

Perceptions of foodbank donors regarding the nutritional needs of foodbank users in the Wirral and West Cheshire area

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Food insecurity is a huge public health concern in the UK ⁽¹⁾. Recently, numbers of UK foodbanks have increased drastically ⁽²⁾, likely in response to an ever-increasing demand for emergency food, particularly in the North West of England.

Foodbanks primarily exist in order to alleviate hunger on a short-term, emergency basis, yet recently, foodbanks are becoming increasingly relied upon as the primary source of food for food insecure individuals ⁽²⁾. Alongside this, rates of obesity and other diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are increasing in food insecure populations ⁽³⁾, with high proportions of low nutrient quality foods supplied by foodbanks making up a large proportion of the diet and playing a vital role in development of such NCDs ⁽¹⁾.

The Trussell Trust report that 90% of foods available within foodbanks are donated by the public ⁽⁴⁾ yet, thus far, in the UK there is little research regarding foodbank donors and their perceptions of the nutritional needs of foodbank users ⁽⁵⁾. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to explore the motivation and decision-making process of foodbank donors and their perceptions of the importance of nutrition both when donating and when consuming foods themselves.

Qualitative research methods were utilised, consisting of semi-structured one-to-one interviews in order to explore, in depth, the perceptions of foodbank donors. Differences in food aid provision and food insecurity may be linked to deprivation and so a small convenience sample (n = 10) were recruited via social media from both the Wirral and West Cheshire, areas that differ in deprivation level. Interviews were conducted via Zoom videoconferencing, adhering to Covid-19 restrictions, and were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed according to the research aims.

Participants donating to Trussell Trust foodbanks on the Wirral (n = 5) mostly aged 46 years or above, all female and have mostly donated more than 15 times. Meanwhile participants from West Cheshire (n = 5) were younger, mostly male and donated less regularly. All participants identified as White British.

Participants indicated a distinct lack of nutritional knowledge and awareness of the Eatwell Guide among participants. Nutrition appeared to be secondary when donating food, with shelf-life being the primary consideration. Participants also highlighted wanting more information on how to donate foods in the best interests of foodbank users.

Due to the low sample number, repeating the study with more participants may aid in confirming the results of the present study.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the need for more nutritional education among the general population, as well as highlighting that improvements in the operational capacity of foodbanks and more information available to foodbank donors, such as a list within supermarkets, would be of use in facilitating donation of foods that support the health of vulnerable and food insecure individuals.

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