

Workshop Notes
“Food Security in the UK”
Dr. Bridget Holmes
8 November 2007

Low Incomes Diet and Nutrition Survey (LIDNS)

Concern was expressed that the LIDNS report gave a much more positive view than the presentation given today on food security. The report suggested that food poverty is not a problem in the UK but the responses to the food security questions suggest otherwise. The facilitator discussed how the food security measure formed a small part of the LIDNS survey and that the results should not be considered in isolation or without taking into account the limitations (see Group 2 discussion).

Definitions and Problems: Food Security vs. Food Poverty

Food Security is defined as: “Access by all people, at all times, to enough food for an active and healthy life.” This means the ability to acquire nutritionally adequate and safe foods in socially acceptable ways. There are different definitions of food security but they generally encompass the same issues.

Food security is a method of investigating food poverty and food access. There is a lot of crossover between food security and food poverty- “security” attempts to quantify a problem, which is difficult to do when assessing food poverty.

Policy makers and consumers may confuse food security and food poverty. To prevent this confusion, we should be clear about what we are trying to assess and use the most appropriate term and methodology.

Food security is linked to sustainability – a generic term. The concept can be applied to different levels (global through to individual or household level) which doesn’t help understanding. It is important to look at the individual or household level to realise the impact. The workshop focus was food security at the individual or household level.

Measuring food security involves asking the person in the household responsible for the shopping and food preparation a series of questions. Some questions cover the household as a whole while others cover adults and then children in the household. The particular questions that focus on children were not included in the analysis for LIDNS due to difficulties with comparability of results across household types (those with and without children).

Groups to Examine the Following Issues

1. **Causes of food insecurity in the UK**
Consider what may cause or contribute to food insecurity and which social groups may be at a greater risk of food insecurity.
2. **Food security assessment in the UK**
Consider the food security assessment and discuss any limitations of it.
3. **Consequences of food insecurity and UK policy response**
Consider the short and long term consequences of food insecurity and what could be done in terms of policy to overcome it.

1. Causes of food insecurity in the UK

Low income / affordability, reduced or poor mobility, financial skills, low education, poor cooking skills, poor health, lack of transport, distance to shops, facilities in local area / access to food / availability.

At risk groups:

Elderly, immigrants, low income, young mothers, large families, disabled, children of deprived parents, lone parents, children of lone parents, homeless, drug / alcohol dependent individuals.

2. Food security assessment in the UK

Feel quantitative measure of food poverty is useful. Makes it real and generates useful statistics for organisations and policy makers.

Limitations:

- Assessments are based over 12 month periods. How does one accurately remember that far back?
- The questions in the assessment are sensitive in nature - people may not provide accurate responses. It is a self reported / subjective assessment and there is potential for bias in the results.
- Where lists of responses/reasons are given people may use the easy option and provide the answer first on the list.
- No standard perception of what a 'balanced diet' is. (It is not defined in the question.)
- Confusion over definitions – several definitions of food security exist.
- How applicable is the concept of food insecurity to developed countries?

3. Consequences of food insecurity and UK policy response

Short term: Psychological impact, social context of consumption, stigma, going hungry, weight loss.

Long term: Poor health and educational achievement, nutrient deficiencies

Policy response:

No single answer, very complex issue

Community work is very valuable; vouchers and welfare schemes are good ideas and very effective. More needs to be done to alleviate food insecurity and food poverty in the UK at many different levels.