Exploring the Availability and Accessibility of Halal Food Aid in New York City: A Multimethod Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examined the availability of and barriers to procuring halal foods in food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City (NYC), focusing on regions with high concentrations of Muslim immigrant communities. The study aimed to identify gaps in access to culturally appropriate food assistance to inform programmatic and policy responses.

Methods: We conducted a multimethod study consisting of (1) a cross-sectional telephone survey of food pantries and soup kitchens across NYC and (2) semistructured interviews with staff providing food assistance support at a local community-based organization. We used descriptive statistics and chi-square (Test of homogeneity) tests to compare pantry characteristics and analyzed interview transcripts using inductive thematic analysis.

Results: A total of 70 pantries completed the survey: 38% offered halal food, with no significant difference across regions with low or high density of Muslim communities, and less than a third had staff who spoke the primary languages of NYC's Muslim communities. Key barriers included high cost and the sourcing of halal food. Qualitative findings highlighted mistrust in the authenticity of halal labeling in pantries, the limited culturally relevance of pantry foods, and the inadequacy of the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* benefits to meet families' needs.

Conclusions and Implications: Halal and culturally relevant food options remain limited across NYC's emergency food landscape. Addressing food insecurity among immigrant families with low income required multilevel strategies, including culturally tailored procurement, partnerships with halal-certified vendors, and increased federal benefits, to promote equitable and sustained food access.

Key Words: food insecurity, food assistance, food pantries, food access, cultural relevance (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2026;58:224−232.)

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INTRODUCTION

As an epicenter of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, New York City (NYC) experienced disproportionate impacts that further amplified structural inequities faced by its minoritized and marginalized communities. Disruptions to households' social determinants of health, including housing overcrowding, precarious employment, unemployment, and lack of health insurance, all contributed to increased COVID-19 burden.[1] As a result, the pandemic left many households struggling with food insecurity, which increased dramatically nationwide[2] and by almost 10% in NYC.[3] These struggles continue today as more than 1 in 10 New Yorkers face food insecurity.[4]

Researchers have documented the deleterious effects of the pandemic on food insecurity for various marginalized communities (e.g., by socioeconomic status, legal status, and race),[5] but data is lacking for religious and ethnic minoritized groups, including Muslim communities. New York City is home to 750,000 Muslims—the largest Muslim population in the US.[6] The Muslim population is diverse: more than half of Muslims are first-generation immigrants, primarily from the Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia.[7,8] US-born Muslim African Americans make up 35% to 40% of the US Muslim population.[9] Because of structural inadequacies of data collection and disaggregation (e.g., the US Census categorizes people of Middle Eastern/North African descent as White), population-level data on COVID-19 burden and related food insecurity are lacking for these communities.[10–12]

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The Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC) is a nonprofit, nonsectarian organization founded in Brooklyn, New York, in 1994 to provide culturally and linguistically competent, trauma-informed social services, including emergency food assistance, particularly for Arab, Middle Eastern, North African, Muslim, and South Asian immigrant and refugee families with low income. We have witnessed—and continue to witness—first-hand the heightened need for food assistance across NYC and the challenges our families experience as they navigate the food assistance landscape.

To further inform their programmatic priorities and prioritize specialized relief to our client population, AAFSC administered a survey with more than 300 households (August through October 2020): 26% of respondents experienced COVID-19 symptoms and/or tested positive for the virus, and 74% experienced economic hardship because of job loss, hours of employment loss, or business closure during the pandemic.[13] In addition, AAFSC programmatic data revealed that 44% of clients (n = 953) screened for social determinants of health needs cited food insecurity as a pressing need, and the organization experienced a 468% increase in annual utilization of its *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* (SNAP)—a federal program providing monthly benefits to help individuals and families with low income purchase food—services between 2019 and 2021. However, even for families enrolled in SNAP, food insecurity remains a challenge, as most households exhaust all benefits within the first 2 weeks of the month.[14] Furthermore, as maximum SNAP allotments are uniform across states, SNAP benefits alone are typically inadequate to address food insecurity in NYC, in which cost-of-living is significantly higher.[14] As a result, many turned to charitable food assistance provided by food pantries and soup kitchens; use of these outlets increased by 46% in NYC during the pandemic.[15]

The types of food offered by charitable food assistance outlets tend to reflect the dietary culture of White Americans,[16] resulting in additional obstacles for food-insecure households that comply with cultural and/or religious dietary rules. A study of halal-observant families in NYC—families who consume foods that are permissible under Islamic dietary laws—found they are often unable to find halal foods at larger food pantries that rely on federal funding.[15] A second qualitative study found that NYC institutions providing food-related services to diverse populations expressed concerns that clients would refuse foods that were not culturally relevant. These institutions also reported challenges in procuring culturally accessible food, including limited funding, storage capacity, and availability from suppliers.[16] More studies are needed to understand the challenges faced in halal-specific food distribution.

Considering the gaps exposed by the pandemic in the accessibility of food assistance in NYC, particularly for Muslim families with low income who require culturally relevant foods, this project used multimethods to examine the availability of, and procurement barriers to, halal food at food pantries and soup kitchens across NYC and to identify whether there are differences based on neighborhood demographic composition. This study aimed to provide insights into the challenges faced by the Muslim community in NYC, helping equip local food organizations and government bodies with information to address key barriers.

METHODS

The study completed the New York University Grossman School of Medicine (NYUGSoM) Institutional Review Board's (IRB) Self-Certification for Quality Improvement projects to certify that this project is quality improvement and is not research involving human subjects, consistent with NYUGSoM's IRB policy and federal regulations governing human subjects research. NYUGSoM's IRB staff were consulted and recommended the Self-Certification process, as quality improvement projects do not require NYUGSoM IRB review, approval, and oversight, nor informed consent processes.

Listening Sessions

Before this study, AAFSC staff conducted 2 listening sessions (in English and Bengali) with 10 members of NYC's Muslim immigrant community and patrons of a partner food pantry to explore their experiences with culturally appropriate food options at food pantries and soup kitchens. Participants cited the scarcity and high cost of halal foods and meat in NYC as a primary concern for being unable to meet their families' dietary and nutritional needs. They also expressed concerns about the halal-compliance of prepackaged, canned, or preserved food at food pantries in general, noting a preference for fresh produce and whole ingredients. Keeping a halal diet was framed as a grounding principle for their food landscape navigation and dietary choices. Findings from the community listening sessions provided an impetus for the present study and informed the study design.

Design

We used a multimethods concurrent design consisting of a cross-sectional survey of food pantries and soup kitchens in all 5 boroughs and semi-structured interviews with AAFSC staff.

Sample

Our priority regions included those in which > 30% of the population spoke either Arabic or Indo-European languages and/or had a country of origin in Arab, Middle Eastern, North African, and South Asian countries. For the survey, we employed a stratified sampling strategy to create 2 comparison groups: the priority regions group, a random selection of food pantries/soup kitchens in regions of NYC with a high concentration (>30%) of the priority communities; and the comparison regions group, a random selection of food pantries/soup kitchens from regions with a lower (≤30%) concentration of the priority communities. Regions were selected based on Geographic Information Systems analysis of language and country of origin

data collected by the 2021 American Community Survey, as described in AAFSC's Story Map: Affordable Health Services in NYC's Immigrant Communities.[17] Recognizing that the need for halal food options is greater in regions of NYC in which the priority community is more highly concentrated, we sought to compare halal food availability between these regions and determine whether neighborhood composition influences the types of food offered by food pantries.

In addition, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of AAFSC staff experienced in SNAP enrollment assistance and food pantry navigation support in Muslim families with food insecurity. The interviews explored their perceptions of food pantry offerings and whether they align with the cultural food needs of AAFSC's service population, given their extensive experience working with immigrant families navigating the food assistance landscape in NYC. Interview participants were recruited via email, and interviews were conducted via teleconference.

Data Collection

An AAFSC staff member administered the survey to food pantry and soup kitchen staff via telephone between November 22, 2021, and March 29, 2022. The survey was informed by findings from our listening sessions and input from various partner food aid organizations. The survey instrument included 15 yes/no and multiple-choice questions to investigate the demand for halal and culturally appropriate food in food pantries, potential barriers to sourcing and providing this food, and staff language capacity (Supplementary Data 1). We entered and stored the survey data in the cloud-based data management platform Apricot (now Bonterra).[18]

The interview guide was also informed by findings from the listening sessions. Questions probed community perceptions of quality and availability of halal and culturally appropriate offerings at food pantries and soup kitchens, with an emphasis on nutritional value and accessibility, as well as service providers' assessment of the navigability of the emergency food landscape for halal-observant communities. Example questions included the following: For halal-observant community members who access food pantries and soup kitchens, what food are they looking for? How does the food offered at these food pantries and soup kitchens compare to the types of ingredients and meals community members want to eat? Does the food offered at these food pantries and soup kitchens offer well-rounded nutritional value? (Supplementary Data 2). NYUGSoM researchers, trained in qualitative data collection methods, conducted the interviews in English via teleconference. Researchers recorded and transcribed the interviews verbatim.

Data Analysis

We generated descriptive statistics on survey data and examined differences between the 2 groups (priority regions group and comparison regions group) in the availability of halal food and relevant languages spoken at the respective food pantries/soup kitchens, using Pearson chi-squared (Test of homogeneity) tests performed using R software version 4.3.1. We also used publicly available geolocation data for all surveyed pantries to create a Geographic Information Systems map of surveyed food pantries in NYC and categorized them according to whether they offered a halal food option. This enabled us to visualize the distribution of pantries offering halal food across the city and their location relative to regions in NYC with a relatively high concentration of the priority communities.

We uploaded interview transcripts from key informant interviews to Taguette, an open-source qualitative data coding tool.[19] Given the exploratory nature of this project, we conducted a thematic analysis using an inductive coding approach to analyze the transcripts.[20] A team of 2 coders met weekly to discuss code generation and iteratively construct a codebook, which ultimately included 19 codes (e.g., halal food preference, halal food access, and food quality). The 2 coders, along with an additional NYUGSoM staff member with expertise in qualitative research and the NYC Muslim community, then discussed emergent findings and organized them into 4 key themes. A third coder resolved discrepancies among coders by making final determinations on codes and themes.

RESULTS

Food Pantry/Soup Kitchen Survey

Of the 260 food pantries/soup kitchens contacted, 70 completed the survey (34 from the priority regions group and 36 from the comparison regions group; see Figure 1). Responding food pantries were located in Queens (44%), Brooklyn (27%), the Bronx (19%), and Manhattan (10%). Only 32% of pantries reported that their staff spoke at least 1 of the top languages spoken by AAFSC's majority-Muslim client base (i.e., Bengali, Arabic, Urdu, Pashto, Hindi, Farsi, and Dari), and the most commonly spoken languages were Bengali (25%), Arabic (22%), and Urdu (12%) (Figure 2). There was no statistically significant difference in language offerings between the priority regions group and the target regions group (Table 1).

In terms of food assistance type, 36% offered a combination of bags/boxes of groceries and prepared meals, and 64% offered bags/boxes of groceries only. Only 38% of food pantries provided halal food, of which 89% provide a halal meat component. Challenges to offering halal food faced by pantries—those offering and not offering halal food—are presented in Figure 3. A total of 41% of surveyed food pantries in the priority regions group offered halal food compared with 35% in the comparison regions group, with no statistically significant difference between the groups (Table 1; $\chi^2 = 0.09$, $P = 0.76$). Challenges in finding and buying halal food were not significantly different by pantries in the comparison regions group than by those in the priority regions group (Table 2; 55% vs 47%; $\chi^2 = 0.37$, $P = 0.54$). Pantries in the comparison



Figure 1. Food pantries (n = 70) in priority regions groups (≥ 30% speak Arab or other Indo-European languages) vs comparison regions (< 30% speak Arab or other Indo-European languages).

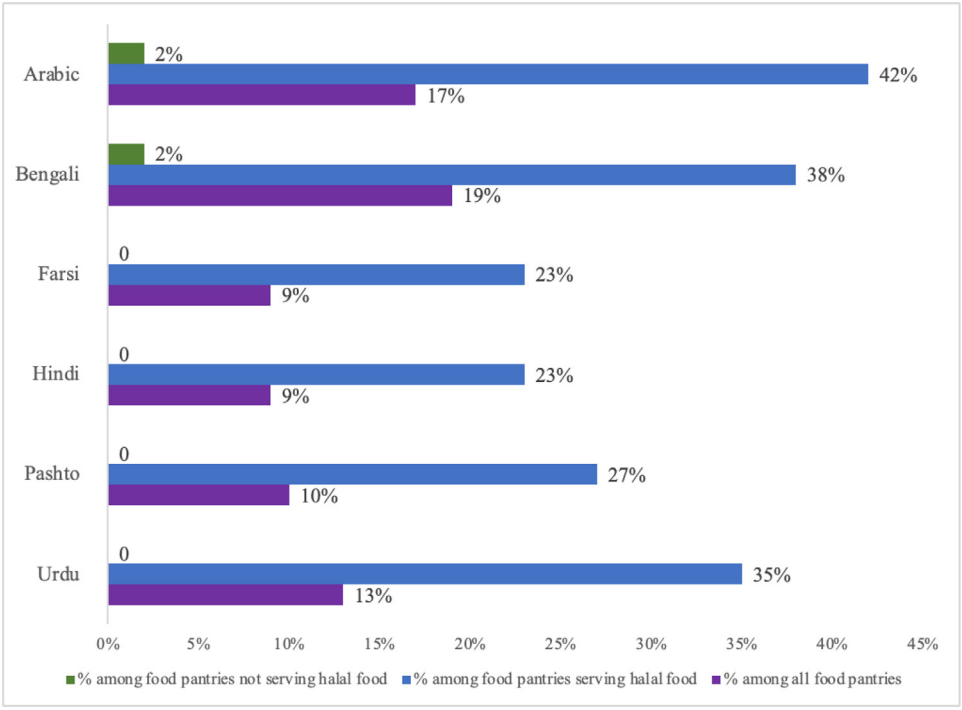


Figure 2. Prevalence of food pantries with linguistic competence in major languages spoken by Muslim communities in New York City among by halal food availability status, November 2021 through March 2022 (n = 70).

Table 1. Food Pantries' Language Accessibility and Halal Food Availability

	Pantry Has Staff Who Speak Relevant Languages			Pantry Has Halal Food		
Sample Group	**No, n (%)**	**Yes, n (%)**	**Total, n**	**No, n (%)**	**Yes, n (%)**	**Total, n**
Priority regions group	26 (72)	10 (28)	36	21 (58)	15 (41)	36
Comparison regions group	27 (82)	6 (18)	33	22 (65)	12(35)	34
Chi-square statistic and *P*	$\chi^2 = 0.43$, df = 1, $P = 0.51$			$\chi^2 = 0.09$, df = 1, $P = 0.76$		

df indicates degrees of freedom.

region group were significantly more likely to report difficulties affording halal food than pantries in the priority region group (Table 2; 64% vs 36%; $\chi^2 = 5.2$, $P = 0.02$).

Of the food pantries that received requests for halal food from their patrons, 70% had a halal food option available. Overall, 38% of food pantries had explored creating or expanding their halal food options, though only 21% of food pantries without an existing halal option affirmed their interest in expansion. Food pantries with no existing halal food option in the priority regions group were as likely to affirm their interest in creating this option compared with pantries with no halal option in the comparison region group (24% and 18% respectively; $\chi^2 = 0.006$, $P = 0.94$). Figure 3 includes challenges in offering halal foods experienced by food pantries. Insufficient demand was cited as the most common reason pantries did not supply a halal food option (60%), followed by logistical difficulties (37%). Some (9%) reported that creating a halal food option was complicated by their dependence on food donations – including from larger food bank organizations—which limited their autonomy to create customized offerings. Among food pantries that provided halal foods, the most commonly reported challenge was difficulty finding and buying halal food products (59%), followed by insufficient funds and resources to afford halal food (30%); though these were not significantly different from those that did not provide halal food. Logistical barriers were significantly greater for those without halal options compared with those with halal options (37% vs 19%; $\chi^2 = 5.4$, degrees of freedom = 1, $P = 0.02$)

Key Informant Interviews

We interviewed 5 staff members from AAFSC, all of whom have deep expertise in navigating immigrant families. Their extensive experience enabled them to comprehensively describe their experiences and common challenges, allowing us to reach saturation despite the small sample size. Interviews yielded 4 main findings on the accessibility and equity of the emergency food landscape for halal-observant communities.

Theme 1: Expectation around the availability of halal food. According to AAFSC's staff, Muslim clients did their best to adapt to available offerings, but they "don't expect to be catered to." Staff no. 1 recalled a Thanksgiving food distribution event in 2021 in which, despite advocacy by AAFSC's staff for the provision of a halal meat option, no meat

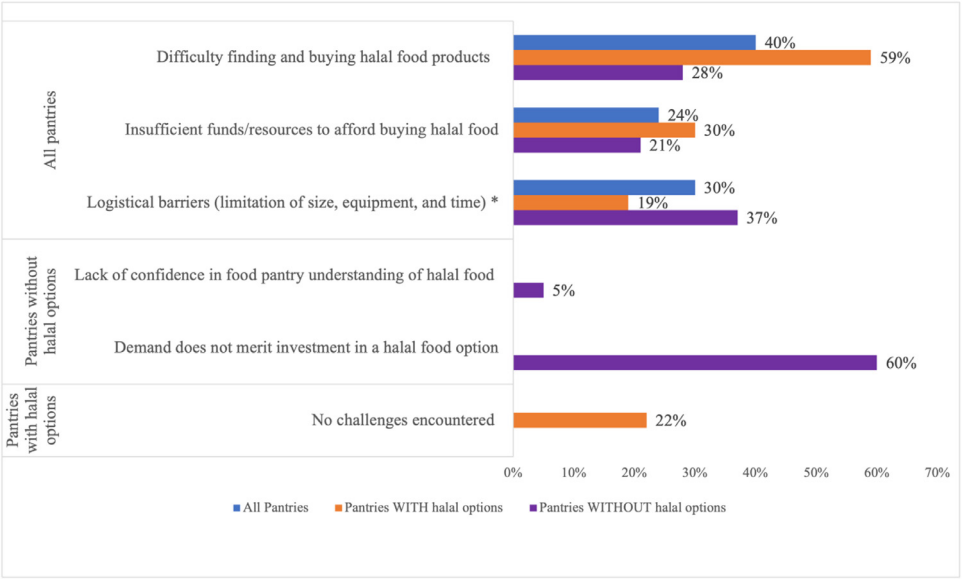


Figure 3. Challenges reported by food pantries serving a halal food option (n = 27) and no halal food option (n = 43) in New York City from November 2021 through March 2022. *$P < 0.05$.

Table 2. Regional Differences in Reported Challenges Related to Halal Food Procurement and Cost

	Organization Experiences Challenges in Finding and Buying Halal Hood			Organization Experiences Challenges Affording Halal Food		
Sample Group	**No, n (%)**	**Yes, n (%)**	**Total, n**	**No, n (%)**	**Yes, n (%)**	**Total, n**
Priority regions group	19 (53)	17 (47)	36	23 (64)	13 (36)	36
Comparison regions group	15 (45)	18 (55)	33	12 (36)	21 (64)	33
Chi-square statistic and *P*	$\chi^2 = 0.37$, df = 1, $P = 0.54$			$\chi^2 = 5.2$, df = 1, $P = 0.02$		

df indicates degrees of freedom.

alternative was made available, resulting in many Muslim clients leaving the distribution empty-handed.

Many Muslims also exercise caution in selecting options at food pantries, as most do not offer explicitly halal options. Staff no. 2 explained that her clients did not expect to find halal meat explicitly but sought options that could help them keep halal. She reported that clients were

> *"more mindful about what they're taking. . .they would strictly [take] vegetables [and] groceries that are permissible. And if there is a canned item, I think they might hesitate."*

On the rare occasion that a halal food option is explicitly offered, community members often do not trust its authenticity.

> *There was a food pantry serving halal chicken tenders. They were frozen, but I observed 2 clients who declined to take those chicken tenders and instead took the fish because they know that, irrespective of whether it's halal or nonhalal, it's still fish. So, it's always going to be considered halal and permissible.* [Staff no. 2]

She attributed this hesitation to mistrust in food pantries, their limited rapport with community members, and the lack of communication about food sourcing. She also suggested that food pantries providing whole ingredients gave Muslim families agency over their food selection and halal observance.

Theme 2: Culturally specific considerations for halal food need and availability . Interviewees reported concerns around the availability of food—beyond halal—that align with the cultural diets and practices of the diverse Muslim communities of NYC. Staff no. 1 mentioned that even when food banks had nonprocessed foods available, they were often generic and did not reflect the preferences of priority communities. In addition, Staff no. 3 explained that her clients often noted an inability to find atta flour, a staple in many South Asian and Middle Eastern diets.

> *There's this specific wheat flour that they use to make flatbread and that I have never seen at any food pantry. And the food pantries are saying no, instead they do offer all-purpose flour, which again, isn't much of what we use in our homes on an everyday basis.* [Staff no. 3]

The food pantry referenced did not carry this product despite their majority-Muslim patronage and proximity to a large South Asian community in Queens.

Theme 3: Deficiencies in SNAP and public benefits. Interviewees reported that clients frequently needed to access food pantries to supplement their SNAP benefits. As described by Staff no. 4, "I always see [clients whom I enroll in SNAP] at food distributions." Interviewees explained that the high cost of food and the inflated cost of halal food at many halal stores led many families to exhaust their SNAP allotments quickly, necessitating pantry use. "They'll probably be paying 10% to 20% more at a halal food store and they tend to run out of their benefits faster," explained Staff no. 3.

Theme 4: Proposed models for halal food assistance. Interviewees identified several organizations that reliably distributed halal and culturally relevant food assistance to meet the unique needs of Muslim communities. These organizations were geared toward serving Muslim communities, indicating an inherent motivation to tailor their services and establish trust with their halal-observant patrons. Staff no. 1 stated that these organizations "provide food bags to families...it goes very, very quickly." However, staff also identified a nonspecialized organization that reliably serves the Muslim community in Brooklyn by fulfilling halal box orders that supplement donated produce with halal meat purchased from a well-known and trusted halal grocery store. Interviewees also endorsed market-style food distribution centers as an alternative to prepackaged food boxes, which allowed patrons to select suitable food items themselves. Describing these market-style distributors, Staff no. 1 stated that

> *"it's wonderful to see that...providers are moving to more of a community market style. I think that really is the way forward, where people can shop for their own things."*

DISCUSSION

Our multimethod study indicated significant gaps in the availability and acceptability of halal food in NYC, as well as barriers for food assistance organizations in sourcing halal foods. Moreover, it highlights additional considerations to improve trust and communication around halal food sourcing and additional

distribution models that cater to diverse food preferences. Our study contributes valuable evidence on halal food accessibility in NYC, an area that has been largely overlooked in the food insecurity literature, by integrating citywide pantry data with community-informed qualitative insights to illuminate the barriers uniquely affecting Muslim immigrant families.

Notably, our survey findings highlight the limited availability of halal food even in pantries located in neighborhoods with sizable Muslim communities. Previous studies have also found a lack of culturally diverse foods for clients in food distribution outlets.[16,21,22] Without a comprehensive guide of specialized food offerings in pantries, Muslim families have difficulty locating relevant pantries and accessing much-needed food resources. This challenge is reflected in the broader literature showing that transportation and difficulty locating pantries are both significant barriers to access among immigrant and minoritized communities.[23–25] The pressing need for a navigable resource for food pantries in NYC catalyzed the development of our Halal Food Pantry map (Figure 1). In addition, our study indicated that clients who received SNAP benefits still had unmet food needs and needed to access food pantries, consistent with previous literature.[26]

Even in pantries that do offer halal food options, utilization by Muslim families is not automatic. Our findings revealed the importance of establishing trust between food aid distributors and halal-observant community members. Studies have demonstrated that language barriers led to limited knowledge of food resources among minoritized groups.[4,27,28] Conversely, beneficiaries reported preferences for, and greater satisfaction with, food pantries with culturally congruent staff who speak their language.[29–31] Our study shows the limited availability of food pantries with staff speaking Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, Hindi, Pashto, and Farsi in NYC. Language barriers are especially problematic for Muslim clients, who often seek assurances on the authenticity of halal meat status.[32,33] In addition, food pantries report clients are less likely to consume unfamiliar foods and may discard those that do not fit cultural preferences.[16,21] Studies suggest that trust, information sharing, and practical assistance are key to creating a supportive environment in food pantries,[34,35] which food pantries may achieve with language concordance.[16]

The ability to procure and offer halal foods in pantries is hindered by several challenges, including logistical issues (e.g., reliance on food donations) and, more importantly, cost. While halal meat is generally more expensive, inflation of the prices of all food goods has aggravated the already tenuous financial situation of food pantries.[36] Food pantries in NYC have previously reported similar challenges in acquiring culturally relevant food, including funding constraints and relying on larger food banks or vendors with limited food offerings.[16] To combat these challenges, interviewees suggested establishing partnerships with reliable halal food vendors as well as market-style food distribution centers, which follow a food choice model. Both approaches have been shown to allow greater flexibility in client food offerings.[16,31] The client-choice model not only facilitates access to culturally preferred foods but also maintains the agency and dignity of food pantry beneficiaries, which may improve nutritional outcomes and dietary habits.[36] While this model offers an alternative to the traditional food pantry model, it also requires additional staffing and financial resources.[16]

This study has several limitations. First, our survey sample was drawn from a publicly available list of food banks and soup kitchens across NYC, which is not exhaustive and may have excluded existing or newer pantries that emerged postpandemic. In addition, we had a modest survey response rate among food pantries; participating pantries may be different than nonrespondents. Second, our survey instrument was developed by the study team for the pragmatic purposes of the study and was not pilot-tested. Third, this study was informed by a listening session with members of a local Muslim immigrant community, who do not represent the entire Muslim population in NYC, which is not a monolith but rather encompasses diverse communities. While some needs and priorities may be shared, each community may have unique needs and preferences that can inform the services of community organizations and pantries alike.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND POLICY

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the structural inequities experienced by immigrant and minoritized communities, including Muslim communities, leading to heightened food insecurity.[13] Access to charitable food assistance is essential for many families with low income, including those targeted in our study. The landscape of food assistance in NYC in 2025 largely overlooks Muslim communities' dietary needs, limiting their ability to equally benefit from food resources. This data supports the need for food assistance initiatives to build cultural and linguistic competency and engage with local communities. This practice will build bidirectional trust between food assistance providers and communities, deepen their understanding of community needs and preferences, and facilitate the provision of equitable assistance. Language competency would allow food pantry staff to communicate how halal foods are being sourced. In addition, a shared understanding of the priority communities' cultural and religious contexts can aid food pantry staff in building patrons' trust in the permissibility of foods labeled as halal.

In addition, the dramatic increase in emergency food assistance utilization generally, and particularly among SNAP beneficiaries, indicates that federal nutrition assistance programs are not sufficient to meet the needs of families with low income.[37] The demonstrated benefit of direct cash payments—through stimulus checks and unemployment benefits—on reducing food insecurity during the pandemic points to an urgent need to reevaluate and increase SNAP allotments.[38] This need is especially

salient for families seeking halal foods, who often face higher prices and limited availability, further straining already insufficient SNAP benefits and exacerbating inequities in food access.

Ultimately, addressing food insecurity will require a commitment to strengthening, rather than diminishing, the systems that ensure families can meet their basic nutritional needs. Building on our findings and the broader literature, food pantries could establish and strengthen partnerships with local community organizations and halal-certified vendors to ensure consistent access to culturally appropriate foods. Pantries can also adopt a market-style, client-choice distribution model that emphasizes client agency in the selection of food. State and city agencies may consider prioritizing funding mechanisms that enable local pantries to procure culturally appropriate food and build cultural and linguistic capacity. At the policy level, increasing SNAP allotments is critical to meet the food and nutrition needs of households with low income, particularly in high-cost cities such as NYC. In addition, the *Emergency Food Assistance Program* could consider expanding culturally tailored procurement to reflect the diversity of communities served. Future research may examine the effectiveness of culturally tailored food assistance models on food security, diet quality, and trust in food aid in diverse communities. Implementation research can assess the feasibility, sustainability, and potential for scalability of these models.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors have not stated any conflicts of interest.

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SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2025.12.007.

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