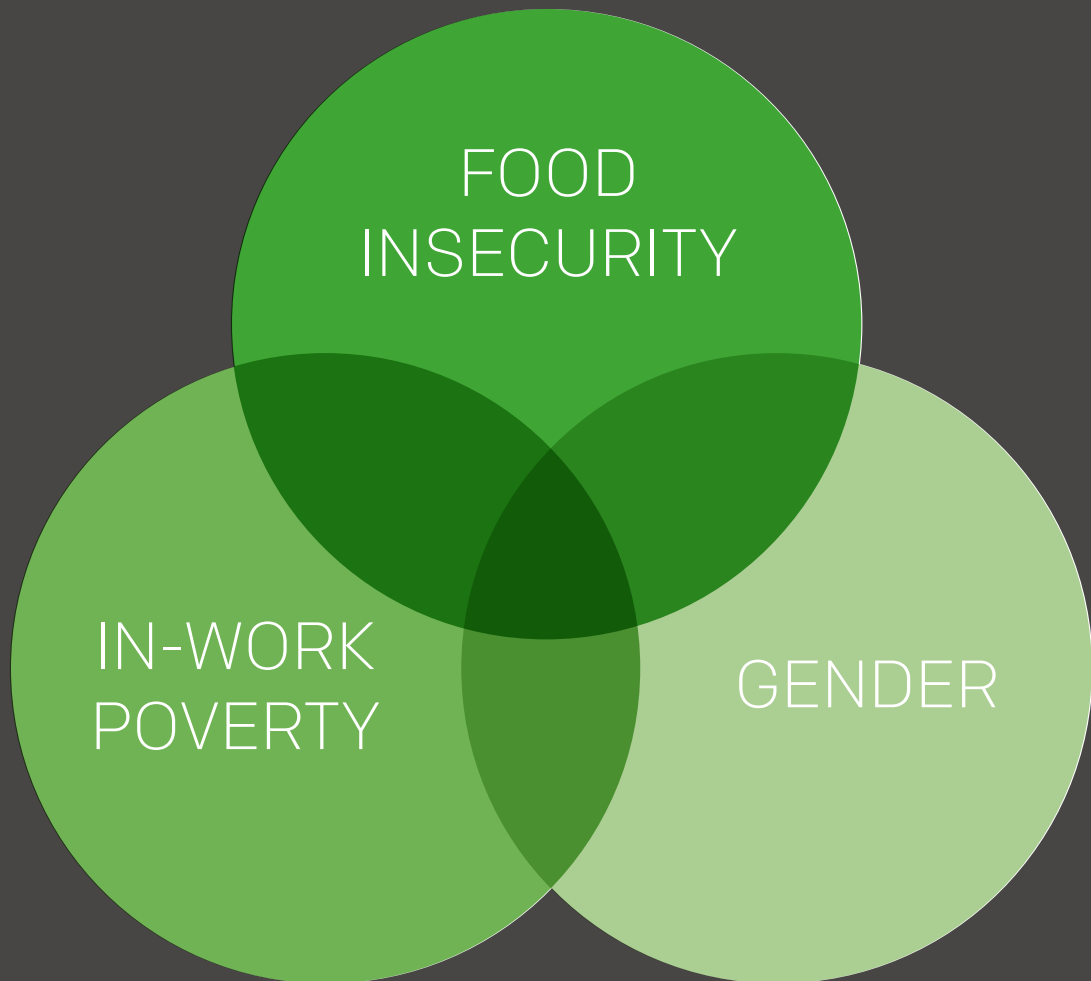


Report No. 6

Food insecurity, in-work poverty and gender: a literature review



Damian Dempsey
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The UWS-Oxfam Partnership: 'For a more equitable and sustainable Scotland'

The UWS-Oxfam Partnership is a formally established relationship between the two organisations, underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding. The Partnership emerged in 2011 as a result of prior collaborative work between UWS staff and Oxfam and its community partner organisations, revolving around the development of Oxfam's anti-poverty advocacy and campaigning in Scotland. The Partnership has comprised:

- A research and knowledge exchange, linking UWS academics with Oxfam Scotland and community organisations in collaborative projects;
- A programme of placements and work-related learning and volunteering opportunities, enabling UWS students to contribute to the work of Oxfam Scotland and community organisations while developing their knowledge, experience and skills;
- The UWS-Oxfam Policy Forum, which brings all of these partners together with a broad range of external organisations from across all sectors of Scottish society, to discuss key questions and to inform understanding and engagement with both existing and emergent issues;
- A series of Collaborative Research Reports, available from the Partnership's website – www.uwsoxfampartnership.org.uk.

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Executive summary

This rapid literature review focusses on how, in the UK, food insecurity intersects with in-work poverty and gender. The review considers both academic and grey literature and takes into account literature published between 2012 and 2019. From the literature, three themes and also a range of recommendations to reduce food insecurity emerged.

Theme 1: Routes into food insecurity

Several drivers of food insecurity were identified, including:

- Household incomes are reduced by stagnant or sinking wages, reductions of in-work and out-of-work benefits, and the rising cost of living;
- Rising debt levels and diminishing support networks for households experiencing debt-related pressures complicate income situations;
- The increase of in-work poverty has left more household incomes below the poverty line – this affects mostly single mother households and single male households;
- Low and irregular incomes through casualised employment, absence of savings, and debt leave households vulnerable to cyclical and unexpected financial shocks.

Theme 2: Experiencing and managing food insecurity

A number of strategies to manage food insecurity were identified, including:

- Lower cost (and unhealthier) high-calorific foods are bought to reduce food bills and to pay for fixed household costs;
- Bulk-buying of foods can alternate with buying only 'for the day' as money may not go further than that;
- To afford food, debt levels are increased;
- Household 'poverty managers', usually mothers, go hungry so that children and other household members can eat.

Theme 3: Access and barriers to food aid services

A range of factors influencing access to food aid provision was identified, including:

- Geographical distance and cost or

unavailability of transport aggravate food insecurity both in urban and in rural settings;

- Food banks often open at times which are unsuitable for those working 'unsocial' hours so that they cannot obtain food parcels;
- Referral processes to food banks can be experienced as 'undignified' and food bank volunteers perceived as condescending – stigma and shame can lead to self-exclusion from food aid;
- Ethnic minority groups use food banks less because of language and informational barriers.

Theme 4: Responses to food insecurity

A variety of responses are suggested by the literature, including:

- Responses to food insecurity take 'palliative' and 'remedial' forms. Palliative forms mitigate against the effects of food insecurity; remedial actions challenge the underlying circumstances that generate food insecurity;
- Data gathering and exchange between food aid providers can enable better service, including higher nutritional quality of food parcels and the identification of geographical gaps in service provision;
- Community-based food aid services which actively involve those affected by food insecurity can mitigate against stigma and resultant self-exclusion;
- Food aid services should provide opportunities for income maximisation through the provision of advice and information;
- A higher National Living Wage, measures to ensure access to more reliable incomes, and 'action plans' by all levels of government could reduce food insecurity.

Recommendations

Recommendations, identified by the author and based on the literature reviewed, include:

- Reversal of the Universal Credit Work Allowance to its pre-April 2016 form, as changes have impacted largely on single parent households – in their majority headed by women – with low incomes so

that the risk of food insecurity for them is increased;

- Food insecurity strategies should be established at the UK government, devolved government, and local government levels to operate in a coherent fashion. Independent statutory bodies should ensure implementation and coordination of these strategies;
- The right to food should be incorporated into law;
- Financial support should be granted for capacity-building in community projects focussed on issues on food insecurity. This should include debt advice and income maximisation advice and mechanisms to enable people to advocate for their own interests;
- Concerted efforts should be undertaken to generate more reliable and in-depth data on food insecurity to support national and local food insecurity strategies;
- The significant gap in understanding of the intersection of gender, in-work poverty, and food insecurity should be addressed through focussed research.

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Food insecurity in the UK – a significant problem

In recent years the significant growth in the number of food banks in the United Kingdom (UK) has captured headlines and has become a political issue, addressed in political party manifestoes and in government programmes (e.g. Hayman 2019; Revie 2019; SNP 2019; Liberal Democrats 2014), and a public issue addressed by a large number of civil society organisations such as Church Action on Poverty (2017), Close the Gap (2018), and also Oxfam (Church Action on Poverty, Oxfam, Trussell Trust 2017). In 2019, there were over 2,000 food banks operating throughout the UK. The UK's largest food bank provider, the Trussell Trust (with about 1,200 food banks), handed out over 1.6 million food parcels in 2018/19 (Coughlan 2019). Some stakeholders in the debate about food insecurity have scrutinised the impact of welfare reforms and spending cuts on the increase of food bank use. For example, the Trussell Trust produced evidence that showed an increase in food bank use by 52% in areas where the controversial Universal Credit benefit programme had been in place for a year or more – compared with 13% in areas where it was yet to be rolled out (Trussell Trust 2019). Indeed, the then Secretary of State for Works and Pension, Amber Rudd, acknowledged that Universal Credit was partly responsible for the increase in uptake of food banks (BBC News 2019).

Underlying the growth of food banks – with some speaking of their ‘institutionalisation’ amid concern they are turning into ‘the normative model in addressing hunger’ (Cohen 2019) – is the problem of ‘food insecurity’. While there is no official government definition of food insecurity in the UK, the following way of understanding the issue is widely accepted: ‘To be food insecure means having insufficient and insecure access to enough food because of a lack of money’ (Dowler et al 2001, 11). Experiences of food insecurity can vary in severity, from worrying about being able to afford enough food to going hungry, as Taylor and Loopstra show (2017, see Image 1).

WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

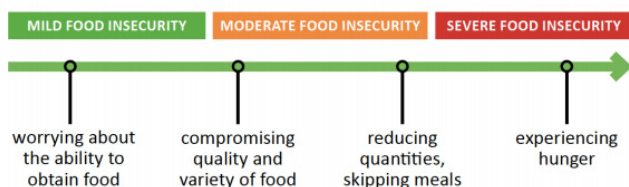


Image 1: What is food insecurity? (Taylor & Loopstra 2017).

Alternative terms such as ‘food poverty’ or ‘hunger’ are also often used to describe food insecurity. Choosing ‘food insecurity’ has the advantage of including a wide continuum of experiences in discussions about food insecurity and its underlying reasons (Loopstra & Laylor 2017).

Food insecurity affects different population groups in different ways. For example, the Trussell Trust identified that single parents and their children are the largest number of users of their food aid services, while single male households are the most common household type (Loopstra & Laylor 2017). Given that 86% of single parent households in the UK (ONS 2016) are headed by women, food insecurity therefore appears to have a significant gender dimension.

The rise in food insecurity overlaps with that of in-work poverty; with regards to the latter, an ‘increasing fraction of those in poverty live in a household with at least one adult in paid work, rising from 37% to 58% of those in relative poverty’ between 1994 and 2019 (Bourquin et al 2019, 2). Since women feature more heavily in the lower paid sections of the labour market (Taylor 2017), the gendered dimensions of food insecurity and in-work poverty is also important to consider. Given this situation, this rapid literature review is focussed on how, in the UK, food insecurity intersects with in-work poverty and gender. Two themes are of specific importance:

1. The connection between food insecurity and in-work poverty. Work is not a fail-safe path out of poverty, and the review gathers the literature on those in the UK who live in food insecurity and are in paid work, on the types of work they are in, and on their experiences of working and accessing emergency food aid.
2. The relationship between gender and food insecurity. As poverty continues to be more prevalent amongst women, the literature review explores what is known about the demographics of food insecurity with a focus on the gendered experiences of food insecurity, the experiences of food insecurity for parents, and the coping mechanisms which may differ for women and men.

This review considers both academic and grey literature. In fact, it made a specific effort at including the latter so that a significant number of documents produced by non-

governmental organisations (NGOs) and campaigning groups is discussed. The review takes into account literature published between 2012 and 2019, thus focussing only on the more current developments, discussions, and policy proposals. However, it does not take into account the literature published since the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus pandemic which hit the UK in early 2020. This pandemic – with between 38,000 and 60,000 deaths by the end of May 2020 (Voce et al 2020; ITV 2020) – has undoubtedly interacted with, and exacerbated, food insecurity in the UK. In one of the first academic studies of the impact of the pandemic, Power et al argue that it has 'revealed the profound insecurity of large segments of the UK population; increased unemployment, reduced hours, and enforced self-isolation for multiple vulnerable groups is likely to lead to an increase in UK food insecurity, exacerbating diet-related health inequalities' (Power et al 2020, 1; also e.g. Taylor 2020). Clearly, the topic of food insecurity is a 'live' one and one which will see more research and other literature published in the near future.

The review applied a 'rapid review' methodology in its selection and appraisal of sources. This form of literature review is considered useful for understanding emergent research topics particularly for policy development (Temple University 2019). Rapid literature reviews employ transparent search and selection strategies in order to assure replicability while they are not as extensive as systematic literature reviews, largely owing to their speedier production.

This review is underpinned by a search strategy which ensured that the most relevant material was identified in order to address the key objective of this review – to establish a deeper understanding of the literature of the relationship between food insecurity, in-work poverty, and gender. This involved applying the search terms 'food insecurity', 'in-work poverty', and 'gender' in various combinations – and also synonyms – to a wide range of search databases (see Appendix A) as well as to general internet search engines and Google Scholar. The identification of grey literature was aided by searching the websites of NGOs and campaigning groups of relevance to the topic of food insecurity.

Contrary to expectations prior to undertaking the review, the literature search results show

that only very few publications, whether academic or grey, discuss all three themes – food insecurity, in-work poverty, and gender. In fact, out of over 80 documents returned, in fewer than a quarter these themes are mentioned together. Where this is the case, frequently one or two of these themes are referred to only in passing. This indicates a somewhat surprising gap in the discussion of how gender and in-work poverty relate to food insecurity. The implication of this finding – and of the resulting synthesis of sources presented in this literature review – is that further research would help to understand better this complex field, also with regards to producing the evidence base needed by policy-makers and campaigners.

The review is organised according to four themes which arose from the search and reading of the literature. These are 'Theme 1: Routes into food insecurity', 'Theme 2: Experiencing and managing food insecurity', 'Theme 3: Barriers to food aid', and 'Theme 4: Responses to food insecurity'. The rapid review concludes with a short list of recommendations, distilled from the review, and produced by the author based on the research conducted in the development of this literature review.

Theme 1:

Routes into food insecurity

Income pressure as a key driver

The literature suggests that a common element for households experiencing food insecurity relates to income not keeping pace with rising living costs. For some, this development is driven by a general trend of sinking household incomes caused by welfare reforms. Such reforms, introduced since 2010 by the coalition government of Conservative Party and Liberal Democrats and since 2015 by Conservative Party governments, have covered a wide range of areas including housing and council tax benefits; in-work and out-of-work benefits; and disability benefits (Beatty & Fothergill 2016; Pemberton et al 2016). Specifically, reforms have led to the amalgamation of six different benefits – income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit – in the new Universal Credit benefit. Alongside this change came stricter eligibility criteria and also the effective reduction of the value of benefits, whether through actual reductions or through freezes. Beatty and Fothergill calculated that £27bn a year will have been taken from claimants by 2020/21 as a consequence. This has been calculated to be equivalent to £690 annually per working age adult (Beatty & Fothergill 2016). Additionally, these reforms have been noted to unevenly distribute impact in a geographical sense – individuals living in more deprived local authority areas generally fare worse with regards to the loss in income. Across tenures there are uneven impacts too, as working-age tenant households in the social rented sector on average fare worst: 'they can expect to lose almost £1,700 per year, compared to £290 a year for working-age owner occupiers'. Private rented sector average household loss is calculated at £790 per year (Beatty & Fothergill 2016, 3). The growth of foodbanks in tandem with these changes in the benefits system has been seen as symptomatic of an erosion of the social safety net (Cooper & Dumbleton 2013). Pemberton outlines a combination of factors following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis that has led to increased poverty for those living on the margins. These factors include welfare state retrenchment, poorly paid and more

insecure work, and rising food and fuel costs (Pemberton 2016). The 'Below the Breadline' report, published by Church Action on Poverty, Oxfam and The Trussell Trust, suggests similar factors stretching household budgets to breaking point – it lists rising food prices, high housing costs, increasing energy bills, sinking wages, and insecure employment (Cooper et al 2014).

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation note that debt is a significant issue and affects most households facing poverty. The pressures to service debt, the report argues, deplete financial resilience whilst repayment schedules can trigger destitution (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018). Although the report focuses on poverty per se rather than food insecurity explicitly, it mentions rising food costs among the general financial pressures that influence destitution. The Foundation defines destitution as the lack of two or more essentials – these are food, heating, lighting, clothing, shoes, and basic toiletries – over the course of a month. In that regard, the report aligns with other analyses of food insecurity which find that food competes with other essentials in low-income households.

Research with low income households across the UK has not only demonstrated the impact that changes to the benefits system have had on income and expenditure, but also how they have contributed to an unravelling of informal support networks between households (Pemberton et al 2016). This has reduced resilience within such networks, placing greater pressure on households themselves to manage difficult circumstances. In turn, dependence on food banks has increased. The link between increased income-expenditure pressures and food insecurity appears to be clear (Pemberton et al 2016). A study conducted across all Trussell Trust food banks (Loopstra & Lalor 2017) established that all households included in the survey – i.e. household which regularly use food banks – faced extreme financial vulnerability. For example, all households had incomes below the low-income threshold defined by the UK Department for Works and Pensions (DWP), while over two thirds of surveyed households reported that over the period 2015 to 2016 they had faced unexpected and rising expenses. For half of the households in this study, unsteady income was a significant factor in prompting them to use food banks (Loopstra & Lalor 2017).

The impact on different household types and genders

Different households are affected in different ways by income-expenditure pressures with regards to food bank use. Research shows that dual income households tend to fare better than single income households. The Trussell Trust reports that amongst its food bank users, single male households make up 39%; single mother with children households 13%; and single female households 12% (Loopstra & Lalor 2017). This shows that households with only one earner – regardless of whether children live in such households – are highly represented as users of food banks. The relationship between single-earner households and food insecurity is demonstrated in research by the Welsh Government on how the country performs against its strategic wellbeing goals (Welsh Government 2018). This report showed that being separated or divorced is linked to material deprivation. The numbers showed that of those divorced or separated, 25% and 22% respectively, lived in material deprivation. Of the widowed or married, only 9% were found to be in this situation. Those identified as having most 'difficulty in keeping up with bills' were those 'divorced, separated, or never married.' They were the most likely to use food banks (Welsh Government 2018, 40). Numerous studies have found that the income-expenditure pressures, discussed above, have impacted particularly harshly on single parent families. Gingerbread – a charity that advocates for single parents – found that one third of all single parent families live in poverty (Rabindrakumar 2018). A report by Church Action on Poverty, Oxfam, and the Trussell Trust (Cooper et al 2014) notes that single parents are twice as likely to live in poverty as couple families. Finally, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the highest rate of persistent poverty in the UK was amongst single parent households (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018).

Single parent households are also affected by poverty even when there is income coming into the household through paid work. Research, again by Gingerbread, shows in-work poverty to be a wide-spread problem in single parent households, far less than in dual income households with children. A core problem for single parent households is finding sustainable work that enables adequate wages to meet household needs (Rabindrakumar 2018). In an earlier report, Gingerbread discussed the relationship between single parenthood,

gender, in-work poverty, and food insecurity. It showed 'that one in ten working single parents surveyed had relied on last resort lenders such as payday lenders, "doorstep" lenders and foodbanks' (Rabindrakumar 2018, 7).

Routes into food insecurity are influenced by gender and household type, as research on food bank use by the Trussell Trust shows. The Trust found that single parents – mainly women – are the largest number of users of their services (Loopstra & Lalor 2017). The Women's Budget Group notes that single parent households are twice as prevalent among food bank users as the general population (Women's Budget Group 2018). The disproportionate use of food banks by single parent households, along with 2016 data showing that 86% of single parent households in the UK were headed by women (ONS 2016), suggests that gender is a significant factor when it comes to understanding who is likely to be at risk of food insecurity.

Gender is prominently discussed in the literature focussed on understanding how food is distributed within households that are facing severe income-expenditure pressures. The Fabian Commission on Food Poverty was established to assess how a fairer food system can be built for people on low incomes and found 'multiple cases of parents – usually mothers – going hungry to feed their children or having to prioritise calories over nutrients to afford their weekly food shop' (Tait 2015, 1). Confirming such findings, the Women's Budget Group (Bennett 2015) demonstrated that mothers in two-parent households are the most likely household members to take squeezes of household budgets upon themselves by diminishing or skipping their meals so that other household members can eat more adequately. Bennett also argues elsewhere that there is a need to acknowledge the unfair gendered distribution of resources within two parent households to understand that the phenomena of in-work poverty goes beyond questions concerning wage levels (Bennett 2018).

The literature review has found relatively little research with a focus on single male households and their use of food banks. This is somewhat surprising, given that this is the most common household type to use food banks. Among the few reports which take this focus is one review of food insecurity by Bristol City Council (Maslen et al 2013). In this review,

older single males are categorised as an 'at risk' group of being in 'food poverty', as the authors refer to the problem. This judgement was made citing a study undertaken by the Food Standards Agency on Consumer Attitudes on Food Standards (FSA 2005) which reports about older single males questioning the utility of cooking 'proper' meals when only cooking for one (Maslen et al 2013).

Immediate drivers of food insecurity

So far, the focus has been on what is often referred to in the literature as the long-term chronic causes of food insecurity (see Perry et al 2014; Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018). However, the literature also outlines immediate causes that lead to food insecurity. For example, the Trussell Trust note that more than one third of food bank users report the experience of an income shock that has occurred to them in the past three months (Loopstra & Lalor 2017). Such shocks can be cyclical in nature, for example occurring repeatedly due to school holiday periods beginning and leaving children without school meals, or they can be the result of unexpected events. The literature shows the most common cause of income shocks to be a benefit sanction (Loopstra & Lalor 2017), i.e. withdrawal of benefit support where the DWP judges that a claimant has not fully satisfied the conditions of their benefit claim. The withdrawal has, over time, been found to have become more punitive even for small infractions (National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales 2016). Research suggests that debt repayment schedules are also significant factors which can trigger destitution (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018). Lastly, shocks can result from the 'drying-up' of irregular sources of income from employment, in particular when it is on the basis of zero-hour contracts (Hick & Lanau 2017).

Taken together this literature highlights a close relationship between being in a low income or irregular income household and different levels of vulnerability to shocks. How this operates on the lived experience level has been outlined in a series of case studies presented in a report by the National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales (National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales 2016). For example, the case of a single parent with a young child shows how their low part-time income meant that routine shocks such as buying a new school uniform at the start of

the year would be managed by reductions in food and/or fuel consumption. The possibility of being unable to manage shocks, routine or unexpected, was a constant source of anxiety for this household. Unexpected shocks such as replacing broken household appliances were the greatest worry as such a shock would mean having to seek loans so that income-expenditure pressures worsen and increase food insecurity (National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales 2016).

Recognition of the vulnerability to shocks has made many food bank providers adopt special forms of resource allocation. In the Trussell Trust's case this takes the form of helping food bank users who are experiencing an acute financial shock and have been referred to the food bank by statutory or non-statutory agencies (Loopstra & Lalor 2017). The Trust then allows clients access to a limited set of food parcels to cover only the shock period while it seeks to work with them and other agencies to ensure that such emergency support does not become a regular requirement. A blog article by the Trussell Trust states that this policy is to ensure that food banks do not become a source of dependency, explaining that 'if someone comes to a Trussell Trust food bank more than three times in six months our system automatically flags that. Then we work with local agencies and charities to make a plan to help that person back onto their feet' (Trussell Trust 2015).

The intersection of gender, in-work poverty and food insecurity

As indicated earlier, there is little literature – academic or grey – focussed on how gender, and in-work poverty interact with regards to the routes into food insecurity. For this reason, the remainder of this thematic section brings literature on one or more of these areas together.

The work by Hick and Lanau on growing trends of in-work poverty in the UK between 2004/5 and 2014/15 has shown that over 60% of those in the UK living in poverty were living in working households in 2014/15 (Hick & Lanau 2017). The Trades Union Congress (TUC) found that 'changes in the labour market, and in particular employers' drive for more flexible and insecure forms of work' have meant that 'having a job is no longer a guarantee of an end to poverty' (TUC 2016, 20). Reductions of in-work benefits seem to matter, too. The Joseph Rowntree

Foundation's 2018 UK Poverty Report argues that, since 2013, changes to the benefits system have resulted in the numbers of workers experiencing in-work poverty growing by more than half a million to nearly 4 million. It also finds that reductions of the breadth of the tax credit system used to top up low incomes have contributed to the rise of in-work poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018, 37). In 2014, the TUC analysis of welfare changes calculated that, cumulatively, three quarters of all welfare cuts to people of working age affect working families, with almost one-half hitting families with children (TUC 2014). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation noted that whilst employment rates are rising, in-work poverty is rising faster (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018). Such simultaneity casts doubts over the widespread notion of work being a route out of poverty (Schmuecker 2018). Evans finds that it seems safe to conclude that work does not eliminate the risk of poverty – indeed the changing sectoral and occupational profile of employment in tandem with the institutional and regulatory changes in the labour market have led to increased concerns about low pay, poor job quality, limited social mobility and increased poverty risk (Evans 2017, 20).

Evans also found, in her wide-ranging survey of the literature related to gender and in-work poverty, that poverty is 'not gender neutral and affects women disproportionately to men' (Evans 2017, 28). This results from differences between men and women when it comes to how they interact within the workplace, including how participation and horizontal and vertical segregation play out, as gendered differences in these interactions produce inequitable outcomes (Evans 2017). For example, the Taylor Review on Modern Work Practices (Taylor 2017) shows that whilst female employment is at a record high in the UK (70.2%), women make up the majority of workers in the low-paid segments of the labour market. The report also showed that, according to official employment figures, women work disproportionately part-time – 41.4% of women work part-time and only 13.3% of men – and that women make up the majority of those on zero-hour contracts (52.2%). Furthermore, casual work is dominated by women (54.7% of casual workers are women), most (70.1%) fixed-term contract employment is undertaken by women, and women make up 52.1% of seasonal workers (Taylor 2017). This situation can be partly explained by the

fact that women continue to play the lead role in looking after children. 'Sandwich caring', looking after young children at the same time as caring for elderly or disabled relatives, also has a disproportionate impact on women's employment and pay. After all, women are four times more likely than men to give up work because of multiple caring responsibilities (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee 2016).

Not surprisingly then, some literature shows an interrelationship between in-work poverty, gender, and food insecurity. A survey from Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) on food affordability, access, and availability gives some indication on how such gender and in-work poverty factors can map onto food insecurity. The study was prompted by a two-fold increase in requests for food aid related advice over the previous five-year period. When asked about their household finances over the course of a year, the responses of advice-seekers in relation to food insecurity showed a stark picture: 45% of respondents reported being worried about food running out before there was money to buy more; 37% had cut down on the size of their meals or skipped meals altogether; and 21% had gone for a whole day without eating owing to a lack of resources (Citizens Advice Scotland 2018, 5). The fact that 73% of the respondents surveyed were women and that 50% of the respondents surveyed were in paid employment suggests a significant overlap between being female, being in employment, and experiencing food insecurity.

Theme 2:

Experiencing and managing food insecurity

Among the topics discussed in the academic and the grey literature is that of coping and management strategies used by people in food insecurity.

The role of women in managing poverty

One element of such discussions is the 'management of poverty' by households, and the prominent role played by women within this process. The Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty reported that this entails members of households acting like 'true economists' in the way that they 'change their purchasing, preparation and consumption of food relative to income' (Tait 2015, 9). As food budgets are more elastic than other household bills, cuts are often made to food expenditure rather than to electricity or gas bills (Tait 2015). Dowler and Lambie-Mumford (2015) have shown that households in poverty may treat both food and household bills as variable costs. They state that budgeting priorities, by necessity, tend to be towards those expenditures whose default consequences are severe, such as rent, fuel bills, local taxes, servicing debts. The food budget is where people can and do make economies, although people also report reducing their fuel and other bills, or relying on credit, to buy food when very pressed (Dowler & Lambie-Mumford 2015, 420). Management strategies also include households spending large amounts of time and effort to prepare cheaper food, travelling to cheaper supermarkets rather than local and familiar shops, taking advantage of price promotions, and carefully planning menus. Menu planning can be particularly open to shocks when supermarkets do not have an item in stock accounted for in the menu, or when the price of a particular item has changed. Some households cease cheaper bulk-buying because of low available budgets and instead operate on day-to-day budgets for food so that 'previous economies of scale (in money and time) are abandoned' (Dowler & Lambie-Mumford 2015, 420). Management of food insecurity is frequently led by women who 'will often shield their families from poverty by going without food, clothing or warmth themselves' (Close the Gap 2018, 3). This shows that

how households manage and cope with food insecurity has a crucial dimension to it.

The role of debt and the overlap with gender

Part of managing food insecurity also involves the use of credit (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018; Dowler & Lambie-Mumford 2015). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation noted that debt repayments compromise household resilience and can trigger destitution. The Foundation found that among people facing such circumstances there are two principle sources of debt – high cost credit such as pay day loans and credit cards, and debt to public bodies such as local councils. Repayments of the latter can take the form of deductions directly from social security benefits payments (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018). Whilst such deductions relate to benefits, and whilst the Foundation do not provide a breakdown of which groups are most at risk of such types of debts, it would be reasonable to suggest that people experiencing in-work poverty are also at high risk of having both forms of debts.

The utilisation of credit has been noted to be a common means of coping specifically for single parents as these household types are unlikely to have any money left after paying household bills (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018). This, of course, brings a gender focus to the question on how debt is a crucial element in the management of poverty. Money Advice Service highlighted that of the 8.8 million people struggling with debt in the UK in 2016, 64% were women. They also noted that women tend to take longer to pay off debt – including credit card, overdraft, and student loan debt – than men (Money Advice Service 2016).

The literature also suggests that the types of debt have gendered patterns. A report by Citizens Advice UK (Hardy 2018) on home credit loans – also known as 'doorstep loans' – finds that those who struggle with this form of credit tend to be female, on a low income, and live in rented accommodation. This type of loan is a particularly high cost form of credit, paid on a weekly to fortnightly basis from household incomes with annual percentage rates ranging from 62% to 1558% (Hardy 2018). The report claims, based on Citizens Advice Bureau casework data, that some clients are offered loans which are unaffordable to them while other clients take on multiple loans. This leads to a situation where 'loan financing is causing costs to spiral' with many customers

calculated as paying 'more than double what they originally borrowed in interest on up to 490,000 home credit loans' (Hardy 2018, 10).

The impact on the quality and quantity of food

Turning to how managing food insecurity impinges on the quality and quantity of food, a report by NHS Scotland found that 'poorer households spend a greater proportion of their household income on food and non-alcoholic drinks compared to those with above average incomes' (Douglas 2015, 9). However, the report also finds that lower income households pay a bigger proportion of their incomes for gas and electricity than higher income households. This presents dilemmas around the need to manage different essentials which bear upon food purchasing decisions. Given that bills for utilities and rent are relatively fixed and that food is a more elastic cost, studies show that people facing food insecurity sacrifice quality for quantity in terms of food. This means that food with high calorific content and low nutritional value is prioritised (Pemberton 2016; Dowler 2015) as it is cheaper (Tait 2015). Citizens Advice Scotland confirmed that people experiencing food insecurity tend to make food choices mostly on the basis of cost and not want or preference. They noted that, when asked how they would spend money on food if they had more income, 20% of survey respondents said that they buy fresh fruit while 27% stated they would buy fruit juice. Although there was awareness that batch cooking and freezing could help in consuming more healthy food, an unspecified number of survey respondents stated that they did not own a freezer. The report concludes that awareness of healthy eating loses relevance if one lacks the means to buy, make and store healthy food (Citizens Advice Scotland 2018).

Awareness of what is 'good' and 'bad' food – with respect to its impact on health – is widespread, including amongst children. A report by Nourish Scotland sought to understand what children think about food insecurity (Kontoravdis et al 2016). Via qualitative research with 32 children from a variety of household types and from different social-economic backgrounds it found that children possessed an accurate awareness of healthy and unhealthy food types as well as of money being the main barrier to accessing healthy food. Lastly, the children were also well aware that some parents make tough choices regarding what they eat in order to

ensure that their children could eat as well as possible (Kontoravdis et al 2016). Lovelace and Rabiee-Khan focus on food consumption in low-income households and find that while many of their research participants – mostly mothers – have a poor understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet, the consumption of unhealthy food is also the result of high cost of, in particular, fresh food. Despite difficult financial circumstances, mothers tolerated food wastage when healthy and expensive food was not consumed by young children as they did not like it and said they would 'try again' (Lovelace & Rabiee-Khan 2015).

The limits of management and coping strategies

The literature on households' coping strategies shows that there are limitations of how far these can go. Dowler and Lambie-Mumford have noted that since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis lowest income household deciles have allocated a dwindling part of their incomes to food. In that regard, there has been a 17% reduction on food spending between 2007 and 2011 (Dowler & Lambie-Mumford 2015). Such diminished expenditure entails buying significantly less healthy food and a concomitant rise in the purchase of processed meat products (Dowler & Lambie-Mumford 2015). This lower quality of what is eaten has been noted in a publication by the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee on hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK (UK Parliament 2019). While saying nothing about gender and food poverty, the report warned that the low quality of food consumed by those suffering from food insecurity can have harmful health outcomes where obesity, stunting and other forms of malnourishment are the result (UK Parliament 2019).

Theme 3:

Barriers to food aid

This section discusses the literature about the barriers to food aid services experienced by people in food insecurity.

Distance and transport

The literature suggests that geographic distance to food aid services may be a pressing problem for some people in need (Purcell & Maynard 2018; Lambie-Mumford 2017). For example, a qualitative study involving 23 participants and seeking to understand foodbank usage in deprived communities found that 'the main problem with accessing foodbanks was that most were a distance from where people lived. Although this was often a short distance in terms of miles, it often necessitated a long walk, bus journey or car travel and there were heavy bags to carry on the return trip'. Such issues of distance also generated additional costs in the form of bus travel and taxi journeys (Lawson & Kearns 2018, 53). A report by Harrogate and Ripon Centres for Voluntary Service shows that the distance to food banks for people living in rural locations and the costs associated with public transport or taxis is a real problem (Kingdom 2013). Reflecting on this report, a blog in The Guardian newspaper noted the paradox for people in such locations - they live in close proximity to food production while struggling to get to sites where they can obtain food (Butler 2013). Nevertheless, despite distance presenting a barriers for people experiencing food insecurity at both urban and rural locations, a report on the operational characteristics of food banks in the UK notes that 'in-depth research on food aid providers has shown how often the focus is on the practical aspects of providing food to people who reach food banks, with little time put toward understanding the scale of local need and accessibility of their services' (Loopstra et al 2019, 31).

Time matters

Limited opening hours of food aid services may restrict workers with long, unpredictable or 'unsocial' work patterns from accessing such services (Church Action on Poverty 2017). Another barrier related to the problem of time of access are seasonal fluctuations associated with school holidays. The combination of having

to manage more childcare responsibilities and the lack of access to school lunches can lead to time and income pressures within the household. As a study by Long et al shows, summer holidays are especially challenging for school-age children in food insecure households as 'they do not have steady access to food' (Long et al 2018, 2). Their research on holiday lunch clubs also shows that food insecure households, in comparison to households not suffering from food insecurity, benefit the most from holiday clubs, suggesting they play an important role in filling the gap of school lunch food provision (Long et al 2018).

Stigma as a barrier

The social stigma relating to food bank usage is prominent in the literature. For example, the Food Foundation note that some people do not use any form of emergency food aid for a range of reasons, including stigma (Food Foundation n.d.). A study for NHS Scotland, using interviews with local health practitioners, found that some clients of these practitioners refuse referrals to food banks because of the stigma surrounding them (Douglas 2015).

The sense of stigma and shame may also be the result of the nature of interactions between clients and staff or volunteers within such services. Power et al recount reports from their study on British Pakistani women who tried to access food banks. Respondents talked of encounters with some volunteers in food banks as undignified experiences due to condescending behaviour which emphasised the inequality between volunteers and food aid recipients (Power et al 2018). Some literature regards the overall referral system adopted by food banks as problematic. For example, the nature of 'referral pathways' leading to food bank access raises the likelihood of such services not being accessed by those in need as would-be food bank users are obliged to 'justify' their need to practitioners from other agencies performing a 'gatekeeping' role. Purcell and Maynard (2018) argue that such referral processes are often perceived as humiliating. An approach which might reduce stigma would be that of an 'open door' food bank, underpinned by thinking exemplified in what this practitioner said: 'If they come here to ask for food, I imagine they must need that' (Pemberton et al 2016).

Ethnic, religious and cultural factors

An individual's ethnic, religious or cultural background impacts on their access to food aid, as highlighted in studies undertaken by Power et al (2018) and Power (2017) on food aid services in the multi-ethnic city of Bradford. With its focus on food bank usage, the research added a new facet to the knowledge about the well-established relationship between poverty and ethnicity. For example, the UK Government's Race Disparity Audit found that 'relative to the UK population overall, people living in households headed by someone in the Asian, Black, or Other ethnic groups were likely to be on a low income' (Cabinet Office 2018, 27; also see Power et al 2018). The faith-based dimension of food insecurity in Bradford was highlighted by Power et al (2018) who also discuss the religious orientation of some food aid providers in the city. The UK's largest food bank provider, the Trussell Trust, is also a religious (evangelical Christian) organisation; however, the food aid services they provide are open for people of all faiths and none (Trussell Trust n.d). In Power et al's work on Bradford it is striking that despite the demographic make-up of the city in general, and those in poverty specifically, most faith-based providers were Christian with little Muslim provision existing by comparison. While what the authors call 'White' food aid providers reported serving very few Pakistani and/or Muslim 'clients', the authors found the reasons for this unclear and write that the data only 'intimated possible forms of inadvertent exclusion' on the basis of culture and religion. Other explanations could be around possible lower levels of food insecurity among Pakistani Muslims at the centre of this research or 'hidden' mechanisms of food aid provision around mosques (Power et al 2017, 464). In a second study, Power et al sought to understand, through focus groups, the lived experiences of poverty amongst British Pakistani and White British women including views on food aid. It showed that British Pakistani women were less likely to use food banks (Power et al 2018). There were three reasons for this: first, 'formal' services such as food banks were not needed because of resource management in familial and social networks; second, they were avoided due to shame; third, knowledge about the existence of food aid services was non-existent (Power et al 2018). This suggests that black and minority ethnic groups with language barriers are at higher risk of facing barriers to accessing food aid (Power et al 2018).

Theme 4:

Responses to food insecurity

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation distinguishes between two types of 'solutions' to food insecurity. The first is called 'palliative' and is concerned with dealing with the symptoms via alleviation efforts. The second is referred to as 'remedial' and consists of efforts to tackle the roots of the problem (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018). These two forms of intervention are common in the literature on routes out of food insecurity, whether at public policy or at community action levels. Apart from solutions of these two types, there are calls to produce better data on the problem of food insecurity in order to devise better policy answers.

'Palliative' approaches

One particular area where palliative approaches are evident is where proposals are made to improve the quality of food aid service delivery. In an investigation into the nutritional value of emergency food provision, Turnbull and Bhakta note a wide degree of variation of the quality and quantity of the food parcels handed out by different food banks despite attempts at standardisation across the sector. Such variation was caused by several factors including 'the volunteer packing the parcel, the stock available, population demographics, and by the organisation who runs the food bank' (Turnbull & Bhakhta 2016, 1). The authors recommend that in order to achieve higher nutritional quality of food bank parcels, food banks should gather more data on usage and share this information amongst each other.

Better data collection and exchange between agencies has also been presented as a palliative solution to enable more adequate geographical coverage of providers. Loopstra states that there is a need for 'harmonised data collection across short-term providers of emergency assistance to enable better identification of where there may be gaps in the provision of emergency support' (Loopstra 2018, 18). To this end, the Independent Food Aid Network has mapped independent food aid providers across Scotland (Independent Food Aid Network 2017).

Earlier, in the discussion of impacts of financial shocks on households, school holidays were mentioned as a problematic time in which

food costs can be overwhelming. This has led to calls to extend school holiday provision programmes (Long 2017; End Hunger UK 2017). End Hunger UK, a coalition of more than 40 national charities including Oxfam, state that holiday clubs should be offered to all families, irrespective of their income or food security situation, as universal access will reduce stigma for those accessing them.

Related to both quality and quantity of food provision via food banks, schemes exist which seek to make use of 'surplus food' from the food industry. For example, FareShare distribute quality surplus food from farmers and supermarkets to food aid providers (FareShare 2019). However, there have been longstanding criticisms of such approaches centring on whether the distribution of surplus food merely functions as a 'band-aid' rather than as a long-term solution that addresses the structural causes of deprivation (Hawkes and Webster 2000).

'Remedial' approaches

While food banks provide, first and foremost, palliative solutions, they are also considered to be potential starting points for remedial approaches. The literature related to food aid work conducted at community level – and often by food banks themselves – shows that the roles such services can play are varied. Briggs and Ford capture this when stating that community sites can range from 'places of care' to 'embryonic places of social action and community advocacy addressing wider issues of poverty' (Briggs & Ford 2017, 82). Much of this place-based community focus relates to a desire to move towards promoting dignity at the core of food aid provision, where services are managed (to an extent) by the populations most affected (Purcell & Maynard 2018).

The Scottish Government has proposed that geographical 'place-based' community settings for food aid services can provide opportunities for people on low incomes to 'access fresh and healthy food, share a meal, and develop new skills' (Scottish Government 2017, 37). Such environments should also allow for advice and information on welfare, work, and debt. One example is the Food Bank Plus model which has started to emerge across the UK in Trussell Trust food banks (Loopstra & Lalor 2017). Aside from the empowerment potential created by wider knowledge of entitlements and support, such an approach can assist a discursive shift

away from stigma and shame to dignity and agency. Key to this seems to be that such services are collectively managed by the people who use them (Purcell & Maynard 2018). The optimism that community-based food aid settings can turn from places of care to sites of political struggle which can produce remedial solutions is tempered by Caplan's (2016) ethnographic study of two food banks, one in London and one in rural Wales. These food banks have become spaces for people from different social classes to engage with each other, for example when volunteers develop relationships to food bank users. They may offer the potential for transforming the (volunteer) practitioner-recipient social relation to one of fellow activists (Caplan 2016; Briggs & Foord 2017). However, Caplan's fieldwork has shown that food aid volunteers often lack understanding of the structural and political reasons for food insecurity. Rather they see their activity in altruistic and charitable terms and also as means to enhance their own 'capacities' (Caplan 2016, 8). Such research demonstrates the importance of practitioners' attitudes and values with regards to food banks' ability to realise their potential of being empowering places of political organising.

The National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales (2016) take an explicit community action focus when it comes to organising political action. Noting the intersection between gender, food insecurity, and in-work poverty while emphasising the relevance of structural causes of poverty, they seek to provide a practical toolkit designed to 'empower women to challenge the system and structures that fail to address poverty, to get involved and make a difference' (National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales 2016, 4). Another toolkit was developed by the Women's Institute as part of their Food Matters campaign (Women's Institute n.d.) and intended to initiate a national discussion on food poverty staged across communities. The toolkit includes information on the problem of food poverty in the UK and ways to tackle it; how to hold a food insecurity debate in one's local community with suggestions on what speakers to approach; and how to tackle food insecurity in one's own community. End Hunger UK seeks to develop the activist potential of volunteers and people with lived experience of food insecurity by facilitating more engagement with MPs and policy-makers (Connelly 2017).

Such capacity building is also embedded in the 'A Menu for Change' project, a coalition in Scotland between Oxfam Scotland, Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, Nourish Scotland, and The Poverty Alliance. It was set up to 'evolve the emergency response to food insecurity in Scotland whilst helping to tackle the underlying drivers' (A Menu for Change 2019a). Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, much of the coalition's work involves helping those engaged within local food bank referral pathways to guide people facing acute income crises towards 'statutory entitlements and cash-based crisis supports, including the Scottish Welfare Fund, as well as debt minimisation' rather than direct them to emergency food aid (A Menu for Change 2019a). At the same time, the project advocates for governments to tackle the underlying drivers of acute income crisis – including gaps within the social security system and to ensure work provides a reliable route out of poverty. A Menu for Change argues that this income maximisation approach supports greater food choices – and thereby dignity – as it allows some access to food on the 'open market' rather than through a food parcel. The project also promotes the inclusion of people with lived experience of food insecurity in discussions relating to how it can be tackled at both service delivery and public policy levels (A Menu for Change 2019a).

A further example of a community-based and capacity-building food aid model is the 'local pantry' (Purcell & Maynard 2018). Described as 'community cooperative food stores run by volunteers for the benefits of their members in low-income communities' (Church Action on Poverty n.d.; also see A Menu for Change 2019b), the local pantry can potentially overcome the barriers of distance and stigma to food aid services. Indeed, one requirement of local pantry membership is that of having to live within a 20-minute walk to the pantry (Purcell & Maynard 2018). Because of this approach, Church Action on Poverty has resources to set and support new local pantries so that the need for them can be satisfied without 'de-localising' them. Instead of operating according to a charity model in which food parcels are distributed freely, members pay a £2.50 weekly fee entitling them to a range of items of their choice. On average, this reduces food spending by an annual of £650 per household. Such food access, paid for and chosen rather than 'doled out', has been reported to promote a sense

of dignity. Also, because the pantry model is a self-referral group, the stigma associated with referral pathways can be expected to be reduced (Purcell & Maynard 2018).

Strategic interventions

Much of the grey literature outlines the necessity of remedial solutions to food insecurity and argues that these need action at strategic level by government. For example, some have argued that 'government should develop and implement an action plan to address food poverty' (Cooper et al 2014, 5), while End Hunger UK state that to become a 'good food nation', the government should establish a coordinated strategy to tackle food insecurity (End Hunger UK 2017). Church Action on Poverty reaffirm this message when stating that there should be a move towards a UK food and poverty strategy that would 'address the underlying causes of household insecurity' (Church Action on Poverty 2017, 3). Such a strategy should include appointing a minister or charging a department to coordinate a policy response across government; measuring household food insecurity; freeing people from the threat of food insecurity; and listening to people with first-hand experience of hunger (Church Action on Poverty 2017). This call by civil society actors for implementing national strategies is evident at the Scottish devolved level, too. For example, the Scottish Food Coalition state that there should be an incorporation of the right to food into Scottish law. This should be backed up by cross-cutting national plans to ensure policy coherence across departments and an independent statutory body that monitors implementation of such plans (Scottish Food Coalition 2018, 2). Similar demands were made earlier by the Scottish Independent Working Group on Food Poverty with an emphasis on 'dignity' (Independent Working Group on Food Poverty 2016).

As food insecurity is closely related to problematic income-expenditure levels, many remedial policy recommendations are centred around raising incomes. Work is promoted as a possible route out of poverty, but only if the national minimum wage is raised to 60% of median wages (Tait 2015), i.e. it would be pegged above the official poverty rate. End Hunger UK made similar recommendations for making work pay, including commitments from the state to incentivise employers to pay a 'real' living wage and to provide decent work (End

Hunger UK 2017). Furthermore, higher in-work benefits are suggested as higher hourly wages may not address insufficient or fluctuating work hours. Gingerbread (Rabindrakumar 2018) recommended that the Universal Credit work allowance should be restored to its pre-April 2016 form, in particular because changes have impacted largely on single parent families and therefore disproportionately on women. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG 2016) note that tighter earnings tapering and reduced eligibility criteria under Universal Credit have meant a reduction of household incomes. Gingerbread further recommend that more tailored support and extended childcare provision should be provided by the DWP and other agencies to single parent families to support work as a route out of poverty (Rabindrakumar 2018). Such recommendations highlight the intersection between gender, in-work poverty, and food insecurity. Close the Gap therefore note that 'women primarily face higher risks of in-work poverty because of the persistent inequalities they face in the labour market' (Close the Gap 2018, 8). They recommend mainstreaming gender analysis in the development of new legislation, policies and programme; efforts to ensure that regulations for specific entitlements are gender impact assessed, and that the Scottish Government increases child benefit.

Taken together, the above recommendations would increase household incomes through higher minimum wages, improved job security, and more social protection. These were referred to by the Below the Breadline report as being integral in restoring the social safety net (Cooper et al 2014). Dowler (2015) argues that ultimately there should be measures to ensure an adequate household income for everyone and that access to food and other necessities should be incorporated into a rights-based framework. In a more recent study, MacLeod emphasises that 'inadequate and insecure incomes from work and social security are the key triggers for food insecurity' and that 'failures of existing social security and wider public services leave people with adverse life experiences acutely vulnerable to food insecurity' (MacLeod 2019, 9).

Measurement and data

Beyond palliative and remedial solutions – but linked to finding them – are recommendations around how extent and impact of food insecurity should be measured and

measurements improved. For example, Church Action on Poverty – calling for a UK-wide food and poverty strategy – argue that policy success can only come on the basis of an adequate understanding of the extent of food insecurity and its causes. Similarly, the Scottish Food Coalition Group (2018) state that for their policy proposals to work, better measurements of food insecurity are required. End Hunger UK suggest an annual government-led measurement effort and ongoing monitoring of household food insecurity across the UK (End Hunger UK 2017), while Power puts particular emphasis on monitoring of household food insecurity to identify the extent of ‘hidden hunger’ (Power 2017).

Some have recognised that understanding the ‘landscape’ of food banks is important to gauging the severity of food insecurity and to having a discussion on solutions. For example, the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) has mapped food aid providers beyond the Trussell Trust’s food bank network and has tried to provide an evidence base to challenge the ‘normalisation of food insecurity’ (Independent Food Aid Network 2017). In Scotland, measurements of food aid provision have been undertaken with similar aims when IFAN and A Menu for Change combined data from the independent food aid sector with Trussell Trust data on food bank numbers and use. The data showed that, for the period between April 2017 and September 2018, 480,583 parcels were distributed in Scotland – nearly double the previous estimates which were based only on Trussell Trust data. IFAN and A Menu for Change have used such statistics to urge the Scottish Government to use its devolved powers to help poorer families (A Menu for Change 2019a). Turning to actual methodological proposals for measuring food insecurity, the Food Foundation advocate that the Scottish and UK governments adopt a well-tested, internationally recommended model to measure household food insecurity. This would involve survey questions on ‘people’s experiences of accessing sufficient quality and quantity of food, cutting back on food and going without food, and experiences of anxiety relating to insufficient food access’ (Food Foundation n.d., 2). Evans (2017) recommends that gender impact assessments are used when designing and implementing policies to ensure that the differential impacts of food insecurity on women and men are identified and then mitigated.

Loopstra and Tarasuk provide insights from Canada in relation to gaps between food bank usage and actual food insecurity across society. Noting that food bank data is not sufficient to map out the extent of food insecurity, they state that ‘population monitoring of food insecurity is imperative for understanding the true number of people experiencing insecure and insufficient access to food, the full spectrum of households affected and the impact of policy interventions and changing economic conditions of this problem’ (Loopstra & Tarasuk 2015, 10). O’Connell advocates for a relative deprivation approach to assist prediction of what types of family are at risk of food poverty. This would require establishing what counts as a socially acceptable diet before looking at who is unable to meet such standards (O’Connell 2019). By including social acceptability and social participation as dimensions, O’Connell argues that it is possible to go beyond mere nutritional indicators of food insecurity and capture the impact that food insecurity has on the social inclusion of those affected. Turning to nutritional dimensions, Turnbull (2016) recommends further research into the content of food parcels to support driving up nutritional standards of food aid, and Nguyen (2017) states that studies on the impact of food insecurity should also include psychological and social components.

Recommendations

The following recommendations, distilled from the literature considered, conclude this rapid review. These recommendations were developed by the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Oxfam Scotland, the University of the West of Scotland, or the UWS-Oxfam Partnership on what policy to pursue to reduce food insecurity.

- The literature suggests that the Universal Credit Work Allowance should be reversed to its pre-April 2016 arrangement as changes have impacted largely on single parent families, thus affecting women disproportionately. More broadly, welfare and labour market policies should be made more gender sensitive, recognising the challenges that women face in the labour market.
- Food insecurity strategies should be established at the UK government, devolved government, and local government levels to operate in a coherent fashion. In particular local government should have responsibility – and be given the capacity – to design and implement strategies sensitive to particular local needs. An independent statutory body should be established to ensure strategy implementation and hold relevant public bodies to account.
- The incorporation of the right to food into law;
- Financial support should be granted for capacity building in community projects focussed on issues on and around food insecurity. This should include debt advice and income maximisation advice and mechanisms to enable people to advocate for their own interests;
- Concerted efforts should be undertaken to generate more reliable and in-depth data on food insecurity to support national and local anti-food insecurity strategies;
- The review has flagged up a significant gap in the literature with regards to the intersection of gender, in-work poverty and food insecurity. This is a gap that should be addressed to ensure that policy debates are suitably informed by evidence on what would make the biggest positive difference

to women who disproportionately feature in the low paid segments of the labour market and who disproportionately feature as the head of single parent households – the form of households that makes up the largest number of people receiving food bank help. Furthermore, the limited understanding of the barriers facing ethnic and religious minority groups in accessing food aid services and the gap in the understanding of food insecurity for single male households should be addressed through more research.

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Appendix A:

Databases used for rapid review

- Association for Computing Machinery
- American Chemical Society
- American Society of Mechanical Engineers
- Barbour Index
- British Standards Online
- Cambridge Core
- CINAHL
- Construction Information Service
- ClickView
- Digimap
- Drama Online
- EBSCO Databases
- Education Source
- Emerald
- EThOS
- Gale Reference Complete
- IEEE Xplore
- Institute of Civil Engineers
- Ingenta Connect
- Lexis Library
- Mintel Market Research Reports
- Oxford Scholarship Online
- PsycARTICLES
- PsycBOOKS
- Psychology & Behavioural Science Collection
- Sage Journals
- Sage Knowledge
- Science Direct
- Sci Finder
- SportDISCUS
- SpringerLink
- Statista
- Taylor & Francis
- Times Digital Archive
- Web of Science
- Westlaw



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