

**FOOD AND POVERTY 2018**

# **Exploring lived experiences of food bank use**

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## Outline of today's talk

- Why a focus on lived experience is important
- My own ethnographic work
- Where to go next?



## My research

- Five year Leverhulme Trust funded project led by Professor Clare Bamba
- Trained as a Trussell Trust volunteer
- Spent four years with the foodbank in Stockton Town Centre
- Took part in all activities that other volunteers did – administration of red voucher, collections at Tesco supermarkets, preparing food parcels, making tea and toast
- Everyone at the foodbank knew who I was and why I was there
- I took detailed fieldnotes (40,000 words!) and also interviewed people in their homes, staff at referral agencies, and volunteers

# HUNGER PAINS

**Life inside foodbank Britain**

Kayleigh Garthwaite

*Foreword by Jack Monroe*

*Afterword by Linda Tirado*

- We've heard that one million food parcels are being given out. But where are the voices of the people who are using foodbanks?
- Focuses on the real stories behind the foodbank statistics
- People using foodbanks have been blamed and shamed for their own situation – the book provides an alternative narrative



## Why do people use a foodbank?

- Problems with benefit sanctions and delays, which could lead to lengthy periods without income for themselves and their families
- Ill health, bereavement, relationship breakdown, substantial caring responsibilities, and low paid jobs were also important
- Struggles with mental ill-health made it more difficult to cope, leading to a worsening of often already poor health

# Food for thought: an ethnographic study of negotiating ill health and food insecurity in a UK foodbank

- People accessing the foodbank were often suffering from chronic health problems, with mental health problems being particularly prevalent.
- Although the food assistance from the foodbank was viewed as a 'lifeline', the food provided could have negative consequences upon people's health, especially for those with food intolerances.
- People accessing the foodbank were aware of how to eat healthily but were unable to do so due to affordability.

## Naomi, 36

“I have IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome) and a lazy bowel and I’m allergic to white wheat...I know at the foodbank you do get a lot of like white, wheat based food but at the moment I’ll eat anything. Like I told yer I was bad over the weekend because of everything that I ate that I shouldn’t have cos I can’t afford to buy fresh vegetables and fruit all the time, and that’s what I’m supposed to eat. I can’t eat anything fried, spicy and a lot of cheap food is the type of food that I can’t eat...but when you’re hungry you’ll eat anything and I suffer the consequences afterwards.”

## **Anna, 51**

“I have a couple of medical conditions...I don't do very well with wheat and dairy, and I tend to get lots of acid reflux now...I also suffer with anaemia so I really do need lots of broccoli, lots of things with iron in it and meat is one of those things that's higher in iron and we're really struggling on that score at the moment. We're eating lots of pasta, lots of cheap sauces, things like that. I have resorted to doing more baking and things but it is a bit of a struggle cos then I do tend to get more health problems the more pastry, bread, things like that that I eat...but we can't afford to do anything other at the moment”



## New project...

- Recently received funding from the British Academy for the project 'Charitable food provision as an emergency response: sharing evidence from Canada, the USA and the UK'
- This will involve an interactive workshop which will bring together international early career (ECR) and senior researchers, charities, front-line workers, media, ***those experiencing food poverty and insecurity***, and grassroots organisations
- Plans to extend this to a wider European network

# Where next for foodbanks?

Three important steps are needed to begin to effectively address rising foodbank use in the UK:

**1/ Government intervention**

**2/ Challenge the stigmatisation of people living in poverty**

**3/ Start \*listening\* to people who are living in poverty**

## Where next for foodbanks?

- Foodbanks cannot become the new normal. They should be seen as **unusual**, *shocking* and outrageous. Emergency food provision cannot replace an accountable system of social protection, as experience in the USA and Canada shows us
- The long-term consequences of increasingly relying on charity to address poverty cannot be ignored. Where provision is adequate and tailored to the needs of people using it, foodbanks can relieve some symptoms of their insecurity – **temporarily** – but there are many structural ‘solutions’ outstanding

**Thank you!**

**Any  
questions?**

