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# FOUND WANTING

Understanding journeys into  
and out of food insecurity:  
a longitudinal study

October 2019

## STUDY AIMS

BY TAKING A QUALITATIVE,  
LONGITUDINAL APPROACH,  
THIS STUDY AIMS TO:



UNDERSTAND THE  
JOURNEYS WHICH LEAD  
PEOPLE TO SEVERE FOOD  
INSECURITY;



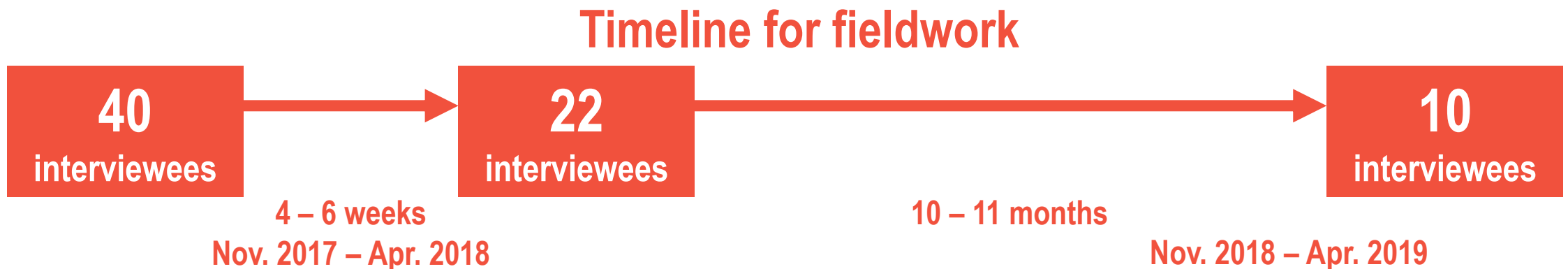
UNDERSTAND HOW THE  
CIRCUMSTANCES OF PEOPLE  
FACING SEVERE FOOD  
INSECURITY CHANGE OVER  
TIME; AND



IDENTIFY HOW BOTH  
CRISIS RESPONSES AND  
PREVENTATIVE SOLUTIONS  
TO FOOD INSECURITY CAN  
BE IMPROVED.

# Research methods

- Qualitative longitudinal methodology (3 stages of interviews)
- Sample: recent experience of food crisis
- Recruitment: Fife, East Ayrshire and Dundee: foodbanks, advice services, SWF, community orgs
- Food insecurity questions to monitor changes in food insecurity over time



# WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?



## Interviewees' food insecurity status at each stage of the research

	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
<b>INTERVIEWEES (N)</b>			
	40	22	10
<b>FOOD SECURE</b>			
%	0	0	30
N	0	0	3
<b>MILDLY FOOD INSECURE</b>			
%	0	22.7	10
N	0	5	1
<b>MODERATELY FOOD INSECURE</b>			
%	17.5	13.6	0
N	7	3	0
<b>SEVERELY FOOD INSECURE</b>			
%	82.5	63.6	60
N	33	14	6

# Summary of research findings and conclusions

- **Physical, psychological and social impacts of food insecurity**
  - Effects of hunger on health
  - Financial and food insecurity severe impact on mental health
- **Experiences of crisis support**
  - Seeking help is a source of shame
  - Empathy and dignity make a difference



*“I went three days without food and I literally, I was close to collapsing in the street.”*

*Philip, Dundee*



*“I hate asking for help, 'cause other people need help too.”*

*Natalie, Dundee*



*“The ladies that I spoke to were all fantastic, and they were really kind on the phone and, not very judgy. I had palpitations at the idea of phoning and asking for help. But, they were so understanding.”*

*Kim, Fife*

# Food insecurity triggers and transition points

- Inadequate and insecure incomes from work and social security key triggers
- Moving in and out of temporary work: agency and zero-hours contracts
- Moving on to Universal Credit
- Disability benefit reassessments

*“My partner’s always in and out of work, that’s always just temporary contracts, getting paid off, and it’s never like permanent, you don’t know if he’s gonna’ go in today and come back without a job”*

*Harriet, Fife*

*“Then we had a review of her PIP, and then they just took everything off me ... they gave her no points whatsoever. So I lost that, and I lost the Carer’s Allowance. Chloe was on the highest amount of PIP, so you’re talking about, it was £500 odd. And £60 odd, Carer’s Allowance. So I lost quite a good bit o’ money.”*

*Anne, East Ayrshire*

# The wider contexts of food insecurity experiences

- Critical events: bereavement, abuse, care, armed forces formed backdrop to food insecurity
- Failure of services to intervene early
- Long-term health conditions
- 29 of 40 reported mental ill health
- Considerable caring responsibilities, lone parents carry burden of food insecurity

“

*“I was my dad’s carer. Constantly, twenty-four seven. And then when I lost my dad, and I just went in tae depression, and everything just kinda fell in”*

*Blair, East Ayrshire*

“

*“Obviously my main priority’s making sure my kids are fed. And if it’s the difference between me getting fed or them getting fed, then it’s them obviously.”*

*Kerry, East Ayrshire*



# Evidence of change over time

- Improved financial situations crucial for improved food security
- Better financial security = feeling more in control, able to plan
- Important role of informal networks and trusted professionals e.g. nursery worker
- Community settings like cafes provide space to socialise and engage with services



*"I think I'm on the road to recovery, physically I'm a bit better, but I'm physically better because my mental health's a bit better ... it's all tied together."*

*Alison, Dundee*



*"She came into the café, and that was when I was about to get evicted ... And she helped me out with loads of things. She did do a lot, like really to get things in place... after four years it's finally got sorted"*

*Jenny, Dundee*

# Reflections

- The extraordinary individual resilience in the face of a combination of social security, housing and labour market failure when people face their most critical life events and transitions.
- The difference empathetic, dignified, quality support can make at every level.
- That by understanding people's journeys over time the research has identified not just failings – but what works to prevent and support.



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# Scottish Welfare Fund crisis grants

- Hugely important role in helping people get through a crisis
- About £12m a year distributed by local authorities
- Average crisis grant award of £90
- 95% awards processed by end of next working day
- 60% spent on food
- Over half of awards are repeats
- Tends not to be promoted for budget reasons: this contrary to principles of social security act.



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# Scottish Welfare Fund research

Much good practice, but not consistent across Scotland. Suggestions for good practice:

1. When taking applications by phone, have the same member of staff take the application and make the award decision
2. Don't screen online applications for eligibility
3. Review what evidence is deemed to be "essential" and reduce this, where appropriate .
4. Make **active referrals** to advice and support services rather than simply signposting people
5. Pay all applicants in cash as opposed to vouchers;
6. Give people their decision over the phone initially, followed by a written decision .



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# Advice services research

- Evaluating advice services from the perspective of people who use them
- Main finding: people often feel shame when seeking advice, so even small barriers to access and welcome can turn people away



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# Holiday provision research

- Looking to see how well existing holiday provision links to provision of information and advice services

# Food co-operatives research

- Exploring the emerging landscape of food co-operatives – community shops, community fridges, ‘pantries’.
- Some projects more focused on reducing food waste, some on reducing food insecurity

# Key recommendations

- **Wide range of policy recommendations for UK government, Scottish government, local authorities, other public bodies and employers**

**All relate back to three over-arching calls:**

- **Ensure adequate and secure incomes**
- **Improve dignified access to cash and advice in a crisis**
- **Deliver holistic, empathetic public services that treat people with kindness and respect**



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# For the UK government

- Restore the value of key benefits and uprate all benefits in line with inflation
- Remove the two child limit and benefit cap
- Remove the 5 week wait for Universal Credit
- Provide better support for those who develop ill health to remain in work
- Improve job security – end exploitative zero-hours contracts, ensure compliance with minimum standards
- Increase the ‘National Living Wage’ to the Real Living Wage

# For the Scottish Government

- Enshrine the Right to Food in Scots law
- Build on the new Scottish Child Payment, and work towards new support for other groups
- Use public sector procurement to deliver fair work, and drive improvements in low paid sectors
- Invest in welfare rights advice and advocacy, increasing access via public services and in community settings
- Strengthen the Scottish Welfare Fund, increasing investment and building on best practice in delivery



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# For Scottish Government, local authorities and other public bodies

- Embed principle of investment, dignity and respect throughout public services and proactively promote a rights-based approach to service provision
- Encourage cross sectoral work to prevent food insecurity, recognising relevance to health, social care, housing and advice
- Improve referral pathways so people have ready access to welfare rights advice and income maximisation opportunities
- Invest in welfare rights advice and advocacy support in community settings and via public services.

# Final thoughts

- Positive change is possible, food insecurity is preventable
- Need to take these steps if to meet Scotland's National Performance Framework objectives of eradicating poverty and hunger and ensuring resilient, vibrant communities
- The stories and experiences in this report must now inform and inspire the action needed

“I wish I was in a high position, that my word went. But I can't do it on my own...I have written to the Council....I've even written to one of our councillors. But then the councillors can't do it on their own either. They need the rest of the country with them”. Henry, interviewee



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