

Food Banks: An Insight into Food Insecurity and the Accessibility of a Healthy Diet

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KEY DEFINITIONS

Food Insecurity/Food Poverty
"limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways" (Taylor and Loopstra, 2016, pp3).

Healthy Diets
Includes 5 portions of fresh fruit and veg a day, legumes, nuts and wholegrains, less than 10% of total energy intake from free sugars, less than 30% of total energy intake from fats, and less than 5g of salt. (WHO, 2022).

Food Banks
Non-profit organisations that distribute food (often non-perishable items) to families experiencing economic hardship which has been donated by members of the public, schools, supermarkets and surplus food organisations (The Trussell Trust, no date).

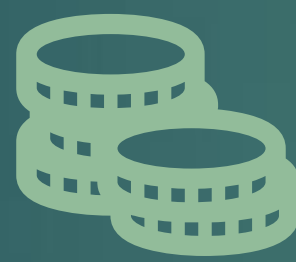
RESEARCH BACKGROUND



•Food bank use in the UK has increased significantly over recent years.



•Food bank use is driven by economic need, in particular due to low incomes which is coupled with the increasing costs of living.



•Structuration Theory: food insecurity is caused by an intersection of structural and individual factors since our practices of agency (eg deciding to take drugs or having an unhealthy diet) are determined and influenced by our surrounding social structures, such as housing stock and education (Giddens, 1986).



•People from lower-income households are more likely to experience obesity and other health related problems as they gravitate towards energy-dense, highly-processed junk food as this is believed to be cheaper than healthier alternatives (Adams, 2020).



•Despite the implementation of the NHS, health inequalities in the UK still persist.



•By December 2013, scholars writing in the British Medical Journal claimed that hunger in the UK had reached a level of a "public health emergency" (Taylor-Robinson et al. 2013, pp1).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Which individuals in London have to resort to food banks?

2. What factors cause individuals in London to resort to food banks?

3. Do the products administered by food banks in London meet the requirements of a healthy diet, as stipulated by the World Health Organisation?

- Ethical approval was granted by the Oxford Brookes Ethics Committee.
- Systematic sampling - London Boroughs with different average household incomes.
- 8 semi-structured interviews including 1 pilot interview.
- Pilot interviews are useful for 'novice researchers' as they can become better informed about the challenges that may arise in the interview process (Malmqvist et al. 2019).
- Interview transcriptions
- Thematic analysis.

RESEARCH METHODS

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A combination of both structural and individual factors lead people to resort to food banks.

"What we found is that a lot of clients who are on benefits, maybe last year they would cope more easily, but now with the increase in prices of fuel and heating and gas and electricity - all these things have gone up. So whereas maybe £100 a week benefits would work for you to eat and keep your house warm, now it's not enough." (Liam, Dad's House).

Mental health issues

Effects of COVID-19 pandemic:

- Increase in use of food banks from
- International students: due to loss of both formal and informal financial support.
- Those reliant on funds from the Department for Work and Pensions: due to delays in payments.

The effectiveness of food banks

- A good temporary safety net, but they don't lift people out of the poverty cycle. Language courses, CV writing support and IT skills development could be more useful.
- Food banks are successful at diverting edible food from doing to landfill

Stigma

- Many food bank users feel ashamed and embarrassed that they cannot afford their own food.
- The voucher and referral system is dehumanising "[the voucher system] challenges people, it challenges their status quo.....a lot of people don't want to have that challenge (Megan, Richmond Food Bank).

Refugees and people seeking asylum

- Resort to food banks because they have no recourse to public funds.
- Not permitted to work.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Abolish the food bank voucher and referral system in order to reduce issues with stigma. To improve the accessibility of a healthy diet, education on cooking and nutrition should be implemented universally at a primary school level.

Health Inequalities

- Overall the food supplied by food banks largely follow in line with the WHO requirements of a healthy diet, albeit more established food banks are more successful at this.
- Other barriers in attaining a healthy diet exist, including cultural differences, a lack of knowledge on how to cook healthy meals and inadequate cooking facilities.

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