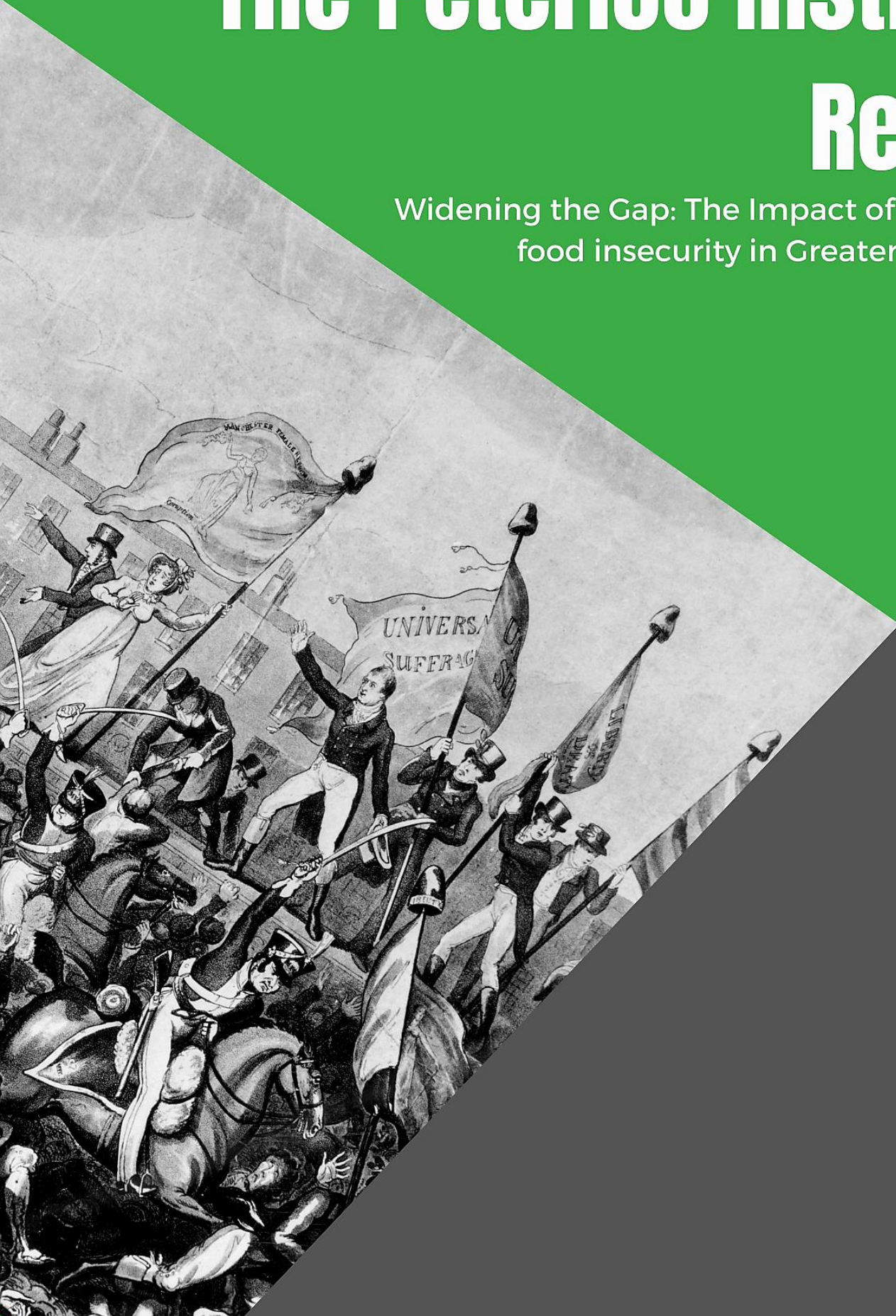29th March 2023

The Peterloo Institute Report

Widening the Gap: The Impact of Covid-19 on food insecurity in Greater Manchester

Health

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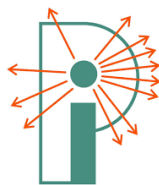
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Executive Summary

With a 25 times increase in applications for emergency care packages to The Trussell Trust between 2010 and 2019, the pandemic can be said to have highlighted and cemented food poverty as one of the most important topics in contemporary British politics.

Conducted during the pandemic lockdowns, this report aims to map out the perceptions of food bank volunteers and food poverty academics on reasons behind the usage and need of food banks. Pre-pandemic, issues of time in making healthy meals, the price of resources, and lack of access to supermarkets were flagged as key barriers; during COVID, these further included problems of a lack of internet access for online shopping, closure of local food banks depriving ability to purchase cheaper resources, and a general increase in poverty.

Policy Recommendations:
- As directly drawn from respondent suggestions, policies that emphasise autonomy, large-scale tackling of poverty, and increasing the supermarket presence to a community establishment should be encouraged.
- Furthermore, the report suggests a chronological series of policies to mitigate food poverty throughout the need cycle:
  - *Prevention*: monitoring and recognising those at risk of food poverty, conducting a welfare reform, and institutionalising 'soft' skills such as budgeting and cooking to improve people's interactions with food.
  - *Long-term interventions*: Providing training and advice as a means of regulating the density of fast-food outlets and increasing the ability for community-grown produce.
  - *Crisis Management*: a comprehensive signposting effort to help those in need know where to go for support, prioritising speed and autonomy.

The report also provides further qualitative evidence for the theory of the *"food desert"*, a geographical isolation of communities from access to fresh, affordable, healthy food.

Introduction

In 2020/21, it is estimated that 4.2 million people lived with food insecurity.[1] The pandemic has magnified the situation nationwide, with the majority of Greater Manchester's boroughs seeing almost half of its child population living in poverty.[2] Food inequality has been at the forefront of British politics and media: from a worrying increase in demand for free school meals and food banks, to the widespread criticism of the government's response to holiday hunger. The plight facing families has been highlighted by campaigns such as that of Manchester United footballer Marcus Rashford, whose publicised appeals aided in a cooperative effort between food bank volunteers and the hospitality industry to increase supply during the pandemic. Politically, there have also been some ground-breaking initiatives, such as the Manchester-based 'Right to Food' movement, which stirred national political turbulence in the summer of 2020.

Whilst it is encouraging to see such initiatives, it is feared that the full extent of the pandemic is not yet visible, and more needs to be done to mitigate the long-term impacts on our most vulnerable. Once again, the uneven outcomes in a crisis reflect a structurally unequal system. As with most societal injustices, the inability to fully access adequate and fresh food arises from disparities in income, ethnicity, gender, and geographical factors.

An understanding of so-called 'food deserts' is integral to any policy response to the above issues. The term 'food deserts' itself remains a contested theoretical terrain in urban studies, but is commonly used to refer to areas of socio-economic deprivation with poor access to healthy and affordable food.[3] Existing research explicates the relationship between limited food access and more serious health problems in residents.[4] Furthermore, investigations into food deserts display a distinct lack of work at Lower-Layer Super Output Areas (LSOA) and does not direct sufficient attention towards the inherently local character

[1] Brigid Francis-Devine et al., "Food poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals," *House of Commons Library,* no. 9209 (2022): 4, https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9209
[2] End Child Poverty, "Child poverty in your area," *End Child Poverty*, https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/
[3] Owen Walsh, "Food deserts: What they are and what causes them," *The Humane League: Food Justice*, February 22, 2022, https://thehumaneleague.org/article/food-desert.
[4] Jerry Shannon, "Food deserts: Governing obesity in the neoliberal city," *Progress in Human Geography* 38, no. 2 (2014), pp. 248-266, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132513484378

of food poverty.[5] Local level analysis of households thus is a valuable tool in researching the nuances of food poverty, wherein vast changes can be observed over relatively small distances across different neighbourhoods.

The impact of COVID-19 on how people interact with their local food system demands attention. The consequences of school closures, increased unemployment, shielding measures, and worsening mental health, among an array of other complex factors, require an in-depth examination to propose effective solutions for those most in need. Because of this urgency, this research aims to produce meaningful results that can aid the policy change we believe is fundamental to tackling inequality. The key focus is to explore how 'food deserts' affect access to affordable, fresh fruit and vegetables in high deprivation areas, taking an approach which aims to incorporate the views of those most involved with food provision into constructive policy guidance. The implications of the findings aim to inform the debate on food poverty by demonstrating the multi-causal nature of food deserts and their links to wider poverty, as well as and emphasising the importance of autonomy as an essential structure around which policy should be constructed.

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[5] End Child Poverty, "Child Poverty in your area".

Literature Review

Food Poverty in the UK

Food poverty has been increasing in the UK over the last ten years. In part, this is the result of the continuation of austerity and the resultant restructuring of the welfare system. A constitutive part of this restructuring is the implementation of Universal Credit which replaced the prior system of complex social security benefits.[6] Since the launch of Universal Credit in April 2013, food poverty among low-income families eligible for assistance has increased significantly.[7] Indeed, food provisions by Trussell Trust, who organise roughly 60% of the U.K's food banks, increased 25 times between 2010-11 and 2018-2019.[8] More recently, the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a sharp rise in food insecurity which has newly exposed many households and contributed to the quadrupling of food poverty rates among adults.[9]

Food insecurity can take numerous forms, from skipping meals to being unable to maintain a balanced diet, as was highlighted by a study showing that those experiencing food insecurity had less access to fruit and vegetables during lockdowns.[10] Unsurprisingly the pandemic made it more difficult for some to access food: lockdown rules prevented the sharing of meals with wider family and friends, isolation or shielding often required food deliveries which added delivery costs to many people's already stretched budgets and, as people bulk bought items, many cheaper items sold out, leaving only expensive alternatives.[11] Consequently, many households have turned to the voluntary sector, which has assisted

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[6] Department for Work & Pensions, "2010 to 2015 government policy: Welfare reform," GOV.UK, May 8th 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-welfare-reform/2010-to-2015-government-policy-welfare-reform#appendix-1-government-policy-on-universal-credit-an-introduction.

[7] Human Rights Watch, "Nothing left in the cupboards: Austerity, welfare cuts, and the Right to Food in the UK," Human Rights Watch, May 20th 2019, https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/20/nothing-left-cupboards/austerity-welfare-cuts-and-right-food-uk.

[8] The Trussell Trust, "End of year stats," accessed March 1 2023, https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/.

[9] Shona Goudie and Zoe McIntyre, "A Crisis Within a Crisis: The impact of Covid-19 on household food security," *The Food Foundation,* March 1st 2021, https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/FF_Impact-of-Covid_FINAL.pdf

[10] Amber Wheeler et al., "Veg voice report: Covid veg," *The Food Foundation*, March 4th 2021, https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/veg-voice-report-covid-veg.

[11] Caitlin Connors, Laura Malan, Siobhan Canavan, Fan Sissoko, Maria Carmo, Claire Shepherd and Fran Cook, "The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19," *Food Standards Agency,* (2020), https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-food-insecurity-2020_-report-v5.pdf/

millions during the pandemic.[12] However, such aid can be unstable and many struggle to access such support, as charities are consistently overstretched.[13] Moreover, as with any form of inequality, food insecurity particularly affects certain socio-economic groups. Racialized minorities experienced higher levels of food poverty throughout the pandemic, whilst adults with severe disabilities faced five times the level of food insecurity than adults without, while families with children also disproportionately suffered.[14]

Manchester

Additionally, the increase in food insecurity has not been uniformly distributed across England, with the COVID-19 crisis making salient the UK's regional health divides.[15] This has highlighted the north of England as being especially vulnerable to food insecurity. In Greater Manchester it is estimated that before the pandemic 620,000 people in the region experienced food poverty out of a total estimated population of 2,835,686 as estimated by ONS in 2020, with the proportion increasing as the pandemic continues.[16]

Although there have been previous programmes attempting to tackle food poverty (i.e., 'No Child Should Go Hungry', Food Poverty Alliance), a system operating based on just-in-time supply chains has inevitably been confronted with stockpiling and supply issues resulting from COVID-19. And pre-existing structural inequalities in areas such as income, mobility and social support have undermined the efficacy of such interventions.[17] Local data reveals the extent of the pandemic's role in exacerbating these pre-existing inequalities: FareShare, a food redistribution charity, nearly doubled its output of food in the first two weeks of lockdown.[18] Moreover, new inequalities have been exposed in accessing food, such

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[12] Goudie and McIntyre, "A crisis within a crisis."
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] Madeleine Power, Bob Doherty, Katie Pybus and Kate Pickett, "How COVID-19 has exposed inequalities in the UK food system: The case of UK food and poverty," *Emerald Open Research* 2, no. 11 (2020), https://doi.org/10.35241/emeraldopenres.13539.1.
[16] Office for National Statistics, "Population estimates for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2019," Office for National Statistics, June 24, 2020, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2019estimates.
[17] Power et al., "How COVID-19 has exposed inequalities in the UK food system."
[18] Fareshare, "FareShare doubles the amount of food delivered to those in need during coronavirus crisis," Fareshare, May 21st 2020, https://fareshare.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/fareshare-doubles-the-amount-of-food-delivered-to-those-in-need-during-coronavirus-crisis.

as insecure employment and reduced obtainability of items in supermarkets, which interfere with conduct commonly adopted in low-income households, including purchasing items at a reduced cost at multiple different supermarkets.[19]

Food poverty is more likely to occur in deprived areas with health inequalities in Manchester observable at a ward level.[20] It is estimated that nearly half of Manchester's neighbourhoods are in the most deprived 10% in England.[21] Illustrative of localised inequality between regions, every borough within Manchester, save for Stockport and Trafford, report at least a tenth of their household population living with food insecurity. [22] These figures thus uncover the striking differences between neighbourhoods. Resultantly, to understand the impact of COVID-19 on food insecurity we have decided to focus our work on a local-level analysis of these wards. As there is not a national consensus on how to measure food poverty, we have decided to conceptualise food poverty through a geographical concept, 'food deserts', which has been used to understand the poor access to food in deprived areas.[23]

Food Poverty and Food Deserts

Food poverty can be identified as the inability to access affordable and healthy fresh food.[24] Food deserts are therefore a form of this, often in the geographical sense of how far people are from healthy and affordable fresh food. This is vital to research in building a stronger understanding of the experiences of food poverty in Greater Manchester, and more specifically, of the Harpurhey ward. The term 'food desert' is contested in theoretical and social research and could be divided into smaller categories based on whether the barriers to fresh food are physical, financial, or down to the mental attitudes of the shopper.[25] This acknowledges that the obstacles to fresh food may not simply be one of space and distance, but apply in areas of poverty and deprivation as well as being dependent on a person's

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[19] Madeleine Power, Bob Doherty, Neil Small, Simon Teasdale, and Kate E. Pickett, "All in it together? Community food aid in a multi-ethnic context," *Journal of Social Policy* 46, no, 3 (2017), pp. 447-471, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279417000010.
[20] Michael Marmot et al., "Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 years on", *Institute of Health Equity*, 2020, pp. 84-86, https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on.
[21] Manchester City Council, "Indices of Deprivation 2019," Manchester City Council, 2019, https://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/27587/indices_of_deprivation_2019.pdf.
[22] Greater Manchester Poverty Action, "Fuel, utilities and food," GMPA, accessed March 1, 2023, https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/pm2022-fuel-utilities-food.
[23] Dianna Smith and Claire Thompson, *Food Deserts and Food Insecurity in the UK: Exploring Social Inequality.* (Oxfordshire: Taylor and Francis, 2022).
[24] Walsh, "Food deserts."
[25] Hillary J. Shaw, "Food deserts: Towards the development of a classification," *Human Geography* 88, no. 2 (2006), pp. 231-247, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.2006.00217.x.

individual circumstances. However, this creates a large data scope of unsupportive food environments and attempting to cover it all would not result in the rich data in one area that this study is aiming for. It is vital though to consider that this field is more complex than just physical access to fresh food;[26] the physical area can impact how people shop as well as the mental and financial factors involved,[27] and this research therefore aims to provide a base from which further research can be conducted.

In addition, it is in these areas in which physical access to food is limited that people are also more likely to face mental and financial barriers. Public health authorities have shown particular interest in food deserts within urban areas with limited access to fresh food.[28] This is important because people in urban areas would be expected to have efficient access to food but this is often denied in more deprived areas. Food deserts are therefore characterised by deprived areas with little access to affordable fresh food within a reasonable distance.[29] A definition for food deserts to work from is based on the scarcity of food retailers in geographical areas, such as "urban zones with 10 stores or fewer and none with over 20 employees".[30] This is connected with, although not interchangeable, with 'food insecurity' and food poverty; based on the inability to access or eat healthy and nutritious food or being worried about future prospects for doing so.[31] This is strongly linked to financial access to food, though clearly overlaps in areas with the concept of food deserts as they both consider access.

This research will, however, approach food deserts primarily from a distance-based perspective towards access to fresh food in order to fit with the scope and time constraints of the study, allowing for further research to consider other complexities surrounding food deserts.[32] It is key to acknowledge that it is not only supermarkets that provide fresh food, but also specialist and local stores.[33] For the purposes of this study, and based on the pertaining

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[26] Philippe Apparicio, Marie-Soleil Cloutier, and Richard Shearmur, "The case of Montreal's missing food deserts: Evaluation of accessibility to food supermarkets," *International Journal of Health Geographics* 6, no. 4 (2007), https://doi.org/10.1186/1476-072X-6-4.

[27] Francine Rodier, Fabien Durif, and Myriam Ertz, "Food deserts: Is it only about a limited access?," *British Food Journal* 119, no. 7 (2017), pp.1495-1510 https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-09-2016-0407.

[28] Apparicio, Cloutier, and Shearmur, "The case of Montreal's missing food deserts."

[29] Julie Beaulac, Elizabeth Kristjansson, and Steven Cummins, "A systematic review of food deserts 1966-2007," *Preventing Chronic Disease* 6, no. 3 (2009), http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/ issues/2009/jul/08_0163.html.

[30] Deja Hendrickson, Chery Smith, and Nicole Eikenberry, "Fruit and vegetable access in four low-income food deserts communities in Minnesota," *Agriculture and Human Values* 23, (2006): 372, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-006-9002-8

[31] Smith and Thompson, *Food deserts and food insecurity in the UK.*

[32] Shaw, "Food deserts".

[33] Apparicio, Cloutier, and Shearmur, "The case of Montreal's missing food deserts."

literature, the definition of food deserts will be areas that fall beyond a 500m radius of fresh food grocers, classified as having "poor access" to fresh food. Finally, the research will approach this complex issue in the context of Greater Manchester to adequately identify the importance of addressing food deserts in Harpurhey, Manchester and more broadly in unequal regions of the UK.

Methodology

The methodology aimed to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food provision providers in Greater Manchester, especially those situated in food deserts. The methodology also aimed to identify key barriers to accessing fresh food and uncover experiences of accessing food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method of Data Collection and Sampling

To understand food access at a local level, workers at food banks and food clubs in Greater Manchester were interviewed. Interviewees were selected based on their professional involvement in food procurement, food banks, and food clubs. Additionally, some interviewees were chosen based on their academic research into food poverty, food insecurity and food deserts. Thus, the data collected represented a range of perspectives and experiences regarding food poverty in Greater Manchester.

Nine interviews were conducted, which each lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. The number of interviews was restricted by logistical barriers such as response rate and completion deadlines. There are advantages and disadvantages to the small sample size used in this research. The ability to construct broadly applicable conclusions from the data collected was hindered by a small sample size. However, a fully representative set of data on experiences of and perspectives on food poverty in Greater Manchester is beyond the scope of this research. Rather, the research aimed to develop a detailed understanding of subjective, personal experiences and perspectives on food poverty. For this research, a smaller sample size was advantageous because it allowed each interview to be longer and of greater depth.

Survey Design

Qualitative interviewing was selected for this research because it provides "uniquely privileged data, grounded in biographical experiences and social contexts" that is conducive to a comprehensive understanding of food desserts.[34] A semi-structured interview approach –

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[34] James Staples and Katherine Smith, "Introduction: The Interview as Analytical Category," in *Extraordinary Encounters:Authenticity and the Interview*, eds. James Staples, Katherine Smith and Nigel Rapport (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), pp. 1-2.

where some questions were established before the interview, and further questions were devised during the interview in response to the interviewee – enabled interviewees to delve into their specialities and elaborate on their thoughts. This productive dialogue was facilitated using prompts during the interviews, which allowed the interviewer to explore certain themes in more detail.[35]

Ethical Considerations

Interviewees were contacted through email and through social media platforms, including Linkedin. Interviewees were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) containing information about the purpose of the research and its implications for their personal data. An ethics process was undertaken prior to the research to protect interviewees' personal data, which consisted of their names, organisation names, job roles, and personal opinions. Data was collected and stored in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018, with the Peterloo Institute as Data Controller for this research. The research was deemed medium risk due to the sensitive nature of the topic, and it was decided that the data collected would be anonymised.

Evaluation

Although qualitative semi-structured interviews were a suitable approach for this research – facilitating depth of understanding and productive rapport between interviewer and interviewee – one drawback was the absence of quantitative data to widen the applicability of the research. For example, triangulation is a quantitative practice that improves the credibility of research.[36] A quantitative element would aid a more rigorous exploration of food deserts in Greater Manchester. However, previous quantitative research has identified the existence and character of food deserts such that it is possible to draw on this data within this research. Thus, interviews with food poverty experts and mapping of the food desert problem in Harpurhey were appropriate approaches, offering meaningful insight into the occurrence and impacts of food deserts and food insecurity in Greater Manchester.

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[35] Bernard H. Russell, *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*, 6th ed. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

[36] Wendy Olsen, "Triangulation in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods can Really be Mixed", in *Developments in Sociology*, Michael Haralambos ed. (Manchester: Causeway Press, 2004), pp. 103-118.

The research originally aimed to address only Harpurhey in Manchester, through interviews and mapping. However, due to the limited availability of organisations in Harpurhey, the scope of the research was expanded to encompass organisations across Greater Manchester. This wider scope was useful because it offered a wider view of food desserts, enabling different localities to be compared. Furthermore, data from a wider range of organisations that are responsible for a wider range of programs was able to be collected within the new scope.

In summary, nine qualitative semi-structured interviews, lasting around 30-45 minutes, were conducted to gain in-depth knowledge of food deserts and food insecurity. Additionally, mapping was conducted of the Harpurhey area to illustrate the geographic extent of the food desert issue and to highlight hotspots.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

To explore food insecurity in Greater Manchester, interviews were carried out with key relevant actors in this field. A total of nine interviews were conducted with a variety of workers from charities and poverty action groups. The design of interviews followed four principles.

1. Firstly, to gain a real understanding into why food insecurity and deserts exist.
2. Secondly to understand how it has been affected by the pandemic.
3. Thirdly what has been done to aid the situation.
4. Fourthly what policies ought to be implemented to really solve it.

This section will be a full analysis of the interviews having collated all responses.

1) Analysis

Food Deserts

Most participants understood food deserts. Participant 1 stated they "ought to be addressed" as they are where food insecurity is more likely to happen. There is indeed a need for a definition, as there was not a clear and shared one by the participants. One of the key points brought up by participants was the fact that there is no demand for fresh food in food deserts. Consequently, there is also a lack of supply in the stores of the area. In the words of participant 5 "people [who live in food deserts] are less likely to buy fresh produce, these shops are going to be less likely to stock them". There were various reasons pointed out explaining why the residents do not purchase these foods. Price unaffordability appeared a couple of times, where it was discussed, that people would rather have frozen food than fresh fruit and veg (Participants 3 and 7), as it is understood as cheaper. Consequently, this lack of demand, described by Participant 1 as "absolutely empty", is not profitable for supermarkets and they close. So, there is "barely any available fresh food" (Participant 9). Sometimes "you have no access to other than a corner shop" (Participant 3) where they do not have fresh fruit and vegetables due to, again, no demand.

While participants had differing understanding/relationships with food deserts, all participants recognised that they are rooted in geography. For instance, Participant 4 stated that "there are big differences between different bits of Manchester", a point mirrored in

Participant 9's testimony that there is a "real disparity between populations". Both accounts touched on the fact that food deserts are more likely to be in the densely-populated and deprived areas. One of the participants had carried out a research project that "found potential food deserts" (Participant 9) in Greater Manchester. The areas mentioned were North Manchester (e.g. Harpurhey), East (Wythenshawe) and South (Chorlton). In summary, most deprived areas are more likely to have food deserts. A recurring theme were the barriers to physical access such as the lack and cost of transport, time and income (Participant 1). This was defined by one participant as the "poverty tax" (Participant 2).

Deprived Areas

Regarding the food poverty situation before Covid, there were a few recurring themes highlighted in the interviews. Firstly, many of the interviewees noted that, as well as general difficulties in accessing food, there are additional barriers to accessing nutritious and healthy food and to making nutritious, well-balanced meals, as these are often more complex and time-consuming (Participant 4). Participants 3 and 4 emphasised that many people lack the skills needed to cook complicated, healthy meals, which raises the question of whether people, particularly those living alone, have the motivation to make something complicated, instead preferring a quicker, easier but less healthy option.

Another theme raised was the issue of time poverty, which was discussed by Participant 6 as something often accompanying financial poverty; if you are working multiple jobs or unsociable hours, or working while looking after young children, it becomes much more difficult to find time to cook complex meals. What is more, a scarcity of time comes into contention with an individuals' ability to prepare food especially if someone lacks cooking utensils or a fully functional kitchen (Participant 9). Participant 7 summarises, "you can hand over someone an aubergine, but then if they take it home and throw it in the bin, you haven't helped them". This quote highlights the time, skills, resources, and motivation necessary to cook meals using fresh fruit and vegetables. This perhaps explains the lack of demand in stores, leading to food deserts where it is then inaccessible.

Location can act as a huge barrier to accessing healthier food. An individual's proximity to a supermarket, which are essential for providing cheaper and varied products, can often determine their ability to access these options. In areas classed as 'food deserts', where housing is a significant distance away from stores with fresh fruit and vegetables, it is

often the case that households are unable to access cheaper and varied produce. The ways in which location acted as a barrier to access was discussed by participants. Participants 6 and 9 highlighted how not having access to a car or having mobility issues compounds one's ability to drive or travel to a supermarket. Participant 9 raised the point that many local corner shops are unable to compete with the prices of big supermarkets. A point echoed by Participant 6, who said that this amounts to a 'poverty premium', that is, "if you ... live in a poor area, and you've not got the car ... you've got much less choice, and you're gonna pay a lot more, even though ... you may be in much greater need." (Participant 6).

It became clear from the interviews that food poverty does not operate in isolation. But rather, it is linked to broader financial poverty, time poverty and mental and physical health (Participants 3 and 8). This means that the causes of food poverty do not occur in isolation. Austerity-era policies, such as reductions in benefits and a low minimum wage in the U.K. have contributed to increases in food poverty in the last decade (Participants 2 and 3). Areas affected by such policies, driven into greater poverty, thus suffer from food poverty. This cyclical relationship was summed up neatly by Participant 3, who said, "if you've got areas, which (where) people are less likely to buy fresh produce, those shops are going to be less likely to stock them" (Participant 3).

These varied problems worsened for many during Covid-19 Lockdowns. For example, it caused more people to rely on online shopping, particularly if they were in isolation or shielding, which further excluded those without internet access or bank accounts (Participant 3). In addition to this, many food banks or food provision projects closed, reducing access at a crucial time (Participant 6). Though food parcel provision schemes alleviated the worst effects of these closures, the social or community aspects of pre-lockdown food projects were lost.

Supply, Demand, and Skillset

Throughout the interviews, it was possible to see the supply and demand, both in supermarkets and food aid, as a key theme surrounding food deserts. Within supermarkets, participants discussed how stores will not stock fresh fruit and vegetables if there is no demand for these items, or if they cannot make enough profit from them to justify it. One participant noted that fresh fruit is often not seen as essential, "It's not on an essential food list. So therefore, when money is low, that will be one of the first things what (that) bites the

dust" (Participant 5). This highlights one reason why less affluent areas are at a higher risk of becoming food deserts if people cannot afford to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, the stores will stop selling them because the demand and profit are not there. The participant highlighted however that this can be linked to a lack of education in food because "If you know how to cook with fruit and veg, that (way) you can make cheap meals as well" (Participant 5), which suggests that given more education, less affluent areas would purchase the fresh fruit and vegetables, creating the demand necessary. Similarly, it was noted that in food aid, specifically a grocer organisation, when the fruit and vegetables were not free, customers instead stocked up on other staples, and there would not be a demand for this.

Participant 3 explained how the items that those using food aid found accessible and knew how to use, such as tinned food and frozen foods, would get taken much before any fruit and vegetables. They went on to discuss how uncommon vegetables would be left, as people did not know what to do with them, "celeriac sweet potatoes, it was like, I don't want to take that because I don't know what to do with it", which highlights again the education aspect affecting the demand on fresh fruit and vegetables. Further, it was discussed by multiple participants that those using food aid would opt for frozen chips rather than potatoes because it is seen as quicker and easier, highlighting a lessened demand for fresh fruit and vegetables than might be in an affluent household with more time. This refers to how food aid and being in poverty can perpetuate unhealthy lifestyles, where fresh fruit and vegetables cannot be a priority there are "neighbourhoods with the highest obesity. The poorest health related to lifestyle" (Participant 5), as much of the food being taken from food aid is unhealthy, and there is not the finance or education necessary to add fresh fruit and vegetables to the essential list, despite the detrimental effects on their lives.[37]

Other Aspects

Another area discussed by the participants was the environmental dimensions of food insecurity, especially in the wake of the pandemic. Participant 7 brought this issue to the forefront of discussion with the point that the escalating poverty levels following the lockdown in March 2020 removed some of the impetus to improve sustainability and reduce overproduction. They said, "I think we're looking at the social because of the pandemic quite a lot (...). The pandemic is the obvious immediate worry for everyone. And it's made food

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[37] Kayleigh Garthwaite, Peter J. Collins, and Clare Bambra, "Food for thought: An ethnographic study of negotiating ill health and food insecurity in a UK foodbank," *Social Science & Medicine* 132 (2015): 38-44.

poverty far worse". This point about prioritising people at the expense of sustainability highlights the importance of getting food to people over the past 18 months, as there has been no choice but to deal with the present situation, Participant 5 shared this view, "the priority of the environmental aspects probably is declined or isn't at the forefront of people's minds...delivering that immediate need.".

However, some of the participants argued that in the wake of Covid-19, there will be a shift back towards considering the environmental implications of food insecurity. For example, Participant 3 discussed how food aid which uses surplus food can indirectly help the environment. They said, "throwing it (surplus food) away causes landfill problems, landfills cause climate change. So, by helping us take projects, you are helping save the planet." (Participant 3).

On the other hand, Participant 5 suggested that surplus food on balance presented a greater danger to the environment. They raised the point that certain foods are "knowingly overproduced" and asked, "is food aid perpetuating the overproduction of food?", which highlights how food made for brand awareness can land in food aid which allows the cycle of overproduction to continue. Vitally, this is often unhealthy food which perhaps makes the situation worse for those requiring food aid, perpetuating unhealthy lifestyles.

Recommendations

Numerous policy suggestions were made throughout the interview process. Participant 7 emphasised the importance of policies that create autonomy, stating that this is one benefit of giving people money rather than subsidising outgoings. He emphasised that, while there is a plethora of prejudicial "horror stories about what poor people might do if they're given money", these are unrealistic, and people need to be able to decide for themselves whether they are prioritising food or rent and so on this week.

However, policy recommendations mustn't only consider the short term. As Participant 9 summarises "it's not just about firefighting, it's not just about emergency supervision, it's about helping people but tackling the root cause". This involves an approach that includes "benefits advice, debt advice, housing support, employment skills training & opportunities, or routes into employment' (Participant 2). Countering food poverty involves more than simply providing food, it involves upskilling, counselling, and building community

links and support networks (Participant 7). Participant 8 similarly emphasises that the provision of advice alongside the material provision is essential.

The interviews also emphasised the importance of coordination among the food provision efforts in Greater Manchester. As Participant 6 summarised "there are lots of people doing lots of things, but it's not always that coordinated or targeted". Consequently, there is a need for monitoring programmes, collecting data, etc. Similarly, Participant 8 recommends a coordinated and clear approach to get comprehensive data, suggesting a UK-wide yearly data collection survey to ensure an efficient and targeted tackling of food poverty.

The role of supermarkets repeatedly occurred in the interviews, both in a positive and negative light. The essential roles that supermarkets play in providing cheap and varied food emphasised the need for supermarkets in areas that currently lack access. Participant 6 suggested an incentive programme to increase supermarkets in food deserts: "if you're going to allow a supermarket to set up, you know, in certain areas, maybe can there be some sort of licensing or requirements and to also ensure that they establish a presence in some of the communities that is probably the market forces are to do out" (Participant 6). However, Participant 1 stated that cases of incentivising supermarkets in the U.S. hadn't had much success. Alternatively, Participant 1 emphasises the significant waste produced by supermarkets, particularly own-labelled food brands, and those laws which prevent fine quality consumable goods from being discarded could be essential to providing more food sources for food provision organisations.

Conclusion
In conclusion, it is evident that food poverty does not exist independently, but instead in conjunction with financial and time poverty often as well as poor mental and physical health. Food deserts materialise in areas that supermarkets deem unprofitable and further food insecurity in these areas. The issue of food poverty is also in part due to a lack of knowledge regarding diet and neglect of the importance of fresh fruit and vegetables but also due to their relative expense. These troubles were exacerbated even further during the pandemic thanks to lost income and the lack of internet access that many faced, preventing them from arranging delivery of groceries. In terms of combating food insecurity, food banks could be better equipped to serve people if legislation was made to reduce the powers that supermarkets have

in discarding perfectly edible food. From a longer-term perspective, benefits advice and upskilling services already exist but there is room for improving the uptake of these services, this way people gain access to the maximum amount of income that they are due and provide themselves ways to gain better paying employment that could drag them out of the financial circumstances that they find themselves in.

2) Areas of Concern

In reviewing the research conducted, it is possible to surmise this into the problems that must be addressed reflecting the findings discussed. This has been categorised into three types:

1. The direct issues of food deserts,
2. The wider problems related to food deserts,
3. The effects of COVID-19 on this issue.

1) Direct Issues of Food Deserts

In the research, it was established that food deserts are defined as areas that have a lack of access to cheap and healthy fresh fruit and vegetables and restricted access to supermarkets. This itself brings with it issues of nutrition for people of all ages. Participants highlighted problems with low nutrition and access being restricted to unhealthy and quick foods, causing obesity and malnutrition.

Similarly, areas that can be classified as food deserts are disproportionately deprived areas, and these residents then face additional charges in accessing food, often referred to under the 'poverty tax'. This can be due to travel costs to supermarkets, or higher prices in convenience stores, and disproportionately affects people with mobility issues or without cars. This must be addressed by ensuring that everyone has easy access to fresh fruit and vegetables.

However, it was also mentioned that food poverty does not operate in isolation. It is linked more broadly to financial poverty, time poverty, and poor mental and physical health. This can mean that there is less time and money to make complex healthy meals. This highlights that in situations where there is access to fresh fruit and vegetables, it is still likely not going to be chosen, which affects the supply and demand in stores cycling to food deserts once more. This is because individuals living in poverty do not have the time to cook

complex meals, perhaps due to jobs or responsibilities. Additionally, participants mentioned the skills required to cook healthy meals, which may never have been taught, leaving the individual's best option to choose the food that is fast, cheap, and easy. This can be addressed by ways of cooking classes and food provision services, such as the food clubs from which some participants were involved in. The success stories demonstrated the possibilities of more nutritional and accessible options, although there is a need for more preventative approaches.

2) Wider Problems of Food Provision Linked with Food Deserts

Speaking to the problems of food poverty and provision more widely, participants noted the need for policies that focus on long-term solutions and tackling the root of the problem and addressing this. For example, there must be services that do not remove autonomy, many food provision services only support those in poverty by subsidising particular items rather than increasing their total wealth and addressing the problem with low income. This removes the ability to choose how to use their resources and does not address the cause of the problem. This leaves individuals using food banks very regularly rather than as a crisis measure. As well as this, it was mentioned that in relation to food provision there is an issue with how supermarkets will give to food banks. Many supermarkets refuse to send their unwanted food to food banks with their branding on the product. This would then cost a manufacturer to change any labelling and makes donations more difficult. Therefore, it is less likely that food banks will receive them. Alternatively, participants highlighted that there are products made solely for brand awareness that the company knows will not sell, leaving this on its way to food banks, as this food was made to be wasted. Hence, it is vital to make policies that decrease preventable food waste and allow unwanted food to go straight to food banks.

3) How COVID-19 Affected Food Poverty

During the multiple national lockdowns due to COVID-19, food provisions were required to change to accommodate the crisis. Reliance on online shopping for many during the lockdown excluded those without bank accounts or internet access highlighting an important factor affecting the access that people have to food. As well as this, food provision services changed massively during COVID-19 to focus on crisis services, leaving many long-term and preventative measures on the sidelines. Due to the urgency to get food to people in food crisis, food banks had to act in this mode. However, it is vital to reinforce those preventative

measures in food provision to begin a decrease in food poverty rather than 'firefighting' as one interviewee put it. Finally, participants mentioned a lack of coordination between services and a huge increase in food provision services to combat the crisis. However, this must be made more clear, communicative, and accessible to create a strong network of food provisions that can work together to help and prevent food poverty.

Policy Recommendations

1) A Review of Previous Literature

The current policy-based literature regarding food poverty makes numerous policy suggestions. These are vital to consider and can be split into proposals that focus on preventative measures, long-term solutions, or immediate crisis provision.

Preventative Measures

Due to the extensive funding and organisation and the necessary long-term stability of preventative measures, many of these recommendations fall under the remit of national and/or local government. The themes recur within the existing literature on preventative policies: the need to recognise food insecurity as related to other forms of poverty and financial insecurity, the connection between food insecurity and the welfare system, and the importance of skills and training to prevent food poverty.

The literature recognises that food poverty does not operate in isolation from other types of poverty. Many aspects of life can influence experiences of food security/ insecurity e.g. unemployment, low-paid or insecure employment, long-term physical or mental illness, expensive housing, and inadequate benefits.[38] As Moore and Evans summarise: "Communities need increased access to high quality and affordable housing and opportunities for secure employment" if food insecurity is to be prevented.[39] "Childcare as a barrier for parents/carers who want to return to work must also be addressed."[40]Furthermore, efforts are needed to combat the further costs that can be incurred by experiences of food insecurity or poverty more generally, often known as the 'poverty premium'. Oxfam estimates that "those who are poorest pay an additional £490 per year on things like having to use a pre-payment meter to heat their homes, buying healthy food at local shops instead of being able to get to cheaper out of town supermarkets, and relying on expensive rent to own schemes to purchase

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[38] Monica Hill, Barbara Goldberg, and Karim Mitha, *Food Poverty Action Plan*. (London: London Borough of Waltham Forest, 2018).
[39] Bernadette Moore and Charlotte Evans, *Tackling Childhood Food Poverty in the UK*. (Leeds: University of Leeds, 2020), p.3, https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/168869/1/PolicyLeeds-Brief4_Childhood-Food-Poverty.pdf [Accessed 1 December 2021].
[40] Ibid.

household goods".[41] Consequently, policies that aim to tackle food poverty must take a holistic approach and recognise its interrelation with other experiences of poverty.

When considering preventative policies for food insecurity, the Fabian Commission, a food poverty commission set up by the Fabian Society, found that numerous governmental provision measures could significantly reduce food poverty.[42] These included:

- An improved benefit system that countered the food poverty caused by delays or mistakes in the system or by individuals receiving sanctions.[43]
- Establishing a minister with the responsibility to reduce food insecurity.[44] This recommendation has also been made by Oxfam.[45]

The Fabian Commission is not alone in highlighting the necessity of welfare reform in countering food poverty and insecurity.[46] While this Autumn saw nearly 6 million people receive a significant cut in their universal credit benefits, numerous charities and food poverty organisations have highlighted the need for welfare reform, often in the form of a more empathetic system to counter food insecurity.[47] Evans and Moore (2018) also highlight the need for clearer information for those eligible for benefits and support in claiming these. Lambie-Mumford argues that the state is moving away from its role to provide food to its citizens, causing an increase in food instability and reliance on the third sector and crisis provision.[48] This shift, from food access is viewed as a human and citizen right to emergency food provision becoming the remit of charity is problematic, as access to charity "is not a

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[41] Katheline Kerridge, *A Menu to End Hunger in the UK*, Oxfam Policy & Practice, October 29 2020, https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/a-menu-to-end-hunger-in-the-uk-62040 [Acessed 1 December 2022].

[42] Cameron Tait, *Hungry for Change*. (London: The Fabian Society, 2015).

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Kerridge, *A Menu to End Hunger in the UK*.

[46] Jessica Sellick, "Hidden Hunger – How Can We Tackle Food Poverty and Insecurity in Rural Areas?" Rural Services Network, January 6 2019, https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/hidden-hunger-how-can-we-tackle-food-poverty-and-insecurity-in-rural-areas [Accessed 1 December 2021].

[47] Hannah Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK: Charity, Rights and Welfare*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute, 2015). http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/SPERI-Paper-18-food-poverty-in-the-UK.pdf [Accessed 1 December 2021]; Sellick, *How Can We Tackle Food Poverty*; Citizens Advice, "Universal Credit cut: Everything you need to know," Citizens Advice, 6 August 2021, https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/about-us1/media/press-releases/universal-credit-cut-everything-you-need-to-know/; Hannah Westwater, "Food poverty in the UK: The causes, figures and solutions," The Big Issue, 7 April 2021, https://www.bigissue.com/news/social-justice/food-poverty-in-the-uk-the-causes-figures-and-solutions/ [Accessed 1 December 202].

[48] Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK*.

right and accessible to all", and decreases certainty around food provision.[49] As a consequence Lambie-Mumford recommends that charities and NGOs work to ensure food is recognised as a right and a social good which is the responsibility of the state.[50]

A final aspect of preventative policy that recurred both in the policy literature and in our research relates to skills and training. Hill, Goldberg, and Mitha's report on behalf of Waltham Forest local council in London highlight the importance of building skills in cooking and budgeting.[51] Similarly, a policy brief on behalf of the University of Leeds highlights the importance of "lifestyle behaviours" and "cooking skills" being developed from an early age.[52] Providing people with the necessary skills is central to empowering people. However, it is vital that this focus on skills doesn't form a deficit approach to the causes of poverty: an approach in which those in poverty are constructed as being so as they are 'lacking', whether this is lacking skills in budgeting, cooking, or any other area. This approach is problematic and can lead to victim-blaming. Nonetheless, it remains a common approach and narrative in the popular imagination. For example; in 2013, Michael Gove, then education secretary, speaking about food banks, claimed that families are forced to use food banks because of their own "decisions" and because of an inability to "manage their own finances".[53] Policies based of such a deficit approach can remove agency from people experiencing poverty e.g. by offering subsidisations on particular items rather than increased incomes, in a way that removes peoples control over their own spending patterns, and consequently such policies should replaced with those that work to provide agency to those they assist, whether through skill or material support.

Long-Term Solutions
Providing long-term solutions for food insecurity requires making solutions that are sustainable and coordinated. These policy recommendations tend to focus on a broader range of actors than the crisis provision recommendations including local and national governments and food insecurity charities and organisations. The need for a coordinated approach, something that was also highlighted in our research, means that partnership underlies much of

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[49] Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK*.
[50] Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK*.
[51] Monica Hill, Barbara Goldberg, and Karim Mitha, *Food Poverty Action Plan*.
[52] Moore and Evans, *Tackling Childhood Food Poverty in the UK*, p.2.
[53] Matt Chorely, "Poor forced to use food banks? They've only got themselves to blame for making bad decisions, says Michael Gove," The Daily Mail, 10 September 2013, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2416737/Michael-Gove-food-banks-Poor-got-blame.html [Accessed 1 December 2021].

these recommendations.[54] Hill, Goldberg and Mitha suggest a food partnership made up of all the relevant stakeholders, including third sector organisations, community groups and relevant professionals in health, schools/ education.[55] Linked to this need for coordination, Hill, Goldberg and Mitha emphasise the importance of relevant organisations identifying those at risk of poverty and being equipped to signpost them to the relevant services.[56] While it is vital that support is in place, it is also vital that people know how to access this support. Lambie-Mumford expands the actors usually included in food security partnerships to include the food industry, arguing that their role should increase from ad hoc support of charity projects to "part of its corporate social responsibility. The industry – specifically retailers – should also look at fairness across their food chains".[57] In regards to food deserts in particular, Hill, Goldberg and Mitha recognise the need for increased access to healthy food.[58] One such approach would involve the local council supporting the local community to increase community food growing programmes and places, particularly in areas which currently lack healthy foods.[59] As well as providing a continual supply of sustainable healthy foods, this approach would have the additional benefits of creating social spaces which could also offer informal support and advice e.g. regarding cooking with the food, and combat the social isolation which becomes more prevalent with poverty. However, the quantity of food produced through community food growing, and the time which it would take to produce such food may limit the impact of such projects. Evans and Moore instead argue for "national policies regulating the density of fast-food outlets or food retail access", to manage both the high concentration of unhealthy food and the lack of supermarkets that often characterise low income areas.[60]

Another important aspect of long-term solutions, and one that was repeatedly highlighted in our research, was the need for high quality and comprehensive information, based on which policies can be formed.[61] For example, Lucas et al emphasise the need, going

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[54] Patricia J Lucas, Gill Cowburn, Andy Street, Ped Asgarian, Lucy Jackman, Sally Hogg, Grace Davies, "COVID-19: Local coordination delivered emergency food, but food plans must address food insecurity," *The University of Bristol*, March 2021, http://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/covid-food-insecurity/ [Accessed 1 December 2021].
[55] Hill, Goldberg, and Mitha, *Food Poverty Action Plan*.
[56] Hill, Goldberg, and Mitha, *Food Poverty Action Plan*.
[57] Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK*, 2.
[58] Hill, Goldberg, and Mitha, *Food Poverty Action Plan*.
[59] Hill, Goldberg, and Mitha, *Food Poverty Action Plan*.
[60] Moore and Evans, *Tackling Childhood Food Poverty in the UK*, 3.
[61] Kerridge, *A Menu to End Hunger in the UK*; Lucas et al., "COVID-19: Local coordination."

forward, for standardised measures of food poverty.[62] As a result of the need for high quality and unified information, the Fabian Commission recommended an inquiry into the processes which cause the 'poverty premium' or 'poverty tax', which makes essential living costs more expensive for those experiencing poverty.[63] It is often suggested that extensive data collection or research efforts, such as this one recommended by the Fabian Commission, need to be the responsibility of the government to ensure a singular and extensive nation-wide information collection.[64]

Crisis Provision

Crisis provision usually involves short-term but essential provision that meets an immediate need e.g. providing food through a foodbank. Successful crisis provision needs to fully meet the need and be easily accessible, often at short notice, and remain so for as long as it is needed by the service user.[65] Sellick emphasises the importance of reducing stigma around accessing crisis provisions to allow them to be fully utilised.[66] Hill, Goldberg and Mitha develop this point finding it necessary that "support is delivered in a non-stigmatising and dignified way".[67] As with the other stages of support, it is necessary that information regarding crisis provision is clear, widely known and coordinated. Consequently, Hill, Goldberg and Mitha advocate a singular and centralised source of information, to provide people with clear and up to date signposting.[68]

Lambie-Mumford argues that food provision through a way other than conventional grocery shopping is heavily constructed as an 'other' system, in which the recipients are classed as the 'needy' and thus not afforded the same privileges as those accessing their food through shopping. For example the food bank recipient lacks the same control and choice over the food they gain, being 'given' rather than 'getting' food, and thus having an inactive role.[69] Similarly, while the food industry works to make the consumer experience as convenient as possible, "recipients of emergency food have, on occasion, to go to significant lengths to obtain this food, including referral procedures and physically accessing projects in

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[62] Lucas et al., "COVID-19: Local coordination."
[63] Tait, *Hungry for Change.*
[64] Kerridge, *A Menu to End Hunger in the UK*; Sellick, *How Can We Tackle Food Poverty*.
[65] Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK*.
[66] Sellick, *How Can We Tackle Food Poverty*.
[67] Hill, Goldberg, and Mitha, *Food Poverty Action Plan*, 23.
[68] Hill, Goldberg, and Mitha, *Food Poverty Action Plan*.
[69] Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK*.

specific places and at specific times".[70] While recognising the vital role that crisis provision currently fills, Lambie-Mumford argues that policy must work to return agency and choice to those experiencing food insecurity.[71] Ultimately, they argue this must be done by recognising food as a human right and returning the responsibility for providing food, either directly or indirectly through increased incomes, employment and welfare, to the state.[72] Lucas et al similarly recognise the lack of agency involved in receiving food parcels, but rather than suggesting that this means food provision can only be the role of the state, they suggest that "[t]he food charity sector should reduce reliance on donated food as the main form of food welfare for vulnerable groups, and follow innovation in the use of cash, vouchers and subsidies to increase choice and empowerment".[73]

2) Consequent Policy Recommendations

As a result of our research and preceding review of existing literature, this project makes the following recommendations:

1. Preventative measures:
   - A mass data collection effort and comprehensive monitoring programme
   - A recognition that food insecurity works in conjunction with many other aspects of poverty and can cause further expenses and the promotion of holistic policy based on this recognition.
2. Long-term solutions:
   - Widely accessible advice and training e.g., employment skills training and housing support.
   - Provision of financial support that doesn't limit autonomy.
3. Crisis measures:
   - A comprehensive signposting effort to ensure those who require crisis support know about it and how to access it.

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[70] Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK*, 9.
[71] Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK*.
[72] Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK*.
[73] Lucas et al., "COVID-19: Local coordination."

Conclusion

This research has aimed to explore the changes and responses to food poverty regarding COVID-19 in Greater Manchester through a specific focus on food deserts. By examining the impact of the pandemic on food provision and providers, it has helped to identify the key barriers in accessing fresh food and produced subsequent policy recommendations with the intention of helping to remedy food insecurity. It finds that uneven outcomes reflect a structurally inequal system with ward level disparities operating to impede access to food in a self-inflicting cycle whereby lack of demand, due to factors such as a lack of financial power, produces a subsequent lack of supply which, paradoxically, further reduces demand and creates self-sustaining food deserts. While food deserts emerge in areas deemed unprofitable by supermarkets, it is also observed that geographical limitations exist concurrently with other socio-economic barriers; price unaffordability, lack and cost of transport, and a deficit in the awareness and skills required to prepare healthy and nutritious meals.

This research has thus highlighted the inherent interconnectedness of supply and demand, wherein the solution to food insecurity and the emergence of food deserts cannot be reduced to merely a solitary action. Instead, policy suggestions made in this report have attempted to recognise that the causality behind food poverty, and more specifically food deserts, is attributable to a multitude of social and material forces. It is therefore important to highlight the need for a clearly defined definition of food deserts, due to lack of a clearly established definition, and to facilitate the continued monitoring and data collection with regard to food inaccessibility; another proposal forwarded in this report.

The urgency and worsening of food unavailability during the COVID-19 pandemic helped draw attention to a number of worrying trends, and demanded a shift in focus of actors concerned with food provision towards short-term crisis mitigation. This took place at the expense of the development of long-term preventative measures aiming to tackle the root cause of food poverty and insecurity. Moreover, trends in welfare reform, and government reluctance to take up the reins of tackling the issue of food poverty has meant that crisis provision has largely fallen to the remit of charities.[74] Coupled with a commercial and

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[74] Lambie-Mumford, *Addressing Food Poverty in the UK*.

legislative structure encouraging preventable food waste e.g., supermarket donations to food banks and branding issues, this demonstrates structural causes behind food poverty.

Food poverty points to the need for policies that encourage and respect the autonomy of individuals and a system that allows for personal choice and individual/family level prioritisation concerning food. This is opposed to the current system where crisis provisions were found to be used on a regular long-term basis; demonstrating a failure to tackle the root issue of low income. Countering food poverty involves more than simply providing food, and should be supplementary to, but not replacive of a more wide-ranging approach including debt and benefits advice and support in housing and employment. Besides placing increased importance on skills and training, preventative policies need to recognise food insecurity as related to financial insecurity and other forms of poverty, as well as acknowledge the connection between food insecurity and the inadequacies of the welfare system.

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