

The Black Farmer Project: Promotion of Food Access and Healthy Living By Urban Farmers in Baltimore

Introduction

Research Question:

How do urban farmers in Baltimore perceive their food environment, and what role do they believe urban farming can play in remedying food apartheid?

- Urban communities have limited access to farmland, which can be a barrier against eating fresh fruits and vegetables (Fitzgerald & Hallman, 2011).
- The implementation of urban farms can lead to greater food visibility, and improve food access for low income communities. They also help consumers become more aware of the importance of growing healthy food (DiDomenica & Gordon, 2016).
- According to *The Washington Post*, despite all Black farmers contribute to their communities, they are constantly losing farmland as a result of systematic racism and biased government policy.

The Current Study

- Using a qualitative approach, we interview Black identifying urban farmers about their experiences with food availability in their neighborhoods, with a specific focus on how the food they produce contributes to a healthier food environment, in order to better understand the role urban farming plays in improving food access for low income communities in Baltimore, Maryland.

Methods

Participants and Procedures

- Participants were recruited through email, social media posts, and word of mouth.
- After obtaining consent, one-on-one interviews with participants were scheduled between summer (June) 2020 and spring (March) 2021.
- Interviews ranged in length from approximately 40 to 80 minutes, and were conducted over Google Meet.

Data Analysis

- Analysts first familiarized themselves with the data by listening to the audio recordings, transcribing, and then reading the interviews.
- Interpretative codes were developed (e.g., pattern-coding) before highlighting quotes and making comparisons across participants.
- Themes and subthemes were extracted from the codes. A concept map was created to visually represent the connections between themes.

Step 1:
Familiarization with the Data
Transcripts were read to identify patterns

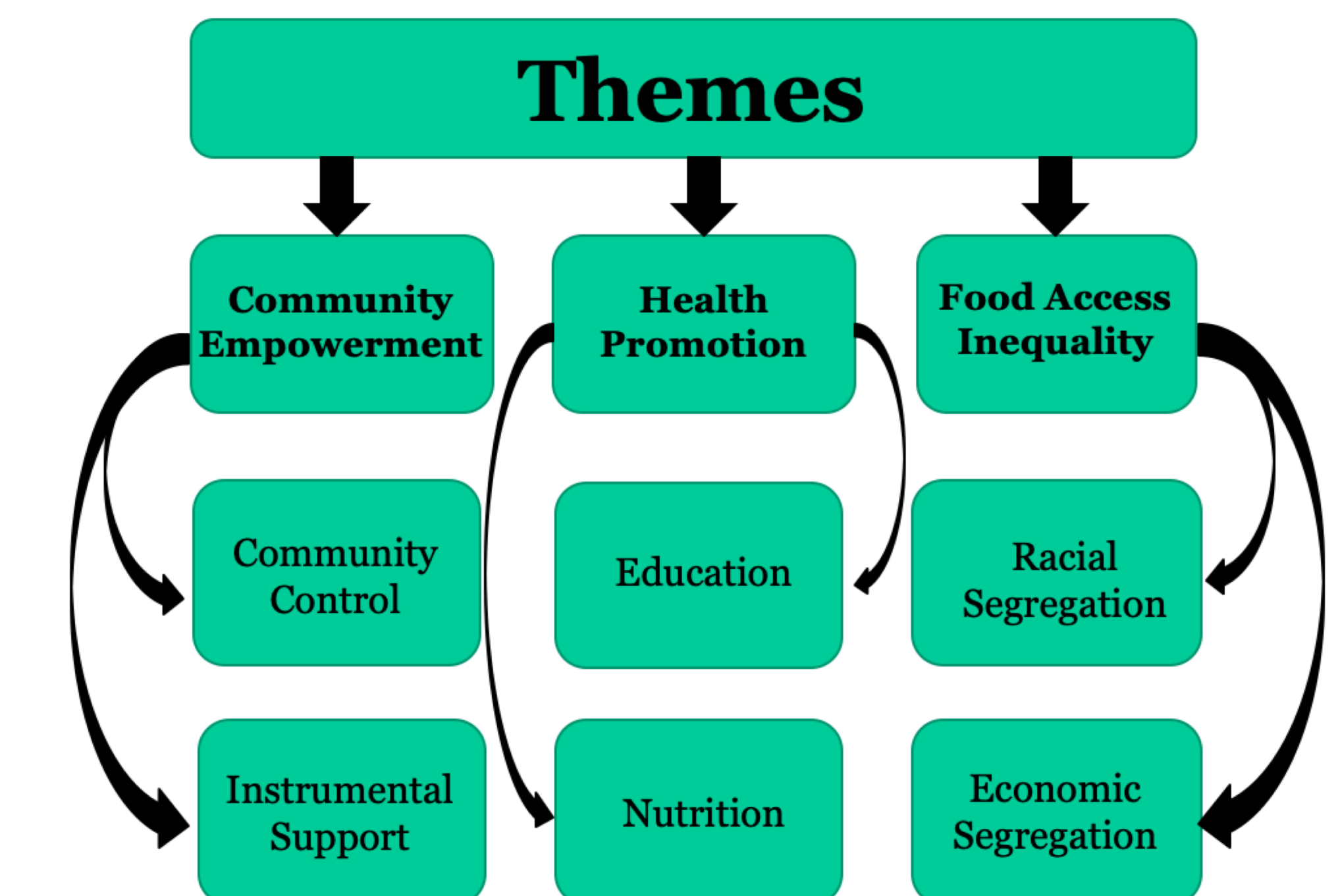
Step 2:
List of Initial Codes
Codes were created to correspond with passages of the data

Step 3:
Final Themes
List of codes was used to identify major themes

Step 4:
Concept Map
Visual representation of themes extracted from the data

Findings

- Thematic analysis revealed three major themes that were found across all interviews: 1) Community Empowerment 2) Health Promotion and 3) Food Access Inequality.
- For each theme, two subthemes were revealed, which can be seen in the concept map to the right. Quotes below represent responses which would be categorized into each theme.



- Community Empowerment: *“I was at a conference where a young woman said I used to be homeless with my kids and then I heard about this program where the city would train you to take a plot of city-owned land and create an urban farm and...now I train other women and my produce is sold to the local school where my daughters go.”*
- Health Promotion: *“I know we're used to boxed and processed stuff, but just getting out of that and going back to our traditional ways... I make sure I emphasize that when I'm talking to...people, they appreciate that mindset...plant-based...kept us going and kept us strong.”*
- Food Access Inequality: *“In Curtis Bay there's Hispanic, there's white, there's black, there's a big Latino population but what we all share in common is that we're poor. And that's what causes us to have the same type of problems...we are a dumping ground for pollutants, the educational system isn't where it needs to be in these communities...we're all faced with not having...a healthy option to go get something to eat.”*

Conclusion

- Findings indicate that urban farmers contribute significantly to making fresh fruits and vegetables available in communities which have been denied access to healthy food.
- Not only do urban farmers provide fresh food for the communities they serve, but they also teach farming techniques to those who are interested, giving others the ability to grow healthy food for themselves.
- A limitation of this study is the sample size. Only fifteen farmers were interviewed, and in the future, a higher sample size would lead to stronger results.
- For future directions, researchers can expand this project to other urban settings, to determine what effects Black urban farmers have on the communities they serve.