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| **“Sometimes I just didn’t have the money”: Removing the barriers to consuming more fruit and vegetables. An exploratory study** |
| **Background/Objectives**  Reliable and affordable access to fruit and vegetables (FV) is a growing concern in developed countries, including New Zealand. FV co-operatives are a popular choice to address access and we aimed to replicate this service to test its efficacy in a community living in high deprivation. This abstract presents the development and practicality of an intervention aimed at increasing FV consumption, recruitment, and retention by addressing the determinants of FV consumption.  **Methods**  Design: Forty households were recruited to a six-month intervention. For the first 3-month period, 20 households were randomised to receive free FV (minimum 5+/household member/day) and the other 20 households were offered $5 FV bags for purchase. The groups crossed-over for the second 3-month period. Inclusion criteria: Households with ≥1 child and having used a food bank or grant in <12 months. Recruitment: A local health and social services agency staff identified households using the criteria and safely recruited participants without coercion or obligation. Measures: Proportion of food consumed and remaining each week. Surveys were conducted at baseline, 3-months and 6-months.  **Results**  Recruitment took place over 21 days. Most households (n=34, 86%) were Māori (indigenous New Zealanders) and had a household yearly income of NZD$20,000 or less (n=26, 63%). Weekly contact was maintained with 35 (88%) households, through the entire intervention and all data collection. When provided with free FV sufficient to meet 5+/day, 96% of vegetables and 93% of fruit were consumed. The $5 bags were thought to be good variety (78%), and not too expensive (80%), but 45% did not have the money or could not organise (35%). Participants cite food vouchers, kerbside fruit trees and a local store as potential options (85%, 85%, and 80%, respectively) for the future.  **Discussion**  We successfully recruited and retained participants living in a high deprivation community by employing trusted others from that community. FV consumption was directly related to access barriers specifically cost and transport. Our results suggest that a FV co-operative will serve a particular segment of the population, those with disposable income and transport. However, for many living in high deprivation, other forms of food security initiatives need to be tested. The outcomes data, yet to be published, from this study will provide salient direction for further research.  **Keywords**  Food security; deprivation; fruit and vegetable consumption; indigenous; Māori; households |