How important is bushmeat for food and nutrition security? A study among rural and urban dwellers of the Brazilian Amazon

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For over a decade, conservationists have claimed that bushmeat is vital for supporting food and nutrition security (FNS) of rural populations living in and around tropical forests. Nonetheless, there remains scant evidence to support this claim and even greater uncertainty around the importance of bushmeat to the urban poor. Urban populations are typically reported as exerting the highest pressure on bushmeat, greatly impacting rural populations that depend of it the most. However, many urban poor have rural origins and still rely on rural livelihoods. We investigated the importance of bushmeat for supporting FNS for rural and urban households in remote locations of the Brazilian Amazon, characterized by high forest cover and multi-dimensional poverty. We conducted an interview-based survey in 1,111 randomly selected households in 4 municipalities. We measured household food security, using a scale on food security perception, and anemia in children, through hemoglobin levels, as a proxy of nutrition security. Bushmeat consumption was more frequent and made up a larger portion of animal protein (herein ‘importance’) in rural households, and in poorer urban households compared to those wealthier. Food insecurity and anemia were prevalent in both locations, though higher in rural ones. Increased frequencies of bushmeat consumption helped protect against food insecurity in poor urban households, while in rural households decreased food insecurity was associated with bushmeat importance compared to other meat types. Although weakly, bushmeat consumption was associated with higher hemoglobin levels, but only in poor rural households. As bushmeat showed more important to rural households, depletion from overhunting is therefore likely to affect them the most, as often stated in the literature. Bushmeat prevented anemia in rural areas only slightly, but was not important in urban locations, probably due to higher availability of other meat types in the latter. We therefore found evidence supporting the original claim that bushmeat is important for FNS for rural dwellers, but we also found it might be important for the urban poor. However, our results on anemia suggest that social determinants of health, such as sanitation and health care, may have a greater impact on nutrition than meat consumption.