

GREATER**LONDON**AUTHORITY

Child Hunger in London

UNDERSTANDING FOOD POVERTY IN THE CAPITAL

August 2013



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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 7 |
| CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION | 7 |
| CHAPTER 2 – THE PREVALENCE OF FOOD POVERTY IN LONDON | 7 |
| CHAPTER 3 – WHAT GIVES RISE TO FOOD POVERTY? | 7 |
| CHAPTER 4 – COPING WITH FOOD POVERTY | 8 |
| CHAPTER 5 – THE ADDITIONAL IMPACT OF FOOD POVERTY ON CHILDREN | 8 |
| CHAPTER 6 – A LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE | 9 |
| INTRODUCTION | 11 |
| AIMS OF THE STUDY | 12 |
| METHODOLOGY | 12 |
| FACE-TO-FACE SURVEY | 12 |
| FAMILY CASE STUDIES | 12 |
| INTERPRETING DATA FROM THE SURVEY AND CASE STUDIES | 14 |
| THE PREVALENCE OF FOOD POVERTY IN LONDON | 16 |
| THE IMPACT OF RISING FOOD PRICES | 16 |
| CHILDREN GOING HUNGRY | 17 |
| CONCLUSION | 19 |
| WHAT GIVES RISE TO FOOD POVERTY? | 21 |
| INTRODUCTION | 21 |
| SQUEEZED INTO FOOD POVERTY | 22 |
| RISING FOOD PRICES | 22 |
| ACCESS | 22 |
| UNDEREMPLOYMENT | 23 |
| SHOCKED INTO FOOD POVERTY | 24 |
| UNEMPLOYMENT | 24 |
| BENEFIT PAYMENTS AND CHANGES | 24 |
| HOUSEHOLD BREAKUPS | 25 |
| CONCLUSION | 26 |
| COPING WITH FOOD POVERTY | 28 |
| INTRODUCTION | 28 |
| PLANNING AND COOKING | 28 |
| SHOPPING | 29 |
| MAKING THE MOST OF OFFERS | 29 |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| CUTTING BACK | 30 |
| CHANGING FOODS | 30 |
| SUPPORT NETWORKS | 31 |
| FAMILY & FRIENDS | 31 |
| KNOWLEDGE SHARING | 31 |
| FREE SCHOOL MEALS | 32 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 33 |
| THE ADDITIONAL IMPACTS OF FOOD POVERTY ON CHILDREN | 35 |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 35 |
| RELATIONSHIPS | 35 |
| SOCIAL PARTICIPATION | 35 |
| IN THE FAMILY | 37 |
| COMPROMISE | 37 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 39 |
| A LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE | 41 |
| CO-OPERATING WITH SUPERMARKETS | 41 |
| FOOD VOUCHERS FOR FRUIT AND VEGETABLES..... | 42 |
| MAKING USE OF FOOD BANKS | 43 |
| FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM)..... | 43 |
| PARTICIPANTS' OTHER SUGGESTIONS | 44 |
| APPENDIX..... | 48 |
| DISCUSSION GUIDE | 48 |
| FOOD DIARY..... | 58 |
| QUESTIONNAIRES | 60 |

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Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The Greater London Authority and Ipsos MORI are pleased to present this innovative study into the breadth and depth of child hunger in London. Aware that the prevailing economic climate and rising food prices has placed family budgets under increasing strain, we interviewed over 500 parents and 500 children, at all income levels and across London, to understand the impact that hunger has on their lifestyle.

We also spent time with 5 case study families, chosen to represent a range of family structures and circumstances. Their stories are outlined in accompanying photo essays, presenting a unique perspective on how parents manage their income to provide food for their children, and the wider impact that food poverty plays in their day-to-day social, school and family lives.

The report is divided into 7 chapters, including the introduction and appendices.

CHAPTER 2 – THE PREVALENCE OF FOOD POVERTY IN LONDON

Over 70,000 children in London go to bed hungry sometimes or often

Two-in-five (42%) parents have cut back on the amount of food they buy in the past year. 9% of children (the equivalent of 74,000 children across London) said that they sometimes or often go to bed hungry. 44% of children in inner-London live in low-income households, highlighting the potential scale of child hunger should circumstances worsen.

One-in-five parents (21%) have skipped meals so that their children could eat, while 8% told us that their children have had to skip meals as there was not enough food to eat. 15% of parents report that their children always or often tell them that they are hungry.

CHAPTER 3 – WHAT GIVES RISE TO FOOD POVERTY?

Half of London's parents are less able to afford food than they were a year ago

Food poverty can afflict families of all types and incomes. Over-half of London parents (55%) have seen their ability to afford food worsen in the last year. A parent losing their job, a family break-up and unexpected guests can all ‘shock’ a family into food poverty. Over time, issues such as rising food prices and a lack of healthy or affordable food options nearby can ‘squeeze’ families into acute hunger.

Unemployment and underemployment are key concerns, particularly in single parent households who may not be financially resilient to changing circumstances. The Trussell Trust notes that recent changes to the benefits system have increased demand for food banks and other support services.

CHAPTER 4 – COPING WITH FOOD POVERTY

Tens of thousands of children are going hungry on a regular basis as their families struggle to cope with food poverty.

Our survey of children has highlighted the scale of this issue. For 10%, their school lunch is the biggest meal of the day. This means that around 82,000 children in London may not get the food they need at home.

The families we spoke to in-depth were extremely resourceful, making the most of supermarket offers, but the affordability of healthy food options, including fresh fruit and vegetables, is a problem for families as food prices continue to rise. 30% of families had cut back on fresh fruit and vegetables in the past month, in favour of cheaper, frozen foods which present better value as they last longer.

CHAPTER 5 – THE ADDITIONAL IMPACT OF FOOD POVERTY ON CHILDREN

The effects of food poverty on children are not limited to hunger

The impact of child hunger is broad. Our research has highlighted the stigma associated with free school meals, trouble concentrating at school on an empty stomach and the inability to invite friends home for dinner as key issues affecting the social and health implications of living with hunger. Equally, the ability to build family bonds diminishes if families aren’t able to sit down to eat together. Families and children living in food poverty are typically not able to engage in other activities such as school trips and occasional treats, with household income focused on essentials.

CHAPTER 6 – A LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE

A key aspect of this research was to understand what measures families would like to see to tackle child hunger. Food prices were unanimously agreed to be too high. Participants focused on co-operation with supermarkets including promotions and special offers on core items, discounts for foods close to expiry date and packs of ingredients along with recipe cards. 37% of parents supported a proposal to use free food vouchers to buy healthy food, but others expressed concern with the stigma of this and other measures such as food banks.

Free School Meals are a crucial service for many families but a lack of choice can make school meals unattractive and there appear to be issues with how free meals are administered. For example, children may have to access meals through different payment methods or times to their friends, exacerbating social isolation issues. The families we spoke to unanimously wanted to provide for their children without relying on the state, but utility bills, childcare affordability and availability and travel costs to budget supermarkets place further constraints on household budgets.

The results from this study have revealed the scale of the challenges faced by the whole city to respond to the problem of child hunger. The proliferation of food banks in London and continuing slow economic recovery UK-wide tell us that the situation is not likely to improve without co-ordinated work from the public and private sector to ensure that those in need are adequately supported, that food prices remain affordable and that we reduce the amount of wasted food that's sent to landfill. By working together on these key challenges, we can start to put an end to child hunger in London.

1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In February 2013 the Greater London Authority (GLA) commissioned Ipsos MORI to undertake an exploratory study into the issues arising from food poverty and the effect that this has on families and children in particular.

This research has been conducted at a pressing time for families in London. With food prices rising faster than inflation and wages remaining stagnant, the inhabitants of the seventh richest city in the world are under increasing financial pressure.¹ As previous research has highlighted², the proportion of people living in poverty is higher in London than the rest of England. This wealth gap is particularly pertinent for children; 44 percent of children in inner-London live in low-income households compared with an average of 30 percent across England.

Households in London spend, on average, £57.90³ on food per week. When faced with financial difficulties, this is one of the first areas where cut backs are made.⁴ Such cutbacks, however, come with consequences for health and wellbeing. The Department of Health defines food poverty as *“the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet”*⁵, suggesting that the key drivers of it are a low income⁶, combined with high and rising food prices.

Given the number of children in London living in low-income households, a high proportion are therefore vulnerable to food poverty. This work seeks to explore the experiences of these and other families across London.

¹ Fletcher, C. (2013) UK households are using savings to pay for food, Which, 5 May. Online at <<http://conversation.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/uk-households-using-savings-to-pay-for-food/?intcmp=HPcarousel1Aconvofooddebtmay5>>

² MacInnes, T et al (2010) London's Poverty Profile: Reporting on the recession.

³ Office for National Statistics (2013) Family Spending: Chapter 5: Weekly household expenditure, an analysis of the regions of England and countries of the United Kingdom. Online at <

⁴ Hall, S. and Perry, C. (2012) Family Matters: Understanding families in an age of austerity. Online at <http://www.familyandparenting.org/Resources/FPI/Documents/Family_Matters_web.pdf>

⁵ Department of Health (2005) Choosing a better diet: a food and health action plan.

⁶ Within this report, we use the term low income to refer to those of working age and relying primarily on their own earned resources but with incomes below the median (middle) in the UK. This is in line with Resolution Foundation definition, which can be found online at <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/media/downloads/Resolution-Foundation-Squeezed-Britain-2013_1.pdf>

AIMS OF THE STUDY

Specifically, this study aims to quantify and understand:

- The prevalence of issues relating to food affordability in London today;
- The lived experiences of children and their families against a backdrop of rising food prices; and,
- The positive steps that families have taken to meet the challenge of food affordability and support themselves, in addition to the experiences of families who are not able to cope.

This report brings together quantitative and qualitative data from Ipsos MORI's research, draws on other secondary data and research findings where relevant and shines a light on the pertinent issue of the impact of food poverty in London today. In doing so, it quantifies the proportion of families in London struggling to afford food, the social and financial impacts of this and the implications it has on children's everyday lives.

METHODOLOGY

FACE-TO-FACE SURVEY

A representative survey of 522 parents and 522 children aged 8-16 in London was conducted in-home face-to-face on paper. Interviews took place between 28 February and 1 March 2013. A self-completion approach was used given the sensitivity of some of the questions being asked. Quotas were set on age within gender and social class using the latest available Census data and the data were weighted at the analysis stage to ensure the survey findings are representative of children and parents across London.
























FAMILY CASE STUDIES

The qualitative research involved five in-home case study visits which included interviews with children and their parents. The fieldwork for these case studies took place in April 2013, with each visit lasting approximately two hours. The purpose of the case studies was to explore in more depth the experiences and coping strategies of families who are vulnerable to food poverty. With this in mind, families were recruited from the survey according to a range of key characteristics including family structure, household income, and eligibility for Free School Meals. They were not, therefore, recruited to be statistically representative of families across London. Instead, as with all qualitative research, they are intended to be illustrative and provide a more in-depth understanding among families in particular circumstances. As a result, it is not possible to draw generalisations about all

families from it. Instead, we present the broad range of views given by participants, and where appropriate refer to the overall balance of opinion or consensus expressed.

Survey participants who gave permission to be re-contacted were recruited by experienced Ipsos MORI executives over the phone. In advance of the interview, each child in the household was posted a food diary, where they were asked to record what they ate for breakfast, lunch and dinner each day in the days leading up to the interview. Participants received a cash incentive of £50 as a thank you for taking part – standard in work of this nature.

Figure 1. A visual sample of the families

| | Household members | Inner/outer London | Free School Meals | Experiences | Challenges | Responses |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| The Smiths Mother: Catherine Child: Ella Child: Chloe |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •A single mother who works part-time. •Catherine enjoys cooking and eating with her two daughters. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Catherine's main challenge is keep her food spending down whilst keeping her children's diet as healthy as possible. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cooks from scratch •Makes a meal plan and shopping list. •Buys reduced food and freezes it. •Cut out treats and puddings. |
| The Akbaris Mother: Sandra Father: Mike Child: Chris Child: Peter |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Married couple with two children. •Mike recently became unemployed; Sandra works part-time. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reduced income. •Trying to lose weight by eating fewer carbohydrates – but protein and veg. too expensive. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Buy cheaper cuts of meat. •Cooking from scratch more, cutting out ready-meals. |
| The Whites Mother: Anna Father: Graham Child: John Child: Molly Child: Will Child: Mark |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Couple; Graham recently employed and Anna job-hunting. •Four children with different tastes in food and strong preferences. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Children didn't like FSMs when eligible •Doesn't have a car which makes accessing large supermarkets difficult | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Trading down and swapping branded food for value options, which are often lower quality. •Cut out treats and take-aways. |
| The Shahs Mother: Janice Child: Bartek Child: Zara Child: Steven |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Single, unemployed mother. •Takes buses to various food shops and makes use of local markets. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •No car - shopping is time-consuming and makes supermarket access difficult. •Lack of cooking skills means a reliance on ready-meals. •Child refuses FSMs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Shares special offers with older daughter, who also provides a lift to the supermarket. •Has to buy cheaper, unhealthy food. •Reliance on ready-meals. |
| The Rollins Mother: Kim Child: Emma Child: Ada Child: Lance |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Single mother works as a childminder. •Her work provides a variable income, which has recently reduced a lot. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •School meals a big proportion of income, and has recently increased. •Can't afford to invite children's friends round. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Makes a meal plan and shopping list •Kim skips meals and eats reduced portions. •Cut back on fruit and vegetables. |
| Key:         Mother Father Older child Younger child Outer London Inner London No Yes | | | | | | |

During the case study visit we undertook a participatory photography exercise with consenting households. We worked with a trained photographer in order to co-produce a photo essay, loosely structured around the theme 'children, food and family life'. The photography exercise aimed to capture a snapshot of the lives of parents and children, and focused on the items and objects in

their lives that were particularly symbolic of their attachments and relationship to food and its impact on their lives. The objects were chosen jointly by the interviewees and the photographer.

INTERPRETING DATA FROM THE SURVEY AND CASE STUDIES

When interpreting the findings, it is important to remember that the survey results are based on a sample, rather than the entire population, of parents and children in London. Consequently, results are subject to sampling tolerances and not all differences between sub-groups are statistically significant. Only significant differences are reported in the text.

Anonymous verbatim comments made by participants during the discussions have been included throughout this report. These should not be interpreted as defining the views of *all* participants but have been selected to provide insight into a particular issue or topic.

2

THE PREVALENCE OF FOOD POVERTY IN LONDON

THE PREVALENCE OF FOOD POVERTY IN LONDON

Summary

- Two in five parents (42%) are cutting back on the amount of food they buy or the amount they spend on food.
- Close to one in ten (8%) parents reported that, at some point, their children have had to skip meals because they cannot afford to buy food.
- One fifth (21%) of parents in London have, at some point, skipped meals so that their children could eat.
- Three in ten parents (30%) in London reported that in the last year they have bought less fruit and vegetables on at least a monthly basis due to the expense
- Many parents value and rely on Free School Meals, although some express concerns over stigma. This was illustrated in our survey, where two fifths of parents (40%) reported that they would prefer to use FSM as part of a system where all children use the same payment method.

THE IMPACT OF RISING FOOD PRICES

The recession has seen real household incomes fall, while the cost of food has risen considerably: food price inflation has outstripped general inflation since 2005⁷, and this trend shows little sign of easing. In this context, it is not surprising that our survey found that over half (55%) of parents in London reported their ability to afford food has got a lot or a little worse over the past year. This was not just the case among low income groups; almost half (49%) of parents in full-time work stated their ability to afford food has worsened a lot or a little.⁸

Our research suggests that families have changed their food purchasing behaviour. Around two in five parents (42%) in London say they have cut back on the amount of food they buy or the amount they spend on food on a daily/weekly/monthly basis. This can take various forms, such as buying less meat or restricting snacks, but our research shows that a significant proportion of families are cutting back on fruit and vegetables. Three in ten parents (30%) in London reported that in the last

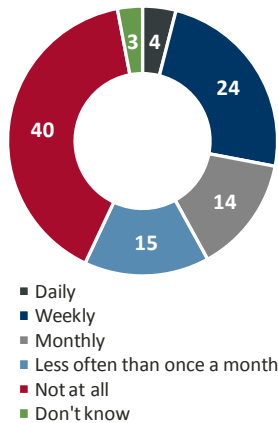
⁷ J Davidson et al (2011) Explaining UK Food Price Inflation, Transfop.

⁸ This is endorsed by research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which found that three in five (58%) of children living in poverty in the UK live in working families.

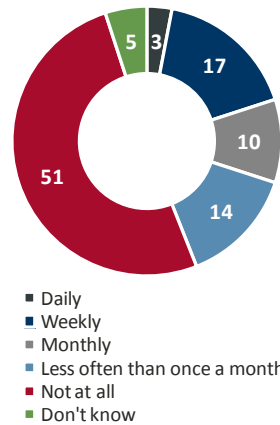
year they have bought less fruit and vegetables on at least a monthly basis due to the expense. This is consistent with other research which shows a decline in the purchase of this type of produce.⁹

Figure 2: Thinking about your household's spending on food, how often, have you done any of the following in the past year?

Cut back on how much we spend on food or the amount of food we buy



Bought less fruit and vegetables and/ or fresh food because it's too expensive



Base: 522 parents were interviewed in London between 28th February – 1st March.

Reducing the amount of food bought and cutting back on expensive, often fresh, produce has led to the claim that Britain is experiencing a 'nutritional recession'¹⁰, whereby increasing prices are resulting in a rise in the consumption of fatty foods among low income households. Indeed, this has been confirmed by analysis carried out by the Guardian which shows that high-fat and processed foods - such as instant noodles, meat balls, tinned pies, baked beans, pizza and fried food - are increasingly eaten by low-income households.

CHILDREN GOING HUNGRY

The survey provides evidence that many children in London are going hungry. Close to one in ten (8%) parents reported that, at some point, their children have had to skip meals because they

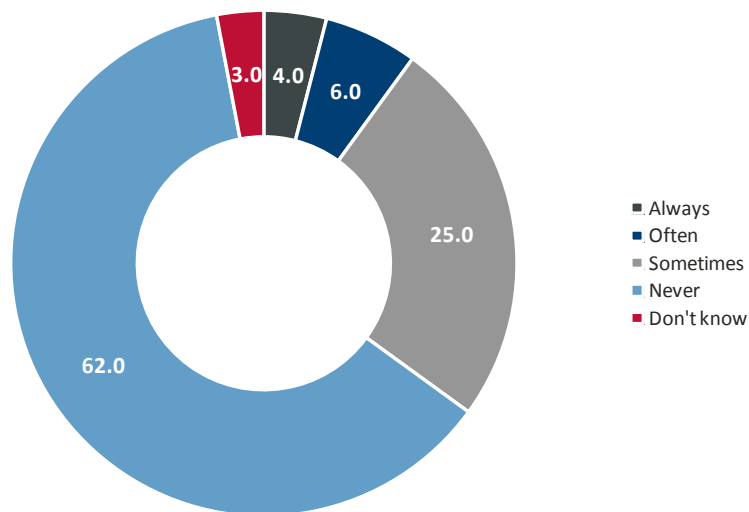
⁹ Work conducted by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, found that in 2011 UK households were buying 10% less fruit and vegetables than in 2007. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2012) Family Food 2011. Online at <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-food-2011>>

¹⁰ Butler, P. (2012) Britain in nutritional recession as food prices rise and incomes shrink, Guardian, 18 November. Online at <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/nov/18/breadline-britain-nutritional-recession-austerity>>

cannot afford to buy food. Overall, 15% of parents in London reported that their children always or often tell them they are hungry, with a further quarter (28%) reporting that they do so less regularly. Related research in London has highlighted teachers' concerns about children going to school hungry.¹¹

It is not just parents and teachers who say that children are going hungry; children themselves also report going without food. As Figure 2 shows, one in 10 children (10%) stated that their biggest meal of the day was their school lunch – a figure which equates to around 82,000 children in real terms. Similarly, 9% (or around 74,000 children across London) said they sometimes or often go to bed hungry.

Figure 3: My school lunch is my biggest meal of the day.



Base: 522 children aged 8-16 were interviewed in London between 28th February – 1st March.

The situation would undoubtedly be worse were parents not making sacrifices like skipping meals so that their children could eat – one fifth (21%) of the parents we surveyed reported having done

¹¹ For example, a recent London Assembly survey of teachers¹¹, found that 97percent of teachers who responded said children in their schools regularly went without breakfast, and over half said this was because families could not afford food. Greater London Authority (2012). Online at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/summary%20teacher%20survey.pdf> >

this. This was particularly noticeable among women, who often act as the ‘shock absorbers’ of poverty.¹²

CONCLUSION

Our research has found that child hunger in London is not only in existence, but is a significant problem affecting thousands of children across the capital. It is well documented that people who lack access to nutritional, well-portioned meals can face risks to health and wellbeing. In subsequent chapters, we examine the causes and impacts of food poverty in London, as well as the coping strategies adopted by families.

¹² Annesly, C. And Bennet, F. (2011) Universal Credit may reinforce the traditional ‘male breadwinner’ model and affect many women’s access to an income, LSE, 21 June. Online at <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/archives/11270> >

3

**WHAT GIVES RISE TO FOOD
POVERTY?**

WHAT GIVES RISE TO FOOD POVERTY?

Summary

- Over half (55%) of parents in London reported that their ability to afford food has got worse in the past year.
- Food poverty is caused by a wide range of issues including rising food prices and reduced income. These factors can ‘shock’ or ‘squeeze’ families into food poverty.
- Many families are affected by multiple factors, but one or two – such as a late benefit payment – can act as a tipping point.

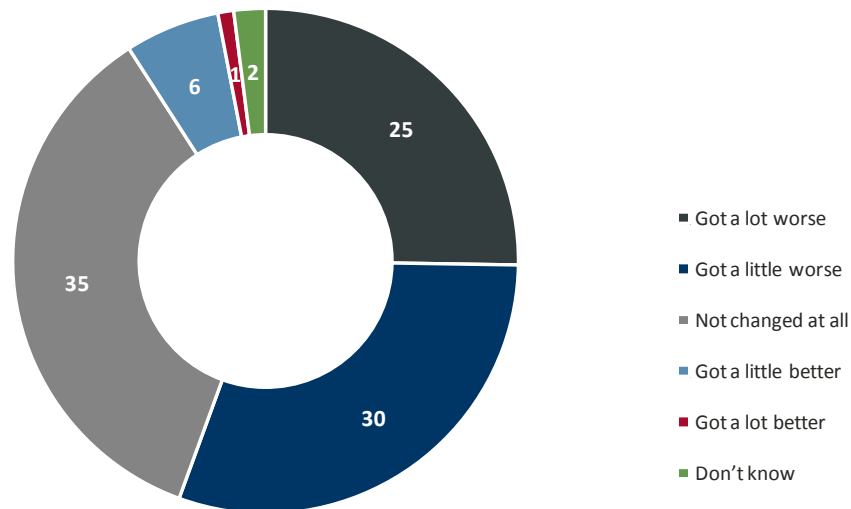
INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in chapter 1 and shown in the figure below, over half (55%) of parents in London reported that their ability to afford food has worsened in the past year, compared with 7 percent who have seen it improve. Food poverty is a complex phenomenon, and families’ journey into it can take different routes. While these routes are multifaceted and varied – low income, debt, relationship breakdown, little knowledge of nutrition or food preparation, to name just a few – we have grouped them into two key typologies; ‘shocked’ and ‘squeezed’.

Being shocked into food poverty refers to an unexpected event or change that leaves a family unable to access or afford an adequate amount and the right type of food. This could be the result of something sudden, like redundancy or an unexpected bill, or take the form of a decision made that radically transforms their ability to access or afford food, such as a relationship breakdown or a move to a new area.

Being squeezed into food poverty refers to how, over a period of time, a series of changes or events can take their toll on families struggling to access or afford an adequate amount of food. Examples of this include a decrease in the number of hours employed leading to a lower income, stagnant wages, increases in the cost of food, changes in local transport, rises in fuel costs or problems accessing large supermarkets where food prices are lower.

Figure 4: Thinking about your household's spending on food over the past year, how has your ability to afford food changed, if at all?



Base: 522 parents were interviewed in London between 28th February – 1st March.

SQUEEZED INTO FOOD POVERTY

RISING FOOD PRICES

Rising food prices are a significant problem for families. The steady rise in the cost of food is noticeable in some produce more than others, with families citing meat, dairy, and fresh fruit and vegetables as areas where they've seen the greatest increases.

I've cut down on the meat ... on Sunday I used to get a lump of pork or beef but we're cutting down now.

ACCESS

The food that parents can buy to feed their children is dependent on the kinds of shops they can get to, what is available in these shops, and how much they have to pay for the items on sale there. As previous research has highlighted,¹³ large supermarkets can usually sell foods at lower or discounted prices than small local convenience shops. This can be a major issue for families; not

¹³ Dowler, Elizabeth (2008) Poverty, food and nutrition, in Strelitz, J et al, Why Money Matters: Family income, poverty, and children's lives, Save the Children. Online at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/Why%20Money%20Matters.pdf> >

only are local, easily accessible shops more expensive but, as examined in previous research¹⁴, the development of out-of-town supermarkets has led to poor quality and little choice in local shops in socially deprived areas.

The local Co-op, it's just so expensive.

If parents are unable to easily access supermarkets and have to add a bus or taxi fare to their food bill, there is often less money available for food. Anna White prefers to shop in Asda because she feels that it offers good value for money and has a wide selection of fruit and vegetables as well as “good things for kid’s packed lunches”. In order to get to Asda though, they rely on getting a lift with a friend, or getting a bus there and a taxi back. This means that their access to affordable and nutritious food is limited; they can only go to the supermarket when it suits a friend or when they can afford the taxi and bus fare, otherwise they use the local stores which are more expensive.

UNDEREMPLOYMENT

That the issue of underemployment is so prevalent among the families we spoke to is hardly surprising, bearing in mind that there were almost 950,000 people either unemployed or underemployed in 2011, accounting for almost 17% of the total working population in London.¹⁵ GLA research indicates that part-time workers earn a lower hourly rate on average than full-time workers, with women who are lone parents and those from minority ethnic groups earning lower amounts still than others in part-time work.¹⁶

The families we spoke to who are experiencing underemployment feel this to be a key barrier to having enough financial resource to afford healthy food for all their family. This is certainly true for Kim Rollins; she works as a childminder although, as some of the parents of the children she cares for have recently become unemployed they no longer required her services. This means that her hours have gone from full-time to part-time almost overnight, leaving her with a much lower income to feed her three children with.

¹⁴ UK Faculty of Public Health (2004) Developing a local nutrition and food poverty strategy. Online at: <http://www.fph.org.uk/uploads/section_d.pdf>

¹⁵ Trust for London and New Policy Institute (2012) Unemployment, worklessness and underemployment. Online at: <<http://www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk/indicators/topics/work-and-worklessness/unemployment-worklessness-and-underemployment/>>

¹⁶ Greater London Authority (2010) GLA Gender Equality Scheme <<http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/equalities/consultations/gender-equality-scheme>>

SHOCKED INTO FOOD POVERTY

UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment can also shock a family into food poverty, and hinder their ability to eat healthy balanced meals. Indeed, our survey statistics show that a third (29%) of unemployed parents buy less fresh food because it is too expensive.

This is particularly pertinent where there is a sudden redundancy, meaning that a parent has to suddenly adjust their food budget and make substantial changes. This is the case in the Akbari family; Mike recently lost his job and Sandra works part-time and, as a result, they are trying to cut back on the amount of food they bought. This is particularly difficult for this family because one of the children is overweight and so the family were trying to eat healthily in an attempt to tackle this problem. However, the high price of fresh meat, fruit and vegetables makes this difficult since their income has changed.

In the last year the price of food has gone through the roof. Where we'd normally spend a £100 a week, it's now £180. That was alright when I was in work, but now when things are tight you have to cut back.

BENEFIT PAYMENTS AND CHANGES

Tax credits are often seen as a necessary top-up to existing income for low to middle income households¹⁷. For Catherine Smith in our research, in lieu of financial maintenance from her former partner, such payments are an essential part of the household income.

The tax credits, we rely on them. Their dad doesn't give me maintenance.

While benefit payments are a vital source of financial support for all of the families we spoke to, a missed or delayed payment or reduction in the amount received could cause significant hardship, shocking the family into sudden food poverty. For example, recent research by The Trussell Trust, a

¹⁷ Green (2012) Life on a low income.

charity which runs food banks across the UK, found that a third (30%) of people using their service over the last year were referred as a result of benefit delays and 15% because of benefit changes.¹⁸

Janice Shah, whose food budget is already constrained, feels that impending cuts to her Council Tax benefit will impact upon her ability to afford food for her three children. She spoke at length at how she already struggles to afford food, and often has to feed her two primary school aged children a supermarkets value brand ‘super noodles’, which cost 11 pence per packet, for dinner as her money simply won’t stretch to cover anything else.

With the cuts kicking in, particularly the council tax, I can’t afford not to tighten [food spending]. The money for Council Tax has to come from somewhere. And they’re changing my rent, that’s going to be another big chunk.

HOUSEHOLD BREAKUPS

Relationship breakdowns were often a significant shock for the families we researched and, in all cases, resulted in them having to make cut backs to their food budget.

This is because household breakups not only often result in a lower household income overall, but the financial cost of separating – including legal fees and moving home – can have a significant impact on food budgets. People in lone parent households are at much greater risk of poverty (55 per cent in London).

Catherine Smith spoke to us about how the legal bill following her divorce, alongside the cost of having to move her and her two daughters, Ella and Chloe, into rented accommodation, left them with no money for food.

We had one month where we had no money, and so we just had to go through the cupboards and see what we could have left. We realised that we had yeast and flour and so we made pizza.

In addition, Kim Rolins spoke about how, despite working part-time, she struggles to afford food since she separated from her partner a few years ago. As a result, Kim prioritises her children’s food needs over her own, often skipping meals so that they could eat.

¹⁸ Morse, F (2013) Food Bank Trussell Trust Sees Demand Go Up Five-Fold Since Coalition Came to Power, 24 April. Online at <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/23/food-banks-trussell-trust-coalition-charity-_n_3138241.html>

Since we've been on our own...more so since all the foods gone up – it is a case of 'OK, feed the kids first' then I'll come into eat last.

CONCLUSION

The families who took part in this study found themselves struggling to afford food for a variety of reasons. While each family's case is different, all are affected by rises in food prices and are in a process of negotiating how they cook, shop, and eat. These coping strategies and processes of negotiation are also multifaceted, and impact both parents and children. However, as the next chapter will demonstrate, parents often bear the brunt of food poverty, as they attempt to protect their children from their increasingly constrained food budgets.

4

COPING WITH FOOD POVERTY

COPING WITH FOOD POVERTY

Summary

- Families adopt a range of coping strategies to deal with food poverty including strict budgeting and careful planning.
- For three in ten London parents (30%) this meant cutting back on fruit and vegetables at least once a month because of high cost.
- Cutting back on food shopping has its limits, after which some parents begin to reduce the amount they eat. One fifth (21%) of parents in London have, at some point, skipped meals so that their children could eat.
- Close to a quarter (23%) of the parents we surveyed said their child or children eat(s) their main meal at school ‘sometimes’ or more often.

INTRODUCTION

Families are employing a variety of coping strategies to deal with their inability to afford food, including strict budgeting and careful planning, but despite this, some families are still having to skip meals.

PLANNING AND COOKING

Some of the first changes that families make are to how they shop and cook. Some families cook from scratch more and avoid ready-meals; many pay careful attention to what they buy, making detailed meal plans and sticking to a strict shopping list.

I make a menu plan for the week and I just get what we need... [otherwise] I just run around after work grabbing bits for dinner which works out incredibly expensive.

Meal plans also help families reduce waste. Planning helps make sure nothing goes unused – by going off before it was eaten, for example.

I'm fed up of wasting food. You spend so much on food and I'm just fed up of wasting it.

Meal plans are not an option available to all though. In order to produce a meal plan, parents have to have certain skills and knowledge, including budgeting skills to be able to fit the plan to a tight budget, and a general knowledge of food: to know what would go with what. The more foods they know how to store and cook with, the wider their choices of meals to include on the plan. Being able to cook from scratch, rather than buying processed foods or ingredients, similarly relies on parents' knowledge.

SHOPPING

MAKING THE MOST OF OFFERS

For the families we spoke to special offers, such as buy-one-get-one-free, are very important. Everyone makes sure to look out for them, and Kim and Catherine swap meals on their plan to take advantage of them – as confident cooks with a broad knowledge of recipes, they can take full advantage of special offers.

Special offers are particularly important when they mean cheaper fresh fruit and vegetables – the high price of which was seen as a significant barrier to eating healthily.

I managed to get some reduced strawberries and two things of grapes, but it's only because they were on offer.

This echoed the results of our survey, which found that in the last year, three in ten parents in London (30%) bought less fruit and vegetables, on at least a monthly basis, because of their high cost.

It is not, however, just the high price of these items that puts low income families off buying fresh fruit and vegetables. In addition, their relatively short shelf-life is felt to make them a riskier purchase. For this reason, frozen vegetables are often chosen instead of fresh. Again, making good use of special offers, particularly on fresh food, relies to some extent on parents' understanding of how things can be made to last.

CUTTING BACK

CHANGING FOODS

Cutting back and trading down helps families stretch their budgets. They swap branded foods for value or basic options and cut out non-essentials. However, whilst this is often seen as necessity, some families prefer not to buy this produce, as while the value-brand food was cheaper, it is also thought to be much poorer quality and doesn't go as far. In addition, some families attach a social stigma to value produce and feel it is embarrassing or degrading to be seen purchasing it.

The Rayner family told us: *“Now we go down an aisle and we get what we've run out of rather than going and buying the little extras and luxuries”*, explaining they have stopped buying chocolates, ice creams and the odd bottle of wine, while Catherine told us her family never had pudding: *“they're just too expensive.”* Similarly, eating out and takeaways are a very rare treat for the families we spoke to, if they happen at all.

Families also change the types of food they buy. As mentioned, frozen vegetables are chosen instead of fresh - *“as much as I'd like to buy fresh, frozen is better as it's not wasted... I've got to look at what's going to last longer”* – and cheaper cuts of meat make their way into families' diets. For instance, the Rayners describe how they had moved from buying chicken fillets and prime cuts of beef to using thighs and braising steak.

The problem with cutting back or trading down as a means of coping, however, is that it comes with limits, and many of the families feel that they have already done all they can in this regard, which results in them having to skip meals. In our survey, we found that one fifth (21%) of parents in London have, at some point, skipped meals so that their children can eat. Other research has shown a similar trend: the Poverty and Social Exclusion research project¹⁹ found that 52% of families can't give their children a minimally acceptable diet²⁰, as a direct result of a lack of money. At least one adult *often* 'skimps' on their own food.

¹⁹ PSE (2012), Living Standards in the UK: PSE First Summary Report.

²⁰ This was defined as being “Three meals a day; fresh fruit and vegetables every day; and meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent at least once a day”. PSE found that there are over half a million children in the UK living in such families.

SUPPORT NETWORKS

FAMILY & FRIENDS

For many of the parents we spoke to, their wider families play a key role in helping them feed their children. Catherine, for example, turns to her parents when she runs out of money and has no food left. Similarly, when times are hard, Anna is able to take food from her parents' freezer, or asks them to feed her children.

If things get really desperate, if we can't eat, my parents will take us shopping.

In other cases, help and support from family members indirectly helps parents to feed their children. For instance, Sam's daughter – who, unlike her mother, had a car – drives her to the supermarket, which is considerably cheaper than the local convenience store.

Kim's teenage daughter looks after her siblings so that her mother can work a second job to boost their household income and food budget. Catherine, who works awkward shifts at a supermarket – often starting at midnight or finishing at 6am – relies on her parents, and the informal childcare they provide, to work.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

The value of support from outside the family also takes on an important role for some of the families we spoke to. Kim told us how parents in her local area are sure to tell each other of any good value special offers they spot in supermarkets: *"if one of us sees a deal we're straight on the phone."* Given that, as previously discussed, special offers are a popular way of making sure the food budget goes as far as possible, hearing about special offers from friends and neighbours means important savings.

Friends and colleagues also share recipe ideas for cheap and tasty meals their children might enjoy. These recipes are often favoured above chef's cookbooks and supermarket menu cards as they don't include expensive herbs and spices, which in some cases make recipes suggested by cook books unaffordable.

Other aspects of work also provide parents with opportunities to make their limited food budget stretch as far as possible. For instance, Catherine is able to access new recipe ideas in her job working on a checkout in a supermarket – by asking customers what they are going to make, and how, with what they bought. This allows her to take advantage of special offers even on foods she wouldn't previously have known how to cook.

If you're out of ideas for meals and see peoples shopping going through you can ask the customer. I say "what is that and how do you cook it?"

This opportunity, like the friends and family others turned to, helps widen Catherine's options, and allows her to take full advantage of the savings that can be made from cooking from scratch. For someone without networks like these to turn to for advice – perhaps relying on uneconomical chef's recipes instead – cooking from scratch is a much less effective cost-saving strategy.

Families also see work as a means to improve their financial situation and, therefore, both the quality and amount of food that they can buy. For instance, to increase and stabilise her wages, Kim is applying for a second job. She is determined to be able to feed all of her family without asking for more help from the state than that she currently receives, and sees work as the appropriate means to that end:

If I gotta do three jobs, I'll do three jobs!

FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Some of the families we spoke to told us how important free school meals are to their family. Around a quarter (23%) of the parents we surveyed say their child or children eat(s) their main meal at school 'sometimes' or more often. Where this meal is free, it offers great relief to the family's food budget.

However, both Janice and Anna told us their children don't take up the school meals they are entitled to²¹. As a result, Anna's children – until she provided packed lunches – "*come home starving*". The reasons children don't take up FSMs include a lack of choice – "*you get a menu but there's only two things*" – and having to queue for too long (which cuts into their play time): "*[it]*

²¹The Children's Society found that 500,000 children in England are not claiming FSM despite being eligible. The Children's Society (2013) Fair and Square Campaign Report, p. 3. Online at: http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/fair_and_square_campaign_report.pdf

takes ages... and then either the food's gone or the bell's gone". Bartek doesn't like to have FSMs as, at his school that means sitting on a table with all the other children who claimed them. His friends bought in packed lunches, and he misses being able to sit with them at lunch times.²² As a result, Janice Shah restricts the food her children can eat at home in order to afford the packed lunch for her son.

Children are also concerned about the stigma attached to receiving FSM; 16 percent of children report that they think receiving FSM is embarrassing – a figure which equates to 131, 921 children across London. This is consistent with findings reported in the wider literature, which suggests that in schools where children receiving FSM have to sit separately from their peers, or where the payment scheme is not anonymised, children are less likely to take them up²³.

CONCLUSION

The families we spoke to employ a variety of coping strategies such as changing the way they shop, cook and eat to fit increasingly tight food budgets. Even so, they have to cut back on food and whilst parents tend to take the brunt of the cut backs, children's diets are affected too – with fewer fresh fruits and vegetables and treats like takeaways and puddings. The struggle to afford food has wider impacts on parents and children's lives, too – and these are discussed in the next chapter.

²² Janice's son, Bartek, was eligible for FSM but to in packed lunches instead. At his school, claiming FSMs

²³ Ibid.

5

THE ADDITIONAL IMPACTS OF FOOD POVERTY ON CHILDREN

THE ADDITIONAL IMPACTS OF FOOD POVERTY ON CHILDREN

Summary

- The inability to afford food has far-reaching social and personal impacts beyond simply the physical, affecting relationships, social participation and aspirations.
- This is illustrated by the survey which found over a third (34%) of children sometimes have trouble paying attention at school because they feel hungry, while one fifth (20%) report sometimes feeling too tired to play with their friends at school.

INTRODUCTION

In addition to food being a prerequisite for good health and wellbeing, it is intrinsically linked to the social and emotional aspects of our lives.

We need food to sustain life; it is at the heart of the way we live and putting food on the table is how we show people we love and care.²⁴

The inability to provide enough food for their families causes some parents a lot of anxiety and guilt about the potential negative impacts of this on their children's childhood.

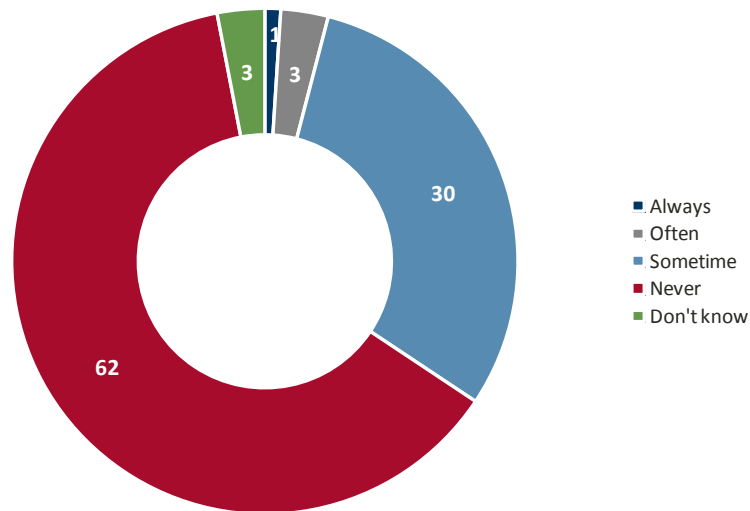
RELATIONSHIPS

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Our survey found that over a third (34%) of children report at least sometimes having trouble paying attention at school because they feel hungry, while one fifth (20%) of children report sometimes feeling too tired to play with their friends at school.

²⁴ Unwin, J. (2013) Our food supply chain is failing poorer people, as consumers and as workers, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 21 February.
Online at: <<http://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2013/02/poverty-food-supply-chain>>

Figure 4: I have trouble paying attention at school because I feel hungry.



Base: 522 children aged 8-16 were interviewed in London between 28th February – 1st March.

Socialising with friends is important for family life and child development. Research conducted by the Children's Society found a link between children's relationships with their friends and their subjective well-being²⁵.

Our work, however, suggests that food poverty may be impacting on children's social development. Unexpected or sometimes planned guests are a major source of 'food shock' for one of the families we spoke to. Kim Rollins recalled an instance where her son, Lance, brought some friends home with him without asking and she had to call their parents and explain that, because she was unable to feed them, they would have to leave. This impacted upon Lance's social life and friendships, and also caused a great deal of worry and guilt for Kim.

I had to ring their parents and explain, 'I can't feed them'; it is embarrassing. As much as I can look after their kids and they can stay the night... that [feeding them] limits me as to how many times they can stay. Obviously if they stay the night, then I have to feed them the next morning... sometimes I've had to say to Lance 'I haven't got the food, Lance, he can't stay'.

²⁵ (2012) The Good Childhood Report 2012: A review of our children's wellbeing, The Children's Society. Online at: http://www.childrengsociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/good_childhood_report_2012_final_0.pdf >

And it's embarrassing to say that to a parent, to turn round and say 'well he can stay, but I can't feed him'...

In addition to limiting the number of times her children's friends could visit, Kim also has to prevent them from visiting their friends houses because she worries that other parents would provide take away pizzas and other treats, which she feels a social imperative to return, but can't afford to.

IN THE FAMILY

Catherine Smith's family cook together, and share their evening meal most evenings. This is very important to Catherine, who uses it as a chance to check that both her girls are happy at school and that they have done their homework, and they catch-up to hear about each other's days. The family also enjoy making their food from scratch and view food preparation as a chance for them to spend quality time together.

The children enjoy making the dough and they love making turkey meatballs.

In contrast, Janice and her children eat their meals in separate rooms. The only space they have where they can eat together is damp, 'falling apart' and not somewhere they want to eat. Unable to afford the cost of fixing it or to reduce the damp by having the heating on, the family eat their meals in different rooms.

COMPROMISE

In the families we spoke to, parents are keen to give their children food they want to eat, despite the restrictions of their budgets. Indeed, Anna White identifies her biggest challenge as '*giving the children what they want and things they enjoy*'.

This tension – between the parents' desire to give their children what they want and affordability – is often encountered in the decision between school or packed lunches. Many of the children we spoke to prefer packed lunches to the food on offer at school – and their parents scrimp and save to provide these. For Janice Shah, ensuring that Bartek has food that he enjoys comes at the expense of him eating healthily, however.

He was having sandwiches and fruit but he wasn't eating it ... Now I just give him packaged junky stuff that he told me he likes to eat. Its junk filled... The bread I bought was just going mouldy because they weren't eating it, so I was glad I didn't have to buy it.

For Janice, the value of good food is not forgotten. Rather, it is compromised as she negotiates a way to give Bartek what he wants to eat and what she can afford. It is important that her children eat three meals a day, and this concern comes above the quality of the food. Talking about her children eating left-over biscuits for breakfast, Janice says:

It doesn't sound very good... but at least they've had something. I know children who go all the way to lunch without eating something.

The stigma associated with being unable to afford food might suggest that people think of food as a marker of who they are, and how they are doing. We found that, in some cases, families' ability to afford food conflicted with their aspirations – about what they want to *be*, not just what they want to have.

For example, the Rayner family want to lose weight and get fitter, and so are trying to cut out carbohydrates and base their diet on protein and vegetables. This is proving extremely difficult as these elements of the food shop are so much more expensive. They find carbohydrates – potatoes, pasta, rice – are cheaper than meat or other proteins, and did a better job of filling them up.

Catherine Smith wishes she could feed her family only organic produce; she is concerned about the amount of chemicals in food, and worries about their effect on her family's bodies. However, with her current budget she considers this goal unrealistic.

I'd love to get organic the whole time, but I just can't afford it...

Sometimes I have to get value stuff, which I don't like. But if you've only got a couple of pounds, then that's what you have to get.

Other families aspire to be able to buy their children more material items to reward them for good behaviour, or just to treat them from time to time. However, with money tight then this kind of spending just isn't an option for many of the families we spoke to. Therefore, in lieu of being able to buy presents, parents often associate food with an affordable way that they can demonstrate their love for their children. This is certainly the case in the White household, where Anne, when she can afford it, gives her children a pudding – such as jelly and ice cream – after dinner. Anne wishes that

this was something she could constantly afford, and is left feeling guilty when she was unable to provide it.

CONCLUSION

For the families we spoke to, food poverty has wide social and personal impacts. Some are obvious: good health increases the chances of a longer life and better well-being, and good food can mean being a healthier weight. Others are harder to see, unless in that situation, however; such as the impact on children's social participation, and the need to compromise on the sort of parent they would like to be (e.g. giving healthy and enjoyable food).

6

A LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE

A LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Summary

- This research sought to understand what would make a difference to parents struggling to cope with the rising costs of food, and many parents came up with numerous solutions including collaborating with supermarkets, having access to food vouchers, increasing access to Free School Meals and making use of food banks.
- Half (49%) of the parents we surveyed stated that they would be keen to use co-operative markets where food prices were lower.
- 17% of the parents we surveyed reported that their children were receiving FSM. Given the cost of paying for children's lunches, many more parents stressed that receiving FSM would help them tackle the rising cost of food. However, how FSM are administered needs attention; two in five parents (40%) would prefer to use them as a part of a system where all children use the same payment method.

As well as understanding the experiences of families with regard to food poverty and hunger, this study also had an eye on the future and sought to determine the policy interventions that could make a difference for those under pressure and struggling to afford both sufficient amounts and healthy types of food.

In doing this, we tested out potential policy interventions supplied to us by the GLA and reactions to these are outlined in the first half of this chapter. However, we also worked with the families in the qualitative stage to ascertain what changes they themselves would like to see – mindful of the fact that, given the pressures on the public purse, these solutions needed to be practical and cost effective.

CO-OPERATING WITH SUPERMARKETS

Many of the interventions we tested with participants focussed on co-operating with supermarkets as, for many, the supermarket provides the mainstay of their food shopping.

Given the high cost of food, families are keen to both make savings and avoid unnecessary food waste. Therefore, enabling families to buy food from supermarkets that would otherwise be disposed of appeals on both fronts and is seen as an extension of the behaviours that families

already engage in; for instance, making good use of promotions and special offers and scouring the reduced items aisle for bargains.

Families point out that the cost of this food needs to reflect the reduced shelf life; at least 50% off the original price tag was considered reasonable. Further, some worried there would be a stigma attached to buying this food though thought this could be countered by restricting these kinds of discounts to premium brands, rather than supermarkets' own 'value' or 'basic' ranges.

People don't want to be seen to be that desperate to buy stuff that has been reduced.

We also explored whether or not families would be willing to buy packages of staple foods that could be used together to make a healthy meal for a small amount of money from a supermarket. For the most part, the families have no issue with this suggestion and said they would simply see it in the same terms as they do a standard supermarket special offer.

If it was marketed like a meal deal, I'd have no problem with doing that.

For families to make the most of this kind of deal though, they suggest that the packs of food come complete with recipe cards and ideas for different meals they can make with the contents which would increase their confidence in the kitchen.

That's a lovely idea. I'm not the world's best cook if I'm honest, and I'm always looking for recipes.

FOOD VOUCHERS FOR FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Given the high cost of fruit and vegetables, any measure that helps to make these items more affordable is warmly welcomed by the families we researched. In the survey work, over a third (37%) of parents support a proposal to use free food vouchers to buy healthy food. Parents in the qualitative work, however, suggest that such a scheme comes with a degree of flexibility and covers frozen fruit and vegetables as well given they carry similar health benefits but keep much longer.

It's a good idea – the only trouble is I don't know whether I would want to buy fresh vegetables as they go off so quickly.

We also discussed at length parents' thoughts on using vouchers to claim such a discount. Some are wary about the stigma associated with this. For instance, Catherine Smith who works on a checkout, is reluctant to use any form of voucher or food stamp – she knows people notice those using them at work, and admitted she judges them herself. Even though she likes the idea of a voucher for fruit and vegetables she says: *"I just wouldn't do it. It's the stigma."* However, other families did suggest that as long as it is not instantly apparent that such vouchers are for use by low income families, then they may consider using them.

MAKING USE OF FOOD BANKS

While parents recognise that food banks provide an important service to those in need they do not feel willing to use one; the stigma attached to making use of this kind of service is simply too great. To illustrate, Kim spoke of how she worries that her friends and neighbours would judge her, suggesting that if you were seen there it would be *"slightly embarrassing...[and would] make you feel like a bit of a failure"*. This was endorsed by her son who stated that he would be *"ridiculed at school"*.

Families, therefore, very much see food banks as a last resort. This is supported by the survey work, with only a quarter (23%) willing to make use of free food provided by food banks – still a significant minority, but much less appealing than the other interventions,

It is thought that one way round this would be to locate food banks some distance from the communities they are meant to serve. This, however, would create logistical difficulties for families in accessing them. Families also raise the issue of information and awareness with regard to food banks too, suggesting that it is perhaps not just a sense of shame that prevents families from using them, but also the fact that they don't know they can help.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM)

Given the cost of paying for children's lunches, the FSM policy has the potential to substantially alleviate the financial pressures faced by families and ensure that children benefit from a nutritious meal at least once a day. However, our research also shows that there are flaws with the way that the FSM is delivered within schools which is having a detrimental impact on take-up.

The lack of choice available can make school meals unattractive. This isn't just about catering to children's personal tastes; what children eat is sometimes to do with behavioural issues while for

other children – particularly young girls – food is tied up with their perceptions of body image. It is therefore important that they are able to access healthy options, like salads, which are currently felt to be lacking. Additionally, it is important to be conscious of cultural requirements in the provision of free school meals (e.g. Halal and vegetarian options), particularly given evidence that such families are disproportionately more likely to find themselves in poverty.

That receiving FSM can prevent children from spending time with their friends is also a concern.

This can be either because they have to sit in a designated area away from their friends, or because time spent queuing eats into their break. Staggering lunch breaks – possibly by year group – may be one way of overcoming this.

The ability to identify FSM claimants can **stigmatise children**; some 16% of those aged 8-16 in London suggested that they would be embarrassed to receive FSM, while two in five (40%) would prefer to use FSM as part of a system where all children use the same payment method, compared to a quarter (27%) who would prefer to use FSM with either a token or ticket.

Of course, another option to consider would be to make school meals free – or at the least heavily subsidised – for all which would remove the stigma associated with eating them. Alternatively, making school meals compulsory for all would be another consideration. This would make it difficult to identify low income families and would also encourage greater socialisation among children; in the qualitative research children told us that while those who ate school dinners had to do so in the canteen, those with packed lunches ate away from their classmates, often at their desk. Finally, such a policy would ensure that all children have at least one balanced meal a day and do not engage in the kind of ‘food trading’ that Bartek Shah did that left him eating food he enjoyed but that contained little in the way of nutritional value.

PARTICIPANTS’ OTHER SUGGESTIONS

While these measures would all go some way to ensuring that low income families are better able to afford both sufficient amount and healthy types of food for their families, participants were also keen to offer their own solutions to this problem and these are outlined below.

In the first instance, families maintain that at the root of this issue is the fact that food prices are too high. Therefore, rather than dealing with money off vouchers, families suggest that reducing and then fixing the cost of staple food items – like milk, bread, eggs, potatoes and other selected

vegetables – would help them considerably. This would not only help them to budget and plan more effectively, but would also help them cope better in winter months when families noticed that their spending on food increased.

Winter is hard...they're eating all day because they're indoors all day and they're bored.

Such a measure would certainly require the backing of supermarkets, and may also necessitate changes being made to how food is sold. This is something that is endorsed in the survey with half (49%) of parents in London supporting the introduction of co-operative markets which stock cheaper food.

Improving access to supermarkets was also raised by families. As such, there may be a role for supermarkets – perhaps in conjunction with TfL – to provide either free or subsidised transport to the shops for low income families. The Dial-a-Ride scheme could be a useful model to base this service on, and it would obviously have to be sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of parents trying to balance both their working and caring commitments.

Also, looking at the issue of transport, there may be scope to widen the potential offered by internet shopping which would save low income families both money and time. Transport issues are also of particular concern to families with one or more disabled parent or child. Such families may find their affordable and accessible shopping options limited. However, the issue is that the supermarkets where low income families like to shop because of the good value these stores are perceived to offer – Morrison's, Lidl and Aldi for instance – do not offer an internet shopping service and so this would need to be addressed for it to be of benefit.

Finally, one of the stand-out points from the qualitative work is how independent and resourceful the families we spoke to are. They are determined to do the best for their children and doing this often means going to great lengths and making significant sacrifices to the detriment of their own health and wellbeing. While parents take these steps without question, that they are not able to feed their children or themselves as much or as good quality food as they wanted is a considerable source of both stress and guilt to them.

Further, parents themselves want to be the architects of their family's fortunes and are keen to improve their own standing – by moving into work or increasing their hours – rather than relying on the state. Standing in the way of this though are issues with childcare, related to both affordability

and the flexibility of provision. These issues are acutely felt by the lone parents we spoke to in the qualitative work who lack access to informal care networks and tend to suffer from greater levels of social isolation as a result – something that has been confirmed by other research we have conducted in London on childcare affordability²⁶. Increased provision of school breakfast and after school clubs would, therefore, serve a dual purpose in helping parents to work and ensuring that children have access to healthy food.

Clearly then, there is much work to be done. But the determination of these parents to improve their situation is evident and there to be harnessed.

There are so many out there that want to work and put food on their families' tables...helping people to help themselves is the biggest thing. There's lots of people out there trying to help themselves – back them up.

²⁶ Hall, S et al (2011) Families' behaviours and experiences in the childcare affordability pilots.

7

Appendix

APPENDIX

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Background:

The Greater London Authority has commissioned us to carry out in-depth case studies in order to gain an insight into the issue of child hunger in London today. This study will play a critical role in filling an evidence gap on the extent and nature of child hunger across London

This research will inform the Greater London Authority's Food Programme future policies, and will be used to create awareness of this growing issue.

Aims and Objectives:

The key areas this interview will explore are:

- Life on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis, and the role that food plays in this.
- Where, when, and what children eat.
- How parents cope with the rising cost of food, and any challenges parents have faced in accessing affordable food.
- The positive steps that these families have taken to meet their (food) challenges.
- What people think would aid their situation. This could include access to Free School Meals, food vouchers, employment opportunities, or services e.g. breakfast/after-school clubs.

| Questions | Notes |
|---|------------------|
| Introduction | 5 minutes |
| <p>Inform participants about the purpose of the research – that we are here on behalf of the Greater London Authority to talk with them about the price of food and the food they buy, and their family's eating habits. The interview will take up to 1 and a half hours, followed by a 30 min participatory photo exercise, and they will receive £50 as a thank-you for their time.</p> <p>Confidentiality: reassure them that all responses are anonymous and that information about individuals will not be passed on to anyone outside of Ipsos MORI.</p> <p>Stress that there are no right or wrong answers - we're just really interested in understanding their experiences.</p> <p>Do they have any questions? Allow time here to answer all questions in detail and reassure participants.</p> | |

Remind them that (where applicable) we'd like to talk to other members of the household too. It's not essential that everyone in the family be there for the entire time and people are free to come and go as they please but the idea is that we find out a bit about everyone.

Get permission to digitally record in order to transcribe for quotes, no detailed attribution.

| Understanding the participant(s) and their life | 10 minutes |
|--|---|
| <p>Can you tell me a bit about yourselves/the family? [names, ages etc.]</p> <p>How long have you lived here? Who lives here with you?</p> <p>Ask about family and friends in the household and their relationships with them.</p> <p>Can you tell me a bit about where you live and the local area?</p> <p>What's good about it? And what's bad about it?</p> <p>Would you like to live somewhere else? Where? Why do you say this?</p> <p>What facilities are there in the area? (e.g. food banks, supermarkets, convenience stores, religious centres, charities, transport links).</p> <p>Which of these do you use regularly?</p> <p>How convenient are they for you? How do you get to these facilities? (Car, public transport, walk)?</p> <p>Are there any facilities in the area that you can't or don't use (e.g. supermarkets, transport)? Why – what is it that stops you from using them?</p> <p>PROBE: cost, distance.</p> <p>Do you know many people in your local area?</p> <p>Do you have friends or family in the area? How often do you see them?</p> <p>Do any of these people provide support or help you out in any way?</p> <p>Would you say there is a community spirit in your local area? PROBE - For instance, do neighbours here look out for one another? Do you do things together?</p> <p>Can you tell me a bit about how you spend your time?</p> <p>PROBE: employment, socialising, caring, studying.</p> <p>What does a typical day look like for you?</p> | <p>The aim of the introductory section is gain as much information as possible about the family and their life. The information you gather here will provide an important context for further discussion.</p> <p>IF NEEDED: Food banks are charitable organisations which distribute food to those who are facing financial difficulties and finding it difficult to afford food.</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>What about a typical week?</p> <p>Has your employment status changed recently?</p> <p>Can you tell me about why this was?</p> <p>What, if any, changes have you had to make to your lifestyle as a result? What has the impact of this been on you? And on others?</p> <p>Has this changed any benefits you do/did receive? PROBE: Tax Credits, LHA, JSA.</p> <p>Do you rent your home, pay a mortgage or have some other arrangement?</p> <p>How did you come to this arrangement? PROBE - determine the extent this arrangement is a choice or a constraint</p> <p>What are the advantages of this? And the disadvantages?</p> | <p>If others are home, speak to them about this too</p> |
| Discussing their food habits | 30 minutes |
| <p>CHILDREN AGED 8 -12: Before starting this section with the parent, please provide the children with the <u>children's exercise</u>.</p> <p>CHILDREN AGED 13-16: Are welcome to join in conversation with parent.</p> <p>I'd now like to talk about the food you and your family eat in a little more detail.</p> <p>Can you tell me about the food you and your family eat?</p> <p>What does a typical 'food day' look like for you?</p> <p>What about a typical week?</p> <p>Do you and your children eat breakfast in the morning?</p> <p>IF EVERYONE EATING BREAKFAST: What do you eat? Does this vary across the week/month? Why? Have you always done this?</p> <p>IF CHILDREN ATTENDING BREAKFAST CLUB: Why did they start attending a breakfast club? PROBE: Parent's employment, lack of food at home, their friends attend, cheaper than feeding them at home.</p> <p>IF NOT EATING BREAKFAST: Why don't you and your family eat breakfast? Has it always been this way?</p> <p>What about lunch?</p> | <p>This section is intended to be explorative. Try to gather as much information about their food habits as possible</p> <p>Refer to pre-task</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>IF CHILDREN RECEIVING SCHOOL MEALS: Do you pay for these, or does your child receive Free School Meals?</p> <p>Do you know what your child(ren) eat at school?</p> <p>IF CHILDREN NOT RECEIVING SCHOOL MEALS: Do your children take a packed lunch to school? Who makes this? What does it typically contain?</p> <p>Is everyone in this household happy with the amount of food they eat? How do you feel after you have eaten?</p> <p>Is this the way things have always been? IF NO: What has changed? Why did this change come about?</p> <p>What about your evening meal?</p> <p>Does everyone in this household eat an evening meal?</p> <p>Where do you eat this? Is that together or separately?</p> <p>What kinds of food do you typically eat?</p> <p>Can you tell me how you go about food shopping?</p> <p>How often do you go shopping?</p> <p>Do you do a regular shop?</p> <p>When do you go food shopping? PROBE: Weekends, end of day when there are mark downs, when I know there are special offers.</p> <p>Do you have a system?</p> <p>How does your system work?</p> <p>How much planning goes into shopping?</p> <p>Do you shop with meals in mind?</p> <p>Do you use a list to shop?</p> <p>Do you stick to what's on the list or get things that aren't on the list? PROBE: do you buy special offers?</p> <p>Can you show me what's in your fridge at the moment?</p> <p>Can you show me what's in your freezer at the moment?</p> <p>How much do you use your fridge/freezer?</p> <p>Do you have any shopping lists that we can see?</p> <p>Where do you shop? PROBE: supermarket, markets, local convenience stores.</p> <p>Are there reasons for your choice?</p> | <p>throughout</p> <p>ASK EVERYONE PRESENT</p> |
|---|---|

Cost?

Accessibility?

Have you always shopped there?

If not...

Why did you decide to change?

Do you intend to change again in the future?

Would you shop somewhere else if you could?

How much do you tend to spend on food shopping?

Per week?

Per month?

Per shop?

How large a proportion of your money goes on food?

Does the amount stay fairly regular?

Have you noticed any change in the price of food?

Are there specific products that you have seen a price increase in?

Was there a specific point at which you noticed the change?

Has this changed what you buy? IF YES: How? (buying less, buying cheaper/own brand produce, changing your diet) IF NO: How are you coping with the increases? (making cut backs in other places for instance)

How familiar are you with how much things cost?

What are the essentials?

What are your luxury items?

Is there anything you'd like to buy but can't? IF YES: How has this changed?

What has the impact of this been on you/your family?

Do you use loyalty schemes / store-cards?

How much of a help are they?

How far do you think about nutrition / health when you shop?

What foods do you consider to be healthy foods? How do you know/decide if a

food is healthy or not?

Can you show me any healthy food you have in your home today?

WHEN LOOKING AT HEALTHY FOOD: Have you always bought this food? IF NO:

When did this change?

How important is it to buy healthy food?

What healthy food do you buy?

Do you think your family eat enough healthy food? IF NO: Why do you say this?

Does everyone in the family have their 5 a day?

What are the 5?

Does the family have enough food?

Does everybody have as much food as they need?

Does everyone in your family require the same food? PROBE: does anyone require special food/supplements?

IF YES: How does this requirement affect how you go about your food shopping?

Are there ever times when anyone doesn't have enough to eat?

How do you know what is enough food? PROBE: calorific content, my family tell me, how I feel.

When and how often has that happened?

Who didn't have enough to eat? PROBE: children, adults, everyone, pets.

Who did it happen to?

How did this affect you/them? PROBE: loss of concentration, feeling ill, feeling upset.

Are you worried that it may happen in the future?

Do you ever have any food left over? PROBE: at the end of a meal, food that has gone off, you don't get round to eating.

What do you do with food that's left over? Why?

Is this what you've always done with leftover food?

IF CHANGED: Why?

Is there anything that you would like to do with leftover food that you can't or don't currently do? IF YES: What?

| Support and advice | 30 minutes |
|---|------------|
| <p>What sorts of advice and/or support have you sought to help you get enough food to feed your family?</p> <p>What triggered you seeking support/advice?</p> <p>Where did you go for advice? PROBE - family, friends, institutions (religious, voluntary, community etc), services (Local Authority, library etc.).</p> <p>What was the nature of their support? How easy was it to access? And how helpful was it? What other kinds of support and/or advice would you find useful? Why do you say this?</p> <p>IF HAVE NEVER SOUGHT ADVICE/SUPPORT: why have you never sought advice and/or support? PROBE: is this because you....don't need any; don't know where to look; don't have time.</p> <p>How well informed do you feel about organisations, services, and forms of support that are available to you?</p> <p>Which issues is it most important that you get help and/or support on? Why do you say this?</p> <p>Where do you get your information from on this kind of thing?</p> <p>How helpful do you find this kind of information? Why do you say this – what else would you like to know?</p> <p>What kinds of information or advice do you think would be helpful for people in your situation to have access to?</p> <p>Do you know of anyone who provides this?</p> <p>What difference would it make if people had access to this?</p> | |
| Policy interventions | 15 minutes |
| <p>I am now going to suggest some changes that might be made to food policies that affect you, and would like hear what you think about them.</p> <p>To get started, are there any kinds of policies or forms of support that you think would help you and your family access food, or improve the way you eat?</p> | |

What about any forms of support which you may have lost (cuts, no longer eligible etc) which you really valued and would make a significant difference to how you eat?

POLICY CONCEPT ONE:

If supermarket food that would otherwise go to waste were to become more widely available for a small cost, how do you think this would benefit your family?

What proportion of the original cost would you be willing to pay? PROBE: 50%, 75%

Would you prefer to buy this produce with cash, or a scheme such as food stamps or vouchers? Why do you say this? (Probe for any stigma around using vouchers or stamps).

Where would you expect to buy this produce? PROBE: supermarket, food bank, community centre, school.

Would you be happy to purchase and consume food that would otherwise go to waste? PROBE: out of date, no longer fresh, might not last very long, damaged packaging.

What do you like/dislike about this idea?

What do you see as the advantages/drawbacks?

How would it improve life for your family?

POLICY CONCEPT TWO:

If you were able to buy a small package of staple food (such as a small portion of rice/pasta, tinned tomatoes, lentils etc) for £1 that could be used to make a healthy meal, would this be of benefit to you?

Where would you like to be able to buy this from?

How many people would you want to be able to feed with this £1 meal?

Is there anything else you would like to see in this package? PROBE: Cooking tips, recipes, utensils, healthy eating advice.

What do you like/dislike about this idea?

What do you see as the advantages/drawbacks?

How would it improve life for your family?

POLICY CONCEPT THREE:

Food vouchers for fruit and vegetables being made available to people with young children and people on low incomes.

What difference would this make to how your family eat?

What would you expect these vouchers to cover? PROBE: a contribution towards the cost of healthy food (50%, 75% etc), the whole cost.

Where would you want to be able to use these vouchers? PROBE: Large supermarkets, local shops, special food pick up centres, food banks.

Would you want to receive a voucher that you could only use on fruit and vegetables, or the cash value? Is there a difference? Why do you say this? How important is this?

What do you like/dislike about this idea?

What do you see as the advantages/drawbacks?

POLICY CONCEPT FOUR:

If the local food banks were able to provide food to people who are trying to eat healthily.

What kinds of food would you like to receive from this service? Why those types of food in particular? PROBE: healthy foods, expensive, usually unaffordable.

What difference would this make to how your family eat?

How would you feel about going to a food bank? Why do you say this?

What do you like/dislike about this idea?

What do you see as the advantages/drawbacks?

In your view, what should the government's priority be when it comes to helping families' access food in London?

Is there any form of support that you currently receive, or have received in the past, which you want to adapt in some way to improve how you access or afford food?

If you had a magic wand to change government's food policy what would do differently in order to improve life for your family?

| | |
|--|------------------|
| What else would have a positive impact on how you and your family are able to access or afford food? | |
| Conclusion | 5 minutes |
| <p>Thinking about all the things we have discussed today what do you think the key message you would like me to take back?</p> <p>Why do you say this?</p> <p>And is there anything else that we haven't discussed that you think is important mention?</p> <p>Why do you say this?</p> <p>Thank respondent(s) for their time.</p> | |

FOOD DIARY



My Food Diary

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Name: | |
| Age: | |
| Hometown: | |

Thank you for taking part in this research.

Before we meet, we'd like you to spend a bit of time thinking about what you eat and keeping a short diary.

We recommend you spend around 5 minutes a day but if you have more time feel free to go over that...



Any questions - just call or email Kathryn Medien
kathryn.medien@ipsos.com

DAY 1**What did you eat today?**

Over the **next few days** we'd like you to fill in a diary about what you're eating each day. Don't worry if some days are blank. **Feel free to stick in images or just use text, whatever you like.**

| | Breakfast | Lunch | Dinner | Snacks Between meals |
|---|-----------|-------|--------|-------------------------|
| What did you eat today? (e.g. toast, a sandwich, a burger) | | | | |
| Where did you eat that? (e.g. At home, in the school canteen) | | | | |
| Who cooked it? (e.g. Mum, Dad, your carer, dinner lady at school) | | | | |
| How did it make you feel? (e.g. awake, tired) | | | | |
| Who did you eat with? (e.g. My friends, my family, other kids at school) | | | | |

DAY 2**What did you eat today?**

| | Breakfast | Lunch | Dinner | Snacks Between meals |
|---|-----------|-------|--------|-------------------------|
| What did you eat today? (e.g. toast, a sandwich, a burger) | | | | |
| Where did you eat that? (e.g. At home, in the school canteen) | | | | |
| Who cooked it? (e.g. Mum, Dad, your carer, dinner lady at school) | | | | |
| How did it make you feel? (e.g. awake, tired, happy, hungry) | | | | |
| Who did you eat with? (e.g. My friends, my family, other kids at school) | | | | |

DAY 3**What did you eat today?**

| | Breakfast | Lunch | Dinner | Snacks Between meals |
|---|-----------|-------|--------|-------------------------|
| What did you eat today? (e.g. toast, a sandwich, a burger) | | | | |
| Where did you eat that? (e.g. At home, in the school canteen) | | | | |
| Who cooked it? (e.g. Mum, Dad, your carer, dinner lady at school) | | | | |
| How did it make you feel? (e.g. awake, tired, happy, hungry) | | | | |
| Who did you eat with? (e.g. My friends, my family, other kids at school) | | | | |

DAY 4**What did you eat today?**

| | Breakfast | Lunch | Dinner | Snacks Between meals |
|---|-----------|-------|--------|-------------------------|
| What did you eat today? (e.g. toast, a sandwich, a burger) | | | | |
| Where did you eat that? (e.g. At home, in the school canteen) | | | | |
| Who cooked it? (e.g. Mum, Dad, your carer, dinner lady at school) | | | | |
| How did it make you feel? (e.g. awake, tired, happy, hungry) | | | | |
| Who did you eat with? (e.g. My friends, my family, other kids at school) | | | | |

DAY 5**What did you eat today?**

| | Breakfast | Lunch | Dinner | Snacks Between meals |
|---|-----------|-------|--------|-------------------------|
| What did you eat today? (e.g. toast, a sandwich, a burger) | | | | |
| Where did you eat that? (e.g. At home, in the school canteen) | | | | |
| Who cooked it? (e.g. Mum, Dad, your carer, dinner lady at school) | | | | |
| How did it make you feel? (e.g. awake, tired, happy, hungry) | | | | |
| Who did you eat with? (e.g. My friends, my family, other kids at school) | | | | |

DAY 6**What did you eat today?**

| | Breakfast | Lunch | Dinner | Snacks Between meals |
|---|-----------|-------|--------|-------------------------|
| What did you eat today? (e.g. toast, a sandwich, a burger) | | | | |
| Where did you eat that? (e.g. At home, in the school canteen) | | | | |
| Who cooked it? (e.g. Mum, Dad, your carer, dinner lady at school) | | | | |
| How did it make you feel? (e.g. awake, tired, happy, hungry) | | | | |
| Who did you eat with? (e.g. My friends, my family, other kids at school) | | | | |

DAY 7**What did you eat today?**

| | Breakfast | Lunch | Dinner | Snacks Between meals |
|---|-----------|-------|--------|-------------------------|
| What did you eat today? (e.g. toast, a sandwich, a burger) | | | | |
| Where did you eat that? (e.g. At home, in the school canteen) | | | | |
| Who cooked it? (e.g. Mum, Dad, your carer, dinner lady at school) | | | | |
| How did it make you feel? (e.g. awake, tired, happy, hungry) | | | | |
| Who did you eat with? (e.g. My friends, my family, other kids at school) | | | | |

QUESTIONNAIRES

CHILDREN'S SURVEY

(the question marked with an * has tracking information from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children report)

Introduction

These questions are about eating at school and at home. They are for you to read and answer on your own. Please try to answer all of the questions.

There are no right or wrong answers. It is not a test. We just want to find out what you think about things.

If there are any words that you can't read or don't understand, please ask the interviewer.

If you come to a question that you can't or don't want to answer, you can miss it or tick the 'Don't know' box.

You do not have to show or tell your answers to anyone, including the adult that you live with. Your name and address are not on this so no-one will know these are your answers.

Please put a tick ☐ in the box next to your answer. Make sure your tick is inside the box as this makes sure we read your answers correctly.

Thank you for your help.

1. How often do these things happen to you, if ever?**I have trouble paying attention at school because I feel hungry**Tick one box

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

Don't know

My school lunch is my biggest meal of the dayTick one box

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

Don't know

I feel too tired to play with my friends at schoolTick one box

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

Don't know

I go to bed hungry because there is not enough food at homeTick one box

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

Don't know

I eat fruit and vegetables at home

Tick one box

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

Don't know

I have a hot meal at home

Tick one box

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

Don't know

2. Some children have free school meals at school. This means that the adult that they live with does not have to pay for their school meals.

Do you think children would feel embarrassed to use free school meals or not?

Tick one box.

Yes

No

Don't know

ASK AS PART OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Q. Some children have free school meals at school. This means that the adult that they live with does not have to pay for their school meals.

Do you have Free School Meals or not at the moment?

Yes I have Free School Meals

No I do not have Free School Meals

Don't know

CHILD HUNGER QUESTIONNAIRE – PARENTS SURVEY

(Questions for which we have national benchmarking data from the Save The Children child poverty research are marked with asterisk)

Thank you for agreeing to fill in this questionnaire. We want to find out how you cope financially with the cost of food, as well as the impact of this on your child(ren). The findings from this study will help the Greater London Authority (GLA) understand the impact of food prices on parents and children, and will be used for future policy development.

The questionnaire will take up to 5 minutes to complete. Once you have finished please hand your completed questionnaire back to the interviewer. If there are any questions that you can't read or understand, please ask the interviewer.

Please answer the questions as honestly and accurately as you can. We would like to reassure you that your answers will remain strictly confidential. Ipsos MORI guarantees that only they will see your completed questionnaire.

1. Thinking about your household's spending on food over the past year, how has your ability to afford food changed, if at all? (Please choose one option only)

- Got a lot worse
- Got a little worse
- Not changed at all
- Got a little better
- Got a lot better
- Don't know

2. Thinking about your household's spending on food, how often, if at all, have you done any of the following in the past year? (Please choose one option on each row)
RANDOMISE

| | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Less often than once a month | Not at all in the last year | Don't know |
|---|-------|--------|---------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Cut back on how much we spend on food and/or the amount of food we buy* | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Bought less fruit and vegetables and/ or fresh food because it's too expensive* | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|

3. Regardless of whether or not you are currently able to afford the food you need for your family, if you were to find it difficult to afford food, please indicate which of the following types of support you would prefer to use, if any? (please select all that apply)

- Food banks that supply you with free food
- Support and advice from a charity
- Free school meals – with a token/ticket
- Free school meals – as part of a system where all children use the same payment method
- Free food vouchers to buy healthy food
- Co-operative markets with cheaper food
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know
- None of the above

4. Thinking about your spending on food in relation to your child(ren), how often, if at all, have you done any of the following in the past year? (Please choose one option for each row)
RANDOMISE

| | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Less often than once a month | Not at all in the last year | Don't know |
|--|-------|--------|---------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Skipped my meals so my child(ren) can eat | | | | | | |
| My child(ren) have had to skip meals because we can't afford to buy food | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

5. How often, if at all, do the following statements apply to you?

| | Always | Often | Sometimes | Never | Don't know |
|---|--------|-------|-----------|-------|------------|
| During the school week my child(ren)'s main meal is eaten at school | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| My child(ren) tell me that they are hungry | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

ASK AS PART OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS**Q. Is your child(ren) eligible to receive Free School Meals or not at the moment?**

Yes, and they currently receive them

Yes, but they do not currently receive them

No

Don't know

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About Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute

The Social Research Institute works closely with national government, local public services and the not-for-profit sector. Its 200 research staff focus on public service and policy issues. Each has expertise in a particular part of the public sector, ensuring we have a detailed understanding of specific sectors and policy challenges. This, combined with our methodological and communications expertise, ensures that our research makes a difference for decision makers and communities.