



THE FUTURE WE WANT: FOOD POVERTY



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WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?

An estimated 8.4 million people in the UK struggle to get enough to eat. This includes many households with people in work, families with children, as well as older and disabled people. In 2018, Trussell Trust, the largest UK food bank network, provided 1.6 million packages of emergency food supplies. For comparison, in 2009 they supplied 41,000 packages.

There are lots of different words used to describe this situation like food poverty, food access and food insecurity.

The Department of Health defines food poverty as 'The inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet.'

Professor Tim Lang characterises the detrimental impact of food poverty: 'Food poverty is worse diet, worse access, worse health, higher percentage of income on food and less choice from a restricted range of foods. Above all food poverty is about less or almost no consumption of fruit and vegetables.'

Renowned expert Professor Elizabeth Dowler adds that people should be able to access food in a socially acceptable way, defining food insecurity as 'The inability to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.'

There is still no official government statistics on food poverty in Britain. One has been announced and the data will be available in 2020. In the interim the University of Ulster has done some research finding –

- 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.
- Two in five respondents (41.9%) had children aged under 18 years living in their households

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

One in three (34.4%) experienced at least one symptom of food deprivation (ie) couldn't afford to eat meat, fish, poultry or vegetarian equivalent every second day; had a day in the last fortnight when they didn't have a substantial meal due to lack of money; would like to have, but couldn't afford, a roast joint (or its equivalent) once a week and/or would like to, but can't afford to have family/friends around once a month for food/drinks.

There is a current crisis in the UK with epidemic levels of people not being able to afford to access the food they need to live well. The UN and other national and international bodies constantly point this out. The UK has been slow to respond to this problem at a national level.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF ABOUT THIS SUBJECT

There is a long history of using the ability to eat well as a proxy for poverty. One of the first, if not the first, attempt to record poverty statistics in the UK was undertaken by Seebohm Rowntree in York in 1899. He used an analysis of the food people could afford to buy as one of his measures but Rowntree's argument that poverty was the result of low wages went against the traditionally held view that the poor were responsible for their own plight.

Look carefully at the language people use to describe this issue and look for the clues that there is a bias that blames those who are poor for the problem. Where can you see this kind of language. The Rowntree foundation has produced some very good work on this – <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/framing-toolkit-talking-about-poverty>

For example, there is no evidence that people on low incomes can cook any less well than those on higher incomes so why do so many people say that if those who are poor could cook better they wouldn't struggle to enjoy good food?

Ask the question – why do people eat food? Is overcoming food poverty about getting free food to poor people so that they don't die or something more. Food is about how we connect people together in social groups and enjoy life. Food poverty is quoted as 10%, but this doesn't include a measure of food socialising (means to have friends/family for food or drink once per month). If that measure is included, food poverty is approx 14%. Why do we often just count food as calories for those who are poor?

What is the root problem of people not being able to eat well? Is it their fault or is there a 'system failure' which causes this?

WHO TO FOLLOW ON THIS SUBJECT TO LEARN MORE

- [The Food Ethics Council](#)
- [Sustain](#)
- [Trussel Trust](#)
- [Company Shop and Community Shop](#)

HOW WOULD YOU APPROACH WRITING ABOUT THIS?

I would always start with language and look at why we have spoken about this issue as we have in the past, I would always try to get to the root causes and recognise that being poor limits your access to lots of things that most people accept as normal, things like good housing, health care, education, sports, arts, culture, food, clothes. Living in poverty limits your access to these things and food is only one of them.

I would also explore what are the systemic reasons that people struggle to access great food and those system would be;

- The global food system and the way food is retailed, where shops are and what they stock.
- The welfare system particularly Universal Credit processes.
- The labour and employment system and the way people on low income low skill jobs are contracted.

THE ORWELL YOUTH PRIZE

WHO WE ARE: The Orwell Youth Prize is an annual programme for 12-18-year olds culminating in a writing prize. Rooted in Orwell's values of integrity and fairness, the prize and the activities around it introduce young people to the power of language and provoke them to think critically and creatively about the world in which they are living. With a focus on social justice, the themes of the Youth Prize ask young people to respond to big ideas. We believe increasing young people's confidence in writing, critical thinking and interest in social justice helps to equip them for their next step, whether that be higher education, apprenticeships or work.

OUR MISSION: We are a small charity with big ambitions. We seek to amplify the voices that go unheard and in doing so give young people the tools, confidence and platform to make an impact and change the world around them.

SUPPORT THE YOUTH PRIZE: As a small charity we are always keen to build our network of supporters. If you are interested in getting involved in the Youth Prize or finding out more please get in touch with Programme Manager Alex Talbott - alexalbott@orwellyouthprize.co.uk