informal food economy to access food. Thus, one cannot solve the problem of food insecurity in isolation. Instead, the problem needs to be

considered holistically with all the other priorities that compromise a person's access to food.

Recommendations and areas for further study

There is a substantial body of research emerging on urban food insecurity in South Africa. While this is playing a key role in examining the extent of this emerging challenge, the research is predominantly quantitative. In order to develop a fuller understanding of the complexities of urban food insecurity more qualitative research is needed. Specifically more qualitative research that seeks to support and advocate for the life-sustaining practices that the urban poor adopt. Such research is necessary to support the resilience of context-appropriate procurement strategies that emerge to overcome context-specific challenges.

Food security research is needed that takes a holistic view of the concept and its limits, specifically, how other core priorities affect people's ability to purchase food. Trading-off between food and non-food expenses results in the urban poor having to compromise on the quantity and quality of the food they purchase. Since these other priorities severely affect people's food access, it is important to understand both what these other priorities are and why they are so important. For instance, if one understands that disposable nappies represent more than a material convenience, but are instead bound by a performance of urban 'modernity' and intimately tied to social status, then an intervention could be targeted at and sensitive to this reality. Research that looks at what other priorities compromise a person's access to food is not only invaluable to addressing food insecurity but it is also key in improving the lives of the urban poor in general.

Additionally, research that examines women's work more holistically is also needed; specifically the unpaid work that women do to enhance household food security. The assumption that formal employment is the answer to overcome gender inequality, as advocated by the feminisation of poverty literature (Casale & Posel 2002; Chant 2008), does not acknowledge the unpaid care work that women do (Chant 2008). Interventions stemming from this discourse have reinforced an on-the-ground belief that women must be employed as well as take care of the household. Instead, research is needed that considers this extra burden and looks to alleviate the pressure on women to do both valuable unpaid and paid work. However, care must be taken to ensure that this does not come at the expense of women losing control of the finances and other core resources they need to ensure household food security.

Lastly, a key finding in this research was the weakening social networks women experience in the urban setting and that increased levels of social cohesion played a role in ensuring a more resilient platform for women to provide for the household. Research is needed that looks further into the role that social relations play in ensuring food security, in order to support those relations. In addition, further research should explore the role that social structures, such as church groups, play in rebuilding social cohesion as a strategy to ensure reliable food security.

Conclusion

The narratives of the women involved in the study highlighted their strategies for accessing food. These stories illustrated the challenging balance these women have to find between the financial costs of food, transport and energy. These women negotiate a fine line between social reciprocity of food, and not giving to nor asking from the people who live in their immediate vicinity. The narratives also show a highly sophisticated and strategic navigating of both the informal and the formal food economy that allows women to find the cheapest and most adequate sources of food in a restrictive food environment. The informal economy plays a key role for food access – whether it be as a consumer or as a form of employment. Lastly, the narratives show how, while food is a priority, there are other essential expenses that affect the amount that these women can spend on food.

While the AFSUN study showed the key role women and the informal food economy play in curbing food insecurity (Battersby 2011a; Crush & Frayne 2011b; Dodson et al. 2012), these findings illustrate some of the key strategies that allow them to achieve this. Understanding the life-sustaining strategies of poor urban women ensures these strategies can be better supported.

References

Alkon, A.H., Block, D., Moore, K., Gillis, C., DiNuccio, N., & Chavez, N. 2013. Foodways of the Urban Poor. Geoforum, 48, 126-135.

Altman, M., & Ngandu, S., 2010. Would halving unemployment contribute to improved household food security for men and women? Agenda, 24(86), 52–65.

Battersby, J. 2011a. The State of Urban Food Insecurity in Cape Town. Urban Food Security Series No. 11, AFSUN. Cape Town: Idasa Publishing.

Battersby, J. 2011b. Urban food insecurity in Cape Town, South Africa: An alternative approach to food access. Development Southern Africa, 28(4), 545–561.

Battersby, J. 2012. Beyond the food desert: Finding ways to speak about urban food security in South Africa. Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geography, 94(2), 141–159.

Battersby, J., & Crush, J. 2014. Africa's Urban Food Deserts. Urban Forum, 25, 143–151.

Battersby, J., & Peyton, S. 2014. The Geography of Supermarkets in Cape Town: Supermarket Expansion and Food Access. Urban Forum, 25, 153–164.

Camp, C. 1982. Foodways in Everyday Life. American Quarterly, 34(3), 278-289.

Casale, D., & Posel, D. 2002. The Continued Feminisation of the Labour Force in South Africa: An analysis of recent data and trends. South African Journal of Economics, 70(1), 156–184.

Chant, S. 2008. The "Feminisation of Poverty" and the "Feminisation" of Anti-Poverty Programmes: Room for Revision? Journal of Development Studies, 44(2), 165–197.

City of Cape Town 2013a. 2011 Census Suburb Khayelitsha. http://resource.capetown.gov.za/documentcentre/Documents/Maps%20and%20statistics/2011_Census_CT_Suburb_Khayelitsha_Profile.pdf

City of Cape Town 2013b. 2011 Census Suburb Khayelitsha. http://resource.capetown.gov.za/documentcentre/Documents/Maps%20and%20statistics/2011_Census_CT_Suburb_Crossroads_Profile.pdf

Cock, J. 2016. A feminist response to the food crisis in contemporary South Africa. Agenda, 1-12.

Creswell, J.W. 2014. 4th edition. Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Cross, C., & Altman, M. 2010. "For us women , working is an unfulfilled dream ": Womens' wage work and food

security. Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity, 24(86), 25–37.

Crush, J., & Frayne, B. 2011a. Urban Food Insecurity and the New International Food Security Agenda. Development Southern Africa, 28(4), 527-544.

Crush, J., & Frayne, B. 2011b. Supermarket Expansion and the Informal Food Economy in Southern African Cities: Implications for Urban Food Security. Journal of Southern African Studies, 37(4), 781–807.

Crush, J., Frayne, B., & Pendleton, W. 2012. The Crisis of Food Insecurity in African Cities. Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition, 7, 271-292.

Devereux, S. 2016. Social protection for enhanced food security in sub-Saharan Africa. Food Policy, 60, 52–62.

Dodson, B., Chiweza, A., & Riley, L., 2012. Gender and food insecurity in Southern African cities, Kingston and Cape Town: Queen's University and AFSUN.

Drimie, S., Faber, M., Vearey, J., & Nunez, L. 2013. Dietary diversity of formal and informal residents in Johannesburg, South Africa. BMC Public Health, 13(1), 911.

Drimie, S., & McLachlan, M. 2013. Food security in South Africa – first steps toward a transdisciplinary approach. Food Security, 5(2), 217–226.

Even-Zahav, E., & Kelly, C. 2016. Systematic review of the literature on 'informal economy' and 'food security': South Africa, 2009–2014. Working Paper 35. Cape Town: PLAAS, UWC and Centre of Excellence in Food Security.

Flyvberg, B. 2006. Five Misunderstandings about Case Study Research. Qualitative Inquiry, 12(2), 219-245.

Frayne, B., Battersby-Lennard, J., Fincham, R., & Haysom G. 2009. Urban Food Security in South Africa: Case study of Cape Town, Msunduzi and Johannesburg. DBSA, Development Planning Division Working Paper Series No. 15. South Africa, Midrand: DBSA.

Frayne, B., Pendleton, W., Crush, J., Acquah, B., Battersby, J., Bras, E., et al. 2010. The State of Urban Food

Insecurity in Southern Africa. Urban Food Security Series No. 2, Queen's University and AFSUN: Kingston and Cape Town.

Gething, L. 2010. Gender, food and nutrition security in the context of the global economic crisis. Agenda, 24(86), 2–2.

Greenberg, S. 2010. Contesting the food system in South Africa: issues and opportunities. PLAAS Research Report, No. 42, Cape Town: Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape.

Groot, J., Mohlakoana, N., Knox, A., & Bresser, H. 2017. Fuelling women's empowerment? An exploration of the linkages between gender, entrepreneurship and access to energy in the informal food sector. Energy Research & Social Science. 28, 86-97.

Hendriks, S. 2014. Food security in South Africa : Status quo and policy imperatives. Agrekon, 53(2), 1–24.

Jacobs, P. 2012. Household food insecurity, rapid food price inflation and the economic downturn in South Africa. Agenda, 24(86), 38–51.

Labadarios D. 2005. Malnutrition in the developing world: The triple burden. SAJCN 18(2), 119-121.

Labadarios, D., Steyn, N. P., & Nel, J. 2011. How diverse is the diet of adult South Africans? Nutrition Journal, 10-33.

Massey, R. 2017. The Effect of Informal Settlement Upgrading on Women's Social Networks: Layout Versus Location. Urban Forum, 28(2): 205-217.

Merriam, S. B. 1998. Qualitative research and case study applications in education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mintz, S.W., & Du Bois, C.M. 2002. The anthropology of food and eating. The Annual Review of Anthropology. 31(1): 99-119.

Misselhorn, A., & Hendriks, S.L. 2017. A systematic review of sub-national food insecurity research in South Africa: Missed opportunities for policy insights. PLoS ONE, 12(8): e0182399.

Neves, D., Samson, M., van Niekerk, I., Hlatshwayo, S., & du Toit, A. 2009. The use and effectiveness of social grants in South Africa. Finmark Trust, 60. Cape Town: PLAAS and EPRI.

Ng, M., Fleming, T., Robinson, M., Thomson, B., Graetz, N., Margono, C., et al. 2014. Global, regional, and national prevalence of overweight and obesity in children and adults during 1980–2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013. The lancet, 384(9945), 766-781.

Oldewage-Theron, W., & Kruger, R. 2011. Dietary diversity and adequacy of women caregivers in a peri-urban informal settlement in South Africa. Nutrition, 27(4), 420–427.

Oldewage-Theron, W., Napier, C., & Egal, A. 2011. Dietary fat intake and nutritional status indicators of primary school children in a low-income informal settlement in the Vaal region: original research. South African Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 24(2), 99-104.

Oxfam. 2014. Hidden Hunger in South Africa: The faces of hunger and malnutrition in a food-secure nation. Oxford, United Kingdom: OXFAM.

Patel, R.C. 2012. Food Sovereignty: Power, Gender, and the Right to Food. PLOS Medicine, 9(6), 1-4.

Pearce, D., 1978. The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work and Welfare. The Urban and Social Change Review, 11(1–2), 28–36.

Peyton, S., Moseley, W., & Battersby-Lennard, J. 2015. Implications of supermarket expansion on urban food security in Cape Town, South Africa. African Geographical Review, 34(1), 1–18.

Pinstrup-Andersen, P. 2007. Agricultural research and policy for better health and nutrition in developing countries: a food systems approach. Agricultural Economics, 37 (s1), 187–198.

Popkin, B.M., Adair, L.S., & Ng ,S.W. 2012. Now and Then: The Global Nutrition Transition: the Pandemic of Obesity in Developing Countries. Nutrition Review, 70(1), 3-21.

Reeves, S., Kuper, A., & Hodges, B.D. 2013. Qualitative Research: Qualitative Research Methodologies: Ethnography. British Medical Journal, 337(7668), 512-514.

Riessman, C.K. 2005. Analysis of personal narratives. In Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J.A. (eds.). Handbook of Interview Research (pp. 695-710). Sage Publications Ltd.

Robinson, E., & Yoshida, N. 2016. Improving the Nutritional Quality of Food Markets through the Informal Sector: Lessons from Case Studies in Other Sectors. Institute of Development Studies, (171), 1–45.

Rogan, M. 2013. Alternative Definitions of Headship and the "Feminisation" of Income Poverty in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Journal of Development Studies, 49(10), 1344–1357.

Ruiters, M., & Wildschutt, A. 2010. Food insecurity in South Africa: Where does gender matter? Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity, 24(86), 8–24.

Satumba, T., Bayat, A., & Mohamed, S. 2017 The Impact of Social Grants on Poverty Reduction in South Africa. Journal of Economics, 8(1), 33-49.

Shisana, O., Labadarios, D., Rehle, T., Simbayi, L., Zuma, K., Dhansay, A., et al. 2014. South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES-1). Cape Town: HSRC.

Skinner, C. 2016. Informal Food Retail in Africa: A Review of Evidence, Consuming Urban Poverty Project Working Paper No. 2, African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town.

Skinner, C., & Haysom, G. 2016. The informal sector's role in food security: A missing link in policy debates? Working Paper 44. Cape Town: PLAAS, UWC and Centre of Excellence on Food Security.

Smit, W., de Lannoy, A., Dover, R.V.H., Lambert, E.V., Levitt, N., & Watson, V. 2016. Making unhealthy places: The built environment and non-communicable diseases in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. Health & Place, 39, 196-203.

Stats SA 2014. Poverty Trends in South Africa: An Examination of Absolute Poverty between 2006 and 2011.

Pretoria: Stats SA.

Steyn, N.P., & Labadarios, D. 2011. Street Foods and fast foods: how much do South Africans of Different Ethnic Groups Consume? Ethnicity & Disease, 21(4), 462-466.

Suter, E.A. 2000. Focus Groups in Ethnography of Communication: Expanding Topics of Inquiry Beyond Participant Observation. The Qualitative Report, 5(1), 1–14.

du Toit, A., & Neves, D. 2014. The Government of Poverty and the Arts of Survival: Mobile and Recombinant Strategies at the Margins of the South African Economy. Journal of Peasant Studies, 41(5), 833-853.

Tshehla, B. 2002. Non-state Justice in the Post Apartheid South Africa - A Scan of Khayelitsha. African Sociological Review, 6(2), 47–70.

Viljoen, D., & Sekhampu, T.J. 2013. The Impact of Apartheid on Urban Poverty in South Africa: What we can Learn from History. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 4(2), 1–2.

Wehler, C.A., Scott, R.I., & Anderson, J.J. 1992. The community childhood hunger identification project: A model of domestic hunger—Demonstration project in Seattle, Washington. Journal of Nutrition Education, 24(1), 29S-35S.

Wilkinson, S. 1998. Focus groups in feminist research. Women's Studies International Forum, 21(1), 111–125.

Yin, R.K. 2011. Qualitative Research from Start to Finish. New York: Guilford Press.

Young, A., Eckstein, D., & Conley, D. 2015. Rhetorics and Foodways. Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies. 198-199.

community
Crossroads
Khayelitsha
0km
5km
10km
Map data ©2017 AfriGIS (Pty) Ltd, Google
Cape Town
Table Mountain National Park
TABLE VIEW
MILNERTON
CENTURY CITY
BELLVILLE
GREEN POINT
OBSERVATORY
RONDEBOSCH
CLAREMONT
WYNBERG
OTTERY
LLANDUDNO
HOUT BAY
PHILIPPI
MITCHELLS PLAIN
KHAYELITSHA
GRASSY PARK
ST JAMES
FISH HOEK