

Food Insecurity, Nutritional Deficiency and Older People in the UK: A Scoping Study

MICRA/ Food@Manchester/ Manchester City Council

Food insecurity, when people do not have the capacity and resources to ensure a sufficient supply of nutritionally appropriate food, has again become a critical ethical and social policy issue in the UK. The UK government has a commitment to the recognition of the right of citizens to adequate food under the International Covenant on Economic,

Social and Cultural Rights. Nutritional deficiency is one of the most challenging issues affecting the health of older people in the UK though it is often undiagnosed and under reported.

However, more than 1 million people aged 65 years and older in the UK are estimated to be malnourished. In the present economic recession there has been a reported rapid growth in foodbanks in the UK and substantial numbers of adults report skipping meals (Lambie 2011).



One in five people (nearly 13 million people) are estimated to live below the official relative poverty line in the UK. In 2012 16% of pensioners (1.9 million) were in households in the UK with incomes below 60% of median net disposable household income before housing costs (DWP 2012).

Research using the National Diet and Nutrition Survey suggests that in the UK there is a north-south gradient in the risk of protein-energy malnutrition amongst those aged 65 and older (Elia and Stratton 2005). It is notable that some major supermarkets are supporting food collections and redistribution in partnership with charities.

The scoping research includes: an evidence review, a practitioners and public evidence call, modeling of food insecurity risk factors using the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing and a series of interviews with foodbank users and volunteers.

The research will contribute to the development of a shared understanding amongst policy makers and service providers of the food insecurity and nutritional deficiency risks faced by older people.

Further funding will be sought through the development of an interdisciplinary large grant proposal focused on food insecurity and nutritional deficiency in the UK. The research findings will make a contribution to the public understanding of the circumstances and experiences of older people suffering from food insecurity and those using foodbanks.

Dr. K. Purdam will lead this interdisciplinary research project in collaboration with Professor A. Esmail alongside colleagues in health research and social statistics at the University of Manchester.

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