

Child food insecurity in the UK: a rapid review

Magaly Aceves-Martins, Moira Cruickshank,
Cynthia Fraser and Miriam Brazzelli*

Health Services Research Unit, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, UK

*Corresponding author m.brazzelli@abdn.ac.uk

Declared competing interests of authors: none

Published November 2018

DOI: [10.3310/phr06130](https://doi.org/10.3310/phr06130)

Plain English summary

Child food insecurity in the UK: a rapid review

Public Health Research 2018; Vol. 6: No. 13

DOI: [10.3310/phr06130](https://doi.org/10.3310/phr06130)

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Plain English summary

Food insecurity (FI) involves difficulties accessing enough safe and nutritious food to meet people's dietary needs and preferences for a healthy life. The consequences of FI can be particularly harmful for children. It is important to understand how FI may affect children's health and social well-being, and what can be done to tackle it successfully. To understand the nature and consequences of the problem in the UK, we conducted a rapid review to identify studies that assess FI in children. As we knew that there were not many studies from the UK, we reviewed the literature from other high-income countries (Canada, the USA, and Australia, New Zealand, and other European countries). We found 109 studies that measured FI in children up to 18 years old and reported its relationship with children's health and social well-being. Most of the studies were from North America and only five were from the UK. The results were not consistent across studies. Nevertheless, we identified some factors that may be linked to child FI, such as low family income, being deprived, living in public housing or low parental education level. In children, FI may affect general health, social well-being, mental and emotional health, and school performance. Food assistance programmes were generally found to mitigate FI and reduce hunger in the short term, but did not eliminate FI or improve academic performance. We also identified some limitations in the way this topic was addressed by researchers. Studies differed in terms of their characteristics and methods, and care should be taken when considering their findings. In particular, the measurement of child FI varied across studies. Hence, there is a need to develop a reliable method to measure it. Information on the extent of child FI in the UK or on the costs of interventions for reducing or eliminating FI was not available, and this is needed.

Public Health Research

ISSN 2050-4381 (Print)

ISSN 2050-439X (Online)

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (www.publicationethics.org/).

Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk

The full PHR archive is freely available to view online at www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/phr. Print-on-demand copies can be purchased from the report pages of the NIHR Journals Library website: www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Criteria for inclusion in the *Public Health Research* journal

Reports are published in *Public Health Research* (PHR) if (1) they have resulted from work for the PHR programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

Reviews in *Public Health Research* are termed 'systematic' when the account of the search, appraisal and synthesis methods (to minimise biases and random errors) would, in theory, permit the replication of the review by others.

PHR programme

The Public Health Research (PHR) programme, part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), evaluates public health interventions, providing new knowledge on the benefits, costs, acceptability and wider impacts of non-NHS interventions intended to improve the health of the public and reduce inequalities in health. The scope of the programme is multi-disciplinary and broad, covering a range of interventions that improve public health. The Public Health Research programme also complements the NIHR Health Technology Assessment programme which has a growing portfolio evaluating NHS public health interventions.

For more information about the PHR programme please visit the website: <http://www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/phr>

This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the PHR programme as project number 17/48/02. The contractual start date was in December 2017. The final report began editorial review in June 2018 and was accepted for publication in October 2018. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The PHR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the PHR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the PHR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

© Queen's Printer and Controller of HMSO 2018. This work was produced by Aceves-Martins *et al.* under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. This issue may be freely reproduced for the purposes of private research and study and extracts (or indeed, the full report) may be included in professional journals provided that suitable acknowledgement is made and the reproduction is not associated with any form of advertising. Applications for commercial reproduction should be addressed to: NIHR Journals Library, National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton SO16 7NS, UK.

Published by the NIHR Journals Library (www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk), produced by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, Scotland (www.prepress-projects.co.uk).

NIHR Journals Library Editor-in-Chief

Professor Ken Stein Chair of HTA and EME Editorial Board and Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

NIHR Journals Library Editors

Professor Ken Stein Chair of HTA and EME Editorial Board and Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

Professor Andrée Le May Chair of NIHR Journals Library Editorial Group (HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals)

Professor Matthias Beck Professor of Management, Cork University Business School, Department of Management and Marketing, University College Cork, Ireland

Dr Tessa Crilly Director, Crystal Blue Consulting Ltd, UK

Dr Eugenia Cronin Senior Scientific Advisor, Wessex Institute, UK

Dr Peter Davidson Consultant Advisor, Wessex Institute, University of Southampton, UK

Ms Tara Lamont Scientific Advisor, NETSCC, UK

Dr Catriona McDaid Senior Research Fellow, York Trials Unit, Department of Health Sciences, University of York, UK

Professor William McGuire Professor of Child Health, Hull York Medical School, University of York, UK

Professor Geoffrey Meads Professor of Wellbeing Research, University of Winchester, UK

Professor John Norrie Chair in Medical Statistics, University of Edinburgh, UK

Professor John Powell Consultant Clinical Adviser, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), UK

Professor James Raftery Professor of Health Technology Assessment, Wessex Institute, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, UK

Dr Rob Riemsma Reviews Manager, Kleijnen Systematic Reviews Ltd, UK

Professor Helen Roberts Professor of Child Health Research, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, UK

Professor Jonathan Ross Professor of Sexual Health and HIV, University Hospital Birmingham, UK

Professor Helen Snooks Professor of Health Services Research, Institute of Life Science, College of Medicine, Swansea University, UK

Professor Jim Thornton Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK

Professor Martin Underwood Warwick Clinical Trials Unit, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, UK

Please visit the website for a list of editors: www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors

Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk