11. Food insecurity among Toronto Muslim households during COVID and the role of key Muslim charitable institutions

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INTRODUCTION

Food banks are non-profit organizations that distribute food to those who have difficulty purchasing enough to avoid hunger. The world's first food bank was established in the US in 1967, and since then many thousands have been set up all over the world. In Europe and North America, which until recently had little need for food banks due to extensive welfare systems, their numbers have grown rapidly since the 2006 economic crisis. Rising food and fuel prices and the effects of the economic recession and social welfare reform led to chronic poverty and lack of purchasing power on top of food wastage (Dowler and Lambie-Mumford 2015). As part of this economic recession, food banks challenged by increasing demand have also struggled to raise funds and get community support (Muslim Aid 2010). In Canada in particular, which is the focus of this chapter, food insecurity has become a serious problem during the economic downturn of recent years. It is reported that one in eight households, or 4.5 million people, is food insecure, of which more than 1.2 million are children. In the city of Toronto, 18.5% of the population is food insecure (Tarasuk and Mitchell 2020).[1] This is significant given that Canada is the fifth largest agricultural producer in the world and produces and imports more than enough food to feed its population (Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance 2020). Yet, one in seven Canadians is food insecure not because of the non-availability of food, but due to lack of economic access, to food, purchasing power, income, and market infrastructure (Huisken et al. 2017). Thus, as a household's income declines, the risk of food insecurity increases.

Food insecurity has been found to disproportionately affect people living on low incomes and younger people, including migrant families and those who are vulnerable and marginalized (Anderson 1990). This is not surprising given the wider body of evidence that households with young children are at greater risk of food insecurity than the general population (Knowles et al. 2015). For example, in surveys previously undertaken around food insecurity and the use of food banks, respondents in households with children aged under 16 were more likely to report having made a change to their buying and eating arrangements for financial reasons than respondents in adult-only households (Harvey 2016). There is also an intersectional and gendered element to the problem that needs to be unpacked. In the first instance, women in low-income households are at particular risk of food insecurity, and households with children headed by single women are more likely to be food insecure than other household types, independent of socio-demographic characteristics (Alaimo et al. 1998). They are also most likely to suffer from mental health challenges due to food insecurity (Collins 2009). The effect is worse in racialized communities where there is an actual or perceived role of women in the family as procurers of food and carers of children and where women may make choices that disproportionately adversely affect them as they seek to protect children and privilege men in the household (Power et al. 2018).

It is often understood that food banks are usually accessed as a "pragmatic" or "last resort" response to food insecurity, typically in the context of an acute income crisis such as the ineffective operation of financial support from a social security system, a sudden loss of earnings, or a change in family circumstances (Perry et al. 2014). The concept of "last resort" can be explained by the fact that, for many, accessing food aid can be a stigmatizing experience, as receiving food assistance can force an individual to abandon dispositions towards food and norms about obtaining food, while placing them in an interaction of charitable giving which damages self-esteem (Van der Horst et al. 2014). For many from marginalized and minority communities, the intersectionality of gender and cultural norms adds additional burdens to using food banks. Thus, this "last resort" aspect signifies that despite the considerable reluctance to seek food aid even in contexts of considerable need, the need is so great that people are willing to engage in potentially stigmatizing experiences (Power et al. 2018).

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns in early 2020, food banks have seen an increase in demand. The pandemic has affected all four pillars of food security,[2] leading to an increased number of people globally suffering from food insecurity. A 2020 report by the UK-based Trussell Trust, a charity working in the UK providing food banks, found that around half of the people who used a food bank had never needed one before, while families with children had been the hardest hit (Trussell Trust 2020).

In Canada, prior to the pandemic, there were 1.1 million visits to food banks and 5.6 million meals served on average each month, but the number has increased significantly since the pandemic hit (Tarasuk and Mitchell 2020). The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on food-insecure households who are unable to access community support and has added new individuals and families to the total (Community Food Centres Canada 2020). The report highlights a 5.3% increase over the previous year and a 26% increase in first-time visitors between March and June 2020, while also highlighting the fact that food banks were implementing several new programs to respond to the pandemic. This illustrates the widening social protection challenges facing food-insecure families. One in four households in rental accommodation is food insecure in comparison to 7.2% of homeowners, making it an urbanized issue (St-Germain and Tarasuk 2020), while 65% of households whose primary source of income is wages or salaries from employment are found to be food insecure (McIntyre et al. 2014). The experience of Canada reinforces the fact that food insecurity remains a racialized and systemic problem where the highest rates of food insecurity are found among Indigenous or Black communities, followed by Arab and West Asian (20.4%), South Asian (15.2%), and new immigrants (17.1%) (Tarasuk and Mitchell 2020). In the Canadian perspective, the racialized category represents a sizable number of minority Muslims who face added challenges in how they perceive membership in the larger community, reconstruct identity, and integrate successfully in addition to the physical, mental, and social health, and stigma associated with being food insecure (Soo 2012).

Despite the increased demand, a large number of food assistance services operating in Toronto, that is, food banks, charitable programs, faith-based organizations, have reduced their operations due to the closing of public spaces, lack of volunteers, difficulty in adjusting to COVID-19 safety protocols, and, more importantly, loss of donations (Tarasuk and Mitchell 2020). This chapter explores how Muslim communities have also been affected by food insecurity due to the COVID-19 lockdown and how Muslim charities are responding. It will explore how, in the face of loss of resources, Muslim charities can be mobilized through greater stewardship and a fulfillment of their Islamic objectives to meet the demands of rising food insecurity in Canada. This chapter will explore how Islam has a four-point charter in the Qur'an to define the minimum rights of humankind: food, clothing, water, and shelter (Qur'an 20:119). Thus, Islamic solutions to this issue have the goal of attaining sustainable food security by connecting food to some of its key acts, worships, and prescriptions.

For the purposes of this chapter, food security is defined as "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an

active and healthy life" (FAO 2006). This reinforces the multidimensional nature of food security and includes food access, availability, food use, and stability. It also helps in the analysis of food insecurity as a social and political construct (Devereux 2000). However, it is hypothesized that there is a gap between theory and practice which the chapter will discuss through primary means, namely interviews with key members of the Muslim community in Toronto and people who run food banks. Through desk research undertaken to analyze the primary data gathered, this chapter will propose a model of the 5 Pillars of Sustainable Food Security (5PSFS) exploring Ramadan/Iftar, Udhiya, Aqeeqa, Fidyah, and Kaffara. This chapter will outline how, using this framework under good donor stewardship, Canadian Muslim charitable institutions can address the issue of food insecurity among local Muslims.

THE ISLAMIC RATIONALE

Islam has established a four-point charter in the Qur'an to define the minimum rights of humankind through the provision of food, clothing, water, and shelter (Qur'an 20:119). The basis of any response related to tackling food insecurity starts with the cornerstone belief within Islam of ensuring social justice, or equity, in society, and the example that the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him – PBUH) set for them in this regard. Virtually all of the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) or *hadith* relate to the preservation of equity. For example, "None of you will have faith till he wishes for his (Muslim) brother what he likes for himself."[3] Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the responsibility of humans towards ensuring equity and social justice on earth: as the hadith says, "Each of you is a shepherd and all of you are responsible for your flocks."[4] There are also many narrations by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in which he urges Muslims to provide food to the poor. In one hadith, he highlights the community responsibility: "Any community, whosoever they are, if a person among them became hungry, they will be removed from the protection of Allah the Blessed, the Supreme,"[5] while in another narration, he stresses individual responsibility: "the person who sleeps full while his neighbor sleeps hungry is not a true believer."[6] Islam also distinguishes itself among other world religions by prescribing feeding the poor as a means of expiation of sins or to make up for any mistake. For example, the penalty for breaking an oath is feeding ten poor persons (Qur'an 5:90); the penalty for killing animals during Hajj is feeding four poor persons (Qur'an 5:96); the religious donation for those who are unable to fast is feeding a poor person for 30 days (Qur'an 2:185).

In the Qur'an, God commands believers to "make not mischief (Fassad) on earth" (Qur'an 2:11). Whilst the meaning of *fassad* can be interpreted as spoiling the natural functioning of the world or spoiling or degrading natural

resources, equally it can be interpreted as creating mischief between people thereby referring to human interactions. Hence, Islamic teachings therefore command Muslims to avoid and prevent *fassad*, which encompasses undue exploitation or degradation of environmental resources or exploiting and oppressing fellow human beings. This has implications regarding the duty of care of communities that are facing food insecurity and that have to access food banks as a last resort. This is the spirit in which the discussion of food banks needs to be understood, in terms of how to not only extend the duty of care to those communities but also the need to provide support to those endeavors. The Qur'anic injunction "He placed therein firm mountains rising above its surface, and blessed it with abundance, and provided therein its food in proper measure in four days – alike for all seekers" (Qur'an 41:11), signifies the fact that the foods that God has provided on the earth are equally accessible to all seekers who try to get them according to the laws of nature. As such, not only should all resources be used in a reasonable, equitable, and sustainable manner, but there is an imperative to ensure that there is an equitable and balanced distribution of resources if there is a deficit. Hence, the imperative is on the community to bring about balance and justice in addressing food insecurity and the use of food banks, being mindful of current and future generations.

Thus, Islam places an emphasis on a spiritual awareness that the Creator has created the means and resources for the food needs of all humans to be satisfied, while maintaining a balance of the ecosystem. In this perspective, Islam provides two components of responsibility that are important to think about when addressing the problem of food insecurity while remembering that no Muslim should bear the burden of another Muslim (Qur'an 43:38; 39:7; 34:18; 17:14; 16:24; 6:164):

1. **Community Responsibility** – All people within the community need to be fed, and it is the responsibility of the community. This is based on the following narration of the Prophet (PBUH): "Any community, whosoever they are, if a person among them became hungry, they will be removed from the protection of Allah the Blessed, the Supreme."[7]
2. **Individual Responsibility** – It is the responsibility of the individual to ensure that their neighbor is fed. This is based on the following hadith: "The one who slept (satisfied) while his close neighbor was hungry, and he was aware of that, would not have believed in me truly."[8]

These two responsibilities emphasize a particular response of the Muslim community to address the current food crisis and the issues related to food banks. The responsibility is thus placed on the community to examine all

opportunities to address the food crisis and to ensure that during times of hardship, there is a level of empathy and sensitivity to the plight of the vulnerable.

It is also worth looking at a historical response to a similar problem. From such a historical perspective, a type of food bank has existed through the Ottoman public kitchens or the guesthouses (*Dar Al-Aldiyafeh* in Turkey and the *Takiyeht* in Palestine) in which food was handed out, free of charge, to specific groups and individuals (Haddad 2020). The Ottoman public kitchens (or guesthouses or hospices) were constructed throughout the Ottoman territories, from the fourteenth century into the nineteenth century. An investigation of these kitchens reveals a nexus of patronage, charity, and hospitality. In Hebron, Palestine, *Al-Ibrahimiyah Takiyeht*, a guesthouse named after Prophet Ibrahim was founded in 1279, and since then, it has offered food to poor individuals and poor families, free of charge, three times a day. One enters the guesthouse; no question is asked except a warm welcome and fine hospitality are given. Al-Ibrahimiyah Takiyeht is supported by the Islamic Endowment Funds. It is estimated that the Takiyeht serves between 4,000 and 13,000 meals daily or 289,000 meals in the holy month of Ramadan [251, and 252]. In most cities in Palestine, Takiyehts are open every day in the holy month of Ramadan, offering complete meals to the poor. Travelers visiting the city are also benefiting and eating at the Takiyehts, representing a long-standing tradition of hospitality.

In Sarajevo today, there are still remnants of such a guesthouse/soup kitchen in existence, *Ghazi Imaret*, where people still receive food (Bint Battuta Diaries 2019). The *Imaret* (soup kitchen for the poor) is part of Gazi Husrev Beg's Waqf related to the mosque (1531/938), alongside a *Musa Firhana* (public guesthouse for travelers) and *Haniqah* (school for dervishes). The established tradition of the *Imaret* is that 18 workers are employed (with no volunteers) and that, with one minor exception, the duties pass from father to son. The Waqf management strives to fulfill the function of providing daily meals for orphans, aliens, and the destitute by organizing as many *Iftars* (Iftar: meal eaten after sunset during the fasting month of Ramadan) as possible in the kitchen of the madrasah during the month of Ramadan. The number of Iftars during the month of Ramadan totals about 6,000 so far, which means 16 meals a day if this total is divided by the number of days in a year.

THE 5 PILLARS OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY (5PSFS)

This chapter proposes a reimagination of the Islamic provisions of food security that are mandated through religious perspectives into a model of the 5PSFS:

1. Iftar – Breaking of the fast in Ramadan.
2. Udhiya – Animal slaughter for charity during the Hajj festival.
3. Aqeeqa – Animal slaughter for charity during a baby's birth.
4. Fidyah – Feeding the poor for missing a Ramadan fast due to a valid reason.
5. Kaffara – Feeding the poor for deliberately missing a fast in Ramadan.

This model comes from the collective thinking of the authors faced with a practical problem on the ground, and the need for a pragmatic approach to addressing it using the Maqasid al Shariah approach. The Maqasid approach outlines pursuing the higher objective of Shariah Islamic law as the objectives or purposes behind the Islamic rulings, to derive solutions to contemporary problems faced by Muslims. The concept of Maqasid provides clear guidance and a framework to the process of ijtihad in solving the issues conforming to human interest while complying with the will of God (Auda 2008).

The model suggests a more sustainable approach towards Muslim philanthropy, which can utilize the above pillars more equitably in addressing the needs of food banks. The above five pillars represent potential annual and continuous financial support towards the provision of feeding opportunities for those in need. It suggests that, based on the rationale outlined above, the pillars can be used to address the challenges faced by food banks. All these opportunities for financial support can contribute to alleviating the challenge of hunger of the vulnerable in society. Unfortunately, there is no empirical data for support or financial resources collected within these five pillars which could go to corroborate or challenge this model. The closest one gets is where international Muslim charities highlight the number of people reached through donations received from Ramadan and Udhiya. However, it is difficult to go beyond anecdotal narratives to ascertain the true impact/demand of the pillars. This itself points to a blind spot within the literature and knowledge for this work. Thus, in proposing a reimagination, this chapter itself posits a theory that needs to be tested more concretely on the ground.

With this caveat in place, the question that this chapter seeks to address is whether this model of food-based philanthropy, based on historical precedent and the Islamic mandate of feeding the poor, could be developed within the Canadian Muslim community.

UNDERSTANDING THE MUSLIM EFFECT IN TORONTO

This chapter explores how Muslim communities have also been affected by food insecurity due to the COVID-19 lockdown and how Muslim charities are responding. Through empirical evidence, it will discuss a theory that in the

face of loss of resources, Muslim charities can be mobilized through greater stewardship and a fulfillment of their Islamic objectives to meet the demands of rising food insecurity in Canada. However**,** accurately identifying the number of food-insecure Muslim Canadian households from national statistics is not straightforward since religious identity is not recorded in Canada when accessing public or private services, including food bank access (Soo 2012). The Canadian census asks questions about faith and religion every ten years, and that too is randomized and optional. Yet the number of Muslim households can be identified through the socio-economic risk factors identified in different reports: belonging to racialized and marginalized communities, living in rental accommodations in urban settings, and being employed in low-wage jobs and precarious work or having lost jobs due to COVID (Tarasuk and Mitchell 2020). A sizable number of Muslims living in Canada fall into the above groups. In addition, as stated above, it is not entirely clear how Islamic philanthropy is being utilized to address some of these key issues.

There are few food banks run by Muslim charities in Canada, while mosques and grassroots groups run their own activities to support local Muslim families who are food insecure. It is unclear, since no prior research has been conducted, how Muslims recognize the issue of food insecurity amidst their communities and sustain food assistance services through their philanthropic activities. Hence, this chapter is one of the very few that highlights some of the challenges faced by Muslim communities in accessing food banks and supporting food banks in Toronto. The chapter explores how Muslim philanthropy can be mobilized through greater stewardship and the fulfillment of Islamic objectives to meet the demands of rising food insecurity in Toronto, Canada.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since no previous study has been carried out on this subject in the Canadian context, this chapter adopted "grounded theory" proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), an inductive strategy whereby the researchers arrive at concepts and hypotheses through discovery and constant comparative analysis to analyze its findings (Chun et al. 2019). As the collection of primary data involved interviews – with representatives of organizations that provide food assistance services to Muslim families in Toronto – that include social interactions, this theoretical approach would help to understand the motives, meanings, contexts, and circumstances of action to arrive at informed conclusions. This being qualitative research, which relates to studying "things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, 2), an "interpretative/constructivist view" was chosen by the authors of this chapter.

The idea of action research was also used since it supports in-depth analysis and helped the researchers in exploring, through multiple stakeholder perspectives, several issues related to drivers and challenges that charitable institutions face in addressing food insecurity through food-related Muslim philanthropy. The following guiding questions formed the basis of the research carried out for this chapter.

1. How do Muslim charities view the issue of food insecurity among local minority Muslims? Since the pandemic, have they seen an increase in demand among Muslims accessing food banks?
2. Have they utilized the 5PSFS (Iftar, Udhiya, Aqeeqa, Fidyah, and Kaffara) in developing a framework to enhance their role in poverty alleviation among local Muslims?
3. What are the ideological and operational challenges they face in implementing the 5PSFS, and what is needed to build the capacity of Muslim charitable organizations?

Empirical Research/Interviews

A series of semi-structured interviews were carried out with 15 representatives of organizations that are involved with food assistance programs to support Muslim households in Toronto. All respondents were senior-level executives and staff who hold key responsibilities in large- and medium-sized Muslim charitable institutions as well as mainstream, that is, non-Muslim, charities and food banks that serve Muslim clients. The 15 organizations were categorized into six distinct stakeholder groups to identify converging and diverging themes and to aid in describing and analyzing the data. The respondents and their respective stakeholder groups will be referred to throughout the research by the codes shown in Table 11.1.

Face-to-face structured (in the pandemic context, virtual) interviews were the primary data collection technique for this research. Interviews are appropriate and essential sources of collecting qualitative data that are commonly used in case studies (Yin 2003). This technique, although time-consuming, provides the opportunity to obtain data in a beneficial manner to cover the overall framework for the researchers while providing the interviewees the opportunity to express their views. Moreover, the interview was not restricted to the initial structured questions, and enough flexibility was maintained to probe further if issues that were deemed relevant to the research arose. Hence, most of the time, 20-minute interviews took over two hours to conduct.

All questions were grouped into three major themes, namely, (1) Demand (for food assistance services among Muslim households); (2) Supply (of local

Table 11.1 Codes used to describe stakeholder groups

#	Group/Category	Code
1	Muslim Food Bank	MFB
2	Muslim Charity	MCH
3	Mosque	MSQ
4	Mainstream Food Bank	FBNM
5	Mainstream Charity	CHNM
6	Grassroot/Resident Group	GRS

Muslim philanthropic support for both Muslim and mainstream food banks); and (3) Solution (the 5PSFS as an Islamically imperative giving model that is year-round, sustainable, and inclusive). During the interviews, direct assistance provided by Muslim charities and mosques was discussed, but the interviews are about understanding the nature of the support of this type of assistance and whether this sits in the psyche of the individual donor. Interview questions were arranged under each of these themes (see Table 11.2).

Data triangulation was used to describe and analyze stakeholder views and synthesize the data with the theoretical aspects of the subject to compare the findings around food insecurity among Muslims in Toronto and the role of local Muslim charitable institutions in supporting them in a sustainable manner using the 5PSFS.

Response Rate

Between April 21 and May 5, 2021, we conducted 15 interviews with a response rate of 93.75% as one respondent could not be interviewed. The response rate could have been even higher; however, because of Ramadan, which is a busy period for people from the Muslim community, and the tight deadlines for the chapter, we were unable to carry out a more focused survey. A more focused survey and focus group discussions are being envisaged as part of the follow-up to this chapter, aligning with the research interests of the authors.

Nevertheless, the number of interviews conducted and the trends identified give no reason for the researchers to believe that there would have been a different analysis or trend discovered.

Wording of the Questions

All the questions used for the interviews are standard questions that were developed to foster a discussion with the interviewees about how they understand

Table 11.2 Questions asked during the interviews

#	Themes	Questions
1	The Demand	• Q1. Food Insecurity among Toronto Muslims • Q2. Muslims Accessing Food Banks • Q3. COVID Effect on Service Demand • Q4. COVID Effect on Program Delivery
2	The Supply	• Q1. Local Support for Food Banks • Q2. Ideological and Operational Barriers
3	Solution – 5PSFS	• Q1. Knowledge of 5PSFS among Interviewees • Q2. Implementation of 5PSFS • Q3. Sustainability of 5PSFS • Q4. Capacity Building for 5PSFS

the issues related to food insecurity among Toronto Muslims, and how they relate it to the Islamic principles of combating food insecurity. In some cases, due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, the researcher asked further questions to delve deeper into the responses and gain an understanding of the interviewees' viewpoints and rich experiences.

A slightly different questionnaire was given to mainstream, that is, non-Muslim, charities and food banks to uncover the support of Muslim donors for their cause, growing food need among Muslim households, and their understanding of Islamic ethics and moral obligations expounded by the 5PSFS. For all interviews, informed consent was obtained and anonymity was assured.

Interview Findings

The results of the interviews are given through quotes based on the three themes discussed above.

Theme 1: the demand

Q1: Food insecurity among local Muslims

> Poverty is growing among Muslims because of large families, low income, immigration status, clustered urban living, rising cost of living, high rents, lack of opportunities as members of the racialized communities, purchasing power parity, etc. (MCH-Z)

All interviewees acknowledged the growing poverty levels and food insecurity among Muslim households in Toronto. Seniors, single mothers, international students, ex-inmates, recipients of social (welfare) assistance, recipients of employment insurance, etc., were shown as groups with greater needs for food security, indicating that poverty affects all segments of the Muslim community. The reasons given by the respondents corroborate the findings by Tarasuk and Mitchell (2020) on food insecurity being a racialized problem, St-Germain and Tarasuk's (2020) conclusion that it is an urbanized issue, and McIntyre et al.'s (2014) report showing most food-insecure householders are employed in low-wage and precarious work.

However, MFB-I, who works at a Muslim food bank, disagreed with the assertion that Muslims are food insecure in Canada. Muslims, according to him, due to their faith and cultural upbringing, do not engage in jeopardizing activities and hence are immune to food insecurity.

> Muslims are not food insecure because they don't have bad habits like gambling, drug addiction, dining out, poor money management, early pregnancy, etc., that are seen among other communities.

When asked why Muslims are included in the rising poverty levels in government data sets, he opined that due to many non-eligible Muslim families accessing food banks and those numbers being reported to the government, the issue of food insecurity among Muslims is magnified in the reports.

While this points to a potential disconnect between leadership and the community issues on the ground, the opinion held by MFB-I is not different from many local Muslims' assumption that the normative tenets of Islam prohibiting vices and deception are applicable and practiced by Muslims, whereas social vices are exclusive to non-Muslims. MFB-I's viewpoint perpetuates that notion and ignores the current realities at the ground level. This incorrect assumption prevents people from finding the reasons for food insecurity among fellow Muslims and finding collective solutions.

Q2: Muslims accessing food banks

> Many Muslims don't come because of stigma. (FBNM-B)
>
> We fill our masjid fridge at Zuhar with food for people to take; Everything is gone by Asr. That much hidden poverty! (MSQ-D)

The majority of the respondents, including FBNM, that is, those who administer mainstream food banks, said Muslims do not come to food banks due to stigma associated with poverty and because the food donations are not culturally palatable or religiously approved. They have introduced best practices and organized community consultations to source culturally appropriate food to

serve their clientele. To avoid the stigma associated with receiving support from a food bank, FBNM and CHNM support grassroots groups (GRS) to discreetly serve Muslim families in their own neighborhoods.

The stigmatizing experience of accessing a food bank validates Van der Horst et al. (2014) and Power et al.'s (2018) research that asserted that accessing food assistance can force an individual to abandon dispositions towards food and norms about obtaining food while placing them in an interaction of charitable giving that damages their self-esteem.

GRS gave many examples of women, especially mothers with young children, receiving food assistance without the knowledge of their husbands. This confirms the international evidence in the literature that households with young children are at greater risk of food insecurity than the general population (Knowles et al. 2015) and it is a gendered problem, as explained by Alaimo et al. (1998) in their study.

MFB-F had a descriptive response to this question: "At our food bank, since it provides Halal food, around 85% users are Muslims. In the past 3 years there has been a significant rise in the number of Muslim users. It has been so because of the refugees coming in. Since majority of the refugees have language barrier, though they are highly qualified, it is hard for them to get a job in their relevant fields. The result being more and more Muslims (Arabs) turning to food banks." According to Hunger stats Mississauga, 72% of the food bank users are visible minority, i.e., non-Caucasian in race or non-white in color who are distinguishable from both aboriginal and other 'older' minorities by language and religion" (Statistics Canada 2021).

MCH-C too confirmed the above with regard to their clients, where Syrian newcomer families make up around 50% of their current clientele. "Our clients are trying to make ends meet on limited fixed incomes. Receiving some form of social assistance from the government is not enough. Those who can work are experiencing economic hardships due to unemployment and barriers to entry into the workforce (language barriers, etc.)."

The above observations uphold the findings by Anderson (1990) and Power et al. (2018) that immigrant families are most affected by food insecurity. Being in the low-income threshold, settling in an unfamiliar environment, and not having the social capital that they used to have in their countries of origin disproportionately add to the vulnerability of Muslim families in securing food.

MFB-I continued to emphasize his point of view on the real reason behind Muslims accessing food banks. "They aren't eligible; but they like the opportunity to have a variety of food and dishes due to emotional and cultural connection to food and for social pleasure. Food prices are not expensive in Canada. Everyone can buy it unless they waste their money or look for luxury food."

This observation is refuted by several studies that link food insecurity among Canadians to economic reasons rather than cultural or culinary reasons. Compared to other developing nations, access to food or affordability to purchase food is established as the primary reason in Canada for rising poverty levels (Tarasuk and Mitchell 2020). Findings by Statistics Canada's 2017–2018 Canadian Community Health Survey highlight that the deprivation in food-insecure households is not limited to food but also extends to other necessities like housing and prescription medications and is purely dependent on income issues (Community Food Centres Canada 2020).

Q3: COVID and increased demand

> Our numbers doubled! (MFB-A2)
>
> In fact, we served double, triple the number we were serving under normal circumstances. (MFB-F)
>
> Food Bank visits in Mississauga went up by as much as 40% from 2019 to 2020. Now with COVID, imagine what the real numbers look like! (MCH-C)

As COVID increased the level of food insecurity from one in eight households to one in seven, all responding organizations began to see the heightened demand for their services. Despite being hit by a loss of donations, reduced operations, and social restrictions, all interviewees mentioned not turning away any clients. The majority of them relaxed their intake criteria and postal code restrictions (i.e., catchment area) to deliver food to areas that were cut off from the supply chain and retail distribution.

While the MFB and MCH saw a surge between 120% and 130%, FBNM and CHNM recorded an increase of more than 180%. MCH-C saw a significant increase of 300% in the number of new online applications and walk-ins from people requesting their service. CHNM-A said that they "had to hire a cook to serve 1,000 meals per week since the community kitchen they operated had to shut down due to COVID."

Community kitchens are community-based cooking programs where groups of people – clients and volunteers – come together to prepare meals, serve others, and take food home to their families. Every member contributes by planning, preparing, and cooking food, and cleaning the kitchen. This allows for social bonding and community development. Two of the respondents, FBNM-F and CHNM-A, mentioned having their own vegetable gardens inside the centers to allow clients to pick fresh vegetables.

GRS too saw "unusual" Muslim clients reaching out to them requesting support. GRS-F related two such anecdotes to illustrate his point.

> One day, one of my key volunteers took a day off from food distribution to attend the court. I assumed it could be a traffic-offense related court appearance. But the

> next day I came to know that the volunteer went to the court to face an eviction notice for not having had paid rent for four months. Despite having such a need of his own, he never disclosed that to anyone, not even me, nor tried to receive his own share of food hampers from our distribution.
>
> Another day, two well-known community leaders came to see me. They requested food hampers. I thought it was for their neighbors or a needy family. When I asked the address, they confided the food hampers are for their families. I personally delivered the hampers to them to preserve their dignity and maintain their respect in the community.

MFB-I pointed out the problems with relaxing the rules to support the needy and how that could be taken advantage of. "When we began to deliver out of our catchment area and relaxed the income requirement to receive food hampers, we saw an unexpected surge in registration one night. Upon inspection, we realized a majority of those requests came from one apartment building or one neighborhood. Those were regular folks. They didn't have a financial issue. But since they were affected by retail sector shortage of food, they tried to get free food delivery from us. We then reinstated the proof of income requirement to ensure deserving and vulnerable population get priority."

The report by Community Food Centres Canada (2020) typifies the views of all our interviewees that COVID-19 "brought in new individuals and families to the total" and that "there was a 26% increase in the first-time visitors to food banks" (Tarasuk and Mitchell 2020).

Q4: COVID and program delivery

> We can no longer have people gather in a large room. So we do weekly food hamper deliveries to their homes. (CHNM-D)
>
> We canceled our soup kitchens. Also lost the community building aspect of our food-related programming. (CHNM-A)

All respondents agreed that COVID affected their program delivery and daily operations. Nevertheless, they adapted to the new reality and found alternative means of food delivery to serve their clientele. The COVID challenge and the deepening social inequities it unearthed also gave birth to creative program delivery that safeguards the dignity of an already vulnerable population.

One CHNM opened a new food bank to meet the rising demands of food insecurity issues among its existing clients. They reassigned the role of their career support manager to lead the food operations out of a warehouse. He showed the video of the warehouse to the researchers and explained their innovative model:

> We introduced a "shopping cart" model with social distancing measures. Clients choose culturally palatable food items from the isles. This novel system preserves their dignity and avoids food wastage.

One of the MFBs found a solution to overcome the closure of its premises to the public. He partnered with a local restaurant to prepare hot meals and informed the clients to pick them up at scheduled times while maintaining social distancing measures. He would stand in front of the restaurant a few days a week to greet his clients.

MFB-F's young team moved online from day one. "We created an online form for people affected and in need of food, delivered food to isolated and vulnerable through Instacart, grocery stores and volunteers, and distributed gift cards."

Another organization, MCH-C, aids with debt relief and urgent medical expenses so that its clients can afford groceries, and occasionally reviews clients' spending habits and provides informal advice so that clients can better manage their finances and live on a limited budget. Food banks are not licensed financial industry experts in Canada; hence, financial advice is provided informally.

Theme 2: the supply

Q1: Local Muslim support for food banks

> We don't see a lot of Muslims donating to local food banks. They like to give it to our overseas programs. (MFB-I)
>
> Except for receiving Halal meat from the mosques during the Muslims festivals, we haven't seen donor dollars coming in from the Muslim community. (FBNM, CHNM, GRS)
>
> Some donors have requested for their recurring support to be canceled due to financial constraints resulting from the pandemic. (MCH-C)

It was clear that food banks – whether they are run by Muslims or non-Muslims – do not receive overwhelming philanthropic support from Muslims. The reason, as espoused by the researcher in these interviews, is one of "relatability," that is, Muslim donors either deny or do not see food security as a burning issue among local Muslims compared to their lived experience of seeing poverty at a more extreme level in countries from where they migrated. Another reason is, as a result of the above, international relief organizations ramping up their marketing efforts to benefit from local Muslim philanthropy with the promise of "maximizing the impact overseas," for example, the ability to feed ten families for a month with a $100 donation instead of feeding a mere ten people in Canada.

In the interviews, the researchers were impressed to hear about food banks moving clients away from a dependency model to a self-reliance model. MFB-C, for example, spoke about their organization's mission of promoting the development and independence of clients by focusing on the core areas of education, employment, and community support.

> Our Aspire model aims to make clients self-sufficient, dignified members of Canadian society. In addition to the immediate food needs, we assign them a volunteer case worker to provide holistic support, such as education support, medical// pharmacy support, prison outreach, parental support, special needs support, etc., through a trauma-informed lens. During COVID, the case workers continued to provide 1-on-1 support through remote check-ins thereby connecting our clients to available resources and helping our clients navigate their way through this pandemic. This empowers and motivates our clients to break the cycle of poverty.

Despite the holistic programming model, MFB-C shared their inability to raise $140,000 through a crowdfunding campaign to move into a new warehouse while other "international charities raised millions of dollars at the same time."

It became evident during the interviews that – although few Muslim and mainstream organizations collaborate in sharing the surplus food – in large part each organization operates in a silo and does not strategically use the collaboration to benefit from Muslim philanthropic donations. As an example, during pre-COVID times, a small mosque the size of MSQ-D raises around $400 per day from individual donors to support the Ifthar program, that is, to feed 40–50 fasting individuals. That is $12,000 not collected in Ramadan during COVID due to mosque closures. Meanwhile, CHNM-A, in the same neighborhood, which was operational during COVID, was approached by many fasting individuals looking for Ifthar food. Had there been a strategic collaboration between the two organizations, that $12,000 donation could have been redirected to provide food assistance to needy local Muslims. The potential effect of such partnerships could have been exponential in addressing food insecurity in Ramadan during COVID since each mosque in Toronto receives between $300 and $5,000 per day for the Ifthar meals. The bigger the mosque is, the larger the group they accommodate for breaking the fast.

Q2: Ideological and operational barriers

As a result of lack of backing from Muslim philanthropy, the researchers heard of Muslim food banks being shut down or engaging in a failing operation. MFB-A shared the lengthy story of their food bank's sad destiny a few years ago. "We had to close down our food bank due to high rent and accumulated $90k debt."

As for ideological barriers, we observed that some of our interviewees believe non-Muslims should not be supported by Islamic philanthropy. Some limited it to Zakat, while others included Sadaqa too.

CHNM-T questioned, "Can you give Zakat or Udhiya to non-Muslim clients? I don't think so," while GRS-F mentioned, "We specifically ask our donors to give donations; nothing from their Sadaqa or Zakat."

While the Muslim stakeholders were embroiled in this ideological dilemma, mainstream food banks and charities were eager to receive Muslim philanthropic dollars to serve their Muslim clients with culturally and religiously appropriate food items, including Halal meat.

MFB-I noted a different ideological challenge from their Muslim client base. "We face issues related to Arab vs Pakistani food, hand vs machine slaughtered meat when serving Muslim clients. Some Middle Eastern clients demand us to serve them lobster while some South Asian clients only want a specific brand of Basmati rice."

Many interviewees pointed to the inconsistency of giving, that is, donors not willing to give on a long-term basis, and inconsistency of commitment, that is, donors spreading their donations too thin without taking ownership of a few causes to achieve any measurable impact. This could be the result of donors' and potential donors' erroneous assumption that there is very little need, if any, for local food assistance programs within Canada, and that the governments are already doing enough to address food insecurity across the country.

Theme 3: solution – 5PSFS

Q1: Knowledge of 5PSFS

> We never thought about it the way you are explaining it. (MFB-A2, GRS-G)
>
> I'm amazed to hear that Muslims have regular food-related giving. We only receive halal meat to distribute during their festival. (FBNM-F, FBNM-B, CHNM-D, CHNM-A)

The questions about the 5PSFS (Iftar, Fidyah, Kaffara, Udhiya, Aqeeqa), which the researchers proposed and tested in these interviews, did not receive a wide range of responses from local Muslim and grassroots organizations, that is, MFB, MSQ, GRS. The idea that such food-related giving could be utilized for poverty alleviation among local Muslims was received as a novel food security concept.

For the mainstream non-Muslim organizations, it was the first time they heard about such beautiful food security concepts in Islam driven by Islamic ethics and communal obligations. They had only heard of Udhiya since it is delivered to them during Eid Adha by neighborhood mosques and Muslim food banks.

MFB-I, a representative of an international charity, was aware of the concept, but not in the way the researchers packaged it and elaborated on its potential in poverty alleviation.

Q2: Implementation of 5PSFSOnly the international charities were utilizing all five pillars in the form of money collected to send overseas.

> We send Qurban and Aqeeqah locally and internationally whereas Fidyah and Fitrah locally. Kaffarah doesn't come a lot.

The rest of the local Muslim organizations collect and distribute a few of the 5PSFS in a fragmented way instead of looking at it holistically.

> As a masjid, we have difficulty to distribute raw meat. So, people bring their Aqeeqa cooked. (MSQ)
>
> We give hot meal and Ifthar-in-a-box to homeless people on the road. (MFB-A)

Having heard of the potential of the 5PSFS, a few Muslim organizations and all the mainstream organizations were eager to implement it. MFB-A enthusiastically claimed, "We are going to advertise it on our website right away."

Q3: Sustainability of 5PSFS

> Yes, it is a sustainable form of giving that will emotionally connect Muslim donors to local needs. (MFB-C, MFB-A1, FBNM-F, FBNM-B, CHNM-D, CHNM-A, CHNM-T)

Seeing the 5PSFS as a year-round giving mechanism to meet the needs of their Muslim clients, mainstream organizations fully agreed on its sustainability potential. The Muslim representative of a mainstream charity (CHNM-A) asked:

> We receive large collection from individuals during Thanksgiving and Christmas. Why can't we have campaigns to promote these giving vehicles because these are important and festive days for Muslims?

MFB-I pointed out that the 5PSFS is not sustainable because these forms of giving are luxuries and seasonal. Unless annual giving, that is, Zakat, and daily giving, that is, *It'am at Ta'am* (voluntary feeding of the poor), complement the 5PSFS, the latter would not be a stable solution.

MCH-Z had the same view. He added another form of giving to make the 5PSFS a year-round giving: "Without Zakat al–Mal and Zakat al-Fitr, it is not sustainable."

The view of sustainability depends on the demand and supply each organization faces. International relief organizations and Zakat-specific organizations consider the 5PSFS to be an additional source of philanthropy as they receive a larger portion of the Zakat and exclusively Zakat al-Fitr from local Muslims for their operations. Even mosques that collect Zakat and Zakat al-Fitr in Ramadan direct those funds to international charities. However, for local food banks, which do not receive Zakat money and/or do not want to use Zakat to serve non-Muslims, the idea of the 5PSFS can prove to be a sustainable source of income in serving their clients. This is because, in the opinions of the authors, the 5PSFS represent a continuous source of localized charity and giving throughout the year that is also very specifically related to food. For example, with the Aqeeqah, we know that births are happening every day across the year, and so this can be targeted. Additionally, during Ramadan and the Hajj periods, food collection can be targeted and planned. All of this points to a very specific and deliberate system of ensuring a sustainable food supply to food banks.

The authors also intentionally excluded Zakat from this study to focus on a less-imagined form of philanthropy that could solve a persistent and growing issue among Muslims. The recent publication of two papers on the implementation of Zakat in Toronto (Bullock and Daimee 2021a, 2021b) is also a reason not to integrate it with the 5PSFS mechanism, lest it would have moved the research in a different direction.

Q4: Capacity building for 5PSFS

> We need to raise our understanding of Muslim cultural and religious practices before asking them to donate. (FBNM, CHNM)
>
> It needs a big storage facility and full-time staff. Muslims do not want to donate for salaries. (MFB, MCH, MSQ, GRS)

The difference between the two groups was clear. While the Muslim respondents alluded to the capital requirements, the non-Muslim respondents looked at cultural competency as a prerequisite to building a marketing campaign to approach Muslim donors.

All Muslim respondents also highlighted the fact that Muslims in general do not want to donate to pay the staff or rent the facilities unless it is for a mosque.

The charity overhead myth has slowly taken over the Muslim philanthropy space after having been sidelined from the Canadian non-profit conversations. Muslim international development charities have been promoting the "0% administrative cost" in their marketing materials, and it seems to have gained widespread recognition among first-generation Muslim donors.

MCH-C summed it up well:

The cost of doing charitable work as per certain acceptable standards requires an investment, including on human resources, infrastructure, marketing etc. This leads to higher establishment and operational costs for organizations in this line of work, which are sometimes hard to explain to the average donor. Higher operational costs may lead to unfair remuneration and below-ideal working conditions for employees. This also results in some charities resorting to desperate marketing gimmicks and strategies, e.g., spending massive amounts on Online Marketing, or not stating the actual and true costs associated with the program delivery and camouflaging costs under various direct program expenses or Advertising "zero admin fees on your Zakat donations" policies just to get an edge over the competition etc.

CONCLUSION

There is clearly a need for better understanding around the problems facing local Muslims in Toronto, especially the problems of food insecurity, the role of food banks, an understanding of the history of food banks from an Islamic perspective, and the potential for help from Islamic philanthropy. There is not enough information about how many Muslims are food insecure or how they are accessing services like food banks. This could be ascribed to the stigma element described in the literature and the barriers some face in accessing food assistance services due to language, mental health issues, and residency status, such as living as undocumented individuals. Lack of trust in institutions and what is provided by local governments could also be preventing Muslims from accessing food banks and hence obscuring the data.

About a quarter of Canadian Muslim households have incomes over $100,000 annually, and Muslims are generally more educated than the rest of the population (Hamdani 2015). Yet our findings reveal a weak understanding among donors of the spirit, scope, and impact of Islamic philanthropy and its potential to contribute to addressing the sustainability needs of food banks. Resultantly, there are no initiatives or interest from the Muslim community to help food banks (both mainstream and those run by Muslims) nor to understand how they can utilize the potential of the 5PSFS as a tool for year-round sustainable giving. The deficiency in understanding of both the local needs and the potential of the 5PSFS inhibits collaboration between local organizations, and ergo, money/food is wasted when it could be utilized and invested appropriately. For example, the potential Iftar collection of $12,000 from a mosque during the COVID pandemic could have been used to support an ongoing feeding program at a neighboring food bank.

Further, the lack of clarity around whether people of other faiths are eligible to receive Muslim philanthropic funds adds further confusion for many Muslim minorities living in non-Muslim countries in terms of effective and efficient use of their donations. This will have implications for the appropriate use of the 5PSFS. In addition, Muslim philanthropic contributions that spread

along ethnic lines back to their countries of heritage cause local charities to lose out while international charities attract local funds. This local vs global impact is a real ethical and ideological dilemma faced by Muslim minorities in the West in terms of "stretching the dollar for impact abroad." That could be the reason why the individual Islamic responsibility – that each Muslim should ensure that their neighbor is fed – did not appear to be prominent in the interview findings. Although Muslim philanthropy driven by Islamic principles has survived the immigration experience to a new secular democracy in Canada, the equal responsibility to support local food security needs through individual donations has not survived the immigration experience.

At the same time, Muslim philanthropy has seen rapid growth in Canada. In 2018, the top 50 Muslim charities received 450 million Canadian dollars in funding. Fifty-four percent of that total was received by international relief organizations, while 45% was received by local organizations, the majority of which are mosques, Islamic centers, Islamic associations, and Islamic schools. Conversely, social services such as food banks and arts and cultural organizations received a smaller piece of the pie (Ali-Mohammed and Latif 2022 – Unpublished draft). The quantitative analysis of the above work has been empirically observed in this qualitative study. As one of the interviewees (MCH-Z) said, "Charity starts from home. Would foreign Muslims send their Zakat and Qurban to help the poor Muslims in Canada?"

From an understanding of the gap of local needs, it appears that community responsibility – which the prophetic narrations emphasize – has been ignored. Had the local food security needs of Muslims been recognized by local donors, the plight of the general population could have been seen, and, as a result, Muslim philanthropy in general, and the 5PSFS in particular, could have been reimagined as a solution to a national problem. The application of Islamic ethics to contextualize modern social issues and the relevance of Muslim philanthropy in finding grassroots solutions could have been highlighted through such a nationwide 5PSFS implementation process.

Literature referred to a Waqf (Endowment) model throughout Islamic history in creating social benefits. Canadian Muslims are still a young community in terms of their immigration history, and the Waqf has not entered their philanthropic vision as a potential solution to address food security. Except for a handful of private foundations in Toronto that focus on research work, all charities use an expendable model to serve the immediate needs of the local and global communities.

There are intersectional gendered implications of food insecurity that need to be understood and unpacked further. As revealed by GRS, women in low-income households seem to employ dual strategies to reconcile caring responsibilities and financial obligations: the first is to make ends meet within household income; the second is to look for outside sources of support while

also trying to avoid any stigma related to taking charity or handouts. Often, it is the women who sacrifice their food intake for the sake of their families, thereby compromising future health and well-being.

Further research could include exploring the issue of food insecurity among Muslims by interviewing food bank users. Although Community Food Centres Canada's annual Beyond Hunger reports include anecdotes from poor and marginalized families, the reports do not identify the recipients by religion nor profile Muslim families. In addition, the solution to poverty should be researched from a wider perspective taking into consideration essential items beyond food and holistic services such as wrap-around support. While the literature identifies food bank access as a "pragmatic" or "last resort" response to food insecurity, the interviewees in this study consider it to be a "first-aid" approach that needs to evolve post-COVID to find effective ways to educate and help clients become self-sustaining and empowered to break the cycle of poverty and dependency on such programs.

Thus, the viability of using the 5PSFS should be developed through further studies bringing together scholars of the text and the context. This chapter is an initial attempt to point to the moral and ethical imperative to address this invisible problem affecting both service recipients and donors among Muslims in Toronto.

NOTES

1. It is likely that this number is a gross underestimate, as these figures are based on Statistics Canada's 2017/2018 Canadian Community Health Survey, which did not include vulnerable populations – those living on First Nations reserves, in remote northern areas, or the homeless (Parekh 2021).
2. The four pillars of food security are food availability, access, utilization, and stability (Charlton 2016).
3. Sahih Bukhari.
4. Ibid.
5. Sahih Muslim.
6. Sahih Bukhari.
7. Sunan Ahmed.
8. Sunan Al-Bazzar.

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