



EATING OR HEATING? AN INVESTIGATION OF FOOD POVERTY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

DAIRY COUNCIL NUTRITION & HEALTH CONFERENCE

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Overview

The issue of food poverty

- Food poverty and the right to food
- Statement of the problem
- The growing problems of food poverty and insecurity
- Northern Ireland in context
- Eating or heating?
- Measuring food poverty
- UUBS Civic Impact research findings
- Conclusion
- Acknowledgements

Food Poverty

A definition...

Food Poverty

“The inability to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food for health, in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.”

(Radimer et al., 1990)

Right to Food

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 (Article 25) enshrines the right to food
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
 - Both explicitly name adequate **food** and housing as basic human rights.
- Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015)
 - No Poverty and Zero Hunger
- We need to protect this right and address the gap between income and food costs



Statement of the problem

- Food poverty: the inability to afford or access a healthy diet
- Short-term and long-term effects
- Result: food poverty = a public health emergency
- Food banks = rapid increase and demand for assistance
- *'Governmentality'* around food has shifted:



Food poverty in the UK

- The UK is the fifth richest country in the world yet we face a growing epidemic of hidden hunger with people increasingly unable to meet their family's basic needs.
- UK food poverty has all the signs of a **public health emergency** that could go unrecognised until it is too late to take preventive action [British Medical Journal, December 2013].
- Food poverty has overtaken healthy eating as a most pressing public health concern.
- *“Some people in the country are not being able to eat at all and if people can't eat at all, what's the point in trying to get them to eat healthily?”* [Derbyshire County Council, 2014].

Reliance on food banks

- UK Government does not officially monitor food bank usage
- 345 Trussell Trust food banks – the number is insufficient – need between 400 and 650 more to cope with expected demand
- Tripling of people reliant on food banks since 2012
- Over 350, 000 people in the UK are reliant on food aid – 35% of these are children [Trussell Trust, 2013]
- This figure could rise to over 500,000 people when also accounting for the work of non-Trussell Trust affiliated organisations [Church Poverty in Action & Oxfam, 2013]
- Geographical gaps in coverage means thousands of people are facing hunger today in towns with no food banks
- We cannot ignore the hunger on our doorstep

The growing problems of food poverty and insecurity

- Food banks have increased over the past 10+ years
- The context for the rise in food banks are rises in food poverty due to:
 - Insufficient (low and falling) incomes
 - Un/underemployment
 - Benefit changes / delays
 - Debt (pay loans / loan sharks)
 - Increasing essential cost of living (rising food, housing and utility bills)

NI in context

Poverty

18% living in relative poverty, before housing costs
(Department for Communities, 2018).

Food Security

5% had not eaten a substantial meal at least one day in the last fortnight due to a lack of money.

Rises to 10% for the most deprived quintile (Department of Health, 2017).

Low income households spend more than their higher income counterparts on food and non alcoholic drinks (13.6% cf. 7.8%; average = 10.5%).



Eating or heating?

Estimates of 2017/18 fuel poverty in NI (households spending >10% to adequately heat their home)

Fuel poor households		2016 (Base position from NIHCS)	2017 (modelled estimates)	2018 (modelled estimates)
Full income definition ³	Number of households	160,000	128,000	154,000
	% of households	22	17	21

NI Housing Executive /
Building Research Excellence,
2019

Other data suggest that ... NI has the highest level of fuel poverty in the UK and one of the highest in the EU, with current estimates indicating that 42% of households are affected... [Department for Communities, 2019]

Food poverty in NI (2006 – 2007)

Aim - to document the state of food poverty in Northern Ireland.

The authors analysed food consumption and expenditure data, the current policy environment and interviewed key stakeholders and conducted focus groups with those experiencing/at risk of food poverty.

There are numerous policies already in existence which, if successfully implemented, will address some of the fundamental causes of food poverty.

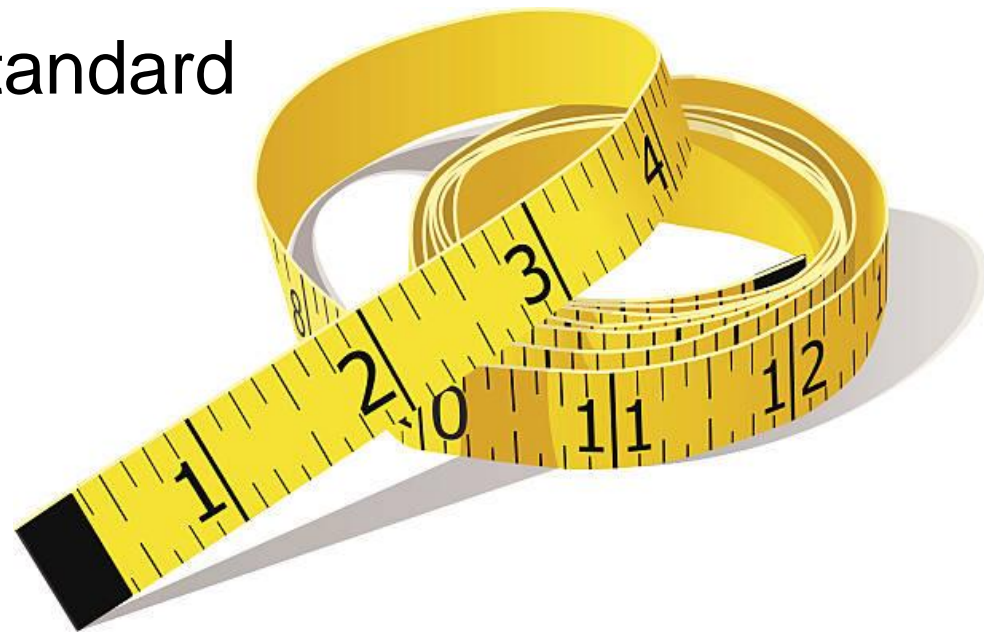
Measuring food poverty

No accepted food poverty indicator

Typically use EU-SILC Food Deprivation Measures

Levels of deprivation based on:

- Minimum Income Standard
- Level of deprivation



UUBS food poverty research

Aim and approach

- To disseminate an online survey comprising three existing food poverty / household food insecurity indicators to determine if there is good agreement in terms of food poverty outcomes from two or more indicators for NI households.
 - EU-SILC (4 food deprivation measures)
 - Food Insecurity Experience Scale (8-item measure)
 - Household Food Security Scale Module (adult 10-item measure and child 8-item measure)
- Ethical approval for online survey was gained for September to November (2018) period
- Data analysed using SPSS
- A total sample size of 944 (N = 944) was gained - overall good variation to responses

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Survey sample

- The majority (78.7%) were employed full/part time or self-employed; the remainder comprised retired (8.1%); unemployed (4.9%); students (3.2%) and homemakers (3.2%).
- One in twelve (8%) had a total household income (salary and benefits) of less than £10,000 and more than half (52.9%) had a household income of less than £39,999 each year.
- One in 14 (7.4%) of the total sample self-evaluated their health status as poor.
- Two in five respondents (41.9%) had children aged under 18 years living in their households

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Emerging results

EU-Survey on Income and Living Conditions (4 food deprivation measures):

- One in three (34.4%) experienced at least one measure of food deprivation.

Food Insecurity Experience Survey (8-item scale):

- One in three (35.7%) reported experiencing at least one food poverty measure concerned with eating less healthy foods or skipping meals etc.

Household Food Security Scale Module (10-item adult measure; 8-item child measure):

- One in five (21.2%) reported experiencing at least one food poverty measure concerned with worry about running out of food or not eating enough.
- 79 households with children confirmed experiencing at least one food poverty measure.

Emerging results continued

EU-SILC (4-item scale)

No (0) positive responses to food deprivation measures: 65.6%

1 positive response to food deprivation measures: 10.1%

2 positive responses to food deprivation measures: 10.1%

3 positive responses to food deprivation measures: 7%

All (4) positive responses to food deprivation measures: 7.3%

FIES (8-item scale)

- Food secure / Mild food insecurity (0-3 measures): 84.1%
- Moderate food insecurity (4-6 measures): 8.9%
- **Severe food insecurity (7-8 measures): 7.1%**

HFSSM (10-item scale)

Food secure / Mild food insecurity (0-1 measures): 88.1%

Moderate food insecurity (2-5 measures): 7%

Severe food insecurity (6-10 measures): 4.9%

Emerging results continued

- There is good 'agreement' between the EU-SILC and FIES food poverty measures. A small minority failed to agree through cross-comparison of indicators.
- There is excellent 'agreement' between FIES and HFSSM measures.
- Therefore, each scale identifies (generally) the same people as experiencing 'mild', 'moderate' or 'severe' food poverty.
- So, how did respondents feel about completing each scale?
 - EU-SILC*: Easy to answer but restrictive answers
 - FIES*: Relevant, clear and simple but some repetition and difficult wording
 - HFSSM*: Straightforward, less challenging

Qualitative findings

*“**Embarrassed** at not having money for basics, with **both of us working.**”*

*“I know my budget: **sometimes 'food' is biscuits.**”*

*“... at present our financial situation is uncomplicated. **I fear for the future** though..”*

*“Based on the last fortnight I have been able to afford meals but, as a working single parent, **I worried about feeding my son over the summer and as a result couldn't afford meals for myself.** Food is fast becoming an issue for me and it is **embarrassing to have to admit that despite working there are still times when you have to go hungry to support your child.** You feel entirely responsible.”*

*“Because although money is tight in our house we budget so we make sure we always have enough money for food which **may mean sacrificing other things,** like treats, but feeding our children and ourselves is a priority.”*

*“**Food bank Friday.**”*

*“It makes me feel terrible to think that **some people living in this, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, may not have enough money to have a large meal,** or to give gifts of food to their friends and extended family. **It makes me feel sick to think about that.**”*

Conclusion

- Food poverty requires a long-term, sustainable solution
- We need to address the policy issues under focus:
 - ✓ low income; under/unemployment;
 - ✓ rising food prices; and Welfare Reform
- Efforts need to be informed by routine, Government-supported monitoring and reporting of the extent of food poverty among our citizens.
- **GOOD NEWS:** From April 2019 the UK Government will measure food poverty (HFSS, 10-item measure) – results available from April 2021.

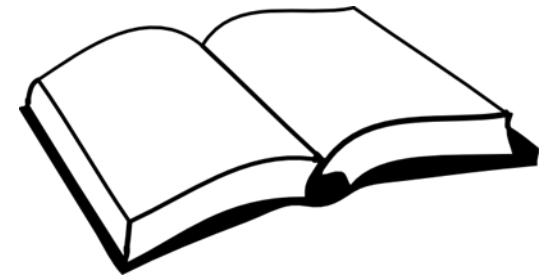
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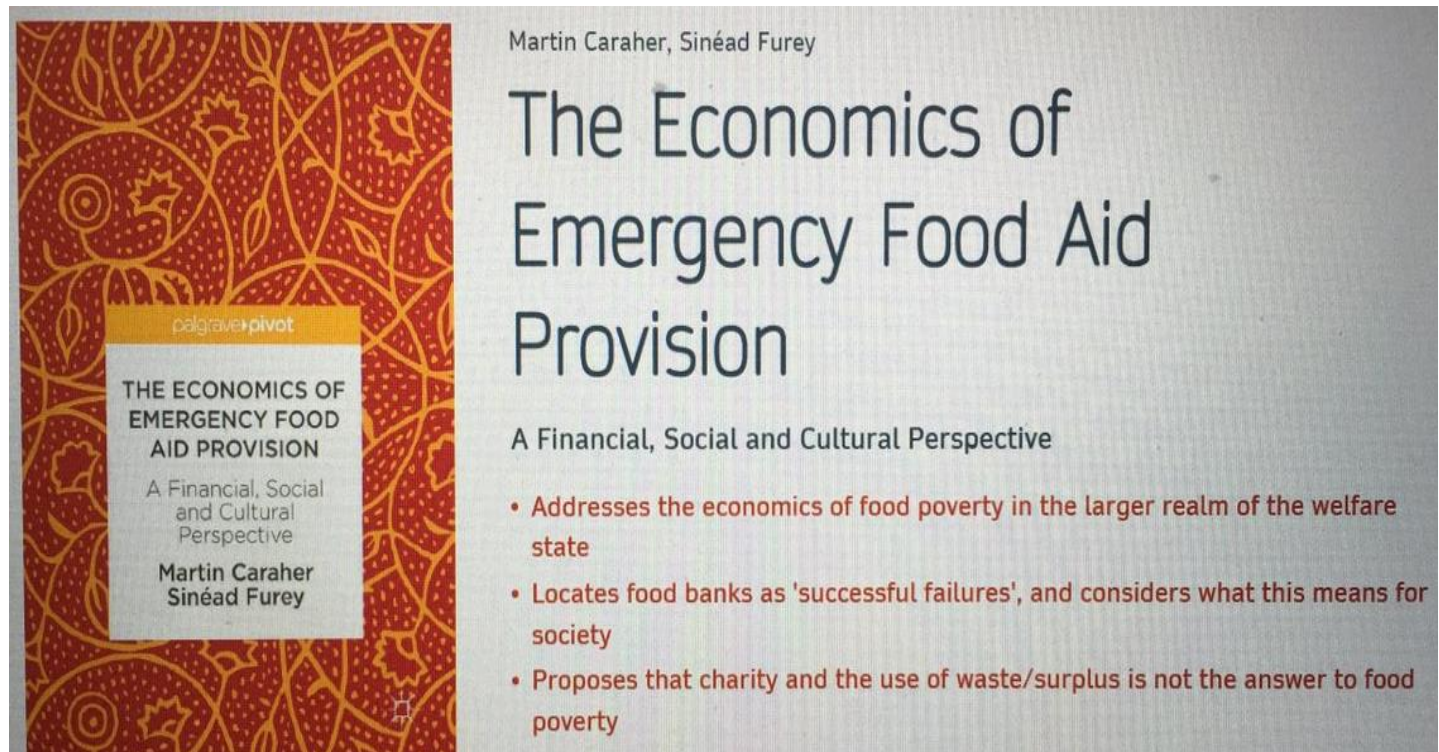
Additional reading



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Any Questions?

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