

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

### **“How Food Justice Impacts Low-Income Neighborhoods”**

In a society like Brooklyn, NY where access to food is significant for the population of people in neighborhoods that are affected by poverty, but is likely to affect the people who are taking a habit into consuming food basically on the verge of being unhealthy and

struggling to change. This research reflects back to previous studies on paper #2 "Preventing child obesity in Latin America," which explains the increasing level of obesity that is threatening the lifestyle of children in poor countries and connecting it to the commercial industries which are contributing to the phenomenon where people comes into contact with. Whether from fast-food restaurants to grocery stores, the rising obesity could be seemingly linked to the people having a choice on accepting what is healthy for them. As part of this research, I took the role of primary researcher to take note of the neighborhood from my perspective of identifying what is a food justice in a low-income community? How are the people there are getting access to consuming these foods? Why might it affect both their future and their family's as well?

A part of analyzing the neighborhood that interests me, I had also conducted 3 interviews with the indigenous residents of the community to understand their perspective of the food justice situation they could be facing. As part of the research, I asked the three subjects on their opinion of what is a food justice they see in their neighborhood? How they think about people coming into access with the local restaurants and stores that could be contributing to this matter? Why might this issue should matter to the community overall in the terms of a healthy lifestyle for them and family? These three questions come into mind of how this research would be identifying the cause and effect relationship between a food justice problem like obesity to the lifestyle of the residents suffering from poverty in this neighborhood. The well-known neighborhood of Flatbush, Brooklyn NY plays a good example relating to the research regarding

the questions to the interviewees had answered that provided me with information that were interesting to the point that it connected back to the food justice issue of paper #2.

As a researcher, I can relate to the issues between both primary research and secondary research as my own personal experience seems to play a role as well. From my experience, I included the point of view of my childhood learning the conditions of obesity surrounding me both from school and in general. I had learned the positives and the negatives to accessing food in society especially being a former resident of Flatbush and through the interactions of both peers and family. This experience from my childhood is also interesting because it also shapes the characteristics of me being an adult living in the world of food justice where I feel like I belong as part of tradition and culture. From this research, I will be able to identify what is a food justice issue surrounding the accessing of food within in a low-income community and how is it seemingly doing harm to people's health than good.

### **Literature Review**

What is known so far about the food justice issues in society is the three stages that were presented in Gottlieb and Joshi's "Food Justice," were the food development, consumption and accessing which causes me to be more interested in the access to food in society. From what I had known so far in the local "food justice" issue in this research is

the unexplainable rise in obesity within society that is affecting the population in a negative way. From the studies I had gathered for paper #2 had offered insight on the child obesity in Latin America especially in certain areas of concern where people are struggling due to the amount of poverty. Almost all studies gave a fair amount of detail explaining the dangerous conditions the people living in these communities are deteriorating in health that makes them vulnerable to illnesses that are caused by the increasing level of obesity. B. Caballero's study "Preventing childhood obesity in Latin America: an agenda for regional research and strategic partnerships," discusses the countries' children population are targeted by this phenomenon with Caballero stating "Obesity comorbidities, such as cardiovascular disease and type-2 diabetes, are also increasing rapidly, and severe morbidity and mortality from these conditions affect a larger percentage of people and at an earlier age" (Caballero, 2017). This leads to a series of threats to any person and any age who are facing changes in their digestive system that is altering their appearance, making feel less healthy and more ill.

The idea of the target population being affected by the levels of obesity is not only changing physical traits but the food environment as well. The community's food environment is made up of numerous supermarkets and fast-food restaurants that are generally thriving nowadays that are influencing the children's diet. From another study conducted by C. Corvalan discussed the changes of the food environment surrounding school about how "a study conducted in 60 schools in two of Mexico's major cities showed that there were on average six

mobile food vendors around public school and the number of mobile food vendors around schools was positively associated with the children's BMI" (Corvalen, 2017). This is certainly a factor which could be contributing to childhood obesity in the first place since the possibility for any adolescent student is most likely to be interested in gaining access to these foods that are containing carbs, fat and sugar. From my experience of attending high school, I had not always been a fan of school lunch like most students, instead I decide to sneak in lunch of my own that I had brought from a vendor stand outside of school. There were other students I had noticed be pulling the same tricks as well until I had been confronted by a peer who is a bit of a health freak who says to "not make it a habit or you will gain a more pounds than you weigh". This means that the young generation is pretty much in uncharted territory with the change of food environment leading to more growing customers associating themselves to dining on fast-food and gaining weight.

From what I understand so far in terms of food marketing, changes in both dietary needs and exposure to environment is the common lack of physical fitness that is also being connected to this plague. The reports brought up in the studies that paper #2 offered had great insight on the children's lack of physical health that demonstrates their inept ability to be socially involved. The reduced physical activities are seemingly linked to obesity in the form of the children's routine to be constantly immobilized from extracurricular activities that would benefit them being healthier and less-likely to be affected by life-threatening diseases. This lead to other

researchers claiming that in order to prevent obesity in the countries is make sure that fitness and health are relevant in most parts of Latin America. In one case, Michael Pratt has made several approaches toward obesity prevention that requires the promotions of physical activities in Brazil. Pratt's article demonstrates some necessary details on the matter of setting up fitness programs across the country where "Brazil launched a strategic plan for preventing chronic disease supported by national legislation that will scale up physical activity promotion programs built around community classes to 4000 municipalities in Brazil" (Pratt, 2017). This idea to abolish obesity in these countries suffering from poverty is likely to be a start for the survival of the people's health and offer change to their lifestyle for them not to feel under any stress chronic or undernutrition ever again. For this research, I will be identifying the topic of what is the food justice issue going on in the society of Flatbush, Brooklyn NY to discuss the possibilities on how it's affecting the public in the community in a negative way and why is it so important for people to realize that it is necessary to become aware of the phenomenon that could be linked to obese rates surrounding low-income areas in the city.

### **Method**

The goal of the research I had provided was to be able to identify what is a food justice issue in a neighborhood I see as low-income, which I chosen as Flatbush, Brooklyn. Flatbush was always known to be a thriving location for shopping that attracts numerous residents to spend money on groceries, clothes, and accessories, but one thing important is the

habit of purchasing at food markets and restaurants that has overrun the area. The primary method I tend to use for this project is to offer interviews with the local residents of Flatbush to get a better sense of what is changing in the environment in terms of public access to food, so I could get their point of view of the food justice situation going on in the community. Since the local area is very familiar since I originally lived here during the early 2000's, I took the liberty of observing the geography of the community itself to generalize the layout of the community to identify each possible source for accessing that strikes me as interesting. The idea is to basically understand the atmosphere behind the food justice issue of accessing which can support the theme of causes behind people's obesity.

The interviewees I had gathered for this research are the current, long-time residents of the neighborhood who been able to sense the food system transformation in the neighborhood and what they would see as better options for the future of the neighborhood. I've known some peers who had grew up with me during my childhood who I had reached out to get their own perspectives about how is the community been changing in their own eyes and if they are still attracted to fast food like before. For the interviews, I had recorded the resident's interactions about the topic on a voice recorder for analysis of the reports I found to be interesting along with the notes I had taken while the interviewee(s) discusses about the situation. Getting to understand the important topic of the matter of getting to know their own personal opinion on what is a food justice issue they deem as "unjust" in their society? Why this matter should be recognized by

other people in low-income communities? And most important of all how should the community tackle this problem in order to find a solution? The overall method is taking the account of what it is like living in a low-income area from the people who experience it to hopefully cure the public's increase level of access to the food system, which had contributed to a lot of health deterioration that are effectively poisoning the lives of people trying to survive in poor conditions.

### **Findings**

The process for gathering this research was pretty tough since it enabled me to fulfill an actual researcher's role which had caused me undergo some stress. Finding the subjects for the interview portion of this research seemed like a very difficult process being that Flatbush was a very busy community to form an interview for individuals without disturbing them however, I accomplished the mission by getting the attention of 2 individuals, one of them I personally known. The first subject for the interview is Emmanuel Bailey, a former student I've known from Raul Wallenberg's PS-194 elementary school and my distant cousin who I hadn't encountered since years prior to moving out of the city. Emmanuel has been living in Flatbush for as long as 20 years so far where he took a job as a cashier at McDonalds a few blocks away from his apartment on Flatbush Ave and Church Ave where oddly enough he was a witness to the food justice issue of accessing in the community. I took up 15 minutes of his time to discuss



the issue that is affecting the community he is living in to which he answered in some interesting details. Recording the conversation, I asked him the first question “What are the things he had noticed during the food transformation in Flatbush as of currently?” Emmanuel discuss the environment appearance to which various food markets and restaurants are formed, indicating how “There are lots of Flatbushers (Flatbush residents) who often never stop shopping at the local shops that are literally being occupied by a huge number of people. Grocery stores are always the worst to shop around here because of the way how people including kids are always purchasing things that aren’t really good like candy and all” (Emmanuel, 2018). From Emmanuel’s words, this startling revelation leads me to believe that the accessing food taking place in Flatbush is always bustling with people so interested in unhealthy items that can be their ultimate undoing.

The second question I had provided for Emmanuel is “Why you think this situation should be realized by the people?” Emmanuel was pretty shy answer first but eventually explain the situation with his mother chronic illness that she sustained from the stress of her late husband Trevor’s death. Emmanuel states how “Everyday she would often go into the cornerstores to buy a deluxe sandwich and come home to eat it. But what’s really messed up about it is how she suffered from frequent heart attacks which the doctors confirmed it was due to the increase blood sugar from the carbs in the snacks she always eat” (Emmanuel). By that moment, Emmanuel looked directly into the recorder and firmly states “Do not make the junk

food business a lifestyle boys and girls, always trusts what is right for your heart and soul,” quote Emmanuel who strongly understands the nature behind the cause of obesity and what negative concepts are associated with it. The third and final question that I presented Emmanuel is “How should the community of Flatbush and any other poverty based neighborhoods should take action to find a solution to this issue in the future?” After witnessing his mother’s troubling addiction to the neighborhood’s local grocery market food that are cause of her sickness, Emmanuel offered some very interesting tips on the lifestyle of eating. The tips that are basically ideas to avoiding the likelihood of always taking up habits for accessing food, he demonstrates that “In order to remedy this thing from going global, we must be able to identify what’s healthy to be eaten than what is not and how we got to stop wasting money for soda and candy for a lunch” (Emmanuel). From Emmanuel’s perspective of the food justice issue, I had a great sense of what accessing food in Flatbush can be explained with the majority of it’s citizens taking a liking to what is unhealthy because no one seem to take notice of the very thing that they purchase to consume which is offering devastating results.

The next interviewee who I conduct this research with is a local van service driver named Johnny Wishbone, who had been a resident in the Flatbush area since migrated from Trinidad in 2003. Johnny was able to take 5 minutes of time since he had no experience with interviews throughout his lifetime. I had asked Johnny the first question that was beneficial to this research “What is a food justice issue in the neighborhood he thinks of as “unjust” or

“unequal”? Johnny was confused at first but explained the public’s immediate attention to fast-food restaurants that are scattered throughout the community. Johnny talked about the “People getting access to all of these restaurants over the Flatbush Ave and Church Ave streets, which is also attracting many kids to hangout” (Johnny). This statement relates back to paper #2 topic of “Preventing Childhood Obesity” as there are various studies I used to discuss the outcomes to children being prone to risks of obesity that is altering their daily lifestyle at a young age. The next question I asked Johnny was “Why is it important for people in communities like Flatbush to recognize this situation”? Johnny had said that “To get to know more about what is going on about the health of these young kids who are always coming from school to eat this sort of junk” (Johnny). The impact on children’s health in these income communities that Johnny most predicted are the example of how the habits to food access that were discussed in Emmanuel’s research is almost a number one indicator to obesity in poverty neighborhoods.

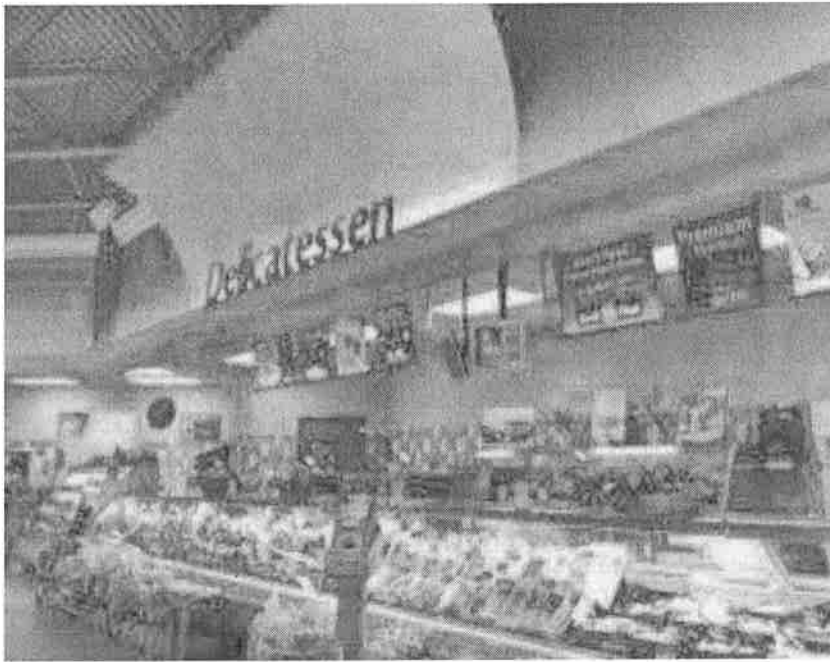
The third question that I presented to Johnny is “How could the community of Flatbush rise up and tackle this problem to find a solution in the future”? Johnny offered some insight that generally requires effort for people to endure, stating “In my opinion no, but there are advantages we can take like going to the gym more often and watching what we eat so we won’t end up fat” (Johnny). Johnny also focuses more on the younger population that are living and going to school in the Flatbush community “These kids has a life ahead of them, a chance to be fit and grow up looking strong, but needs to cut down from the junk food that McDonalds keeps

poisoning them with” (Johnny). From what I learned from this interview goes back to the point of paper #2 about access to food coming into the contact of young children who are suddenly the attention the level of obesity that can provide a stressful experience growing up in a society so poor that makes it look unable to be saved from this epidemic.

### **Observation**

During the course of roaming the Flatbush neighborhood in search of defining the food justice of accessing, I came to observe interesting things surrounding the town’s places of interests in terms of stores and restaurants. I drove through the Flatbush Ave section and stopped at Tilden Ave to take notice of the local Stop & Shop supermarket that seems to be an ideal spot for the food justice issue I am exploring. Stop & Shop was very familiar to me since my parents typically take me to shop there when I was a child; I remembered that I typically get easily attracted to the bakery and snacks they sell there begging my parents to buy them, but they sometimes refuse as it was intended to make me look fat or it will get me sick. Moreover, the experience shopping there gave me a reason to return again to understand the motives of others who could still be interested in unhealthy items that I was. From the observation, I had noticed there are shoppers in the store who typically pick out items in the bakery and chips aisle than those at the fruits and vegetables row. There were a selection

of bakery and goods that had some long lines and also indoor deli which sells cheese which could contain a variety of calories which could be a contributor in obesity.



From what I seen during this trip to Shop & Stop was all significance to the overall topic of what food access in society is all about, which is options and decisions the people makes. I've stick around for as long as 5 hours approximately to take notice of the traffic who would be basically overwhelming the lines for unhealthy food products more than healthy items, which surprisingly appears to be a gathering of kids. This particular observation relates to the research questions that I brought up in both Emmanuel and Johnny's interviews that discuss what, why and how? The question of what is a food justice issue in food access is the locals' decisions

which shape them to be affected by obesity in terms of the emotional stress that triggers them to be unhealthy. The question of why it should matter to others remains a question that might or might not be ignored, the community of Flatbush is always thriving to attract residents to their restaurants and shopping industries that are basically inflicting the problem of obesity on these poor people particularly little kids who seem inevitably attracted to the products being served in these places across the area. Another thing I noticed in the Flatbush community is when I was walking up to my car, a missionary stopped me to inform the possibility of fast-food restaurants are being setup in the neighborhood to get a cash grab from customers. The missionary also talked about the likelihood of the demographics most likely to eat these foods more routinely in the neighborhood is either African-Americans and Hispanics, possibly due to the amount of poverty that has been overwhelming the community. To explain how should the community tackle this problem to find a solution is the idea of the public being aware of this epidemic in order to change their habits and choose wisely than what was witnessed by my perspective on Stop & Shop, where the environment is made up of generally unhealthy items and customers having more access to that section of the store.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

The experience of conducting this research was blissful to the point that I feel what food justice in society is all about. The interesting points that were in my findings on

the issue of accessing food mean is identifying the landscape of health in a low-income community that is likely to be affected by obesity which would be a situation that put everyone currently suffering from poverty and stress at risk to falling victim. The health is what is important for these people living in these communities and gathering information from the interviews and the observation had educated me in the way that I did not understand which was pretty much frightening. It was a great experience learning about the food justice issue centered on my former neighborhood of Flatbush that made me feel like I evolved from being a little boy who was always under the impression that the neighborhood's treats were good to eat to an adult who finally grew up knowing the issue of accessing food in society has consequences that depends on your decisions to define what is healthy. What was interesting about the data I collected is the interviews with Emmanuel Bailey and Johnny Wishbone that inspired me to know more about the causes behind the food accessing in Flatbush. From these subjects responses to the research questions had basically offered a clear point of view of what happens in the future if this situation gets out of hand and the casualty would be immense if there is no change in the habits of the residents' eating lifestyle.

What should be of concern for this food justice issue is the choices these people are trying to make in terms of what is healthy and what is not. It is important to understand how the human body would function if the gravity of obesity is taking over these people and changing them forever if they have a strong connection to the amount of food they eat which can be hurt

their chances to survive a healthy life. In relationship with the secondary research that I also conducted, there were a few similarities that I took noticed during the interview with Emmanuel talking about how his mother suffered from a heart attack refers back to some studies I had researched for paper #2 especially preferably B. Caballero's research. Caballero explains the health concerns of children in Latin America who are suffering from different types of diseases in the wake of this disaster. Another thing I had also noticed that connects to the secondary research was Johnny's interpretations on how children is being affected by the access of food is quite similar to C. Corvalen's studies on children tending to be addicted to food around school is a factor to childhood obesity, since it would be obvious that children take up habits to hangout in these places of interests.

Seeing how a society like Flatbush is impacted by the issue of accessing food is powerful, but does not necessarily mean it's irredeemable, it can be improved. We should be able to identify what is good to shop for if we are to be able to sustain a healthy lifestyle and one thing is to be mindful. It is always important for one to understand the nature of how food is produced the way it is, so we can have generalized an idea that if it's going to be good or bad for health. We need to be more aware of our surroundings in a society overcome by numerous fast-food chains and grocery stores that are selling products made to expose the human body chemicals that could break down muscle into fat, just by purchasing something that looks tasty. People should be focused more on buying a meal with meat and vegetables for their families instead of



French fries and burger with processed meat. There should also be more physical activity that would offer positive change to the characteristics of people's addiction to accessing unhealthy foods. This relates back to the personal perspective of my experience of the issue when I started being more engaged in sports primarily Basketball to the point it changed my habits of getting attached to baked goods and started making right choices for my health that impressed my peers.

Overall in this research the questions still remain, what is a food justice issue in a low-income community? How are the people getting access to these foods? And why might it affect both them and their family's future? From the extensive research I did for this project enabled me to want to find the answers but can't, the answers are what society itself sees as an issue and what they think they should be able to do something about it. It comes down to choices and decisions which determines our function to be able to detect a problem and work together to find a solution. There is no doubt that the food justice issue of accessing food is can cause a great amount of change in the face of the community going into the future, but it shouldn't leave people in fear that it will be something that has power over them because it's really not. To all communities in Brooklyn NY, Flatbush or otherwise please don't let the power of food access take control! We should all come together in harmony to form a plan to change our routine in the environment of food justice to create a better healthier world for our fellow men, women, children to ensure justice can be heard and can be served just like the food we come into contact with.

## Works Cited

Caballero, B., Vorkoper, S., Anand, N. Rivera, J.A. "Preventing Childhood Obesity in Latin America: an agenda for regional research and strategic partnerships." *Obesity Reviews*, July 2017, Vol.18. pp.3-6, peer-reviewed, Accessed 4 Dec. 2018

Kline, L., Jones-Smith, J., Jaime Miranda, J. Pompkin, B.M. "A research agenda to guide progress on childhood obesity prevention in Latin America." *Obesity Reviews*, July 2017, Vol.18, pp.19-27, peer-reviewed, Accessed 4 Dec. 2018

Corvalen, C. Garmendia, M.L, Jones-Smith, J., Lutter, C.K, Miranda, J.J, Pedraza, L.S., Pompkin, B.M. "Nutrition status of children in Latin America." *Obesity Reviews*. July 2017, Vol.18, pp.7-18, peer-reviewed, Accessed 4 Dec. 2018

Wishbone, Johnny. Personal interview. 5 Dec. 2018

Bailey, Emmanuel. Personal interview. 5 Dec. 2018

Gottlieb, Robert, and Joshi, Anupama. "Food Justice." The MIT Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2010.