

“Nobody needs to go hungry in this town”:

The lived experience of foodbank clients in the East Midlands.

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On the breadline: the wall of shame.



Aim, Objectives and Rationale

Rationale:

- **Foodbanks have continued to increase in the UK over the last decade.**
- **Socio-political influences in rise of foodbanks (e.g. austerity cuts, welfare reform).**
- **Some research on experiences of foodbank clients (e.g. Garthwaite's research).**
- **Experiences of poverty differ across societies, shaped by own unique contexts (Lister, 2004).**
- **This study explores clients' experiences of foodbank use specifically within the East Midlands.**

Research question: What are clients' experiences when utilising foodbank services?

Aim: To explore the lived experiences of people utilising foodbank services.

Objectives:

- **To observe and interview foodbank clients to explore their lived experiences of utilising foodbank services;**
- **To observe and interview foodbank employees/volunteers about their perceptions about the foodbank clients lived experiences of accessing and utilising foodbank services.**

Methods and analysis

Research approach

- Interpretivist positioning
- Qualitative methodology
- Ethnographic principles

Research context

Two food aid organisations supported this study, facilitating recruitment and data collection of participants.

Site 1 - N=12

Site 2 - N=4

Research context

Reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Health and Society, University of Northampton (January 2017). Ethical considerations:

Vulnerability, sensitivity, safety, anonymity, confidentiality, data protection.

Methods and participants.

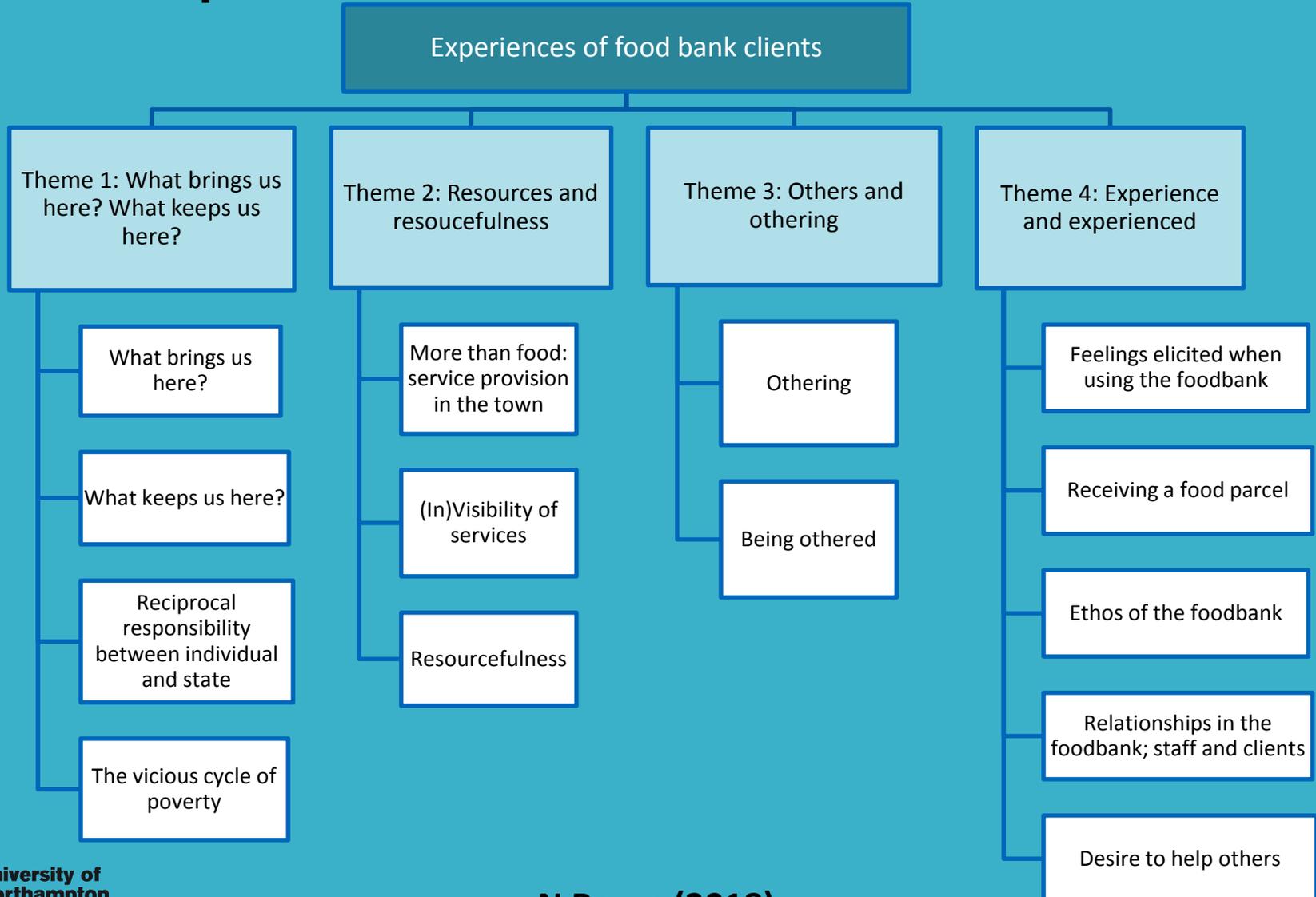
- Interviews with clients (N=11; 7 male, 4 female; Mean age=33 years; Ethnicity= 15 White British, 1 Black African).
- Interviews with foodbank employees/ volunteers (N=5; 1 male, 4 female; Mean age=60 years; Ethnicity= 4 White British, 1 Russian Latvian).
- Observations within the foodbank.

Analysis

- Thematic analysis of field note observations and interview data transcripts.
- Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6-step thematic analysis framework.
- Bottom-up inductive approach, to enable the development of themes to be data driven (Boyatzis, 1998).
- Triangulation of data. Method triangulation (interviews and observations) and source triangulation (clients and employees/volunteers) was conducted within analysis

Results: Thematic analysis map

Superordinate and subordinate themes



Factors influencing experiences of foodbanks

Outside the foodbank:

Health and social care services:

- Housing
- Employment
- Income and benefit
- Health

Examples of difficulties:

- Housing criteria resulting in people not being a priority
- Slow and difficult benefit systems and policies
- Lack of mental health services

Interactions:

- Interactions with the public
- Interactions with others in hardship crisis
- With services

Wider crisis services:

- Food aid
 - Night shelters
 - Emergency accommodation/refuges
 - Substance abuse
- Examples of difficulties:
- Shelter facilities not supporting foreign nationals and couples

Moderating influencing

- Behaviour
- Perceptions/cognitions
- Previous experiences
- Duration of hardship

Inside the foodbank:

Interactions:

- With staff
- With volunteers
- With clients

Content of the food parcel

- Quantity
- Preferences

Feelings:

- Shame/degradation
- Fear/Apprehension
- Loss of autonomy
- Gratitude
- Kindness

Feelings:

- Welcoming
- Non-judgemental

Outside the foodbank

Socio-political issues and 'the cycle of poverty':

- Experiencing chronic benefit cuts and delays, low wages, unemployment, housing and mental health issues. (similar to Cooper & Dumbleton, 2013; Lambie-Mumford et al., 2014; Loopstra et al., 2015; Reeves & Eagle, 2015).
- Welfare, employment and housing services brief, patchy, inefficient, difficult to navigate. **'systematically failed by services', resulting in a 'cycle of poverty'**

“ We are in emergency accommodation, so we can't get a job, couldn't get a house with the council, so I need to private rent but of course I can't pay for my rent. It's a vicious and never ending circle really, you just go round in circles, round and round and round. ” (Male Client)

Internal: Personal desire to change

- Clients ready to change angry and resentful for being let down, powerless to change circumstances.
- Chronic poverty over time changes expectation and desire to change.
- People who have grown up in poverty; way of life, little desire to change.

“ I think a lot of them don't know how to live differently. I think a lot of them have been brought up in the care system, so they are kind of lost within that. ” (Female Employee)

Inside the foodbank

Feelings when using the foodbank

- **Shame, degradation, desperation, embarrassment, loss of pride and autonomy, fear and apprehension, gratitude.**
- **Similar to other research: Douglas et al., 2015; Garthwaite, 2016a; Purdam et al., 2015; van der Horst et al., 2014)**
- **Stigma presented in two distinct forms; 'felt' and 'enacted'. Experienced inside and outside the foodbank.**
- **Felt: fear of experiencing stigma. Enacted: actual experience of stigma (Scrambler & Hopkins, 1986; Sheeth et al., 2016).**

“ It’s nerve-wracking when you have a baby. But everyone’s like really nice. Because you think you’re gonna get judged but everyone’s like really nice. ”
(Female Client)

“ I was asked if I was ‘working.’ ” (Female Client)

Ethos and relationships

- **Foodbank ethos: kind, welcoming, non-judgmental. Making clients feel valued, respected and dignified.**
- **Clients contribute to ethos through kindness, generosity, gratitude, and desire to help others.**
- **Ethos reciprocally create by staff and received by clients.**
- **Staff and clients make clients feel safe, welcome, accepted and comfortable**

“[it’s] like a big family here, basically.”
(Male Employee)

Conclusion and implications

Conclusion:

- **Clients' experiences are varied and complex, influenced by personal, behavioural, social, political and relational factors.**
- **Clients 'systematically failed' due to socio-political issues such as austerity cuts and welfare reform.**
- **Clients stuck in the 'cycle of poverty' and critically reliant on crisis services.**
- **Services often 'reactive' rather than 'interventional'.**
- **Experiences outside the foodbank influence experiences inside the foodbank.**
- **In the foodbank, clients feel range of different (and often difficult) emotions and feelings. Supported by much research; 'universal truth'**
- **Staff and volunteers foster supportive, welcoming and respectful ethos.**

Implications for policy and practice:

- **Government intervention to change political influences fueling rise in foodbank use.**
- **Anti-stigma strategies around lived experience of poverty, supported by sympathetic government and mass media rhetoric. No negative stereotypes around poverty.**
- **Enable crisis services to become more visible?**
- **Support employees and volunteers develop skills enabling them to foster a caring, understanding and empathetic culture and atmosphere to support clients using foodbanks.**

Thank you

Any questions?

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**“I just love it here because I find people here are among the most kind, generous, community minded people than I meet anywhere.”
(Female Volunteer)**