

Eating Traditional Foods Enhances Diet Quality Among First Nations in Canada

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BACKGROUND

The Indigenous peoples in Canada encompass diverse cultures, languages, and traditions, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities⁽¹⁾. They have inhabited the land for thousands of years, nurturing deep connections to their ancestral territories and practicing unique ways of life. Traditionally, Indigenous peoples thrived on locally sourced foods, living in harmony with their environment and serving as its stewards⁽²⁾. These traditional foods are abundant in essential nutrients, making them significant contributors to a well-rounded diet.



First Nations Food Nutrition and Environment Study (FNFNES). Document Download. Available from: https://www.fnfnes.ca/docs/TOTAL_GC_FNFNES_Resume_sheet_April_9_2019.pdf.

RATIONALE

Understanding the dietary patterns of First Nations is crucial for addressing health disparities and promoting well-being. Historical assaults (colonization and loss of control over their lands and lifeways) have strongly altered dietary practices and impacted health outcomes for generations. Canada conducts regular health surveys to assess the extent to which individuals adhere to dietary guidelines. However, Indigenous peoples living on reserves are excluded from these surveys.

AIMS

- To assess the dietary quality of First Nations using the Healthy Eating Food Index-2019 (HEFI-2019).
- To identify factors influencing dietary quality among First Nations.

METHODS

We used data from the First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study⁽³⁾ to calculate the HEFI-2019 score across ninety-two First Nations communities throughout Canada. Data were collected from 6485 individuals aged 19 years and older. Participants provided information on sociodemographic factors and dietary intake using structured questionnaires and 24h dietary recalls. The HEFI-2019 score was calculated to evaluate the eating habits of First Nations.

Comparison to the Healthy Eating Food Index-2019

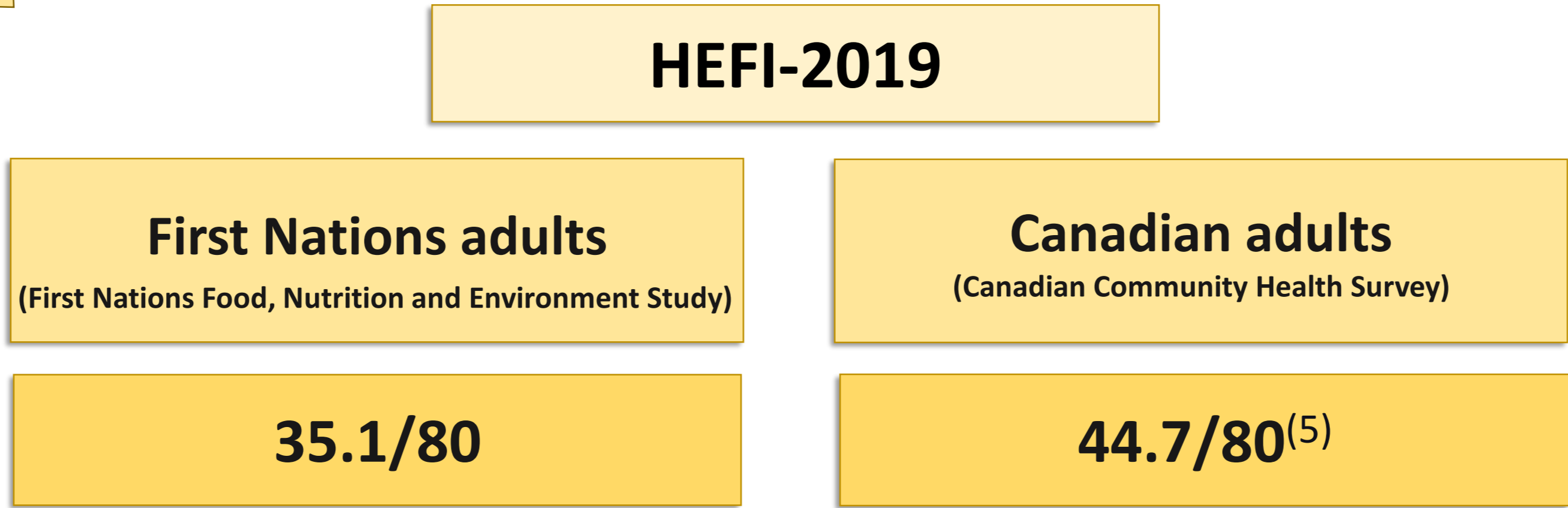
Results from the 24h recalls were compared to the HEFI-2019, an index developed to measure adherence to dietary recommendations based on the 2019 Canada's Food Guide⁽⁴⁻⁵⁾. The index measures adherence to recommendations on food choices rather than amount of food consumed⁽⁴⁻⁵⁾.



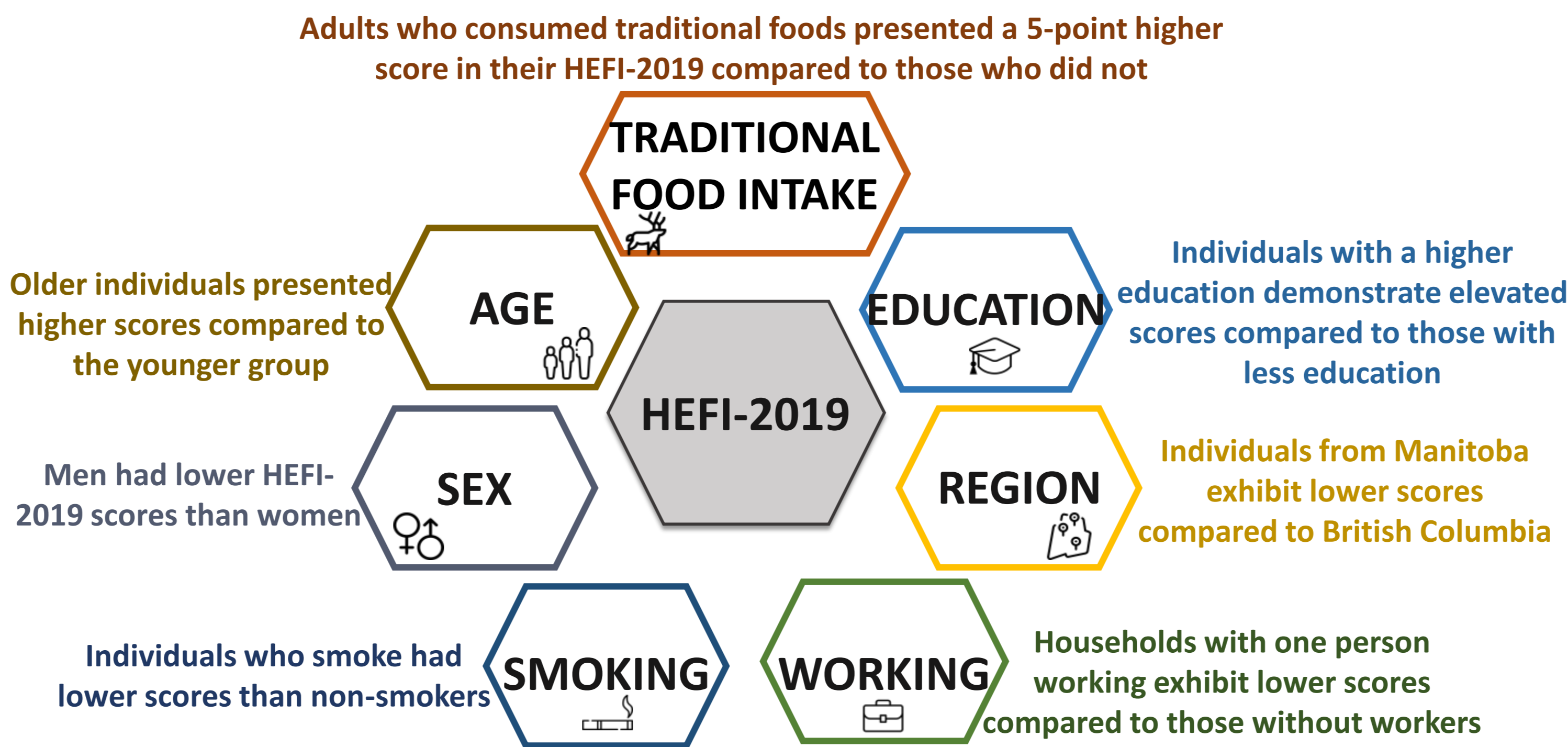
Government of Canada. 2019. Canada's Food Guide. Available: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

RESULTS

1 The HEFI-2019 scores



2 Factors associated with the HEFI-2019 scores



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the mean HEFI-2019 score among First Nations indicates a relatively low level of adherence to healthy dietary choices. However, the study underscores the positive influence of traditional foods on diet quality, emphasizing their cultural and nutritional significance within First Nations communities. By understanding the factors influencing dietary choices, community stakeholders, policymakers and healthcare professionals can develop effective interventions aimed at promoting healthier eating habits and reducing health disparities within Indigenous populations.

Take Home Messages

- Consumers of traditional foods exhibited a higher score in their HEFI-2019 compared to non-consumers.
- Considering factors such as age, sex, education, income and smoking status that shape diet quality holds the potential to improve overall health outcomes for First Nations individuals.



<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/our-culture-is-in-everything-this-indigenous-chef-is-on-a-crusade-for-food-sovereignty-1.5134323>

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

It must be acknowledged that the science used to develop Canada's Food Guide was based on horrific, unethical nutritional experiments that were conducted on Indigenous children in residential schools in Canada in the 1940-50s⁽⁶⁾. We cannot change this dark chapter of history, but progress can be made through reconciliation by working together with Indigenous populations to develop an Indigenous Food Guide that is both culturally appropriate and addresses their realities.

REFERENCES



Feed your curiosity – scan for references!

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