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TALKING WITH THEIR MOUTHS HALF FULL: FOOD INSECURITY IN THE HAMILTON COMMUNITY

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

While the sociology of food has attended to what symbolisms of presence can tell us about society, the same attention has not been attributed to symbolisms of absence. Within the context of affluent post-industrial societies, food insecurity means that people are “at times, uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food” (Nord *et al.* 2009, p. 2). This project is a comprehensive study of responses to, and experiences of, food insecurity in Hamilton City.

The issue of food insecurity has been difficult to politicise in New Zealand. One of the reasons for this is that the demand for food aid is usually reported by individual organisations, rather than across the entire food support sector. The first phase of this research was a multi-provider survey that documented the demand for formal food support in Hamilton over a one year period in 2006/2007. The findings show that during this time the community absorbed \$1,157,623 worth of state funded Special Needs Grants for Food, while philanthropically funded third sector organisations provided 4,232 food parcels and 25,557 community meals. The survey findings demonstrate that the socio-political environment in which formal food support takes place is characterised by the unwillingness of the state to fully realise its role in affirming the right of citizens to be free from hunger. At the same time, there is evidence of a corresponding willingness to delegate provision of food aid to charity based third sector organisations that receive no state funding.

The second phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of the experiences of ten community members who were confirmed as food insecure using the 'Standard 6-item Indicator to Classifying Households by Food Security Status' (Bickel *et al.*, 2000). The data showed that, as far as they were able, respondents exercised a range of endogenous strategies (the means that individuals and households applied in the private domain to manage food insecurity and hunger), but ultimately, the utility of these diminished. In this event, respondents pursued either informal exogenous strategies (through social networks), or, particularly where there were limitations on social capital, formal exogenous strategies in the form of service use. This study points to food insecurity as an experience that is shrouded with secrecy, shame and fear of stigma. Further, the experience carries with it a range of social implications in the form of exclusion, marginalisation and disempowerment, all of which have seldom been recognised elsewhere in the literature.

In acknowledging the complex and non-linear nature of food insecurity at macro, meso and micro levels, Rittel and Webber's (1973) criteria for 'wicked problems' is utilised as a theoretical framework for synthesising the findings. The thesis advocates for a collaborative approach to re-solving the persistence of food insecurity in which the range of stakeholders involved is broadened to include those who 'talk with their mouths half full'.

Dedication

This thesis is sincerely dedicated to Dr Ted 'The Wizard' Ninnes who is directly responsible for nurturing the sociological imagination that has been both a blessing and a cause for significant loss of sleep since I first encountered his teaching almost two decades ago.

Mentor, supervisor, colleague and friend - it has been a privilege.

May you *revel* in your retirement.

K.M.

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The contributions of Hamilton's formal food support sector in supplying the data that inform the quantitative dimension of this study are acknowledged. Finally, my sincere thanks to those members of the Hamilton community who have shared their experiences of food insecurity in the chapters that follow. I hope that your voices have been done justice here.

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List of Abbreviations

CPAG	Child Poverty Action Group
DPB	Domestic Purposes benefit
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
HeHa	Health Eating, Healthy Action
MSD	Ministry of Social Development
NZCCSS	New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services
NZPMP	New Zealand Poverty Management Project
SNG	Special Needs Grant
TAS	Temporary Additional Supplement
WINZ	Work and Income New Zealand

Entrées: An Introduction

Absence is a theme that permeates much of this thesis. Rather than telling a story about the *symbolisms of presence* and what they imply – the usual approach of sociological investigations into food – this work posits that *symbolisms of absence* can also tell us a great deal about the conditions of the social world.

The topic of this study is the culmination of personal and political interests in the sociology of food, in issues of social justice and a humanitarian awareness of the symptoms and prevalence of relative poverty and deprivation in New Zealand society. In 2005, I returned to live in the neighbourhood of my childhood after an absence of over two decades. I answered a knock on my front door one Sunday afternoon to greet a man in his early twenties seeking donations of food. He explained that there were no services open that could help him at this time. Although I did not ask after his personal circumstances (he may well have been feeding others too), I was able to provide him with some canned goods and fruit. I ate my own dinner that night wondering about the nature and prevalence of foodlessness in my community. What had happened in my old neighbourhood that people were now reduced to door knocking to meet basic human needs? What did that feel like? How did people cope? What implications did not having enough food have for health, for relationships and for social participation? Given that this instance of absence had generated so many questions, the decision to apply a sociological lens to answering them was not a difficult one.

As I was to discover later, foodlessness and hunger within the context of relative poverty is addressed in a body of literature that explores the somewhat sanitised term ‘food security’. There was little within this that addressed my initial

curiosity with regard to the experiences and implications that accompany what I have (quite intentionally) referred to throughout this study as *food insecurity*. In fact, due to the quantitative nature of most inquiries, the accounts of the individuals most affected seemed to have disappeared almost entirely. It has been both my quest and my privilege to augment existing accounts of food insecurity with some of the voices of these individuals. The product is a testament to the various members of the Hamilton community who came forward to talk about a social issue that is often stigmatised, de-politicised and silenced. Following an assessment of the significance of this study, an outline of the overall structure of this thesis is provided. A brief contextual profile of Hamilton City has also been added for those readers unfamiliar with the community in which this research is located.

The significance of this study

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself (sic) and of his family, *including food*, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 25(1))

Academically, the sociology of food is still in relative infancy as a discipline in New Zealand. While there is growing interest in examining the cultural modes attributed to the presence of food, the sociological literature that contemplates food's absence, as elsewhere, remains relatively scant. Although a review of the literature highlights a number of other disciplines that have tended to dominate and delimit research on food insecurity, the addition of a sociological perspective is particularly useful as a means of structuring ideas about a complex social problem, the dimensions of which interact across macro, meso and micro levels. The sociological imagination also supports an analysis that considers the historical, cultural, structural and critical contexts in which the problem of food insecurity is embedded.

A small number of academic, non-governmental and (to a lesser extent) governmental reports on poverty assert that issues of foodlessness often affect low income New Zealanders. However, portrayals of meso-level responses to food insecurity are usually provided via statistical accounts of the demand for formal food aid, and these are often fractured because of the micro-organisational manner in which service use is reported. Further, within the literature, micro level accounts of how people experience or address food insecurity are almost entirely absent. The current study distinguishes itself by drawing together both micro and meso responses to food insecurity and, as far as the author has been able to tell, is the first comprehensive work to do so in the New Zealand context.

The research that underpins this thesis has endeavoured to overcome some of the limitations and problems that have plagued micro-organisational, academic and policy constructions of food insecurity in New Zealand. A grounded methodology overlays quantitative data collected *across* local service providers with a more substantial qualitative dimension in which members of the Hamilton community who are affected by food insecurity share their stories, strategies, aspirations and concerns in an attempt to give form and voice to the lived experience of food deprivation in the social world.

Although an experiential approach¹ to understanding food insecurity is emergent in the limited international literature, this study distinguishes itself as one the first of its kind in New Zealand to engage with personalised accounts of foodlessness². The title of this thesis – *Talking With Their Mouths Half Full* – refers to the writer’s firm conviction that the most powerful way to convey the consequences of hunger and foodlessness is not through the statistics gathered by service providers, but through documenting the shared thoughts and stories of those who live with the absence of food on a day-to-day basis.

¹ The term ‘experiential’ is used here to denote people’s subjective accounts of a phenomenon at the micro level.

² A comprehensive literature search conducted in 2006 located only one New Zealand study that incorporated experiential accounts. Woodhouse (1999) has applied a qualitative approach to examine the realities of food poverty in a little known report undertaken for the Wairarapa Public Health Service.

The correlation between poverty and food insecurity in industrialised countries is well established, and to that end this study adds to an existing platform of knowledge. This work challenges some of the traditional constructions of poverty in New Zealand by asserting that food insecurity is a symptom of *relative* poverty and not just synonymous with *absolute* poverty³. It is hoped that this study provides a voice which is heard and a face which is recognised by service providers and policy makers both locally and nationally. Furthermore, by giving the phenomenon of food insecurity a human rather than statistical identity, decision makers are reminded that as a society we have accountabilities in terms of the rights which we must extend to all.

Thesis structure

Chapter two positions this study within the sociology of food and establishes a framework for conducting a review of the literature by asking historical, cultural, structural and critical questions about foodlessness. This review informs the working definitions of food security and its opposite - food insecurity - that are applied throughout the thesis, and accepts that within the context of wealthy post-industrial societies (as distinct from those characterised by absolute poverty) the primary cause of food insecurity is income inadequacy. With regard to the New Zealand context, three dominant discourses are uncovered in the form of Third Sector responses from non-government social service providers and their advocates, academic responses based in the health and nutrition framework (and to a lesser extent social policy and poverty studies), and government responses by way of social security policies and commitment to population health initiatives. The key measures by which the issue of food insecurity is formally addressed are identified as state funded Special Needs Grants for Food, and philanthropically funded foodbanks. The review also notes that existing accounts of food insecurity are largely quantitative, and that there is marginal inclusion of the element of 'voice' on behalf of those who encounter the problem as a lived experience.

³ The distinction between absolute and relative poverty in relation to food insecurity is addressed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Chapter three outlines the theoretical and methodological orientation of the research and proposes overcoming the limitations observed previously by implementing a mixed methodology that (i) surveys the nature of provision and level of demand for food support services in order to verify the existence of food insecurity in the Hamilton community, and (ii) engages with the lived experience of food insecurity with a view to developing understandings and about people's strategies for addressing it and gaining grounded perspectives on its implications. As such, the overarching theoretical approach of grounded theory is considered as a basis for developing an applied method that utilises sociological ethnography and interpretive field research. The process of developing the instruments for a survey of formal food support providers within the confines of existing organisational data is described, as is the procedure involved in constructing a schedule for in-depth interviews with community members who are measurably food insecure. A number of definitional issues - particularly those pertaining to formality of service provision and confirming respondents' status as food insecure - are explored and resolved, and a descriptive account of how the two dimensions of the research are operationalised in terms of ethical considerations, sample refinement, recruitment and data analysis is provided.

Chapter four presents the survey's findings. An optimal participation rate across the organisations identified as formal food support providers is achieved, including Hamilton's two major foodbanks, a coordinated programme of six community meal providers and the Ministry of Social Development, which oversees the administration of Special Needs Grant for Food ('food grants') via Work and Income New Zealand. The findings demonstrate that in the 2006/07 year there was sufficient community demand to absorb 4,232 food parcels (each catering for a household for three days), 25,557 community meals, and food grants to the value of \$1,157,623. While these findings are not considered a precise measure of the prevalence, they indicate that food insecurity is experienced by a significant minority of Hamilton residents. On the basis of the data, the socio-political context in which third sector organisations operate is also able to be explored. The results confirm that these services receive no state

funding despite regular referral of clients by Work and Income New Zealand. Provision is entirely dependent on community philanthropy in the form of donations and volunteerism. A number of organisations from this sector report constraints on the level of provision they are able to offer due to high levels of demand and limited resources.

Chapter five profiles the sample of community members who participated in in-depth interviews about their experiences of food insecurity. All respondents (n=10) were able to be confirmed as experiencing low (n=2) or very low (n=8) food security using a robust instrument. While each individual is introduced according to the researcher's subjective impressions, this is balanced with an objective description of their demographic attributes and environmental circumstances (including income and fixed expenditure). The amount of money with which respondents are able to purchase food constantly falls below (and in some cases well below) the Estimated Weekly Food Costs indicator at the Basic level, confirming that food insecurity is primarily a result of inadequate income. In examining respondents' ideas about what underpins food insecurity, food is identified as a flexible cost that can be easily eroded by other essential expenses that, for one reason or another, take priority. Respondents also highlight the impact of increasing costs (including food) on purchasing power, and identify a range of other 'shocks' that they consider have contributed to their status as food insecure.

Chapter six identifies the endogenous strategies that participants use to respond to food insecurity as part of the day-to-day way in which the experience is privately (and often, secretly) managed. Respondents describe the usual ways that they obtain food and the strategies they apply to maximise their purchasing power and food's utility through their food preparation and eating practices. Disrupted eating patterns are universally observed amongst the sample, and avoiding or alleviating hunger is often accompanied by compromised nutrition, particularly for parents who report prioritising their children's food needs above their own. As far as they are able, participants exercise a range of approaches at the micro level before engaging with exogenous strategies to alleviate their

situation. The findings also acknowledge that there are limits to the endogenous strategies that people with insufficient income are able to apply, at which point exogenous means of addressing foodlessness and hunger must be considered.

Chapter seven reports on the exogenous strategies applied to address food insecurity. While social, family and community networks provide important means of informal support, respondents are conscious of the potential for loss of social standing and the stigma that publicising their food status can bring. The data show that those with strong proximate networks tend to experience food insecurity in less extreme forms, and consequently their engagement with formal services is not as extensive as those who have limited social capital. As all participants were users of formal food support services, in this chapter they share their experiences of the various services available. The process of obtaining a state funded food grant has been experienced as invasive and demeaning. In some cases respondents have developed a high level of reliance on foodbank and community meal services, although the latter is identified as holding much appeal due to the absence of any formal assessment of eligibility and the opportunity for social interaction. On the basis of the results, a hierarchy of strategies is proposed that models the transition from endogenous strategies to exogenous strategies of an informal nature based in social relationships, and finally, formal exogenous strategies through interaction with food support services.

Chapter eight addresses the data with regard to people's experiences of the impacts of food insecurity. 'Food anxiety' or constantly worrying about food absorbed a considerable amount of psychological energy and could be a cause of tension in household relationships - particularly those between parents and their children. The impacts of anticipated or actual hunger are also noted, and a number of psychological and active strategies for coping with this are identified, including social withdrawal. An absence of 'food capital' imposes further limits on social participation and the ability to extend or reciprocate hospitality. There are also implications for participation in citizenship processes, and the experience of food insecurity can be accompanied by a sense of social injustice,

political alienation and disempowerment. As part of their strategies for addressing these impacts, respondents compare themselves with those whose circumstances they perceive to be more challenging than their own. The chapter concludes by examining the themes of resilience and resistance, and acknowledging respondents' desire for change.

Chapter nine draws together the findings of the survey and interviews by providing an analysis of food insecurity via the 'wicked problem' framework initially proposed by Rittel and Webber (1973). In justifying the use of this framework within a sociological context, food insecurity is constructed as a multi-causal non-linear social problem that can only be tamed through reflexive re-resolution, rather than solved. Recognition of the complex and interrelated elements of the problem is achieved by examining the drivers that exist at the macro (global) level, before an analysis at the meso and micro levels based on the findings of this research as a community case study is presented. Specific attention is paid to the values and paradigms that underpin existing responses to food insecurity, and likewise, to the perspectives based in the experiential accounts of food insecurity that are presented in earlier chapters. Subsequently, five key points consistent with the wicked problem framework are developed, and the chapter concludes by advocating for collaborative approaches to re-solving the problem that include a broader range of stakeholders - particularly food insecure people themselves. A methodology that has potential for operationalising such a process in the future (General Morphological Analysis) is also briefly introduced.

Chapter ten concludes the thesis by acknowledging that there are social and political limitations on taming the wickedness of food insecurity. An assessment of the strengths and limitations of the research is made, and directions for future research are suggested. The question of what sociology - and more specifically food sociology - could bring to processes of re-solving the persistence of food insecurity in Hamilton (and elsewhere) is also addressed, and developments that have occurred in the literature and in the community over the duration of this project are recognised.

Hamilton: where it's happening

Figure 1.1. Hamilton City in the Waikato Region



Source: Department of Internal Affairs

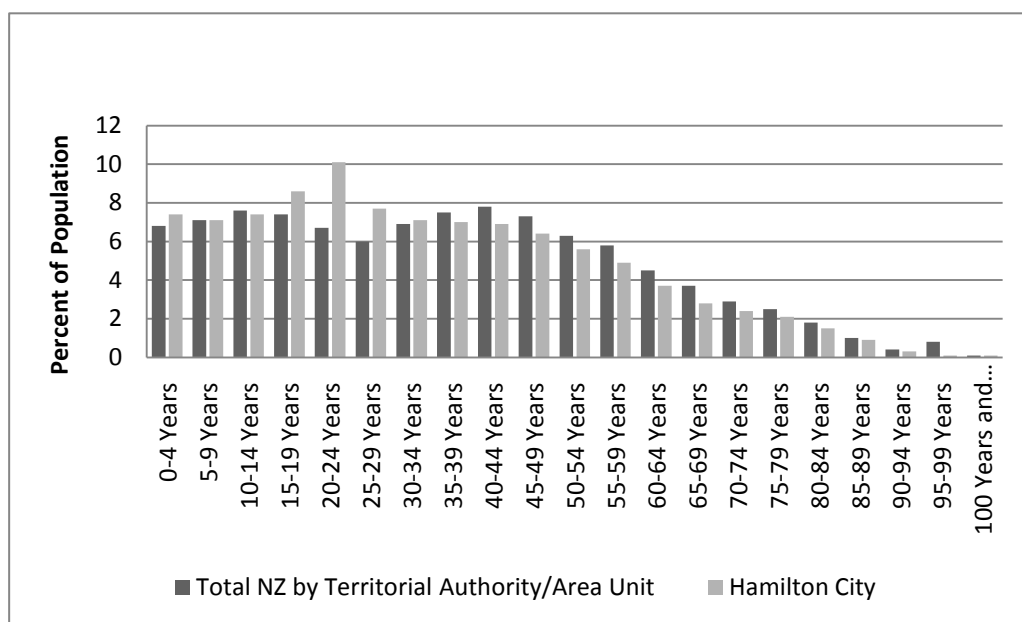
Having described the structure of the thesis, it is pertinent to inform readers about the social, environmental, cultural and economic context in which this study is embedded. Those familiar with Hamilton will recognise the sub-title of this section as the catch phrase of a long running branding campaign to distinguish the city as a desirable cosmopolitan locale. The 'snapshot' account that follows is based on a selective review of secondary material sourced mainly from local and central government organisations. The review has purposely been limited to capture the context as it was around the period that the research took place (2006 and 2007), and to an examination of community characteristics that are considered likely to have some interaction with food insecurity.

Hamilton city is located in the heart of the Waikato region in the central North Island of New Zealand (see figure 1.1 above). The region is acclaimed for its fertile soils and temperate climate and considered to be one of the richest

agricultural and pastoral areas in the world. Due to the concentrated nature of the dairy farming industry, the Waikato is also New Zealand's most significant regional exporter.

According to the last national *Census of Population and Dwellings* (Statistics New Zealand, 2006), Hamilton is New Zealand's seventh largest city by population, with its 129,249 usual residents distributed across 40 suburbs. It is also a growing city. Between the 2001 and 2006 censuses, the usual resident population increased by 12.5 percent, compared with an increase of 7.8 percent for New Zealand over the same period. Projections forecast that Hamilton's population growth will continue to outstrip national averages well into the future, adding around 43,000 people by 2031 (Statistics New Zealand, September 2007).

Figure 1.2. Age Composition of Population, New Zealand and Hamilton City, 2006



Source: Ministry of Social Development (2007).

Hamilton has a notably youthful population, with 41 percent of its people aged 24 years or younger and 21.9 percent of the population aged between 0-14 years (Ministry of Social Development, 2007). In 2006, the median age was 31.2 years, as compared with the national median of 35.9 years (Quality of Life Project⁴,

⁴ The Quality of Life Project is a longitudinal survey that reports bi-annually on a range of social

2007). As shown in figure 1.2, there were higher proportions of people aged 15-29 than those found across the population nationally. Compared with many other localities in 2006, Hamilton had a low proportion of older people; 8.91 percent of the population were aged 60-74, and only 4.9 percent were over 75 years of age (Crothers, 2006).

On census night 2006, there were 32,619 families in Hamilton. Of these, 38.2 percent were couples without children, 40.2 percent were couples with children, and 21.6 percent of families were headed by a sole parent. As shown in table 1.1, Hamilton has a slightly larger proportion of one parent families than that found nationally.

Table 1.1. Family Types in Hamilton and New Zealand, 2006 Census

Family Type	Hamilton City (%)	New Zealand (%)
Couple without child(ren)	38.2	39.9
Couple with child(ren)	40.2	42.0
One parent with child(ren)	21.6	18.1
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Statistics New Zealand

At least 70 different ethnic groups live within the city's boundaries (Ministry of Social Development, 2007). According to census data⁵ (summarised in table 1.2) around two thirds of Hamiltonians identify as European or 'New Zealanders' (75.90 percent), a fifth as Māori (19.92 percent)⁶, 10.57 percent Asian, and 4.17 percent as Pacific peoples. Less than two percent identified as an 'other' ethnicity (1.55 percent). Of the 12 cities monitored by the Big Cities project, Hamilton has the second highest proportion of Māori, but a much smaller proportion of the population identify their ethnicity as Pacific or Asian than in the cities that make up the neighbouring Auckland region (Quality of Life, 2007).

indicators across New Zealand's 12 largest cities.

⁵ Census respondents could indicate which ethnicities they identified with and this data includes people who identified more than one.

⁶ This compares with 14.6 percent nationally (Statistics New Zealand, September 2007, p. 13).

Table 1.2. Ethnic Groups in Hamilton City, Auckland Region and New Zealand ^{7,8}, 2006 Census

Ethnic Groups	% Hamilton City	% Auckland Region	% New Zealand
European	65.34	56.47	67.60
Māori	19.92	11.08	14.65
Pacific peoples	4.17	14.38	6.89
Asian	10.57	18.93	9.18
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African ⁹	1.50	1.50	0.90
Other ethnicity¹⁰			
New Zealander	10.56	8.02	11.12
Other ethnicity–other	0.05	0.05	0.39
Total other ethnicity	10.61	8.07	11.16¹¹

Source: Statistics New Zealand (2006).

Census 2006 data for labour force status showed that 48.07 percent of working age Hamiltonians were in full time employment, while just over 14 percent (14.08) were in part time work, and 29.45 percent did not participate in the labour force¹² (Crothers, 2006). In 2005, the labour force participation rate was around 67 percent - slightly below the national average. Hamilton's dependency ratio (the ratio of people not of working age to those of working age) has consistently fallen below the national average, probably due to the high numbers

⁷ All percentages are for the census usually resident population count, and have been rounded to two decimal places.

⁸ Includes all of the people who stated each ethnic group, whether as their only ethnic group or as one of several ethnic groups. Where a person reported more than one ethnic group, they have been counted in each applicable group.

⁹ 'Middle Eastern, Latin American and African' was introduced as a new category for the 2006 Census. Previously, Middle Eastern, Latin American and African responses were allocated to the 'other ethnicity' category.

¹⁰ 'Other ethnicity' includes responses for a number of small ethnic groups and for 'New Zealander.' For 2006, New Zealander responses made the largest contribution towards the 'other ethnicity' category.

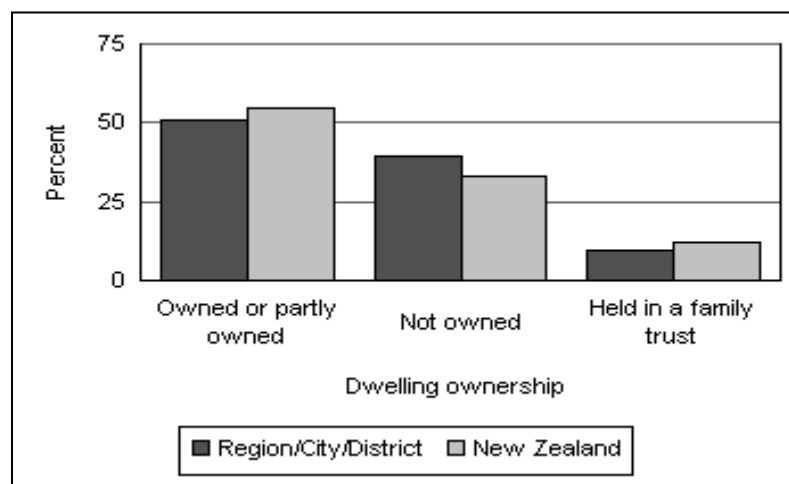
¹¹ The calculation of this figure is affected by the rounding process used by Statistics New Zealand.

¹² Additional to these categories, the proportion of people who were unemployed in Hamilton at the time of the census was 4.54 percent.

of students attending its three tertiary institutions, and relatively small numbers of retirees in the composition of the population (Hamilton City Council, September 2005).

Levels of home ownership (see figure 1.3) in Hamilton are slightly lower than the national average (51.2 percent). Census 2006 data reviewed by the Quality of Life Project (2007) showed that 47.7 percent of Hamiltonians owned the dwelling that they lived in¹³, just over one third (33.7 percent) lived in rented dwellings, and 18.6 percent lived in accommodation provided through other arrangements¹⁴. Of the 12 cities monitored, Hamilton had the third lowest incidence of people living in temporary dwellings in 2006¹⁵.

Figure 1.3. Ownership of Dwelling by Household, Hamilton City and New Zealand, 2006 Census



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Between 2001 and 2006 the cost of buying a house in Hamilton rose by 84.5 percent - the third highest increase in the country over the same period (Quality of Life Project, 2007). Massey University's *Home Affordability Report* (cited in Quality of Life Project, 2007, p. 109) demonstrates that mortgage affordability in

¹³ With or without a mortgage.

¹⁴ For example, people who were living rent free. This category also includes people whose answers did not fall within one of the two prior categories (that is, home owners or rental tenants), as well as those whose response was unidentifiable or not stated.

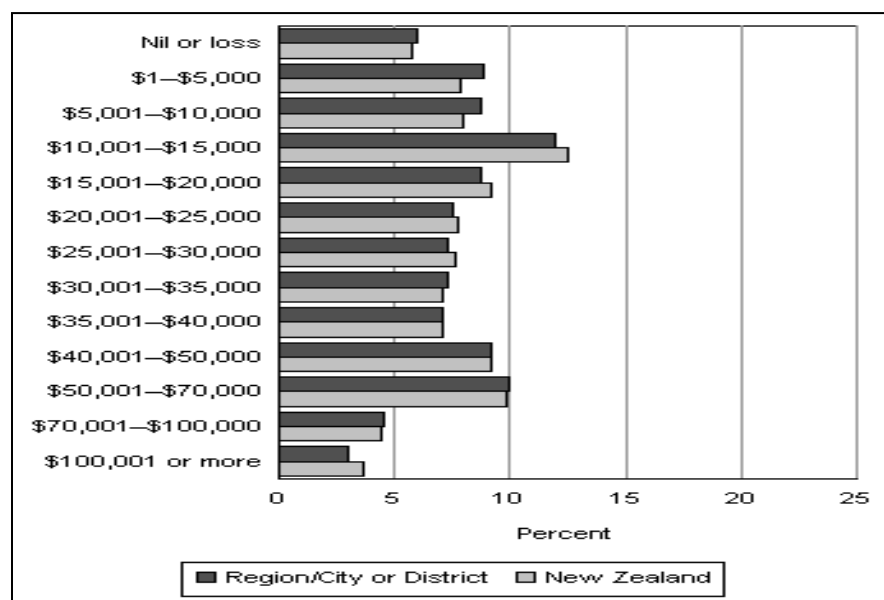
¹⁵ Temporary dwellings include makeshift dwellings, tents, caravans, boats, and mobile homes. Typically they are less habitable than permanent dwellings in terms of health and safety and physical hazards.

the Waikato/Bay of Plenty region is fractionally lower than average affordability nationally.

Household Economic Survey 2004¹⁶ (HES) data for the Waikato region demonstrated that the average proportion of household income used for rental tenure in the Waikato was 24.3 percent, as compared to 16.3 percent in privately owned housing (cited in Quality of Life Project, 2007, p. 11). Median rents in Hamilton increased by a third (33.3 percent) between 2002 and 2006, the second highest increase out of New Zealand’s twelve largest cities.

Longitudinal data reported in the Quality of Life Project showed that in 2006 the average ordinary time earnings for working Hamiltonians was slightly less than the national average. Of the 12 cities monitored, Hamilton was one of only two in which average ordinary time real (inflation adjusted) earnings had decreased over the period 2003-2006¹⁷ (Quality of Life Project, 2007).

Figure 1.4. Income for People Aged 15 Years and Over, Hamilton City and New Zealand, 2006 Census



Source: Statistics New Zealand

¹⁶ This is the last year in which the HES was available in regional form. From 2005 Waikato data are agglomerated under the ‘rest of the North Island’ category.

¹⁷ The other city was Wellington, which decreased by 0.5 percent. Hamilton decreased by 3.1 percent.

In terms of income distribution (see figure 1.4 on previous page), census 2006 data for Hamilton city shows that around a fifth (20.47 percent) of people over the age of fifteen had a *personal* income of less than \$10,000 annually, and a further quarter (25.47 percent) had income of between \$10,000 and \$25,000. While personal income levels in Hamilton are described as being very similar to the national levels, there are slightly higher proportions of people who earn less than \$10,000. This may be attributed to Hamilton being a university/polytechnic city with a high number of students on relatively low incomes (Hamilton City Council, September 2002).

In 2006, the median *household* income in Hamilton was \$52,800, compared with a national median of \$51,400. Almost a quarter (23.5 percent) of all Hamilton households had income of less than \$30,000 (Quality of Life Project, 2007).

In the year ending March 2006, 11 percent of the Hamilton population was in receipt of a Work and Income New Zealand benefit - the second highest level of benefit receipt of the 12 cities included in the Quality of Life Project. A Sickness Benefit was received by 4,633 people (or 3.6 percent of the Hamilton population), 4,444 people (3.4 percent of the population) received a Domestic Purposes Benefit, and 2,685 people (or 2.1 percent of the population) were receiving an Unemployment Benefit. A further 2,442 (1.9 percent of the Hamilton population) were in receipt of other types of benefit, bringing the total number of beneficiaries to 14,204.

In 2006 the proportion of Hamiltonians with gross real income of less than 60 percent of the median equivalised national income¹⁸ was 18.2 percent. Although this was an improvement on the conditions over the period 1991-2001, by applying this measure of relative poverty longitudinally, Hamiltonians were slightly more likely to be poor in 2006 than they had been in 1986 when the proportion was only 16.6 percent. People whose ethnicity was non-European were over-represented within this group, as were those in the non-working age groups (0-24 years, and 65+). Hamilton females were slightly more likely to have

¹⁸ Benchmarked at 2001

low incomes (19.6 percent) than Hamilton males (16.7 percent) (Ministry of Social Development, 2007).

The New Zealand Deprivation Index (NZDep01) provides a scale that ranks relative deprivation at area unit levels, where an index score of 1 indicates the lowest level of deprivation and a score of 10 indicates the highest¹⁹. On the basis of an application of the index to Hamilton, more than a quarter (26 percent) of the population ranked either a decile 9 (16 percent) or 10 (10 percent), with nearly half (49 percent) of Hamilton residents ranking between 7 and 10 (Quality of Life Project, 2007). Seventy-two percent of Māori and 73.2 percent of Pacific peoples living in Hamilton fell within the decile 7 - 10 range, as did 50.8 percent of children and 41.1 percent of those aged 65 and over (Waikato District Health Board, 2007).

Discussion

Hamilton city has exceeded national trends in population growth in the recent past, and will continue to do so for some time into the future. The distinctions observed between Hamilton and New Zealand as a whole are attributable to a comparatively high proportion of younger people in the local population, substantial proportions of beneficiaries and students living on low incomes and a higher than average concentration of Māori. Overall though, it could be argued that Hamilton is fairly indicative of middle New Zealand: levels of home ownership are consistent with national trends, incomes run close to national averages, and patterns of income distribution are fairly evenly matched with those found over the whole of New Zealand.

Given that this thesis has committed itself to addressing the theme of absence, it has been of interest to the author to note that although multiple sources confirmed the presence of relative deprivation and its prevalence within certain

¹⁹ The index incorporates eight dimensions of material and social deprivation including: the proportion of people who receive a means tested benefit, live in a household with income below an income threshold (adjusted for household size), do not live in their own home, live in a sole parent family, are unemployed, are without qualifications, experience household overcrowding, have no access to a telephone and no access to a car (Salmond, Crampton & Atkinson, 2007).

factions, there is scant information about how the Hamilton community responds to this. Population growth has the potential to place increasing pressures on responses already struggling to address demand. Further, in an environment of economic downturn, it is likely that the available pool of philanthropic funding will contract as belts are tightened by both public and business sponsors. Hamilton has already experienced local debates about whether community resources that third sector social service organisations have traditionally relied on for funding should be redistributed as consumer rebates or community grants²⁰. With these points in mind, subsequent chapters of this thesis explore some of the challenges faced by this sector in terms of its existence as a formal response to the issue of food insecurity.

²⁰ A striking example of this process was played out by the WEL Energy Trust in 2008, when disbursements were frozen as elected representatives failed to agree on this issue. Consumers, in electing a new membership, were essentially asked to vote on whether the profits from the community owned electricity provider should be redistributed via rebates on domestic power bills, or as grants to community organisations which service both WEL energy customers and non-customers. In the 2007/2008 funding round, the Trust had provided \$2.1 million of community grants. The result of the election confirmed that voters wished to maintain the status quo and the Trust subsequently resumed redistributing profits through community based organisations.

Food for Thought

This chapter outlines the literature that has informed the working definitions of food security and food insecurity which have been applied in this study. In assessing the range of portrayals of food insecurity in New Zealand and elsewhere, a number of limitations within existing accounts are identified. On the basis of these, a sociological framework is proposed as a means of inquiring into the historical, cultural, structural and critical significance of food insecurity at the local level. The questions generated within this framework provide the foundation for exploring food insecurity via an approach based in the sociology of food.

What is Food Security?

At its most basic level food security describes a situation in which people do not live in hunger or in fear of hunger. In 2003, the Food and Agriculture Organisation estimated that there were 852 million people worldwide who were chronically hungry due to extreme poverty, while up to 2 billion people lacked food security intermittently due to varying degrees of poverty (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2003).

Early concepts of food security were generally applied at the macro level, rather than at the level of the household or individual. A nation's food security status was able to be calculated by dividing its total food production by the level of consumption required according to a demographic breakdown and the calorific value needed to sustain the population. Countries that could not feed their inhabitants by means of their own production forecasts and which were not economically equipped to import adequate food to supplement local supplies

were deemed to be food insecure¹. This approach to conceptualising food security is problematic in that it assumes an equitable distribution of available food amongst the population according to nutritional requirements. For this reason it has largely been abandoned (Ayalew, 1997) and (at least in industrialised countries) contemporary measures of food security are more likely to be applied at individual, household or community levels.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active life. (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 1996, p. 37)

The definition of food security adopted by the FAO is consistent with the principle that everyone has a right to adequate food, to be free from hunger and to enjoy the general human dignity enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1999). The definition encompasses the criterion of affordability and acknowledges that food production does not always equate with food security – if food is available in fields or in stores, but people cannot afford to acquire it, then their food security is jeopardised. The dimension of affordability is further reiterated in a definition developed by the World Bank (1986) and subsequently adopted by the USDA.

Food security for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other strategies). (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Reserve Service, 2000)

While the notion of food security has been defined and applied in numerous ways over the past two decades, contemporary definitions tend to express its dimensions in terms of three common attributes: availability, access and utility. Access to food is considered to be derived from opportunities either to produce food directly, or to obtain food by means of exchange for other commodities or

¹ This has been the experience of many industrialising countries where advanced malnutrition constitutes a major humanitarian issue.

services. Within the USDA's definition, two aspects relating to access are crucial. Firstly, *access must be sufficient for activity and health*. Sufficiency is usually measured in terms of caloric intake relative to physiological requirements for a specified period of time. Secondly, *access to food must be sufficient at all times in all possible circumstances, and in a manner which is sustainable*. However, the accessibility of food is subject to fluctuations. Environmental events and changes in the market forces that impact on the price of food in relation to affordability can mean that the food security of an individual or household is vulnerable if there is an inability to cope with these fluctuations. *Chronic vulnerability* occurs in situations where insufficient resources (including lack of income) are able to be accessed in order to obtain food in socially acceptable ways (USDA Economic Reserve Service, 2000).

Food Insecurity

Having considered the concept of food security, the thesis must then inquire as to how its inverse term – food insecurity – can be conceptualised. Internationally, food insecurity has been described quite simply as “the absence of food security” (Millennium Project Task Force on Hunger, 2004, p. 33).

Although a number of international definitions seek to conceptualise food insecurity in terms of a range of other factors - including war, terrorism, corruption and environmental degradation (World Food Summit, 1996) - conceptualisations emanating from industrialised western countries tend to correlate food insecurity with relative poverty and inadequate resources, including income. Nord, Andrews and Carlson (2009) provide an example of this approach in recognising that food insecurity means that households are “at times, uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food” (p. 2).

Within the context of affluent nations, it is worth noting that the condition of food insecurity and the experience of hunger are not necessarily synonymous. While the Millennium Task Force (2004) explains hunger as: “A condition, in

which people lack the basic food intake to provide them with the energy and nutrients for fully productive lives ... [as] an outcome of food insecurity”, it also points out that “All hungry people are food insecure, but not all food insecure people are hungry” (p. 33). In essence then, food insecurity in wealthy nations can occur with or without hunger where adequate, nutritious and safe food cannot be acquired in socially acceptable ways - usually a result of inadequate income. In New Zealand, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) describes food insecurity as a condition that applies to “The proportion of the population who report that their household can afford to eat properly only some of the time (Ministry of Social Development, 2002).

Poverty, Deprivation and Food Insecurity

It is now over a decade since the *Rome Declaration of World Food Security* asserted that:

Poverty is a major cause of food insecurity and sustainable progress in poverty eradication is critical to improve access to food. (World Food Summit, 1996)

Discussions about food insecurity commonly refer to the concepts of poverty and deprivation. Historically, the discipline of economics had defined poverty in terms that were essentially financial, with weak purchasing power or low per capita incomes widely accepted as the main indicators. However, agencies attempting to address the complex interplay between poverty and deprivation ultimately found the stringent economic criteria of the terms restrictive. As a result, a number of attempts to redefine and broaden conceptualisations of poverty are reflected in most contemporary definitions, many of which address people’s abilities to satisfy basic needs – whether they are those required for basic existence, material parity or social participation (Gross, 1997).

Relative Poverty

Robert Holman (1978) explains the emergence of the concept of *relative* poverty as a response to the deficiencies of using ‘subsistence’ based concepts such as those developed by Booth and Rowntree at the turn of the twentieth century.

The inadequacies of the subsistence concept have contributed to the formulation of an alternative – the concept of relative poverty. From this perspective, the poor are not defined as those who fall below a fixed subsistence level, but as those whose incomes are considered too far removed from the rest of the society in which they live. In short, the poor are identified in relation to or relative to other people. (Holman, 1978, pp. 13-14)

Internationally, contemporary definitions of *absolute* poverty refer to an inability to obtain the necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter (Giddens, 2002, p. 682). In contrast, *relative poverty* – the measure used by most OECD countries including New Zealand – refers to:

... a lack of access to sufficient economic and social resources that would allow a minimum adequate standard of living in that society. (Waldegrave, Stephens & King, 2003, p. 198)

The subjective nature of relative poverty remains open to contestation and even broad agreement on functional definitions is usually followed by debate about how it should best be measured. This lack of consensus is based on what Waldegrave *et al.* (*ibid.*) describe as the need for judgements to be made as to what constitutes a minimum adequate income or minimum adequate standard of living. The construction of ‘adequacy’ has the potential to be manoeuvred according to the agenda being served. This is perhaps especially true in research, policy and political spheres.

Statistics New Zealand evaluates poverty by ranking households in order of their incomes (after adjustments to allow for differences in size and composition), effectively dividing the population into income quintiles. Rather than adopting an official poverty line, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) has implemented a default assessment referred to as ‘population with low incomes’, which measures the proportion of the population in economic family units with equivalent disposable income net-of-housing costs below three thresholds benchmarked to 1998 medians². The proportion of the population who fall below

² The three thresholds are referred to as low, medium and high, and correspond to 40 percent, 50 percent and 60 percent of net-of-housing incomes.

a threshold of 60 percent of the median disposable household income before housing costs are deemed to fall within the auspices of low income and by implication, relative poverty.

A more comprehensive income based measure has been applied by the New Zealand Poverty Measurement Project which has sought to develop a poverty line more in keeping with the subjective notion of income adequacy, rather than with an arbitrary fraction of the mean or median household income. This 'basket of goods' approach involves the use of focus groups to draw on the practical experiences of low income householders in order to: "estimate *minimum adequate household expenditure* over a full range of household expenditure categories." (Waldegrave *et al.*, 2003, p. 198). The findings of this approach have also supported a relative poverty threshold set at 60 percent of median disposable household income after adjusting for housing costs. By this measure around 19 percent of New Zealand households were below the poverty line between 1993 and 1998 (*ibid.*). A 2005 report by the Ministry of Social Development on population with low incomes confirmed that the figure of 19 percent has continued to persist over time at the 60 percent threshold, indicating that within the contemporary context about one in five New Zealanders experiences relative poverty (Ministry of Social Development, 2005).

Deprivation

In terms of the current study, the conceptual relevance of *deprivation* – of which food insecurity is certainly a symptom - should also be acknowledged. Townsend (1987) supplies a useful commentary in his description of deprivation as a state of observable and demonstrable disadvantage relative to the local community or the wider society in which an individual, family or group lives. Townsend also makes an important distinction between deprivation and poverty in arguing that while poverty is associated with the *objective* control and exercise of resources, deprivation is associated with *subjective* conditions, and as such takes an experiential form (Townsend, 1993). Regardless of the measure used³,

³ A useful outline of the three main methodological approaches for measuring deprivation is

determinations about deprivation will vary according to the social context in which the experience is located and the subjective norms used to characterise 'adequacy'.

Deprivation can occur in both material and social forms. Material deprivation refers to the material apparatus, goods, services, resources, amenities and the physical environment and location of life. In contrast, social deprivation refers to roles, relationships, functions, customs, rights and responsibilities implied by membership in a society and all its subgroups (community, family, household, etc.). Within these categories, people may experience singular or multiple forms of deprivation (Townsend, 1993). Socio-economic deprivation specifically refers to a multiple form delineated by "... the social and economic factors that influence what position(s) individuals and groups hold within the structure of society" (Lynch & Caplan, 2000, p. 20). Food insecurity can be understood as part of the spectrum of deprivations that occur in situations of poverty. Food is often one of the few flexible costs that low income households are able to manipulate in order to service other fixed financial demands. While an absence of food certainly denotes a form of material deprivation, the relationship between food insecurity and social deprivation is less clear.

Food Insecurity: experiences and social implications

Several qualitative research projects undertaken in Canada document the experience of food insecure households in terms of social implications. Hamelin, Habicht and Beaudry (1999) found that these included impaired learning for children, loss of productivity, increased need for health care, feelings of powerlessness and exclusion, erosion of the ability to transfer food knowledge to the next generation, and decreased participation in social life. They also noted attitudinal shifts with regard to the acceptability of the behaviours that people engaged in to obtain food - including increased reliance on social agencies and criminality, and on extended family and credit. Tarasuk (2001), in considering the experiences of food insecure women, reported that a number of common

provided by Carr-Hill and Lavers (2000)

strategies used to augment resources in situations of food hardship. These include purchasing food on credit, sending children to a friend or relative's home for a meal, delaying bill payments, giving up non-essential services such as television, and selling or pawning possessions in order to purchase food. The number of strategies that women used was directly correlated with the severity of household food insecurity.

The approaches taken in these Canadian studies provide a useful basis for examining the experience of food insecurity in New Zealand society by augmenting quantitative data that documents the levels of support provided by social service agencies. Qualitative experiential research also has the potential to highlight important social implications of food insecurity which impact negatively on key aspects of both human development and the development of society more broadly.

Food Insecurity in New Zealand

Sources that address New Zealand's food history in the early colonial period describe the young nation's early appeal to settlers in terms of abundance with regard to food and the resources necessary for the production of food (see for example Bailey & Earle, 1999; and Bawden, 1999). The realities of accessing this abundance, however, proved challenging for a substantial number of the optimistic new immigrants. Sutch (1969) and Tennant (1989) provide accounts of provincial soup kitchens and ration programmes operating through the 1860s and 70s to accommodate settlers who often arrived into a situation of labour oversupply with few resources in reserve. By the late 1880s responsibility for the provision of formal relief had been legislated to provincial Hospital Boards⁴, and there is evidence that many of the poor relied on a combination of these provisions in tandem with what they were able to obtain through church based charity to relieve their foodlessness.

⁴ See for example Husband's (1994) account of Hospital Board relief from 1886 to 1913 in Freeman's Bay, Auckland.

The economic depression of the 1930s provided New Zealand's second – but notably, most visible – era of food insecurity. In 1932, the Auckland City Mission provided over 102,000 meals as access to government relief tightened and public demand expanded (Uttley, 1997). Other reports (such as Simpson, 1974) have noted the prevalence of malnutrition in New Zealand children in the mid-1930s.

Food insecurity in its third era is a phenomenon that has occurred over the past two and a half decades. Cuts to social security benefits in 1991, the passing of the Employment Contracts Act and comparatively high levels of unemployment in the early 1990s, along with the introduction of market rents for state housing, reductions in real wages, and rising levels of beneficiary indebtedness to the state through growing reliance on recoverable welfare advances are factors that various authors have identified as contributing to the increased visibility of food insecurity in New Zealand since the late 1980s (Mackay, 1995; Waldegrave *et al.* 1999, 2003; McGurk & Simmers, 1999; and Wynd, 2005).

Thematically, much of the research provided in the early 1990s concentrates on the increased need for, and use of, service delivery to alleviate food insecurity in an era of economic and structural adjustment. Growing disparities in socio-economic status in the late 1990s resulted in food insecurity becoming the subject of commentaries on both poverty (Waldegrave, King & Stuart, 1999) and health (Else, 2000).

In Parnell's (1997) study of low-income households, one third of respondents reported that they often did not have enough food, and 40 percent worried constantly about feeding their households. The 1997 National Nutrition Survey (see Russell, Parnell, Wilson & Faed, 1999) supported these findings, noting that in New Zealand half of Pacific households, one third of Māori and one tenth of households identifying as European/other reported that 'food runs out often or sometimes'. Almost half of Māori and Pacific households and one quarter of European/other said that the variety of food they were able to eat was limited by lack of money. Significant numbers of respondents reported having to rely on others to provide food or money for food in order to feed their households, and

4 percent of the sample reported making use of special food grants and foodbanks. The incidence of service use was significantly higher for some groups, particularly Māori (19 percent), Pacific Peoples (14 percent) and younger people (9 percent). Women were also recorded as accessing these kinds of assistance more often than men.

The New Zealand Poverty Measurement Project (NZPMP) considered food insecurity in a national survey (Waldegrave *et al.*, 1999) that drew its sample from respondents in the lowest 20 percent of household income. Over 60 percent of the sample reported being unable to buy essential food items at some time in the previous three months, and many (24 percent) could not afford to buy essential items most times that they shopped for food. Nearly half had been unable to provide a meal for their family at some point in that same three months, and 28 percent had been unable to provide four or more meals in that period. The findings of the NZPMP study reinforced those of the 1997 National Nutrition Survey by reiterating that food insecurity was a lived experience for many of New Zealand's poor.

Else (2000) uses an assessment of research on the implications of poverty for health and nutrition to debunk a number of persistent social myths about food insecurity. She reports that by the late 1990s urban foodbanks estimated that they supplied up to 10 percent of households in their areas, including people who were in work. Further, she confirms some of the health implications identified in the results of the 1997 National Nutrition Survey: that levels of obesity and overweight were increasing in the New Zealand population; that one third of adults did not consume the recommended three servings of vegetables a day, and that half did not achieve the recommended two servings of fruit. Those living in the most socio-economically deprived areas were found to be at higher risk of inadequate intakes of vitamin A⁵, riboflavin⁶ and folate⁷ (B vitamins) than

⁵ Vitamin A deficiency is not usually observed within the context of developed nations, however sub-clinical vitamin A deficiencies may increase children's risk of developing respiratory and diarrheal infection, decrease growth rates, slow bone development, and decrease the likelihood of survival from serious illness. Common dietary sources include eggs, liver, whole milk, highly coloured fruit and vegetables, and fortified foods such as margarines and cereals (Biochemistry - Vitamin A)

those in less deprived areas. Else's conclusion affirms within the New Zealand context a position that was already well established by earlier observers in a number of other affluent nations⁸: that the health of poorer people is at risk due to limits placed on food purchasing, for which lack of income is the major cause.

When the National Children's Nutrition Survey (Ministry of Health, 2003) asked households if they could afford to eat properly, 20 percent reported that they could only 'sometimes' afford to do so. Further, when asked if food ran out in their household due to lack of money, 18.5 percent of households responded 'sometimes', and 3.6 percent considered that this occurred in their household 'often'. This study also highlighted that limitations on the variety of food consumed were caused by lack of money and that many people were relying on support from outside the household to meet the demands of feeding their families. Within the sample, 8.6 percent of respondents confirmed that they had sought some form of assistance in addressing their food needs in the previous 12 months. Further, the 2003 survey confirmed that the situation for the vulnerable groups identified in the comparable survey of 1997 had shown little improvement in the interim period.

Food Insecurity: indicators of prevalence

In New Zealand, rates of provision of food parcels supplied via third sector foodbanks and (to a lesser extent) uptake data for food grants provided via the state welfare apparatus are commonly cited indicators of food insecurity. It is worth noting, however, that the accuracy of these indicators in estimating prevalence is indicative rather than absolute.

⁶ Prolonged deficiency of riboflavin (also known as vitamin B2) impairs growth and may cause chapped lips, soreness of the tongue, and corner of the mouth, and certain eye disorders including poor visual acuity and abnormal sensitivity to bright light. Rich dietary sources include liver, milk, eggs, whole grains, brewer's yeast, and green vegetables (Biochemistry - Riboflavin).

⁷ Folate is more commonly known as folic acid. Deficiencies can result in megaloblastic anaemia and folic acid is important in reducing the risk of neural tube defects in foetal development. Folate is found naturally in leafy vegetables, citrus fruits and juices, wholemeal bread, yeast, liver and legumes (New Zealand Ministry of Health).

⁸ Including Brown (1987) in America; Crotty, Rutishauser and Cahill (1992) in Australia; and Lang (1992), Leather (1995) and Cullum (1997) in the United Kingdom.

Food Grant uptake

Work and Income New Zealand administers the payment of a Special Needs Grant for Food (colloquially referred to as a 'food grant') that is intended to alleviate food insecurity where an applicant demonstrates a lack of financial resources available to meet immediate food needs, and where this lack has been pre-empted by another essential expense. Applicants must meet a number of eligibility criteria⁹, and other than in exceptional circumstances there are strict limits as to the dollar amounts of relief that can be accessed over any 52 week period (Work and Income New Zealand, n.d).

Evaluations of an applicant's circumstances include special or unusual costs, their age and health and that of any of their dependents, their ability to improve their financial situation, whether or not they are considered to have spent their money in an 'unwise manner', and the extent to which access to the basic necessities of life would be compromised if the Special Needs Grant for Food was not obtained (Work and Income New Zealand, n.d.).

The Ministry of Social Development's (2006) *Statistical Report* for the year ending June 2005 showed that during the period 2000 to 2005, the most common reason for payment of Special Needs Grants - which can also be approved in a number of other emergency situations - was to purchase food. Despite substantial reductions in the numbers of people who received benefits or were registered job seekers/unemployed over the same period¹⁰, approvals for Special Needs Grants for Food continued to rise from 274,601 in 2000/01, to 299,739 in 2004/05. Food grants are available regardless of whether household income is derived from benefit payments or from waged work, and the increase in applications may therefore encompass working families and individuals, as well as beneficiaries.

⁹ These include evidential income or asset testing, evidence of another essential need or emergency which has compromised the resources available for the purchase of food, and proof of permanent or 'ordinary' New Zealand residency. The eligibility criteria for food grants are examined in further detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁰ The number of people receiving benefits (excluding superannuation) reduced from 362,014 in 2001 to 301,389 in 2005, and the number of registered unemployed decreased from 191,855 in 2001 to 83,633 in 2005 (Ministry of Social Development, 2006).

Applications for assistance with emergency food costs are routinely declined once clients have used their maximum entitlement, and it is worth noting that the *Statistical Report* makes no reference to the number of applications that were declined. Further, at the time this study took place, the eligibility criteria and limits on the monetary amount of assistance available had not been adjusted since December 1994 (Mackay 1995, p. 7)¹¹. By implication, existing levels of entitlement failed to reflect any upward changes in the cost of food that had occurred over a 13 year period¹².

Foodbanks

There is no comprehensive definition of the term 'foodbank', although Wynd's (2005, p. 6) suggestion that they are "... a not for profit organisation serving people in need by securing and distributing food through local service agencies" appears to fit the way in which most of these services operate in the New Zealand context. Wynd (*ibid.*) warns against using service provider data to assess the prevalence of food insecurity for a number of reasons. Firstly, many of the agencies involved in providing these kinds of services are more occupied with service provision than with record keeping, and consequently there is potential for under-reporting. Secondly, there is broad variability in the recording of data across agencies, and inaccuracies are likely. Thirdly, a small number of foodbank clients may 'play the system' by utilising the services of a number of different agencies, or giving bogus details (for example, claiming more dependents than they actually have) in order to access higher levels of assistance. While the limitations of using foodbank data to assess the prevalence of food insecurity are obvious, it is still useful to consider the prevalence of foodbanks themselves, and to profile likely users of their services.

¹¹ In 1994, entitlements to Special Needs Grants for Food were increased in response to an explosion in demand for food parcels, and an expansion in the number of foodbanks opening in the period 1991-1992. The rapid increase in demand for food support over this period has been attributed to benefit cuts (Mackay, 1995).

¹² The levels of entitlement as they existed at the time when the research took place are reported in Chapter 4. Changes were made during the period over which this thesis was written, and these adjustments are referred to in Chapters 4 and 9.

In 1989 there were 16 foodbanks in Auckland, but by 1994 this had escalated to over 130 (Mackay, 1995), with an estimated total of 365 foodbanks in operation nationally (Downtown Community Ministry, 1999). The economic reforms of the late 1980s and the subsequent rolling back of the welfare state in favour of the neo-liberal model are consistently cited as the drivers for increases in both the prevalence of foodbanks and visibility of food insecurity over this period (see for example Mackay 1995; McGurk & Simmers 1999; and Wynd 2005).

A 2005 report issued by the Poverty Indicator Project (NZCCSS, 2005) featured a national survey of New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) affiliated foodbanks. The project identified a range of income related reasons that cause people to use these services including housing costs, debt servicing (most notably, debt repayments made to Work and Income New Zealand), health and medical costs, problem gambling and childcare costs. While most of these are consistent with other literature, the project also established a number of more complicated situations contributing to foodbank use, including pressure to give money to the church among the Pacific peoples, asylum seekers awaiting decisions on residency appeals, and people migrating to Auckland where housing was expensive and work was sometimes poorly paid. The study also demonstrated that many people were habitually factoring the existence of foodbanks into their economic arrangements as part of the institutional setting in which the poor of New Zealand have often come to operate.

The most common client group in the NZCCSS study was sole parents, with beneficiaries accounting for 70 percent of clients overall. Groups who were disproportionately represented included women, Māori and Pacific peoples. More than half of foodbank users were from households with children, but surprisingly, there were few clients over the age of 65. Again, these findings lend further support to the dimensions of poverty that give rise to food insecurity, including gender and ethnicity.

Hamilton Foodbank Data

The NZCCSS study (2005) was intended as a national undertaking, but provides some statistical and demographic data specific to its Hamilton affiliates, collectively known as The Hamilton Combined Christian Foodbank. To date, this is the only expansive assessment of provision that has been made in Hamilton beyond the current study.

The demographic profile of Hamilton foodbank users did not alter significantly over the four year period reported, with the exceptions of a decline in the numbers of Pakeha applicants (down from 40 percent of clients in 2001, to 25 percent in 2004), and an increase in the numbers of Māori applicants (up from 51 percent in 2001, to 67 percent in 2004). Other variables, including sole parenthood, gender, households with children, and age had remained constant over time. Longitudinal data show that while the average number of applications for food parcels trended downwards slightly over the four year period, requests for assistance began to escalate again in the final quarter of 2004, with a monthly average of around 120 applications.

Consistent with the national profile, 85 percent of clients in Hamilton reported that their sole form of income was a social security benefit, and 15 percent received some income from wages¹³. Notably, the average equivalised disposable income of applicants had not increased over the period of the study. Debt levels were identified as an issue of significance for users of the Combined Christian Foodbank, with more than 80 percent of respondents demonstrating personal indebtedness, and 65 percent of applicants naming Work and Income New Zealand as a creditor.

Based on these 2004 figures, the 1300 people per month¹⁴ that the Hamilton Combined Christian Foodbank assisted in accessing food indicated significant levels of food insecurity in Hamilton. Later parts of this thesis offer updated

¹³ Around 10 percent of applicants received income from working only.

¹⁴ Based on the household size of the primary applicant.

assessments that take into account levels of provision in a number of other Hamilton services whose objective is also to alleviate food insecurity.

Frameworks for Documenting Food Insecurity in New Zealand

Within the literature it is possible to locate three dominant approaches to constructions of food insecurity in New Zealand. It is worth exploring each of these in further detail in order to understand some of the complexities and limitations with which they are imbued.

Third Sector Social Service Provider Responses to Food Insecurity

As identified earlier in this chapter, foodbanks have flourished in New Zealand since the late 1980s. These, alongside a number of other services which provide food relief, are run primarily by third sector organisations. Food insecurity has been difficult for these organisations to politicise, in part due to ad hoc and inconsistent record keeping. Data inconsistencies have made quantitative research difficult, if not impossible. It was these difficulties that, in 2004, led the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) to withdraw from the Poverty Indicator Project which has provided key research and policy advice on a number of other poverty related issues. NZCCSS explains its reasons for withdrawing from the project in the following:

The fundamental problem was unreliability in the collection and measurement of [foodbank uptake and client] data. As noted, there are issues of definition of terms, and measurement, as well as consistency within agencies. Ultimately, this difficulty around the inconsistency of the data was insurmountable, and was a major factor in the decision to terminate the project.

In addition to the quality problems of the data, collating and publishing the results of the surveys was a resource-intensive process. Disappointingly too, it was difficult to maintain media interest, and it was felt resources could be better employed for other poverty work. (Wynd, 2005, p. 12)

Historically, third sector organisations – particularly those that are faith based initiatives – have been dependent on public philanthropy to resource their

activities. However, in the neo-liberal environment their survival has been reliant on the adoption of more corporate models of operation. This includes identifying 'core services', and participation in competitive tendering processes to gain state funding for delivery of services. Further, social services of this nature are actively encouraged by government to find alternative income streams and to form relationships with the corporate sector to access sponsorship in the form of donations of cash or resources. The culture of competition that exists around funding means those third sector providers must often work against - rather than with - each other. In light of this, research data are usually obtained and analysed at the micro or organisational level. While the competitive funding environment encourages better data collection in terms of demonstrating outputs, it is not conducive to the production of collective data sets that allow measurement of outputs *across the entire food support sector*, as organisations may be reluctant to open their books to others on the basis of 'commercial sensitivity'. Fragmented approaches have contributed to a failure on the part of the third sector to politicise food insecurity, to make convincing policy arguments, and to sustain its momentum as a public issue. The core business of food support providers is, after all, to feed people - an activity that already takes considerable effort and coordination without the additional burden of an advocacy role.

Academic Responses to Food Insecurity

As indicated earlier in this chapter, food insecurity in affluent countries is something to which food sociologists have only recently begun responding. Academic responses have predominantly utilised either health and nutrition frameworks, or examined food insecurity as part of a broader range of issues within the disciplines of social policy or poverty studies.

The most common point of departure for the health and nutrition paradigm has been to use data sources such as nutrition surveys to associate food insecurity with malnutrition and the myriad of allied conditions that result from deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals. Particular attention has been paid to the health impacts of a poor quality diet on children, which include

developmental, learning and behavioural implications, and more recently, an epidemic of obesity and early onset diabetes correlated not with over-consumption as one would expect, but with foods high in empty calories and saturated fats. Foods that fit this profile are often cheaper than their more nutritious counterparts and therefore attractive to low income households. The health and nutrition approach has also recognised that the implications of food insecurity are gendered – women, given their over-representation in the lower income ranges, are more likely to suffer health impacts than men. Women are also more likely than men to head one parent households and to make tradeoffs in their own nutrition to mitigate the impacts of food insecurity on their children’s health (Olson, 2005). A number of studies have shown that food insecurity in women is correlated with ‘poor’ or ‘fair’ self-rated health and physical limitations (Siefert, Heflin & Williams, 2001), and one American study reported that 60 percent of the food insecure women in its sample fit the diagnostic criteria for clinical depression (Olsen, Anderson, Kiss, Lawrence & Seiling, 2004).

Academic responses to food insecurity also encompass those drawn from poverty studies and social policy perspectives, particularly with regard to welfare politics. Riches’ (Ed.) (1997) *First World Hunger* provides an excellent example of this genre of analysis, in which cross national comparisons are made in order to critique the modes of relief offered by various western welfare states. A more current local account is provided by McPherson (2006) who applies a socio-political perspective in a study of Christchurch foodbanks. In taking this approach she highlights a significant tension between state and third sector provision.

Governments have become too dependent on the provision of food parcels from foodbanks. They have factored foodbanks into their welfare policies, allowing them to continue to under-fund and under-provide essential welfare services. The foodbank industry allows the public to believe that the problem of hunger in our communities is being answered. Furthermore, government agencies such as WINZ will regularly refer clients on to foodbanks,

despite New Zealand foodbanks receiving no direct state funding.
(McPherson, 2006, p. 5)

While academic explorations of food insecurity have certainly helped to position its existence as a social negative, they have been predominantly quantitative, and with regard to the New Zealand context, rely heavily upon (organisational) data that report client profiles, levels of service uptake and growth in the numbers of service providers (see for example Mackay, 1995). Within these approaches the challenges are identified as structural or organisational. The voices of the food insecure are subsumed in the statistics as incidences of food deprivation or its health consequences. There is little room within such academic approaches to examine the social implications that the experience of food insecurity brings with it at the level of the individual.

State Responses to Food Insecurity

Direct state assistance to alleviate food insecurity is limited to the Special Needs Grant for Food administered by Work and Income New Zealand. Indirectly, state commitment to moving people out of situations of income inadequacy that underpin food insecurity is administered through income support policies such as Working for Families¹⁵. While this policy package has been effective in lifting the household incomes of many low and low-to-middle income families since its introduction in 2004, some critiques argue that rather than reducing economic inequities, Working for Families has actually perpetuated them by incentivising labour market attachment to the detriment of those families who – for whatever reason – are unable to achieve this¹⁶.

Other indirect state responses have dedicated resources to population health measures with a view to limiting the social and fiscal costs of the health burden

¹⁵ Working for Families is a policy package that offers a range of income tested tax credits, as well as transfer payments to assist in meeting the costs of housing, and subsidies to improve the affordability of childcare (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.)

¹⁶ The in-work payment that forms part of Working for Families has been roundly criticised by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) for discriminating against children on the basis of their parents' employment status (Child Poverty Action Group). Replacement of Special Benefit with a less generous Temporary Additional Support supplement coincided with the Working for Families roll-out, and progressively reduced the level of social security payments received by over 50,000 beneficiaries and people on low incomes (Wellington People's Centre, 2006).

associated with poor diet. One of the most contemporary examples of this is the 'HeHa' (Healthy Eating/Health Action) initiative¹⁷ which actively promotes three key nutritional messages on a national basis: eat a variety of nutritious foods; eat less fatty, salty, sugary foods; and eat more fruit and vegetables (HeHa, 2008). While public education measures such as HeHa are useful in mitigating some of the negative impacts associated with poor diet choices, they do little to ameliorate the immediate situation for those whose choices are restricted or enforced by a lack of resources with which to acquire the recommended foods in the required amounts.

Discussion

Although foodlessness and hunger have been considered extensively in regard to industrialising nations in which absolute poverty prevails, there is a demonstrated preference within the literature addressing post-industrial countries to examine food's *presence* and the practices that surround it, rather than food's *absence*. This reluctance is reiterated in the New Zealand context by the lack of attention that the issue has received in the state sector. Food insecurity as a social indicator has progressively disappeared from relevant government studies and publications, despite its incidence fluctuating only moderately according to reports by health authorities, social agencies and advocacy groups. Since 2003, The Ministry of Social Development has excluded food security as an indicator of social wellbeing in its annual *Social Report*¹⁸. This absence coincides with the government's expression of a desire to see foodbanks go "out of business" over time in December of 2001, and the introduction of the Ministry's Foodbank Strategy in 2002 (Wynd, 2005). Although unavailable on the MSD's website at the time of this review, the strategy is referred to in a number of the Ministry's publications and encourages closer attention to the relationship between the state and third sector provision of food support. Almost a decade

¹⁷In accordance with the goals of the New Zealand Health Strategy, Healthy Eating – Healthy Action (HeHa) is the Ministry of Health's strategic approach to improving nutrition, increasing physical activity and achieving healthy weight for all New Zealanders (HeHa, 2008).

¹⁸The first edition of this was produced in 2001.

after the government announced its aspiration to see them gone, foodbanks remain an accepted feature of New Zealand's welfare landscape. The political challenges that food poverty presents have effectively been "taken off the menu", despite evidence suggesting that the social consequences and pervasiveness of food insecurity are far reaching.

There is irony in the common construction of New Zealand as a land of plenty in terms of the abundance of natural resources available to sustain the food requirements of its population. Underpinning this construction is the fact that a substantial part of the economy relies upon the ability to exploit these resources: the food and beverage industry describes itself as the 'lynchpin of New Zealand's prosperity' and is the largest manufacturing sector by total output, accounting for half of all merchandise exports at a value of \$14 billion per annum (NZTE 2005). In New Zealand, issues of hunger and foodlessness are generally associated with emotive media images of distressed and malnourished children in developing or war-torn nations which reference absolute poverty, and environmental or political obstacles. The discourse around food security in wealthy nations is one that constructs it as a spectacle that happens 'over there' to 'them'. In New Zealand, this contributes to what Else (2000) refers to as 'hidden hunger' – a situation in which the issue of food insecurity is publicly and politically marginalised, and the significant minority who suffer from it are trivialised, silenced and invisible. The scant local literature summarised in this review confirms that enforced food deprivation is one of the ways in which poverty is expressed in New Zealand, and that food insecurity amongst some members of the Hamilton community is demonstrable rather than hypothetical.

The literature selected for review documents the rise of relative poverty and deprivation in New Zealand society over recent decades – a rise that parallels the prevalence of food insecurity. Two formal mechanisms that offer some relief have been identified: foodbanks run by third sector social service organisations, and the Special Needs Grant for Food administered by the state. That these mechanisms are *necessary* in an affluent society is not in dispute. Rather, there seems to be a lack of consideration as to their *adequacy* in meeting the needs of

the food insecure. It is doubtful that uptake levels for formal relief provide an accurate measure of the real incidence of food insecurity in our society, given that research in this realm faces substantial practical and methodological challenges that are not easily resolved. The existing local literature with regard to formal assistance, while confirming that food insecurity is certainly present in New Zealand society, fails to inform as to the other kinds of networks or strategies that people utilise to resolve their varying states of foodlessness. Recent work in the New Zealand context has primarily applied service provider, nutrition or population health perspectives which, without exception, rely upon quantitative analyses. Such frameworks contribute little to understandings of how food insecurity is *experienced* in the daily lives of a significant minority within our society.

New Zealand has ratified a number of covenants, declarations and conventions in international law that affirm the right to food security. These include the United Nations' International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1996) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), both of which recognise the right of people to an adequate standard of living including the right to food. New Zealand has also committed to furthering the aims of the World Declaration on Nutrition (Rome, 1992) and the Declaration and Programme of Action World Summit (Copenhagen, 1995) which invite member states to draft national programmes of action to defeat poverty and improve nutrition (Riches, 1997). Given that the right to food is acknowledged in international law, it is vital that questions about the adequacy of services that aim to address food insecurity be raised - particularly when a large part of the sector which services the food insecure relies upon philanthropic rather than state funding in order to meet demand. Reliance on a competitive charity model is at least in part to blame for a lack of useful quantitative data that could assist the issue in gaining political traction. However, collecting this kind of information is not among the key tasks or priorities of most of the organisations working in this sector. By offsetting the demand for public provision, charity has inadvertently contributed to removing accountability for the issue of food insecurity from the political domain.

The single source that refers specifically to the demand for food support in Hamilton (NZCCSS, 2005) was limited to a quantitative analysis of foodbank use. While this study confirms that the client profiles of Hamilton service users parallel those nationally, its contribution to developing an in-depth understanding of the challenges and experiences faced by this community's food insecure is minimal and presents, in many ways, more questions than answers. Research approaches such as those applied in Canadian studies of food insecurity provide useful frameworks for exploring some of these questions. An experiential approach to understanding food insecurity enables implications to be identified at both social and individual levels. Further, experiential accounts have the potential to serve as a means of returning the debate surrounding strategies to alleviate food security to one premised on the rights of citizenship.

There is a paucity of academic literature, both internationally and locally, that positions food insecurity in post-industrial nations as an issue that can be examined via food sociology. Watson and Caldwell (2005) support this point in observing that:

...more research needs to be done on the *absence* of food in everyday social life. Often depicted in policy studies as a consequence of economic or environmental factors, food deprivation is deeply embedded in the cultural, political and religious processes that people take for granted. Furthermore, the actual lived experience of hunger differs dramatically in response to cultural circumstances (p. 3).

Sociology as a framework for examining food insecurity: an appetiser

Stephen Mennell (in Germov & Williams, 2004) contemplates why sociologists, until recently, have paid so little attention to food and eating, which are, after all, universal human activities essential to survival and requiring a substantial amount of social organisation. He also ponders why it is only recently that food has had its coming of age as the centre of so much sociological attention. Mennell's line of thought is a useful prelude to introducing what this thesis

perceives as a substantial oversight in the development of the sociology of food, at least within the context of post-industrial nations.

Mennell maintains that the lack of consistent sociological investigation into food has been determined in the first instance by the dominance of the Marxian tradition within the discipline, which while busying itself with an analysis of the nature of industrial production neglected to develop parallel critiques of the domestic realm. Secondly, examinations of food within the social sciences have been confined mainly to the discipline of anthropology which has supplied extensive investigation into food beliefs and taboos, and cultural practices to do with food's production and consumption. More recent anthropological endeavours have turned their attention to structural concerns involving food, such as the history of exploitation in colonised and developing countries in order to supply the wealthy west with commodities such as sugar¹⁹ and coffee.

Mennel also believes that part of the reason that sociology has neglected a systematic examination of food until recently is the lack of prestige that domestic (and by implication, female) preoccupations have held as areas of popular research. He observes that:

For much of the twentieth century, the prestigious topics [within Sociology] tended to be stratification and class inequality, politics and power, industry, organisations and bureaucracy. All were in some sense masculine concerns. The inequality between the sexes was taken for granted, while that between the social strata was not: work was mainly a man's world, the home and the kitchen a woman's. Leisure, culture, consumption – and food – were widely considered to be peripheral and even frivolous concerns. (Mennell, S. in Germov & Williams (Eds.), 2004, p. vi)

Although improvements in the status of women cannot be granted with full credit for the development of food sociology as a sub-discipline, the women's movement in post-war capitalist societies drew fresh attention to the concerns of the domestic sphere and almost certainly had a role to play in positioning the activities that surround food as worthy of sociological attention. Further,

¹⁹ See for example: Mintz (1985).

Mennell notes that the shift in sociological focus from production to consumption contributed to by the likes of Riesman (1950) in the 1950s, and developed further in the 1970s and 80s by theorists of the post-modern or post-industrial society such as Bell (1974, 1976), has also contributed to the development of sociological discourses about food.

Just as sociology has historically neglected food as an area of concern, food sociology itself has been equally negligent in addressing the issue of food insecurity, at least with reference to affluent societies in the industrialised world. Contemporary commentaries in food sociology tend to take the perspective that where there is food, there is an observation to be made about the way in which the social world operates. Substantial attention has been paid to the way in which individuals construct and relay social identity through what they consume (or conversely, choose not to consume), and to the socio-political analysis of global food systems and multinational agribusiness. Various food movements including fast food (Ritzer, 2000), slow food (Pertini, 2003), gastro-tourism (Hall *et al.*, 2003) and gastro-porn (see McBride, 2010) have also received attention. The point here is that assumed *presence* has dominated sociological thinking about food in wealthy nations to the extent that the *absence* of food and what that implies within this context has largely been ignored. As such, the current project sits precariously within the existing parameters of food sociology, while hoping to assist in developing a more inclusive and comprehensive sociology of food as a platform for examining the significance of food's absence.

Willis (1999) has operationalised C. Wright Mills' (1959) concept of the sociological imagination by suggesting a template that Germov and Williams (2004) consider a useful starting point for asking questions that concern the sociology of food. The four strands of this model form a framework that supports sociological analysis via an analysis based in historical, cultural, structural and critical factors. Although it is most likely that this approach was described in the first instance to cater for circumstances in which food is present rather than absent, the framework has been adopted in this study as a useful starting point for positioning the research within the sociology of food, for orientating a review

of the existing literature and for generating research questions. As such, the initial conceptual framework that guided this study has taken the following form.

Historical factors

The literature review points to three substantial periods of food insecurity in New Zealand's post-colonial history. The most recent appears to have been underpinned by the structural and economic reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Historically, the charity model (overseen in New Zealand by what is now referred to as the 'third sector'²⁰) has become an embedded response in which issues of hunger and foodlessness have been depoliticised. The questions this research asks about the historical factors that underpin food insecurity in the Hamilton community include:

- What are the historical drivers that have shaped contemporary discourses about food insecurity?
- What are the social, economic and political conditions that have influenced patterns of production, distribution and consumption in the current era of food insecurity?
- What strategies have been used to address food insecurity in the past, and what bearing do these have on current strategies at political, service provider and individual levels?

Cultural factors

The literature review has pointed to a number of personal shifts that occur in situations of food insecurity. These changes are likely to impinge on social patterns and have the ability to alter previously accepted cultural norms. The themes and questions developed under this heading largely refer to strategies for addressing food insecurity at micro and meso levels.

- What social mechanisms and resources do people make use of – either formally or informally – including social and cultural capital, in order to

²⁰ The term 'third sector' is used in this study to denote not-for-profit non-government organisations that are active in social service provision.

respond to food insecurity?

- What role does food insecurity have in shifting or reinforcing cultural norms around the acquisition and consumption of food?
- What limits does food insecurity place on social and cultural participation, and what are the implications of these limits in terms of social costs?
- In terms of bearing these costs, what are the consequences for the community in particular and society in general?

Structural factors

The literature has indicated that in New Zealand measures such as foodbanks, community meals and Special Needs Grants for Food (each of which will be examined in some detail in later parts of the thesis) contribute to a growing reliance on structural forms of relief as part of people's economic arrangements. The questions and themes under this heading refer mainly to what this study deems as *formal* responses to the issue of food insecurity.

- Is there any relationship between formal and informal strategies²¹ for addressing food insecurity, and if so what form does it take?
- How adequate are the structural mechanisms for relieving food insecurity? How are they resourced? How is eligibility determined? What experiences of these mechanisms do people have?
- How do existing structural mechanisms impact on the development of informal strategies to address food security at individual and community levels?

Critical factors

The critical aspect of this research examines why things are the way that they are, and incorporates an experiential approach to food insecurity in order to suggest how they could be otherwise. This aspect also includes issues of disadvantage

²¹ The distinction that this study makes between formal and informal strategies at community level is explored at length in Chapter 3. The distinction between formal and informal strategies at the micro level is explored in the chapters addressing the qualitative findings.

and marginalisation. As such, the critical questions that underpin this research include:

- Are the various ways in which food insecurity is assessed adequate, and are corresponding responses satisfactory?
- Do current policies and practices respond to people's lived experience? If not, what are the immediate and future implications?
- Do experiential accounts of food insecurity indicate that New Zealand is meeting its obligations under international law in terms of ensuring food security as a basic human right?
- In what ways could current relief mechanisms (both formal and informal) be further enhanced or developed?
- What does the experiential approach to understanding food insecurity have to offer the process of change?

In acknowledging the limitations to the study of food insecurity identified in the literature review, and in seeking to extend current approaches to the sociology of food by inclusion of the dimension of absence, the thesis now turns its attention to describing the development and implementation of a methodological approach that seeks to answer these research questions.

A Recipe for Research: Methodology

In our fieldwork we do not look for confirmations but for theory's refutations. We need first the courage of our convictions, then the courage to challenge our convictions, and finally the imagination to sustain our courage with theoretical reconstruction. (Burawoy, 1998, p. 20)

This chapter provides a detailed outline of the methodology that this study has used to explore food insecurity in the Hamilton community. A mixed-method approach has been applied, and as such, data collection was essentially carried out in two phases. The first of these – a postal survey of food support services – collected *existing quantitative data* with a view to establishing an aggregate account of the level of formal food support being provided in Hamilton. The survey also granted an opportunity for service providers to provide additional qualitative responses which, as well as contextualising the quantitative data, allowed an exploration of some of the challenges presented by the meso-level operating environment. The second (and more substantial) phase of this research took the form of *in-depth qualitative interviews* where members of the Hamilton community shared their experiences of food insecurity. The particular focuses of this phase were the micro level strategies that respondents applied to avoid or address foodlessness, and identification of the impacts of food insecurity at personal, household and social levels.

Although the two substantive components of this research are interrelated in that they both describe responses to food insecurity, it is acknowledged that each needs to be able to take its place independently. The socio-political contexts that provider organisations must navigate are very different to the micro level contexts experienced by food insecure individuals. While both are valuable in tandem they are informed by quite different motivations, logics and

values. With a view to presenting an approach that is both unifying and divergent, the results of the quantitative and qualitative phases have been presented independently before undergoing synthesis in the theoretical chapter.

Methodological perspectives

The methodological perspectives adopted to inform the applied methodology of this study are based in grounded theory. As a general method for social scientists, grounded theory was initially developed by Glasser and Strauss (1967) as a means of testing theory generated within an inductive framework. The approach is considered to be 'grounded' because it first develops out of, and then is organised around, an emerging explanation of the data. Martin and Turner (1986, cited in Myers, 1997) assert that grounded theory is a "...theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data". Further, grounded theory's assertion that 'all is data' allows mixed-method findings to be complemented by a broader consideration of contextual and secondary data and a continuous interplay between systematic data collection and analysis (Myers, 1997).

Figure 3.1. Methodological framework

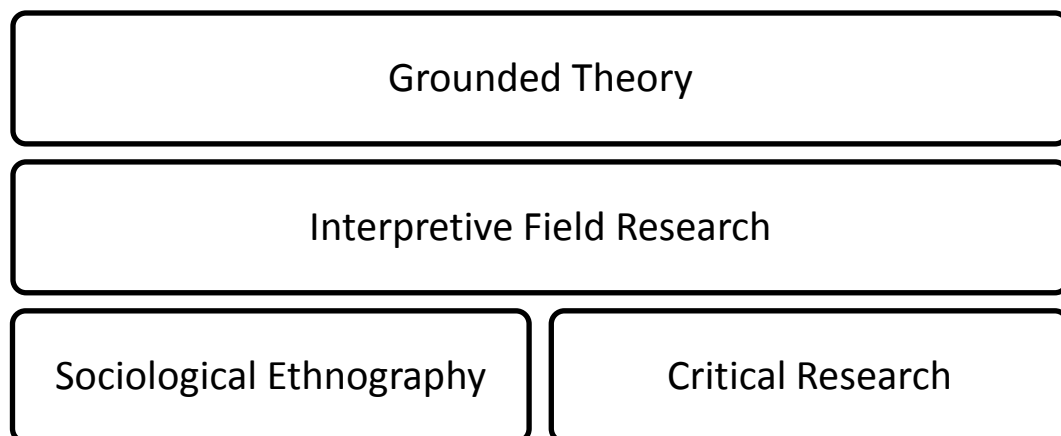


Figure 3.1 illustrates the methodological framework applied in this study. Interpretive field research is a methodology located within grounded theory, and encompasses both sociological ethnography and critical research. As such, interpretive field research supports the collection of data to address the research

questions at both general and specific levels¹, typically by applying a mixed-method approach that attracts both qualitative and quantitative data. Klein and Myers (1999) distinguish the interpretive field research approach from the positivist tradition on the basis that “...the subject matter is able to be set in its social and historical context so that the audience can see how the current situation under investigation can be as it is” (p. 24). The value of mixed-method approaches is increasingly recognised within the Social Sciences on the basis that the strengths of one method can balance the limitations of another. This is particularly true where quantitative approaches undermine understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of its participants and omits consideration of the social and institutional contexts in which the phenomenon occurs (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994).

Within the discipline of sociology, the ethnographic approach differs from that taken in anthropology in that aspects of social life or sets of social relations are examined, rather than the multitude of activities that take place in a whole society². Within sociological ethnography, “The ethnographer aims not to represent some independently existing life-world or culture, but rather to give a fictive account of a self-exploratory ‘experience of the other’...” (Goldthorpe, 2007, pp. 64-65) with a view to understanding the dimensions of these experiences and how they are shaped by the social contexts in which they occur.

Critical research recognises that people’s abilities to change their circumstances are constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political power relations. By bringing to light the inequalities implicit in these relations and questioning the status quo, some degree of emancipatory outcome in terms of eliminating “the causes of alienation and domination” is generally sought (Myers, 1998). The current project adopts the critical research approach as a means by which the structural inequalities that perpetuate food insecurity can be described through a sociological analysis and challenged through social critique.

¹ Klein and Myers (1999) offer a useful outline of the interpretive field research process, alongside a number of principles that have practical implications.

² For a useful discussion of this distinction see Campbell (2000), p. 37.

Adopting the investigative field research approach in this research has been useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, the scope of data collection was limited only by the availability of data – which could include anything from reflective field notes about conversations with staff at community agencies, to raw survey data or audio recordings of semi-structured interviews, to the broad range of secondary sources found in both the literature review and the community. Such a diverse range of data supports a sociological analysis that encompasses policy, provider, community, household, and individual accounts of food insecurity. Secondly, due to the constraints of time under which post-graduate research is often carried out, this approach supports a cross-sectional (versus longitudinal) analysis that is useful in providing a ‘snapshot’ of food insecurity within a fixed spatial, social and historical context.

Developing the methodology

In line with sociological ethnography, the development of the research methodology used in this project was influenced by the community setting and some of the events that were receiving public attention during the early period of the study³. Having commenced a review of the literature and looking for ways in which the research could be of use in a practical sense, several community houses in Hamilton were visited and informal discussions were held with staff about how the people in their neighbourhoods were faring in terms of food security. These visits provided a background for the development of early ideas about existing community responses to food insecurity, both formal and informal. One community house worker passed on a piece of advice that was to prove particularly valuable while undertaking the fieldwork that preceded the applied research: “Get out there, pound the pavements and talk to people. You can’t do it from an office”. The people she was referring to were the staff, volunteers and clients who populated Hamilton’s social service and community based

³ This includes the level of public concern generated by statistics about the levels of child poverty in New Zealand, and the release of estimates of the number of New Zealand children attending school without having had breakfast. Both of these issues became highly politicised during the early stages of the research, and the debates surrounding them received considerable coverage in popular media.

organisations. This mantra was rigorously applied over the subsequent three months, prompting many further discussions that cultivated support for the research idea. Neighbourhood development officers, community youth workers, population health experts and social service organisations dedicated to advocating for their specific client groups⁴ passed on information that eventually paved the way to the coordinators of Hamilton's principal food aid organisations. The support for the research idea amongst community organisations was substantial and many snowball type recommendations were made about further key people who could be consulted, or resources were provided as 'leads' to the next source of information. Although largely informal, the information captured⁵ during these interactions helped to inform an emergent understanding of the operating environment in which the research would eventually be undertaken.

This operating environment necessitated the development of a methodology that reflected the limitations and realities faced by both service providers and those experiencing food insecurity. In terms of service providers, it is to be remembered that their core business is not data collection or research participation, and that their primary accountabilities are to funders and clients. This fact necessitated the development of research questions that fit with the data already being collected for organisational purposes rather than requesting that providers undertake new forms of data collection specifically for use in this project. Additionally, those individuals who experience food insecurity face many of the accompanying challenges that are symptomatic of poverty – the least of which should be participation in research. In considering these realities, every effort was made to minimise the resource demands that participation put on individual and organisational respondents. Their generosity in terms of the time and thought that they put into the responses that have been utilised as data in this study should not go unrecognised.

⁴ Including Pacific Peoples, sole parents, people with mental health challenges, new immigrants, youth and older people.

⁵ These meetings were recorded in field note form and formed the basis for a running record of local networks – a literal 'who's who' of the Hamilton social services sector!

Methodological Challenges

The problem of definition

There was a need to develop practical parameters for identification of two distinct samples in this research: one being providers of food support, the other being community members who experience food insecurity. Decisions had to be made about which of the various forms of food support could be used as indicators of the presence of food insecurity, as well as how participants in the qualitative part of the project could be confirmed (or refuted) as being food insecure. Consequently, the terms 'food support' and 'food insecurity' have been defined very specifically. By way of illustrating this requirement, we can think of a situation in which a person attends the home of a relative for an evening meal because they have run out of food and have no financial resources with which to purchase more. Alternatively, the same person may elect to attend a community meal provided by a local social service organisation in order to relieve their situation. Both strategies have involved accessing food support – but it is more likely that the latter will be able to be evidenced quantitatively. With regard to 'food insecurity', it was necessary to consider whether respondents should be able to self-define their status as food insecure, or whether some more objective diagnostic test should be applied to verify their claim – despite the potential for externally imposed definitions to undermine personal constructions of identity.

Food Support

The literature review that informed this research confirmed that within the New Zealand context one of the main indicators of food insecurity is foodbank use. What had also become clear during the discussions with community organisations in Hamilton was that foodbanks were not the only means by which people were accessing help when they were unable to meet their food requirements independently. Social support agencies reported that they often assisted people by supplying information about Work and Income New Zealand's Special Needs Grant for Food (or 'food grant') – although there was scant reference to this as an indicator of food insecurity within the literature. Further,

a number of agencies in Hamilton were coordinating regular provision of free⁶ 'community meals' where no form of needs assessment or eligibility testing was required. Many schools in Hamilton were supplying breakfasts or occasional snacks and lunches to children who came to school hungry or without food. There was also evidence of fruit and vegetable cooperatives where participants could pool their resources to access regular boxes of fresh produce at a low cost, of meals delivered to the homes of people whose mobility or ability to source and prepare food for themselves was limited, of free 'in-house' meals where attendees were fed as part of another activity or event in which they were participating⁷, and of community garden arrangements in which people swapped their labour for fresh produce. While there is the possibility that this list may not be exhaustive there is reasonable confidence that each of the significant forms of publicly available food relief that exist in Hamilton have been considered in this research.

Formality

It was decided that the criteria for defining food support and the basis for sample selection could be found in the degree of *formality* with which a food support activity was imbued. As this distinction excluded a number of the activities described above, it is worth considering how the notion of formality has been applied.

The first criteria for determining formality was that the activity must involve a response to personal or household food insecurity that required the recipient to seek food assistance from outside of informal networks such as the extended household, family, friends or neighbours. Formal providers were conceptualised as universally accessible, provided – in most cases⁸ - that an individual met

⁶ In some instances providers requested a non-compulsory gold coin donation or 'koha'. The term koha is derived from the Māori language and used colloquially in New Zealand to denote a gift (often of money) or token presented to a host to acknowledge hospitality.

⁷ Examples of this include a church offering a cooked lunch to university students following the Sunday service, and a community house that provided young people with dinner following an afternoon Hip-Hop workshop.

⁸ The obvious exception to this would be community meals, in which there is no test for eligibility other than attendance.

eligibility criteria. In formal provision eligibility is usually achieved on the basis of evidence about a person's material conditions or personal circumstances.

Secondly, formal food support providers were considered on the basis of self identification where there was evidence that all or part of their operational mandate was food relief. There was a requirement within this provision that this mandate was recognised by other social support organisations in the form of referring clients on for assistance with accessing food support.

Another aspect that contributed to the evaluation of an activity as formal was the regularity and continuity of food support provided. Formal support was considered to exist when the provider operated out of a fixed venue with stated times at which assistance could be sought. Further, there were likely to be policies in place with regard to eligibility as opposed to providing food support in an ad hoc manner.

Formality denotes some means of reporting or accountability in terms of record keeping. It is unfortunate that a number of the activities that were initially identified had to be excluded from the sample on this basis, as without records about the levels of assistance that they were providing – either in terms of cost or quantity - there was simply an absence of data that could be utilised for the purposes of this study. This was particularly regrettable in regard to Hamilton's 58 schools, given that more than one third of them had responded positively to an email enquiring whether they were feeding hungry students. Only one school that responded in the affirmative kept data about the amount of food support that it supplied.

Formality was also indicated by the legal or affiliated status of an organisation. A number of providers were registered as trusts, and amongst the eventual sample of organisations, most had received the status of a registered charity for tax purposes, or operated under the umbrella of a larger organisation that held this status.

The food support services that best fit the criteria of formality as outlined above included foodbanks, the Special Needs Grant for Food provided by Work and Income New Zealand, and community meals⁹. Ultimately, these were the services that constituted the sample canvassed by the organisational survey of formal food providers.

Food Insecurity

For the qualitative aspect of the research it was necessary to establish some non-invasive and objective means of determining which interview candidates were food insecure so that the sample of participants accurately reflected the experience of food insecurity as it had been constructed in the literature review. There were two ways in which this was achieved.

The first was that interview candidates were asked to indicate whether or not they had used one of the formal food support services (a foodbank, community meal or food grant) in the 12 month period leading up to the return of a research recruitment flier (see Appendix II). While the decision to interview people who fit this criteria potentially excluded those who may have been experiencing food insecurity but were able to utilise other informal support within the community, the decision was justified on the basis that those who were utilising formal assistance were more likely to be open to discussing food insecurity as a personal issue given that they had already registered their need for assistance with a formal food support service¹⁰. A number of services that had participated in the survey research had indicated their willingness to assist in advertising the

⁹ Although community meal services did not meet the requirement of the criteria in terms of making assessments of recipients' eligibility, they did fit all the other dimensions of formality. Their inclusion in the survey is considered justified on the basis that preliminary discussions between the researcher and service providers indicated that these services were well utilised by low income people who were vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity. Further, respondents in the qualitative aspect of this study reported using community meals as an exogenous strategy for addressing food situations. Community meals do not appear to have attracted any research attention in New Zealand, and in the absence of any literature to offer further guidance on the matter of whether they constitute a formal response to food insecurity, the researcher has elected to include them.

¹⁰ It is acknowledged that accessing potential respondents in this way may have imposed limits on the scope of the sample, as people who had not used formal food support services as a strategy for addressing food security were ineligible for the research.

research (for example, through distribution of fliers with food parcels) as part of the recruitment process for interview respondents, which made for ready access to a pool of potential interview candidates.

Given that the purpose of the qualitative research was to gather experiential data from people who could be objectively identified as food insecure it was necessary to apply some instrument that could confirm this status. The interview schedule (see Appendix II) included a section of screening questions drawn from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Guide to Measuring Food Security (Bickel, Nord, Price, Hamilton & Cook, 2000). The instrument selected¹¹ provides a 12 month Food Security Scale and enables food security and food insecurity¹² to be categorically differentiated on the basis of a person's response to six screening questions. While the 6-item measure is a shortened form of another widely used 18-item measure it has still been shown to demonstrate "...reasonably high specificity and sensitivity with minimal bias with response to the 18-item measure" (Blumberg *et al.* (1999) cited in Bickel *et al.* (2000), p. 60). One limitation of using the shortened form is that it does not enable measurement of "... the more severe levels of food insecurity at which child hunger has been experienced and reported" (Bickel *et al.* (2000), p. 60). However, as this project was directed solely at gathering the experiences of adults it was appropriate to use the short form to confirm the food security status of respondents. Further, taking a qualitative approach enabled participants who were parents to express their observations with regard to the impacts of food insecurity on their children's lives and on the broader dynamics of relationships within their households.

Ethical considerations

Significant consideration of the ethical implications of this research for participating food support organisations and for individuals experiencing food

¹¹ The full title of this instrument is the 'Standard 6-item Indicator to Classifying Households by Food Security Status'.

¹² The application of these categories in the current study, along with some critical reflections about their recent re-framing are outlined more fully in Chapter 6.

insecurity was undertaken. Ethics approval for both phases of this project was sought via two submissions to the University of Waikato Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. A number of ethical issues have influenced the approaches this study has taken to data collection techniques and presentation of results. Ethical considerations also shaped recruitment practices and the nature of the sample. The preservation of respondents' best interests (either organisational or individual) was paramount in both the development and implementation of the research activities.

In keeping with the principle of minimising harm, anonymity of participating agencies and interview respondents was a central ethical consideration. With the exception of Work and Income New Zealand, who are the only provider of food grants and therefore readily identifiable, anonymity was granted to participant food support agencies and potentially contributed to the excellent rate of participation achieved in the survey. Service provider anonymity was considered important for operational reasons such as funding. There was the possibility that resources that had been granted for other activities may have been diverted into providing food support, and that any identification of this practice in the research could discredit service providers in the eyes of funders. Further, it was not considered appropriate to make the financial details or internal protocols of participant organisations available for public scrutiny. This provision had implications for the analysis of results, which has largely been undertaken on an aggregated basis across the food support sector, rather than at the level of individual support services. Agencies were not asked to supply any raw data that might identify their clients. Rather, the only data the survey requested was that pertaining to the quantity and costs of the food support that they supplied to the community. Further, the issue of ownership of service provider data was addressed by inclusion of an *Authorisation to Release Data* form (see Appendix I) that could be signed off by an organisations designated signatory.

Anonymity was also assured to all interview respondents. This was an ethical consideration on the basis that the details that many of them shared were intensely personal – including commentaries about themselves and their

relationships, their personal practices and beliefs, and their financial status. Anonymity has been achieved by the use of pseudonyms and occasional changes to other details that may have allowed identification, such as referring to a relative or friend by title rather than name, and referring to a service type rather than the name of a particular service provider¹³. It was also recognised that interview participants were vulnerable at a number of levels, the most obvious being the extent of the deprivation that many of them faced. The research interactions aimed to minimise harm by treating respondents and their conditions with sensitivity and respect. Informed consent was only conferred when a clear understanding of the voluntary nature of participation had been clearly achieved¹⁴, and respondents understood that they had the right to withdraw from the project at any time without question if they so wished¹⁵.

A coding system was applied to all of the raw data collected in the research activities. The coding key has been safely stored, as have all the sources (both electronic and hard copy) that document research responses. All of this information will eventually be securely destroyed.

The research has been indirectly funded by a doctoral scholarship awarded to the researcher by the University of Waikato. Other than confirming satisfactory academic progress on this thesis, the university exercises no claim to the research data or findings.

Negotiating the personal, the political and the professional

Applied sociological research does not occur in a vacuum. As researchers, our own values, cultural understandings and experiences all have the potential to colour the lens through which we make sense of the social world.

¹³ Square brackets have been used in direct quotes to denote where this has occurred.

¹⁴ No reward or inducement was offered for participation in the interview, but it was considered ethically acceptable to offer all those who returned the recruitment flier a chance to win one of five music CD vouchers regardless of whether or not they proceeded to the interview stage.

¹⁵ There were no instances in which participants expressed a desire to withdraw from this research.

From the point of view of the researcher, this project has presented personal, political and professional challenges at various times. There was a need to traverse the service provider sector and this was very much new territory. The culture of these organisations required careful navigation in order to build up the credibility, trust and rapport that would enable the research activities to begin. Thankfully, helping services are predominantly staffed by people who are by nature, helpful! In some instances the operational approaches taken by service providers were observed from a personal stance as punitive or coercive. However, it is not the role of the researcher or the purpose of the research to judge the way in which food support organisations or their personnel go about their daily operations from a moral vantage point.

Entering into the private lives of individual respondents, many of whom are already vulnerable to the intrusions that accompany welfare dependency and service reliance, also presented challenges. As a sole parent who has raised a family on a sometimes meagre income there was some researcher empathy with 'being on the receiving end' – although it is intended that the experiences presented in this thesis are representative of the individuals to whom they belong rather than a reflection of some aspects of the researcher's own life experiences.

Politically, this research is underpinned by a conviction that food poverty within the New Zealand context is an objectionable result of structural inequalities that perpetuate material and social deprivation, rather than an outcome of deficiencies at the level of the individual. This outcome has a very human face and several inquiries were received from people who had picked up recruitment information pertaining to this study after they had been declined a food grant by Work and Income New Zealand. In most instances simply providing information about other means of food support available was enough to satisfy these inquiries, but in a more extreme case, one of these calls came mid-week at dinner time. A grandmother with six children who had been left in her care by their parents had been declined a food grant that afternoon and was desperate to find some way of feeding her charges. As it was outside the operating hours of

any services, an immediate decision was taken to put together a 'food parcel', which was delivered by the researcher within the hour. Additionally, the following morning, follow-up contact with the grandmother was able to be made by a support service at the request of the researcher. In this instance the role of 'community member' took priority over the role of 'researcher', despite the fact that the woman in question would have made an ideal interview candidate.

Beyond food grants, the provision of formal food support in Hamilton is dominated by agencies that are ideologically influenced by the Christian faith. Understanding how this influences service delivery was integral to establishing successful rapport with these organisations. Faith seemed to assist the staff and volunteers working in this sector in coping with the levels of deprivation and hopelessness that they witnessed on a daily basis. For the researcher, maintaining a professional composure during interviews with some of the clients of these services was challenging at times, particularly where parents described the sacrifices they made to feed children, or where people described strategies that involved isolating themselves from their social networks. The interview and transcription processes were tasks accompanied by a degree of emotional upset, though the researcher acknowledges that this 'second-hand' distress is just a shadow of the daily reality faced by respondents¹⁶. Not being able to supply interviewees with any form of reward for their participation – when it was so obvious that even a small token could have alleviated their situation in the short term – was a persistent frustration, especially as the community that is the subject of the research was (and continues to be) is the same community in which the researcher lives, works and raises a family. Although a number of people who could have acted as respondents were known to the researcher personally, these community members were intentionally excluded from participation on the basis that the personal and the professional realms should remain distinct and that these relationships should not be treated in a manner

¹⁶ Over the past two decades, the researcher has conducted interviews that number into the hundreds across a broad range of topics. However, few of these have had the level of emotional impact that was encountered in the series undertaken for this project.

that could be considered exploitative. Interestingly, the primary motivation of participants seemed to be that having their stories recorded could contribute to making a difference for others at some level. Perhaps, then, there is some comfort to be taken in the thought that this research offers an avenue for achieving this on their behalf.

Methodology - The Quantitative Dimension

The quantitative component of the research involved evaluating the provision of food support with a view to examining the parameters and conditions of formal responses to food insecurity in the Hamilton community. The literature review (see Chapter 2) indicated that no comprehensive multi-agency assessment of food support services aggregated across the sector had been made previously, either in Hamilton or elsewhere in New Zealand. In fact, just two quantitative assessments were available. The first reported levels of provision by a national social service organisation that supplied food parcels through its affiliates at the sub-regional level (NZCCSS, April 2005). The second consisted of the Ministry of Social Development's annual *Statistical Report* which presents aggregated national data about the number of Special Needs Grants for Food made by Work and Income New Zealand annually. The current research adds to those sources that already exist by *aggregating organisational data across the various providers that make up the formal food support sector* - albeit at a local rather than national level.

In mid-2007, a postal survey was administered to Hamilton food support services (namely foodbanks and community meal providers), and additional local data were requested from the Ministry of Social Development with regard to the Special Needs Grant for Food administered by Work and Income New Zealand. This request framed questions in such a way that responses were able to be integrated with those obtained in the survey data so that, for the first time, an assessment of provision could be made across the range of providers that make up Hamilton's formal food support sector.

Establishing the survey sample

During the fieldwork that informed the methodology a database was developed that identified all the known forms of food support in Hamilton and the organisations that were responsible for administering each of them. The database eventually tracked 60 organisations (including 25 schools) that were actively assisting people with accessing food. Broad categories were formed so that activities of a similar nature were able to be grouped under the classifications shown below in figure 3.2. Contact was made with representatives from as many of these organisations as possible to determine what kind of record keeping was available that could constitute data for a summary survey assessment of the levels and conditions of food support within the community. Problematically, the majority of services kept no records and there was a need to distinguish formal and informal provision on this basis (as discussed earlier). The fieldwork also assisted in understanding how formal programmes were resourced and the types of 'output' information that it was necessary for them to collate to support funding applications. Establishing a degree of consistency was integral in developing both an appropriate research sample and questions that providers were likely to be able to answer within the context of a survey. Ultimately, the survey sample was restricted to organisations that ran foodbanks, offered regular community meals or administered food grants - resulting in a total sample of 10 organisations¹⁷.

¹⁷ This figure includes nine community based providers, plus Work and Income New Zealand.

Figure 3.2. Summary of Food Support Activities identified in the Hamilton Community, 2007.

Classification	Description	Number Identified	Data Available	Designation	Retained in sample
Foodbanks	Provide food parcels for a household to applicants who can demonstrate need, or bread to client group.	12	Yes	Formal	3
Community meals	Regular free cooked meals at fixed venue. No assessment of need but well attended by people whose access to food and social contact is compromised.	6	Yes	Formal	6
Food grants	Provide food vouchers to applicants who can demonstrate an emergency which has left no resources with which to access food in the usual manner.	1	Yes	Formal	1
In-house meals	Free meals provided alongside another activity which is the main purpose of attendance.	7	Limited	Informal	0
Food cooperatives	Group purchasing of bulk fruit, veggies, meat or staples. Often supplied through a weekly not-for-profit box scheme.	5	Limited	Informal	0
Schools	Supply of food to students. Eligibility usually on the basis of observed hunger or as supplementary nutrition ¹⁸ .	25	Limited	Informal	0
Community gardens	Shared or allotted gardens in public spaces. Usually an expectation of a labour contribution.	3	No	Informal	0
Direct financial assistance for food	Cash assistance to access food in cases where need has been identified by organisation. Eligibility on basis of membership ¹⁹ .	1	No	Informal	0

¹⁸ Such as the Fruit in Schools programme, where children in low decile schools are supplied with a piece of fresh fruit each day to support a more balanced diet.

¹⁹ In this case, the organisation concerned was a church that assisted congregation members in instances of hardship.

Foodbanks

Although 12 foodbanks were initially identified, only 3 were retained in the final survey sample. It became apparent during the fieldwork that 7 of the organisations that had been identified as foodbanks provided food parcels to their clients on behalf of a foodbank collective to which they were affiliated, and that all of these outlets had commonly agreed eligibility protocols. The central foodbank collated excellent data about levels of provision across all these organisations, as it was also tasked with making funding applications on behalf of its affiliates. The other major foodbank in Hamilton was part of an organisation that provided a range of social services and operated independently. Three smaller organisations were also identified as foodbanks. One regularly distributed free bread to its client group and had records of this activity for funding purposes. This 'bread bank' was retained in the sample. The other two organisations assisted congregation members or service users on the basis of informally identified need, but neither kept any records about the levels of support offered and both were omitted from the sample on the basis that they did not meet the criteria of formal provision in terms of assessment, regularity or record keeping.

Community Meals

The fieldwork had identified that the community meals provided in Hamilton were both well attended and well coordinated. Six different agencies took it in turn to supply meals on a fixed day of the week. Although there was no centralised data collection, each provider kept similar data about supply levels and the costs of provision, and all six were included in the survey sample.

Food Grants

Work and Income New Zealand was included in the sample on the basis of offering formal support via the Special Needs Grant for Food. As part of a central government ministry, it is a function of Work and Income New Zealand to collect data about Special Needs Grants for reporting purposes. As a major contributor

to food support in Hamilton it was important that the sample captured these data, although the service provider survey was not considered by the researcher to offer a format easily suited to completion by the Ministry of Social Development or Work and Income New Zealand. For this reason, the core survey questions were adapted to produce a request for information that could be coded according to the same schedule as responses from the other organisations included in the sample. Work and Income New Zealand also provided a range of additional (unrequested) data about the levels of food support delivered and the conditions under which this is administered, and where appropriate these have also been reported in the results chapter that follows.

Developing the survey instrument

The Survey Questions

Development of the survey questions was influenced by the grounded theory and interpretive field research methodologies adopted in this study, and by the need to gather evidence that complemented an ethnographic account of food insecurity in the Hamilton community. The survey questions were designed to elicit data that would allow the levels of food support being dispensed to the community to be quantified. They also sought data with regard to the ways in which formal food support was being resourced and delivered, and the conditions that providers imposed (or did not impose) on eligibility. Additionally, it was hoped that the data would assist in highlighting features of the broader socio-political contexts in which these organisations operated, such as the relationship between state funded and charity based forms of food support.

It was evident that there was no standard way in which provider organisations recorded a number of variables (internal policies, guidelines on eligibility criteria, value of goods supplied, etc.), and this presented a challenge for collecting data in survey form²⁰. Question development was mindful of the need to record responses so that data could eventually be coded in a uniform way and a

²⁰ The lack of standardised data had already seen the quantitative dimension of one larger scale study of foodbanks in New Zealand abandoned. See discussion of Wynd (2005) in Chapter 2.

comprehensive data set measuring selected dimensions of provision across the formal food support sector could be collated.

The development of the survey questions was also influenced by the literature review, and by insights gained in the preliminary fieldwork stage. Themes that arose in these early phases of the project included the reliance of service providers on community philanthropy, questions around the adequacy (or otherwise) of state responses to food insecurity, and the relationship between existing state responses and those of community based services.

Survey questions were eventually themed in a way that would enable ease of completion and analysis. These themes included: the nature of the organisation, resourcing, descriptions of food assistance, client sourcing (including eligibility and referral relationships), and ability to meet demand.

Piloting the survey questions

Because of the relatively small size of the sample it was not considered feasible to pilot the survey questionnaire. Instead, two key informants who were familiar with the social services environment, the provision of food support and the data that were likely to be available were issued with drafts of the survey and asked to comment and provide feedback. Both were satisfied that the questions were appropriate, but suggested that space should be made available in some questions for further detailed comments from respondents. This suggestion was implemented before the survey was administered. The survey instrument in its final form can be found in Appendix I.

Administering the survey

The survey was administered to nine providers (three foodbanks and six community meal providers) by post in mid-May 2007 with a request for completion and return²¹ by mid-June. At this point several non-returns were followed up by phone, and a 100 percent return rate was achieved by early July 2007.

²¹ By stamped addressed envelope to the post office box of the researcher

Additional Data from Work and Income New Zealand

In May 2007, a request for information pertaining to Special Needs Grant for Food was submitted to Work and Income New Zealand via the Ministry of Social Development. A copy of the postal survey was included so that Work and Income's data managers would have a clear indication of the parameters of the data that would be useful in developing a response. An additional list of specific questions was submitted. A copy of this request can be found in Appendix I.

Data management and analysis

Although the size of the survey sample meant that the number of responses was small, SPSS computer software was used to assist in managing the data. This was useful in that it allowed the data to be easily explored in different ways, including uni-variate, bi-variate and multi-variate analysis. All responses were coded, and data were aggregated across provider categories and the sector as a whole. Where data were insufficient or reported at an inconsistent level of detail across providers, a process of averaging and pro rata estimation has been applied. These instances are clearly noted in the presentation of results in Chapter 4. The presentation of the survey results has been kept intentionally simple as the sample size is small and a number of the hypotheses that the research aimed to test are easily supported without an advanced statistical analysis.

Methodology – The Qualitative Dimension

The objective of the qualitative dimension of this project was to gather data that could give voice to the realities of the experience of food insecurity for an indicative sample of food insecure members of the Hamilton community. Between December 2007 and February 2008, 10 semi-structured interviews were carried out across respondents who were confirmed as food insecure using a standard international measure in the form of the USDA's Standard 6-item Indicator to Classifying Households by Food Security Status (referred to earlier in this chapter). The research was interested in documenting the strategies that these people utilised in order to manage food insecurity, and how their

subjectivities were shaped in terms of the personal and social implications they experienced. Within the international literature (with regard to post-industrial societies) very few sources introduce the voices of those who endure food insecurity. The experiential approach taken in this research is in stark contrast to previous accounts of food insecurity in New Zealand, which are largely based on service provider data that quantify particular client groups and tangible outputs while obscuring the personal and human dimensions.

Recruitment of the sample

Gaining access to a pool of Hamilton residents who had a likelihood of experiencing food insecurity was critical in establishing a research sample. It was considered that those who had used a formal food support service in the past 12 months were potentially vulnerable to food insecurity in either transient or ongoing forms, and that as these people had already engaged with service providers the probability of them self-identifying as possible interview candidates was promising.

Recruitment posters and fliers²² advertising the study were developed (see Appendix II), and these were displayed by a number of social service provider offices in Hamilton. Additionally, the managers of all four Work and Income New Zealand branches in the city authorised the display of recruitment materials in client waiting areas. Hamilton's two foodbanks also assisted in the distribution of fliers by including them with outgoing food parcels. The study was further promoted by emailing a small advertisement to all Hamilton schools for inclusion in school newsletters, and by way of a press release (see Appendix II) which generated an article in a free community newspaper that is delivered to homes city wide. All recruitment materials contained a land line phone number that could be used to contact the researcher for further information about the project, as well as a mobile phone number for contact by text messaging. Expressions of interest in participation could be recorded by completing a panel

²² Fliers included two filtering questions – one with regard to residency in Hamilton, and the other with regard to which of the formal food support services had been used in the past twelve months.

on the recruitment flier, which could then be forwarded to the researcher's post office box by freepost.

In all, 23 eligible expressions of interest were received and these were tracked on an Excel spreadsheet. A recruitment pack (see Appendix II) including further information about the project and the interview process was sent by post. Candidates were again encouraged to contact the researcher by phone, text message or email in order to have any questions answered. If candidates decided to proceed to the interview phase, they were able to return a signed consent form by freepost, and were then contacted by the researcher to set up an interview at a time and venue that suited them. If no response had been received two weeks after the initial information pack was sent out, a reminder letter and new information pack was forwarded to the candidate. Thirteen of the consent forms were not returned and ultimately, a sample of ten respondents participated in semi-structured interviews, the majority preferring to do so in their own homes, with two requesting to meet at the researcher's office, and one in the city's public library.

Designing the interview schedule

The interview schedule was designed using a mix of open and closed questions that allowed a range of information to be collected with regard to the respondents' circumstances and the extent of food insecurity within their household. More importantly, questions were designed with a view to identifying the strategies used to address food insecurity and capturing respondents' accounts of impacts associated with the experience. Accordingly, the schedule was divided into three parts: demographic and household information (including income and expenditure), the USDA Standard 6-item Indicator to Classifying Households by Food Security Status Level²³, and an extensive section on household food strategies (incorporating personal and household impacts of food insecurity). Questions were ordered in a logical

²³ Although this instrument is comprised of closed end questions it also acted as a useful prompting device in the interview situation, with many respondents electing to explain their responses further, adding to the richness of the data that was able to be collected.

sequence that assisted in developing an ease of rapport progressively throughout each interview. By the time the open ended questions involving self reflection were posed, respondents were reasonably relaxed and responded well to further 'probing'. A full copy of the research instrument can be found at Appendix II.

Carrying out the interviews

All interviews were carried out by the researcher in person in accordance with the interview schedule. Before each interview commenced the consent form and information sheet were revisited with respondents to make sure that they were aware that no reward was offered for their participation²⁴. In order to uphold best ethical practice the researcher reiterated respondents' rights to terminate the interview at any stage, or to withdraw the use of part or all of their data on a 'no questions asked' basis within two weeks. Consent to make an audio recording of the interview was sought before any recording commenced, and contact details for both the researcher and the FASS Human Research Ethics Committee were again supplied. This was also a time in which respondents could ask any further questions about the research. Although it was anticipated that interviews would take around one hour, most respondents voluntarily continued the conversation well beyond 60 minutes.

Immediately following each interview, reflective field notes were made by the researcher. These described any impressions about the respondent, the questions that elicited good responses or needed to be refined, and the main themes that had arisen in the course of the interview. Although there was considerable variation in the individual circumstances of each respondent, an initial impression of the main themes in each interview was noted. As the interview series progressed these themes were able to be more fully explored, and new themes and sub-themes were identified.

²⁴ It is considered highly improbable that the opportunity to win one of five CD vouchers offered to all those who returned a recruitment flier (regardless of whether or not they proceeded to the interview stage) provided an inducement for interview participation.

Managing and analysing the data

After the period for withdrawal of data by respondents had lapsed, recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Because the nature of spoken expression differs from written form, the data were 'cleaned' during the transcription process to remove content (such as 'ahh' and 'um') that can detract from readability. NVivo8 computer software was used to manage the data and each interview was identified within the programme as a 'case'. Various attributes of each respondent (such as age, gender, level of household food insecurity, income, etc.) were able to be coded so that attributes such as gender or the level of food insecurity could be queried against differing strategies for addressing food insecurity or the variety of personal implications arising from the experience. Each transcription document was imported into the programme and a coding scheme based on the early observations about the interviews was applied by using the 'free node' function of the software. Within the data at each node it was possible to observe further sub-themes, and subsequent codings using 'tree nodes' were applied. Organising the data in this way enabled a hierarchical system of classification that resulted in clear themes and sub-themes, and these have been used as the basis for the description of results.

Presenting the results

The results of the survey and interview phases of this research are reported separately in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. The results of the survey are presented in the numerical form that typifies quantitative approaches and provide a reasonable basis for estimating the level of supply of both state and philanthropic food support within the Hamilton community. They also outline the criteria that those who experience food insecurity must meet in order to access assistance, and provide a number of insights about the limitations that formal food support organisations face in terms of meeting the demand for their services. Additionally, the results of the survey were presented by the researcher

in a summary report written specifically for participant providers (McNeill, 2008a)²⁵.

The interview data are also presented in a way that is typical of this kind of research, and due to the questions that the research sought to explore it has been necessary to present these results thematically across a number of chapters (see chapters 5 to 8) that highlight respondents' private and public strategies for responding to food insecurity, as well as their impressions about what underpins it and the implications that accompany the experience. The themes associated with each of these aspects have been explored using direct quotes from the research interviews. Readers should note that truncation of quotes has been indicated by the use of '...', followed by a space. In instances where this notation occurs without a space it indicates that the respondent has paused before continuing their sentence.

In some instances the extracts selected from the data are indicative, and in others a series of quotes from different respondents has been used to affirm a particular point or illustrate different aspects of a similar experience. As much as possible though, rather than the researcher imposing extensive reinterpretations or discourse analysis, the themes presented are expressed in the voices of those to whom the experience of food insecurity belongs. In this manner it is hoped that the reader is brought closer to an understanding that is consistent with respondents' voiced experiences.

Analysis

Following the presentation of results from each phase, some mechanism for integrating the findings of both elements of the research was required. In responding to the grounded orientation of this study, the theoretical framework selected to achieve this synthesis is one that facilitates consideration of the complex and inter-related nature of non-linear social problems. Initially

²⁵ Some of the responses that made progress towards achieving the recommendations made in the summary report are discussed in Chapter 10.

proposed by Rittel and Webber (1973), the 10 characteristics²⁶ of 'wicked problems' have been developed to inform a critical sociological analysis which recognises that the experience of food insecurity is embedded in structural inequalities and power relations. Drawing on the findings of this study, the analysis acknowledges the relationships between food insecurity and the various contextual factors that underpin it at the macro, meso and micro levels. On the basis of this, five points informed by the results are developed to frame 'the wicked problem of food insecurity' (see Chapter 9) in a manner that advocates for changes in the way that it is identified, defined and addressed.

²⁶ In summary, Rittel and Webber (1973) propose that 'wicked' problems can be differentiated from 'tame' ones on the basis that: 1. There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem; 2. Wicked problems have no stopping rule; 3. Solutions to wicked problems are not true or false, but good or bad; 4. There is no immediate and ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem; 5. Every solution to a wicked problem is a 'one-shot' operation. There is no opportunity to learn by trial and error, so every attempt counts significantly; 6. Every wicked problem is essentially unique; 8. Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem; 9. The existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways. The choice of explanation determines the nature of the problem's resolution; and 10. The planner [or other actors who act as decision makers] has no right to be wrong.

Taking Stock: An Evaluation of Formal Food Support in the Hamilton Community

This chapter reports on the results of the quantitative component of the *Talking With Their Mouths Half Full* project – a survey of formal food support providers that was carried out across 10¹ Hamilton organisations in mid-2007. The approach taken in this study is distinctive in its aim to capture a broader account of the demand for food aid in the Hamilton community than that which has been reported elsewhere (see for example NZCCSS (2005) on the provision of food parcels in Hamilton). By evaluating levels of demand and provision across the formal food support sector, this phase of the research responds to questions about the strategies that are used to address food insecurity at the meso level and the resources required to support the various structural responses that have been identified. The survey also aimed to capture data about the eligibility criteria that those who seek food support must meet, and the adequacy of existing formal measures. Within the results there is also scope for examining the nature of the relationship between state and third sector measures to alleviate food insecurity.

The literature review that informed this research identified the demand for food parcels as a commonly cited indicator of the prevalence of food insecurity (see for example: NZCCSS 2005; and Wynd 2000). Further, with regard to assessments at the community level, it is usual that evaluations of formal provision are reported on the basis of the observations of a *single* provider rather than across *all* the providers that service a particular community. Accordingly, these portrayals of prevalence have the potential to be misleading by way of under-

¹ This includes the response from Work and Income New Zealand which, although not in survey form, provided data that in most cases were able to be aggregated with those supplied by other respondent organisations.

estimation. While the results of this effort do not attempt to quantify or estimate *actual* levels of food poverty in Hamilton, they certainly confirm that there is strong demand for services that assist people in alleviating food insecurity. Because participant organisations were able to provide qualitative responses to contextualise the quantitative data, these results also provide a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual environment in which formal food support services operate than that presented in similar studies.

Foodbanks in Hamilton

In total, five of the ten organisations surveyed reported providing a foodbank service. However, it is crucial to note that three of these were initially included in the sample on the basis of providing a community meal service. In instances where these services reported supplying food parcels and where they were members of a foodbank collective which was also included in the sample, double counting has occurred. Data that were double counted has been removed in all calculations that follow so that this problem is not duplicated. As such, it is more accurate to conclude that the Hamilton community is serviced by two major foodbanks. One is collective in nature; its core activity is to supply parcels to eight participant social service organisations that act as distribution points around the city. The other provides a range of social services including a substantial foodbank², and all applicants for food support undergo a broader needs assessment by an in-house social worker and can be referred internally to other forms of ‘wrap around’ assistance.

Both organisations identified dependence on a combination of volunteer and paid staff³ to operate their foodbank services, and both serviced clients who were self referred, referred internally within the agency, or by external

² The other services offered by this organisation included budget advisory services, life skills education, counselling, material assistance, limited financial assistance, and advocacy and information services.

³ Both employed one paid worker, and in one of the foodbanks this person was a full time employee.

community organisations and agencies - including Work and Income New Zealand⁴.

Clients must meet eligibility criteria in order to access assistance from either of the two services. In the case of the foodbank collective, assessments are made by participating agencies who all adhere to an overarching eligibility policy. Clients are required to present a Community Services Card and a letter from Work and Income New Zealand verifying that they are unable to obtain assistance through the Special Needs Grant for Food programme. Likewise, Hamilton's other major foodbank requires clients to verify hardship, personal circumstances and exhaustion of other means of food assistance. One foodbank also requires clients to obtain verification from Work and Income New Zealand that they have been assessed to ensure correct levels of benefit entitlement⁵. Both organisations refer clients to budget advisory services if they regularly⁶ access food support.

Both foodbanks stipulated set hours and days of the week during which food parcels could be accessed by clients. One foodbank was open Monday to Friday from 10am until 12 noon. The other was open on four weekdays, but required parcels to be ordered by 1pm for collection on the same day. There was no availability of food parcels at weekends, although one provider reported responding to emergency after hours requests⁷. One organisation has a shut down period of three to four weeks over the Christmas period, but supplies supermarket vouchers in lieu of food parcels to several participating agencies that do stay open over the holiday season.

⁴ At least two community houses spoken to in the course of developing the research had successfully assisted people in need with obtaining food parcels through both of the foodbanks, which verifies the agencies' claims of accepting external referrals.

⁵ This occurs after a client has used the foodbank service twice.

⁶ Both organisations refer clients to budget advisory services after providing food parcels to them twice. One organisation specified that it makes the referral after providing food twice within a six month period.

⁷ Further follow up with this organisation confirmed that the foodbank responds to occasional afterhours requests for food assistance made by New Zealand Police on behalf of an applicant. This is the only circumstance in which they offer afterhours assistance.

The content of food parcels offered by both services provide sufficient food for three days, and quantities are varied according to the number of people in the applicant's family or household. One foodbank described the normal contents of its food parcels as bread, cereal, tinned fruit, tinned spaghetti and baked beans, soup, tinned vegetables, jam or another spread, tea or coffee, pasta and pasta sauce, packaged noodles, sugar, flour, rice, meat, butter, and fresh fruit and vegetables.

The data show that the two organisations in combination provided 4,232 food parcels over a 12 month period during 2006 to 2007⁸. This represents an average supply of 352 food parcels per month, or the receipt of more than 80 parcels per week by various members of the Hamilton community. One foodbank had calculated that its supply alone had addressed the emergency food needs of approximately 3,750 adults and 3,040 children over the period of its last reporting year.

The data are unclear when it comes to calculating the cost of food assistance provided by the two foodbank agencies. This is due to the fact that much of their stock is donated, and therefore no cost is attributable to it. The differences between the concepts of *cost* and *value* had recently been explored by one foodbank, which had commenced monitoring the value of donated items. The results of this early monitoring allow an estimation of the *value* of donated food items which, on *average*, totalled \$1,612 per month (or approximately \$19,344 annually). In addition to this, the same foodbank spent an average of \$2,610 per month to purchase food supplies (\$31,323 in the 12 month period ending February 2007). By these estimates, this foodbank (which supplies 21 percent fewer food parcels than the other service) provides food assistance with an *average value* of \$4,222 per month, or \$50,664 annually. Although the larger foodbank was unable to forward this level of data, it reported providing food parcels that meet the same levels in terms of quantity (that is, food for three days). On the basis of the calculations for its smaller counterpart, the *average*

⁸ The reporting periods used by each organisation were slightly different: February 06 - January 07, and April 06 – March 07.

value of the food assistance offered by this provider would be \$61,303 over a similar annual period. In total, the two foodbanks combined could be providing food with an *estimated*⁹ *total value* of \$111,967 annually.

Both foodbanks also reported a number of other costs associated with administering food assistance. The nature of costs they identified included: staffing (wages, training costs, ACC levies), utilities including electricity and phone, venue costs such as rent and insurance, maintenance, security, waste management and cleaning costs, administration costs including stationery and auditing fees, and costs for storing, packaging and distributing food. In one agency alone these additional costs totalled \$42,725 (for the year ending February 2007). Added to the value of the food it provided, the *total cost* of food provision for this organisation (including the overheads and the value of food supplied as outlined above) for the 12 month period ending February 2007 can be estimated at \$93,339. Again, using a pro rata approach to calculating overheads (on the basis that the other similar organisation provided 21 percent more food parcels) the larger foodbank would provide services at an estimated *total cost* of \$113,000. Based on estimates guided by the data provided in the survey, foodbank services in Hamilton had an *estimated total cost* of \$206, 339 per annum.

The arrangements of both agencies were considerably different with regard to funding and resourcing of food support. This difference was based on the fact that while one organisation reported undertaking fundraising activities, the other reported that it was able to secure funding externally from both community and corporate charitable trusts. In the latter case, this meant that funding was tagged specifically to the provision of food support, whilst in the former no specific funding to supply food assistance was obtained. Other than this critical difference, both agencies reported that during their last annual reporting period

⁹ 1. A *process of averaging* has been used because the data addressing the value of donated food did not cover a full one year period; and 2. The figures for the value of the food supplied by the larger foodbank are based on *informed pro rata calculations* where the data from the smaller foodbank has been used as a baseline to make an estimation that takes into account the proportional difference in numbers of food parcels delivered by each service.

they had secured resources through donations of money or food from private individuals¹⁰ and donations of food from businesses or the corporate sector.

In order to assess the ability of organisations to meet the demand for food assistance the survey asked participant organisations to respond to two statements using a scale that ranged from 'never' to 'always'¹¹. When asked if the demand for food assistance through their organisations was higher than they had the resources to meet, one foodbank (the larger multi-service organisation) responded 'often', while the other (collective foodbank) responded 'sometimes'. Both responses indicate that providers consider that there is a shortfall in supply which leaves them unable to meet the level of community demand for food assistance as well as they would wish to. When asked if they had to ration food or compromise the quality of food supplied to their clients due to resource and/or funding constraints the answers in both cases matched those in the previous question – again an indication that supply is compromised in terms of quality due to resourcing (or lack thereof).

Discussion of foodbank findings

The two major foodbanks that service the Hamilton community were both initiatives of faith-based organisations. Both provided parcels composed of enough basic food to meet the needs of the applicant individual, family or household for three days¹². Normal services operated within a window of fixed hours during week days, with a gap in availability after hours and over weekends.

Despite similarities in the nature of provision, there exist two quite different organisational models – one collective and one part of a larger multi-service agency. Each of these models has structural advantages and disadvantages. The sole activity of the collective is the running of the foodbank and this provider is

¹⁰ One of the organisations reported an arrangement with a local supermarket in which customers could specify a donation amount to be added on to the total cost of their groceries at point of sale.

¹¹ The options for responses were: never, sometimes, often, and always.

¹² It appears to be this criterion rather than one of balanced nutrition that determines food parcel contents. Interestingly, the word 'nutrition' does not appear in any of the survey responses as a basis for determining what is supplied, though it should also be noted that the survey questions did not make specific reference to nutrition as a determinant either.

therefore able to better concentrate its efforts on attracting external (philanthropic) resourcing. At the same time it has a number of overheads that are not offset by virtue of being part of a larger organisation. The multi-service agency foodbank does not attract tagged funding for its foodbank services. Rather, the foodbank's operational costs are covered as part of the budget of the larger organisation that relies on both philanthropic and contractual funding to provide a range of social services.

The costs of running these services over and above the value of the food that they supply are informed estimates only. While one agency was able to give a concrete breakdown of its annual running costs, the other, as part of a multi-service agency, was not. It is likely that in the latter case economies of scale were at work in terms of offsetting venue and other costs. Although foodbanks that operate under the umbrella of larger organisations are able to offset service costs in this way, a number of their overheads are subsumed into other aspects of the organisation's accounting system.

From the data available, it has been possible to calculate an *estimated cost* of the food support provided by the two agencies on the basis of extrapolating the average value of the food and the costs of overheads. While these figures can only be regarded as indicative, they represent a replicable attempt at calculating the *total cost* of the Hamilton's 'foodbank industry'. In fact, these calculations are arguably conservative – they do not account for the value of the donated labour, without which foodbank services would have to meet further staffing costs in order to remain operational. It is apparent that the cost of delivering food relief via foodbanks was significant relative to the value of the food being delivered. According to the data supplied by one foodbank the service costs associated with providing food with an estimated value of \$50,664 amounted to \$42,725. In other words, every \$1 worth of food value delivered attracted a service cost of 84 cents.

Even though the estimates of value and cost presented here are cautiously conservative¹³, both foodbanks acknowledged that levels of demand are higher than they have the resources to respond to, and both services were in a position where they sometimes needed to ration or adjust the quality of the food assistance in a downward direction in order to stretch their resources. The estimated \$206,339 that it cost to provide 4,232 parcels in the 12 month period reported was all resourced by community charity. Hamilton's two foodbanks are entirely reliant on philanthropic resourcing. For as long as this continues to be the case, at the levels of demand evidenced by the survey, these services cannot be viewed as sustainable responses to food insecurity.

Community meals in Hamilton

The research identified six organisations in Hamilton that provide regular community meals and there appeared to be a good degree of co-ordination between them. Although each agency provided according to its means, meals were available every day of the week except Saturday. Four of the six organisations provided a cooked lunch, and two provided an evening meal.

According to the data, approximately 25,557 meals were supplied across the six providers over a recent 12 month reporting period¹⁴ - an average of 491 meals per week. There was a considerable variance in the number of meals provided by each agency, with largest contributing approximately 8,800 per year and the smallest 1,680.

Client eligibility for participation in a community meal was not assessed by any of the providers, nor was there any referring of clients to other support services after multiple attendances. Two organisations reported an expectation that attendees should also participate in the services of their affiliated churches.

¹³ Assuming that the food to supply 4,232 parcels is attributed a value of \$111,967 each food parcel would contain food valued at \$26.45. Even after estimated overhead costs are used in a similar calculation, the total cost of a food parcel would amount to \$48.75. These figures are considered to be extremely low given that each parcel is intended to provide a household with enough food to last for three days.

¹⁴ Again, the reporting periods used by each provider were slightly different, but all covered a 12 month period that had commenced in 2006 and ended in 2007.

However, both agencies also confirmed that they would not prohibit anyone who did not comply with this expectation from attending a meal.

From the data, the standard of provision appeared to be a hot meal of meat (or fish), potatoes (one agency supplied pasta) and at least two other seasonal vegetables. A number of services also provided a dessert. Additionally, two reported providing a soup course depending on availability. Others offered bread and butter, drinks (those specified were tea, coffee, Milo or cordial) and occasional fresh fruit or muffins.

All the agencies that supplied community meals reported providing more than one other social service¹⁵, and all were dependent on volunteers to carry out the work associated with providing a community meal programme, with only two of the agencies reporting a combination of paid and volunteer staff.

Half of the community meal providers reported that they received specific funding for this service, although on close examination of the data none of these were funded by state organisations, and only one had been externally funded by a community organisation¹⁶. In at least two instances it was apparent that specific tagged funding was reserved for community meals under the umbrella of the organisation hosting them¹⁷. The data also showed that the most common resource base for these services was donations of money or food from private individuals. Only two of the six organisations reported donations (one of both money and food, and the other just of food) from the corporate or business sector. Two services reported partially funding their community meals with revenue derived from the operation of second hand stores¹⁸.

¹⁵ Other services reported included: budget advisory services, life skill education, counselling and guidance, material assistance, financial assistance, advocacy and information services, support groups, residential care, adult education, computer education workshops, fitness and recreation services for people with intellectual disabilities, night shelters and religious observance.

¹⁶ Specifically community trusts or other charities.

¹⁷ This was clarified by the additional comments which were made by organisations in response to the question about sources of funding and resources.

¹⁸ It is unclear whether this revenue was tagged specifically for community meals or whether it subsidised a range of services within these organisations.

Five out of the six community meal services were able to report the cost to their organisation of the food that they had provided over a recent 12 month period¹⁹. Excluding the value of donated food and overhead costs (such as staffing and amenities), the aggregate cost of food amounted to \$30,900. The *average* cost of food to each of these five organisations was \$6,180, and on this basis an extrapolated cost for *all six* agencies can be estimated at \$37,080 annually. Respondents also identified a range of costs beyond food that were necessary to provide community meals. These included rent for venues, power, phone, plant costs (such as catering equipment, cutlery and crockery, furniture) and the expenses associated with cleaning and maintenance. Only one organisation reported that it incurred no additional costs beyond food in providing its service²⁰. The data supplied was not at a level of consistency that allowed the service costs of providing community meals to be estimated.

Three of the six organisations that provided community meals reported that they considered that they were 'never' in a situation where the demand for their services was higher than they had the resources to meet. The remaining providers considered that this was 'sometimes' the case. Likewise, half of the provider organisations reported that they 'sometimes' had to ration or compromise on the quality of the food supplied in their meals due to resourcing or funding constraints, but two providers stipulated that they 'never' had to do this. The remaining agency commented that the biggest challenge it faced was estimating how many to cater for in advance²¹.

Discussion of community meal findings

Community meal services in Hamilton are situated within a number of larger faith-based organisations that exercise a degree of co-operation, providing meals on all but one day per week. All six services that responded to the survey were

¹⁹ Again, these reporting periods varied. However, they all ended in the period between December 2006 and May 2007.

²⁰ This is likely to be because these costs were absorbed into the other activities and venue costs of the organisation. That is, in order to provide food support the organisation utilises resources which are available because of its other functions.

²¹ However, this organisation also noted that it was rare for someone to go without a meal, even if volunteers had to open a can of baked beans.

affiliated to Christian organisations, and there was an expectation amongst some providers that those who were supplied with meals would participate in other aspects of the church community, such as service attendance.

In two cases there was evidence of innovation in terms of creating a sustainable funding base. The operation of small second-hand clothing businesses provided income that could be used to offset the costs of community meals (and possibly the provision of other social services as well). While these efforts are valuable, these businesses are still essentially reliant on community generosity in the form of donated goods. While tagged funding for community meal services had been obtained through community grants within some of the larger organisations, there was little evidence in the data that any of these programmes were widely supported by donations from the corporate or business sector. Resourcing was more likely to be derived from personal donations of money or food.

The data reflect the absolute reliance of community meal programmes on volunteerism - an element common to all providers. It is possible that the use of volunteer staff offsets the service costs of providing community meals to a larger extent than the other kinds of formal food support examined in this study. Service costs are also likely to be more easily absorbed into provider organisations that already have appropriate infrastructure in place (staffing, venue, equipment, and utilities) to cater for other core activities²².

The informality of the community meals – with their absence of bureaucratic assessment for eligibility and an emphasis on the sharing of food as an opportunity for social participation and community cohesion – may account for the popularity of these services. There is an apparent degree of ‘insider knowledge’ at work amongst recipients, as meals are held across six different venues, and at different times of the day²³. On average, the 491 meals provided

²² For example, a church is likely to have a working kitchen and furniture.

²³ Interestingly, the original source document for tracing community meal services in Hamilton was provided to the researcher by one of the Waikato District Health Board’s Community Mental Health clinics. The list is generally supplied as a service to DHB clients who are vulnerable to food insecurity or isolation in the community context, although the DHB itself does not fund any community meal services. There are parallels to be drawn here with Work and Income New

to members of the Hamilton community every week tended to be of a high calibre, and with a two or three course cooked meal as the standard unit of provision, community meals are certainly more than 'soup kitchens'. Even though they faced such high levels of demand, providers considered that their resourcing allowed them to meet this adequately, and that they were not in a position where implementation of eligibility criteria or extensive rationing was necessary.

Special Needs Grants for Food in Hamilton

Work and Income New Zealand is a division of the Ministry of Social Development. It has responsibility for benefit transfer payments, including food grants, under the auspices of a broader programme of Special Needs Grants. According to the statement prepared by the Ministry in response to the research questions submitted²⁴:

These grants are one-off recoverable or non-recoverable payments to assist people who are facing hardship to meet an immediate essential or emergency need. When a person applies for a Special Needs Grant, including for food, Work and Income will also assist them to manage their costs in the longer term, by ensuring that they are receiving their full and correct entitlement to the assistance available and referring the person to a budgeting service if appropriate.

In order to receive a Special Needs Grant a client must meet an income test and provide evidence that they have an essential need, emergency need or require payment for specific circumstances, and that they are unable to meet the cost from their own resources or through other sources. Additionally, they must be a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident (i.e. not be in New Zealand unlawfully or on a temporary permit), and be ordinarily resident in New Zealand.

Applicants do not have to be receiving a benefit to qualify for a Special Needs Grant. An applicant who meets all of the qualifications may be able to receive a food grant if they (or their family) have an immediate need to purchase food,

Zealand referring its clients to foodbanks, which similarly, receive no state funding.

²⁴ See Appendix 1.

have no resources to so, and would otherwise have to rely on a foodbank. Further, the need for food must have been caused by an essential expense.

More than one application for a food grant can be made during the course of a year, but unless there are exceptional circumstances, the total grants awarded during any 52 week period could not exceed the amounts shown in table 4.1²⁵.

Table 4.1. Maximum rates of entitlement to Special Needs Grant for Food per 52 week period (as at July 2007)

Household or Family Type	Maximum \$ available in a 52 week period
Single person with no dependent children	\$200
Married or civil union couple with no dependent children	\$300
Married/civil union couple/sole parent with 1 or 2 dependent children	\$450

It should be noted that the above amounts are not yearly entitlements: rather, they are used as a basis for calculation of the maximum amount which will be available at the time an application is received. Within this maximum, the actual amount provided per application “is based on each individual case, taking into account a client’s individual circumstances”²⁶.

Work and Income New Zealand has five service centres in Hamilton²⁷, and provided aggregate data across these with regard to Special Needs Grants, and more specifically, Special Needs Grants for Food. Table 4.2 (see following page) shows the total number and value of Special Needs Grants in the year ending March 2007, and includes the income type of the applicant. It also shows the number of applications for Special Needs Grants that were declined, although there is no indication within the data of the basis for these decisions.

²⁵ These were the current maximums in July 2007 when the data were collected. New rates of entitlement were applied in August of 2008. See also footnote 49.

²⁶ Peter Hughes (Chief Executive, Ministry of Social Development), personal communication, July 4, 2008. This quote is taken directly from the written response supplied by the Ministry of Social Development to answer the research questions.

²⁷ These are located in Hamilton City, Hamilton East, Five Cross Roads, Dinsdale and Glenview.

The data show that a total of 16,637 Special Needs Grants with a value of \$2,175,786 were approved in the 12 month period ending March 2007. Of those on benefits, applicants were most likely to be in receipt of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (6,546 instances with a value of \$829,951). A substantial number of grants were also received by those who were not in receipt of a benefit (2,706 valued at \$493,634). It should be remembered that this table addresses Special Needs Grants which cover a broad range of essential emergency needs. The following data, however, pays attention to Special Needs Grants that specifically address food.

**Table 4.2. Special Needs Grants in Hamilton by main income type
(year to March 2007)**

Income type	Number of SN Grants	\$ Amount	Number Declined
Domestic Purposes Benefit related ²⁸	6,546	829,951	382
Emergency Benefit	176	27,543	16
Invalid's Benefit	2,310	266,317	153
Independent Youth Benefit	59	5,330	3
Non Beneficiary Assistance	2,706	493,634	180
New Zealand Superannuation/Veteran's Pension	332	45,498	21
Orphan's Benefit/Unsupported Child's benefit	18	2,622	4
Sickness Benefit related ²⁹	2,138	235,208	177
Unemployment Benefit related	2,095	236,689	197
Unemployment Benefit - Training related ³⁰	181	23,688	23
Unemployment Benefit - Student Hardship	8	1,200	0
Widow's Benefit	68	8,106	5
Total	16,637	2,175,786	1,161

²⁸ Includes: Domestic Purposes Benefit– Sole Parent, Domestic Purposes Benefit – Caring of Sick or Infirm, Domestic Purposes Benefit - Woman Alone, and Emergency Maintenance Allowance.

²⁹ Includes: Unemployment Benefit and Unemployment Benefit Hardship.

³⁰ Includes: Unemployment Benefit Training, and Unemployment Benefit Training Hardship.

Table 4.3 below gives an indication of the demand for food support through Special Needs Grants for Food in Hamilton over a five year period. This data indicates a gradual but not insignificant increase in the level of demand across the Hamilton community over time. This increase was inconsistent with national trends, which saw the rate of food grant approval peak in the 2003/2004 period, but recede again by 2005/2006³¹.

Table 4.3. Special Needs Grants for Food approved in Hamilton in the five years ending June 2006

Year to June	Granted – Hamilton	Granted – Nationally ³²
2002	9,556	287,167
2003	10,296	295,243
2004	11,162	302,260
2005	11,974	299,739
2006	12,453	297,485

The data provided in table 4.4 (see following page) shows that almost three quarters (74.8 percent) of the Special Need Grants approved in Hamilton in the 12 months ending March 2007 were grants for food, with a total value of \$1,157,623. Work and Income New Zealand clients who were in receipt of a Domestic Purposes related benefit³³ accounted for 44 percent of approvals. The second highest rate of approval was for non beneficiaries (14 percent), closely followed in similar proportions by those in receipt of an Invalid's benefit (13 percent), an Unemployment related benefit (13 percent), or a Sickness benefit (12 percent).

³¹ Although the data cannot explain this anomaly it is useful to contextualise these results. Over the period 2001-2006 Hamilton City experienced a rate of population growth (12.6 percent) that was significantly higher than that found nationally (7.8 percent) (Statistics New Zealand, September 2007).

³² In order to produce this table data supplied at the local level was matched with national data provided in the Ministry of Social Development's *The Statistical Report: for the year ending June 2006* (Ministry of Social Development, 2007), p. 146.

³³ These are also known collectively as 'Carers' Benefits'.

Table 4.4. Number of approved and declined Special Needs Grants for Food in Hamilton in the year to March 2007 by main income type

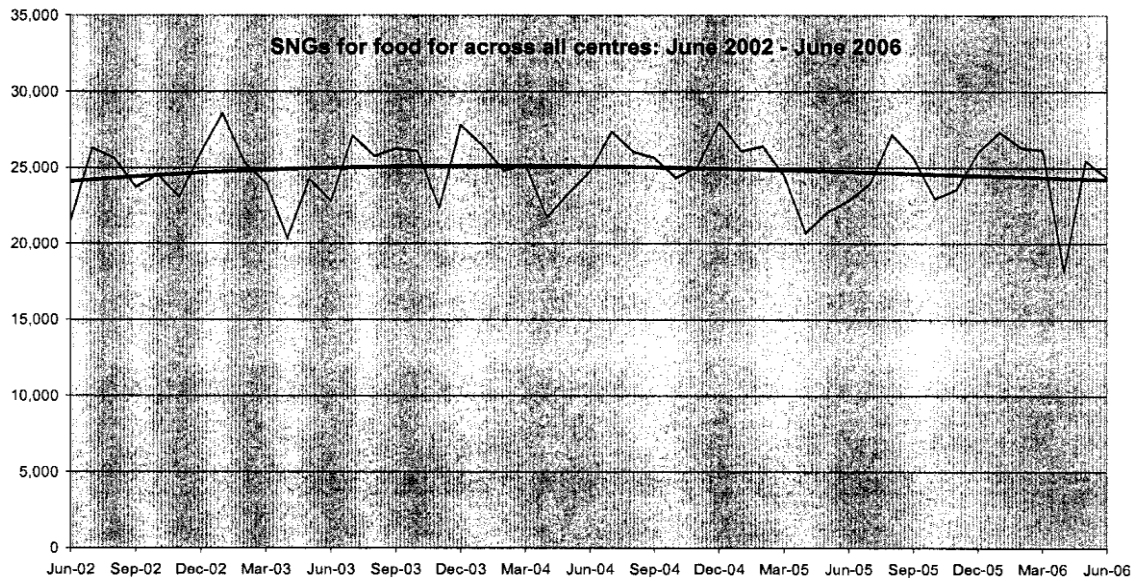
Benefit type	Number of SN Grants	\$ Amount	Number Declined
Domestic Purposes Benefit related ³⁴	5,481	568,731	227
Emergency Benefit	124	12,351	8
Invalid's Benefit	1,648	127,134	74
Independent Youth Benefit	48	3,250	0
Non Beneficiary Assistance	1,738	175,030	95
New Zealand Superannuation/Veteran's Pension	224	18,828	10
Orphan's Benefit/Unsupported Child's benefit	15	2,150	1
Sickness Benefit related ³⁵	1,494	117,292	107
Unemployment Benefit related	1,504	119,186	117
Unemployment Benefit - Training related ³⁶	104	8,215	8
Unemployment Benefit - Student Hardship	6	610	0
Widow's Benefit	52	4,847	0
Total	12,438	1,157,623	647

³⁴ Supra footnote 28

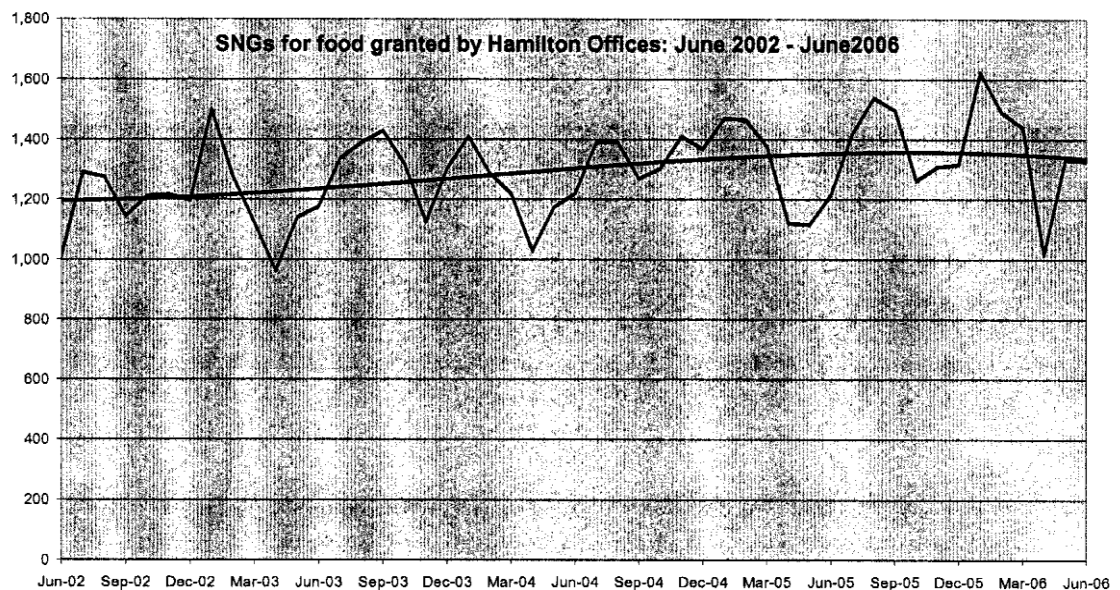
³⁵ Supra footnote 29

³⁶ Supra footnote 30

**Figure 4.1. Monthly time series for Food Grants in New Zealand,
June 2002 – June 2006³⁷**



**Figure 4.2. Monthly time series for Food Grants in Hamilton,
June 2002 – June 2006**



³⁷ While the image quality of these figures leaves much to be desired, they have been taken directly from the electronic source provided by Work and Income New Zealand as an official response to the research questions submitted.

According to the data supplied by MSD in response to the research questions about longitudinal trends in food grant use:

There is considerable volatility in counts of Special Needs Grants for food both for Hamilton and across the whole country. Trends over time can be heavily influenced by the particular time periods chosen and seasonal and local events.

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 (see previous page) show monthly series data for national and local food grant approvals. Longitudinally, the demand for food grants in Hamilton tended to mirror national trends. Further, there is evidence of seasonal trends over the four years reported with the number of food grants approved peaking regularly in January each year, and reaching regular annual lows in the month of April. Demand in Hamilton reached a four year high in January 2006, with just over 1,600 approvals, but had receded again by April to just over 1,000.

Discussion of Special Needs Grant for Food findings

The data provided by the Ministry of Social Development confirms that Work and Income New Zealand encourage clients to take responsibility for managing their financial situation effectively, and offers information to assist them in doing so. While Special Needs Grants provide short term non-recoverable assistance to meet a range of essential costs, including food, Work and Income New Zealand “also helps clients to meet these costs in the longer term”.

When a person approaches Work and Income for assistance with costs, the first step is to ensure they are receiving their full and correct entitlement to the appropriate financial assistance. We will talk to the client about the current circumstances for them and their family (if relevant) to determine whether the client is in financial hardship, needs budgeting advice, or has any other personal or family issues such as illness. It is important that we understand why the client cannot meet these costs, so we can provide the most appropriate form of assistance.

On the basis of income source, the client profiles of those who had utilised Special Needs Grants for Food in the year to March 2007 are well aligned with those of local foodbank users (as assessed by the Hamilton Combined Christian Foodbank

in NZCCSS, 2005). Beneficiaries form the main group of service users for both Special Needs Grant for Food and foodbanks, and within this sole parents account for just under half of all applicants. Given this similarity, it is worth considering that provision of “the most appropriate form assistance”, as referred to in the statement above, may not exclude being referred to the philanthropic aid administered by foodbanks once a client’s entitlement to the state funded Special Needs Grant for Food has been exhausted.

Quasi-formal food support

A number of modes of formal support that were not strictly foodbanks, community meals or food grants, were identified in the survey data. With five out of the nine participating organisations reporting that they provided ‘other’ food support, the frequency with which these anomalies occurred warrants further explanation, particularly in terms of describing the nature of these ‘quasi-formal’ responses.

One agency reported that it had been able to supply up to five sacks per day of bread that had been donated by a bakery since 1999^{38,39}. Any excesses to the requirements of the agency’s clients were forwarded to other community based social service agencies for distribution.

Maintaining a ‘community food cupboard’ was another measure reported. Although the agency that identified this form of response participated in the foodbank collective and provided a community meal, the tradition out of which foodbanks emerged has persisted in a manner that allows the organisation to answer any requests for food assistance that fall outside the dimensions of other service types in terms of urgency or eligibility assessments.

³⁸ As noted in Chapter 3, this bakery had closed during the year leading up to the survey, and as a result, the breadbank also ceased. The closure of this service, due to the loss of the sole sponsor, illustrates the fragility of the resourcing environment in which most provider organisations operate, and highlights some of the advantages of securing resources or funding in multiple ways.

³⁹ This organisation was able to supply data relating to the cost of overheads up until the breadbank’s closure. As the data fell within the period of the survey it has been included in the calculations in table 4.5, which summarises the quantity and estimated costs of formal food support activities in Hamilton for the 2006-2007 year.

Another service that was identified was the provision of ready-made frozen meals, with delivery if required. Although there is a cost associated with these, they are a useful resource for those whose food security is compromised by mobility resulting in a lack of access to normal means of food acquisition, and perhaps for those of limited means in terms of food preparation skills and access to adequate cooking facilities. These meals place an emphasis on health and nutrition – a function that does not appear to be paramount in other forms of formal food support.

One agency reported providing individualised parcels of non-perishable food in special cases where a person in need fell ‘outside of systems’⁴⁰, and may have difficulty in confirming their eligibility for assistance in other settings.

Finally, one agency that had been included on the basis of providing community meals also reported a number of other ways in which it responded to emergency requests for food support. These included providing food aid at any time in the form of food parcels (on an irregular basis⁴¹), limited financial assistance and vouchers for food, and delivery of meals to families in need through illness or other difficulties.

Discussion of quasi-formal food support

The identification of these unanticipated ‘other’ forms of food support in the survey sample demonstrates a good degree of reflexivity amongst service providers and highlights the fact that there is no ‘one size fits all’ community response to food insecurity. While some of the quasi-formal services border on the informal with only vague record keeping and no tagged funding, many agencies retain the capacity to respond in instances where more formal support is inappropriate or unachievable. Outside of these agencies, much of this kind of ‘other’ food support is unaccounted for, although inquiries with community

⁴⁰ Most often this means that the person has no fixed abode, non-confirmed residency status, or is living ‘below the radar’. In such cases an individual would have difficulty accessing assistance through Work and Income New Zealand.

⁴¹ This agency is not part of the foodbank collective, and due to the irregularity of demand and supply (about 40 parcels per year) has not been included in the analysis of foodbanks *per se*.

organisations which preceded this research confirm that quasi-formal responses to food insecurity are certainly not uncommon in Hamilton.

For those who require assistance but are alienated by having to participate in bureaucratic assessments that seek to quantify the status of their need, these alternatives for having those needs met provide an important safety net. The lack of regulation around evidencing eligibility allows agencies to respond to situations of need with a degree of spontaneity that would otherwise be lacking.

Discussion of survey findings

The summary of results in table 4.5 (see following page) shows the quantity of food support delivered, the estimated value of food supplied, and total service provision costs⁴² for formal food support in Hamilton⁴³ over a one year period between 2006 and 2007. Given that *every* organisation that provided formal food support made data available with regard to quantity of provision, it is accurate to conclude that the aggregate figures denoting quantity are a reliable reflection of *satisfied demand* in alleviating food insecurity in the short term. Other than the data supplied by the Ministry of Social Development which indicate the number of applications for food grants that were declined (647 in the year ending March 2007), there is no way of measuring how many instances of *unsatisfied demand* also existed in the community over this period.

Further, the survey data provide an informed basis for supporting the claim that in the 2006/2007 year the prevalence of food insecurity in the Hamilton community was at such a level that formal food support services provided food with an *estimated total value* of \$1,306,670⁴⁴. Given that the data did not consistently reflect the value of donated food and voluntary labour across the entire sector, it is likely that these dollar estimates are conservative.

⁴² In the case of foodbanks this cost is an informed estimate only, based on the costs of the food delivered that were reported by the foodbank collective. On the assumption that the food parcels supplied by the other significant foodbank in Hamilton are for a similar level of provision, an extrapolated cost has been applied to calculate the figure.

⁴³ The periods that agencies collected data across differed according to their internal reporting requirements, but all ended in the first half of 2007.

⁴⁴ This figure includes the estimated total value of food and *does not include* estimations for the cost of service provision in the form of overheads.

Table 4.5. Summary of Results – annualised quantity and value of formal food support in Hamilton 2006/2007 ⁴⁵

Formal Food Support	Quantity of support annually	Annual value of food	Annualised total cost of provision ⁴⁶	Voluntary labour input	Funding Source(s)	Funding constrained	Assessment of client eligibility
Foodbanks	4,232 food parcels to feed a household for three days	\$111,967 (estimated – includes estimated value of donated food)	\$207,839 (estimated)	Yes	Philanthropic	Yes	Verification from WINZ that SNG for food has been fully utilised in all instances. Verification from WINZ that benefit entitlement is correct in some instances. Needs assessment by social worker in some instances and referral to other in-house support services. Referral to Budget Advice Services after presenting twice over a six month period.
Community Meals	25,557 meals	\$37,080 (estimated - excludes value of donations)	Data inadequate to estimate	Yes	Philanthropic	Yes	No formal assessment of need for food support. Expectation of participation in religious observation in some instances, but not compulsory.
Special Needs Grant for Food	12,438 SNGs for Food (approved)	\$1,157,623 (actual)	Not reported	No	State	Yes ⁴⁷	Assessment of entitlement and verification of unusual or emergency expense which has left applicant with no money to obtain food required. Referral to foodbank if full entitlement has been used.

⁴⁵ The results for quasi-provision have been excluded as these were unclear in the data, both in the quantity of provision and in associated costs. The costs of delivery for the provider that supplied a breadbank have been included with the figures under the foodbanks category (see footnote 39).

⁴⁶ Including the cost of purchased food, the estimated value of donated food, paid labour and overhead costs, but excluding value of donated labour.

⁴⁷ Work and Income data confirmed that in the year ending March 2007, 647 applications for SNG for Food were declined in Hamilton. There are two primary reasons that clients may be declined – they either fail to satisfy the eligibility criteria by not providing evidence of a cost that has left them with insufficient money for food, or they have already used up their entitlement for the 52 week period, in which case they can be assessed for eligibility through a foodbank.

It is problematic that much of the stock that community organisations redistribute as food support is donated and therefore not attributed a financial value in record keeping. Likewise, there is a strong reliance on voluntary labour amongst community organisations, the value of which goes unrecorded. Of the nine community organisations surveyed, only three had paid staff members to coordinate their food support services, and only one of these held a dedicated position, with the balance of the required labour sourced via volunteer workers. Additionally, there is no way of accounting for labour costs for Work and Income staff or other paid staff that work as part of a larger organisation, but who are directly involved in providing front line food support.

The results show that Work and Income Special Needs Grant for Food was the largest source of formal food support for Hamilton, with more than 12,000 food grants approved over the reporting period. There are limitations in using this figure as an assessment of food insecurity because Work and Income New Zealand will generally only grant approval for the amount that a client can prove has been spent on another essential expense on each occasion, and clients typically have to make multiple applications to access their entitlement until it is used up, at which point they generally become eligible for assistance through a foodbank.

At the other end of the provision spectrum, an unanticipated result was the number of 'quasi formal' responses to food insecurity provided by organisations that also offered formal responses. Although these have been explored in the results section to highlight their diversity and reflexivity, these services are by nature erratic and largely unrecorded. As such, the data supplied in the survey was generally descriptive and not considered robust enough for this category of provision to merit further analysis at this point.

Another of the surprising outcomes of this research was the number of community meals provided in Hamilton – averaging almost 500 per week. The term itself seems to carry different meanings in various international contexts, and there is a dearth of

reference within both the New Zealand and international literature as to the specific role of these services in terms of alleviating food insecurity. While part of their function is certainly social, the absence of any form of eligibility testing may make these meals appealing to members of the community who have few resources for obtaining informal food assistance through normal social networks⁴⁸. Community meals may also hold appeal for those who are ineligible for state assistance or who are not in a situation where they are able to interact with Work and Income New Zealand favourably (for instance, where a person does not have a residential address). Whatever the reason, these meals are certainly well utilised by members of the Hamilton community, and although good data are available to indicate levels of demand, the organisations that provide them do so with no state funding.

The relationship between state funded food aid and community based food support is tenuous in that once an applicant has used up their entitlement through the state apparatus, the only other means of formal support available is via charity based organisations, the vast majority of which are the social service arms of faith-based organisations. Churches have long played a part in cultivating charitable and humanist values within communities, and while this observation is by no means a criticism, the dominance of services with such an ethos in the provision of food support may to some extent enable other organisations (particularly those maintained by the state) to abdicate or evade responsibility for service provision. Without exception, the third sector organisations that provide food support in Hamilton receive no state funding and are entirely dependent upon fundraising endeavours and community philanthropy for donations of cash or food. Hamilton's two major foodbanks both report that the quantity and quality of the provisions that they are able to make are compromised by a lack of resources, and half of community meal providers also confirm that their levels of provision are similarly limited.

⁴⁸ The idea that community meals provided an alternative source of support for those without family or social networks is explored further in the qualitative aspect of this research. See Chapter 7.

The obvious demand within the community for formal responses to food insecurity over and above programmes of state assistance raises questions about whether or not the measures implemented by the state are adequate or appropriate. Further, given the state's obligations under international accords guaranteeing the right of citizens to food, it is cause for concern that organisations that are resourced by philanthropy and volunteerism are expected to meet shortfalls in the levels of state provision as part of the normal way in which this right should be achieved. While the term 'adequacy' is subjective, and each country that signs an accord is expected to provide within its means, New Zealand policy makers appear to have paid scant attention to how adequacy has been impacted by changes in the cost of food over time: at the time of the survey the maximum rates of entitlement to Special Needs Grants for Food had not been adjusted since 1994⁴⁹. An analysis of the survey results points to findings which are consistent with those of McPherson (2006), whose study of foodbank use in Christchurch concluded that:

Foodbanks are not a sustainable solution to the problem of food security in the community. In order to eliminate food insecurity, the people in the community who experience poverty, deprivation and food insecurity must be actively identified and assisted in sustainable and empowering ways. The voluntary welfare sector alone cannot tackle the problem and symptoms of poverty, and state involvement necessitates a shift in priorities and direction (p. 97).

While limitations in using the results of the data to estimate the prevalence of food insecurity in the community are acknowledged, measuring the demand for food support services adds credence to the position of this thesis that food insecurity is a very real issue for many people despite its relative invisibility in policy terms. The continuing presence of formal food support services in the Hamilton community is

⁴⁹ In the months following the survey the time frame over which the total grant amount could be accessed was halved, effectively doubling entitlements (Ministry of Social Development, 2008). Anecdotally, this was in response to the significant increases in food prices that had been observed worldwide, and the increasing number of applicants who were using up their entitlement over shorter periods of time – placing a corresponding pressure on community providers.

both necessary and concerning. Necessity is demonstrated by the levels of demand for services. Concern is warranted by the fact that many of the services that participated in this research reported that they are struggling to meet demand at current levels. It is further warranted because the demand trend for food support services in Hamilton appears to be heading in an upward direction, compared with decreases in the national trend line. It is likely that Hamilton's rapidly growing, comparatively youthful population (with a higher than average proportion of people with low incomes) are some of the factors underpinning this. Further, increases in the cost of food and local housing are borne disproportionately by those on low incomes, and are also likely to influence the patterns observed.

The strength of this phase of the research has been its ability to collate summary evidence of the demand for food support *across* Hamilton's formal food support sector. This type of approach is required if community based providers are to make a case with regard to the inadequacies of state provision, and the research has highlighted a number of short comings within the available data that will need to be resolved in order for such arguments to gain political currency. Rather than the micro-reporting that currently exists, there is a pressing need for the development of agreed uniform data collection across all food support services (including those that were excluded from this survey on the basis of an absence of data) to better represent current and longitudinal levels of provision in the future. Further, it is imperative that local services commence collecting data that realistically represent the costs involved in delivering food assistance. This includes accounting for donated food and voluntary labour. Undertaking such data collection could contribute to better monitoring of broader policy impacts on food insecurity, and at the very least, could provide powerful leverage in politicising the issue of food insecurity in the eyes of funding bodies and policy makers.

Talking With Their Mouths Half Full

One of the objectives of this thesis has been to conduct an examination of food insecurity that includes an experiential dimension. This chapter introduces each member of a sample of respondents from the Hamilton community with a view to addressing questions (see Chapter 2) about the micro level social and economic factors that contribute to contemporary experiences of food insecurity. Respondents accounts confirm the findings of the literature review: that food insecurity in affluent nations is primarily caused by inadequate income (see for example: Else, 2000; and Nord, Andrews & Carlson, 2009). However, a number of 'shocks' that can act as causative factors are also identified.

The qualitative data that inform this aspect of the research was obtained through in-depth interviews with ten respondents from nine households¹. Other than residing in Hamilton City and having accessed a formal food support service of some kind over the 12 month period prior to recruitment, respondents were not selected on the basis of any other criteria such as gender, household composition or ethnicity. As a result, there was considerable variation in their personal attributes, circumstances, and in their experiences of food insecurity. As a group, the respondents consisted of seven men and three women, with ages ranging from 32 to 56 years. Six of the ten respondents identified as Māori, with the remainder identifying as New Zealand European or Pakeha. Five respondents had dependent children in their care, and three were sole parents².

¹ One household provided two respondents – a married couple who wished to participate in the research in a joint interview.

² Although a direct examination of food insecurity in children fell outside the scope of this study, parents' accounts denote the dual challenges of ensuring a food supply for both themselves and their children in the circumstance of low income.

As the purpose of this research is to examine the experience of food insecurity at an intimate level, it is appropriate to introduce and profile the participants as individuals in their own right initially, rather than as a collective 'sample'. In order to achieve this, a series of summary tables follows, accompanied by a fuller description based on the researcher's impressions about each respondent³. Because this aspect of the research was essentially qualitative, the data in each table varies according to what each person shared in their interview and accordingly, the categories reported differ slightly across respondents. For example, while a limited number required no prompting in declaring their 'in the hand' income, others were more cautious. All of the respondents had been in receipt of a social security benefit and were therefore questioned about their income and expenditure by Work and Income New Zealand with some regularity. The research has purposely adopted a less invasive approach around detailing aspects of personal income and expenditure and only asked respondents to identify their benefit type and an annual income bracket (from a list) which they believed most accurately described their situation. A similar approach was taken with expenditure, so while respondents were asked to outline their outgoings and may have volunteered amounts to support this, amounts were not specifically requested. The only exception to this was a direct question that asked them to specify the amount of money they had left each week, after paying their fixed expenses, with which they could buy food.

On the basis of the data, reasonable standardisation has been achieved across most of the variables used in the 'people profiles' that follow. In the interests of demonstrating consistency and specificity, table 5.1 defines the parameters of particular variables where there is some potential that these could be open to interpretation.

³ The basis for these descriptions has been drawn from reflective field notes that were made by the researcher immediately after each interview.

Table 5.1.Key for interpreting ‘people profile’ variables

Variable	Parameters
Self identified income	Refers to the income that was volunteered by respondents without direct questioning. Unless noted, this amount refers to the respondent’s ‘in the hand’ income after any enforceable deductions such as WINZ debts, fines or Housing New Zealand rents. All figures are retrospective in NZ\$2007.
Self assessed annual income	Refers to respondents’ identification of an income bracket from a list (in \$5000 increments) where they were asked directly to identify which bracket they believed best described their annual net income.
Private debts	Refers to credit arrangements that respondents had entered into with private organisations. Examples include personal loans from finance companies or private individuals, credit card payments and hire purchase agreements.
Other enforceable payments	Refers to debts that can be deducted from a person’s income directly by statutory authority – such as child support payments, debt repayments to Work and Income New Zealand, or court imposed fines.
Self assessed disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	Identifies the answer to a direct question, which was “After the expenses you have just told me about, how much money do you have left over each week with which you can buy food?”
Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at Basic level	Refers to the <i>Estimated Family Food Costs</i> guidelines for Hamilton in 2007. These are calculated annually for five of New Zealand’s main centres by the University of Otago’s Department of Human Nutrition and are based on the cost of meeting the New Zealand Food and Nutrition Guidelines for one week (Department of Human Nutrition, 2009) . The <i>Basic</i> cost category reported here assumes that all foods will be prepared at home, and includes the most commonly consumed fruits and vegetables and the lowest priced in items within a range of food categories. Calculations have taken into account how many people respondents were responsible for feeding based on the following weekly cost to feed each person at the basic level: Man - \$50, Woman - \$47, Adolescent Boy - \$62, Adolescent Girl - \$52, 10yr old - \$40, 5yr old – \$27, 4yr old - \$25, 1 yr old - \$23.
Household food security scale ranking	Determined on the basis of responses to the <i>Standard 6-Item Indicator set for Classifying Households by Food Security Status Level</i> . A discussion of this instrument is included in Chapter 3.

People Profiles

Introducing Kerry

I've always managed up until now, and the food grant has certainly been a blessing. And just paying the other bills as well – just keeping on top of the whole thing. And sometimes I just won't buy as much food or something.

I met with 34 year-old Kerry in her rented home in Hamilton's eastern suburbs. We talked easily at her kitchen table about her interest in food, her experiences of food insecurity, and her curiosity about the research process. As an undergraduate university student, but also the sole parent of two young children, the Domestic Purposes benefit was her main source of income. Her weekly income fluctuated depending on the amount of supplementary assistance she received to offset the costs of her studies. She also undertook casual part time work in the horticulture sector. Her food security ranked as low, and she estimated that she had around \$100 a week left over after fixed expenses. Kerry had utilised formal food support services by way of a food grant when high electricity bills had whittled away any leeway in her budget.

Kerry appeared to have extensive social networks and the support she gained through these had mitigated her need to interact with formal services with any great frequency. Her ex-partner was an active presence in both her life and his children's, and made minor contributions to the household resources. She spoke of longstanding relationships with neighbours who she was able to borrow occasional staple ingredients from, and described a tight-knit extended family that valued collective preparation and sharing of food.

Following the interview, Kerry showed me the beginnings of a small garden that she was cultivating to provide herbs and salad ingredients over the summer. The property was also host to established fruit trees that she reported making good use of. Kerry was kind enough to give me a water melon plant as a parting gift – one of many that she and a friend had cultivated from seed. She remained

buoyant throughout the interview, exhibiting obvious motivation with regard to improving outcomes for herself and her family over the longer term.

Table 5.2. Kerry

DEMOGRAPHIC	
Gender	Female
Age	34
Ethnicity	Māori
Main occupational status	Student
Household composition	Single person with two dependent children aged 6 and 4
INCOME IN PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS	
Main source of income in previous 12 months	Domestic Purposes benefit
Secondary income from other sources	Regular casual part time work
Self identified income	\$520 to \$600 per week
Self assessed annual income	\$20,000 -\$25,000
HEALTH STATUS	
In receipt of a Disability Allowance	No
ACCOMMODATION COSTS	
Accommodation type	Private rental
Weekly cost	\$230
EXPENSES	
Private debts	No
WINZ debt	Yes
Other enforceable payments	No
Transport	own car
Communications	Landline, mobile, internet
Other	Childcare and OSCAR
FOOD SECURITY	
Self assessed disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	\$100
Number of people to feed	1 woman, child (6), child (4)
Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at Basic level	\$99
Household food security scale ranking	Low (2/6)
Services used in previous 12 months	Special Needs Grant for Food

Introducing Daryl and Liz

We were on the edge of being evicted and we're thanking God that these different service providers are there and that they have helped us get through that hurdle and that we don't have to go down that path of homelessness with the three kids. (Daryl)

It's humbling. It's just really humbling. (Liz)

Liz and Daryl were a recently married couple who requested the opportunity to undertake a joint interview. We met at their modest home on a tiny suburban section. Liz and Daryl's marriage had had serious implications for the household finances because the rates of benefit for a couple were lower than those for two individuals, and their combined income had reduced by around \$200 a week. In the time leading up to the interview they had almost lost their house after defaulting on mortgage repayments. Meeting the expenses of a family of five was not easy on the \$100 a week that was left over after fixed expenses had been paid, and their food security ranked as very low. As a full time student, Daryl's Student Allowance was the family's main form of income, and Liz referred to a notebook that she carefully maintained each day with details of their income and expenditure.

Liz and Daryl both had strong Christian values and these assisted them in coping with the issue of food insecurity. However, they also spoke extensively of the tensions that not having enough food created within their family relationships. Liz's repertoire of skills in food preparation could only stretch resources so far, and having used all of their food grant entitlement, the family was now regularly accessing foodbanks. This support was sought in secrecy: Liz was worried about her two older children finding out and informing her ex-husband. When these children were staying with their father, Liz and Daryl, along with their younger child, attended community meals. These were occasions that they looked forward to enormously, both as food support and as social occasions.

Table 5.3. Daryl and Liz

DEMOGRAPHIC	
Gender	Daryl = male, Liz = female
Age	Daryl = 38, Liz = 35
Ethnicity	Both identified as NZ European/Pakeha
Main occupational status	Daryl = student, Liz = beneficiary
Household composition	Married couple with three dependent children, aged 11, 13 ³ and 3
INCOME IN PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS	
Main source of income in previous 12 months	Student Allowance and DPB
Secondary income from other sources	Daryl had limited casual work
Self assessed annual income	\$20,000 - \$25,000 (combined)
HEALTH STATUS	
In receipt of a Disability Allowance	No
ACCOMMODATION COSTS	
Accommodation type	Own home with a mortgage
Weekly cost	\$255 (including rates and insurance)
EXPENSES	
Debts	Hire Purchase (heating system)
WINZ debt	No
Other enforceable payments	Child support offset in place
Transport	Own car/children's bus fares
Communications	Landline
FOOD SECURITY	
Self assessed disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	\$100
Number of people to feed	Man, woman, 2 adolescent girls, child (3)
Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at Basic level	\$214 ⁴
Household food security scale ranking	Very low (6/6)
Services used in previous 12 months	Community meals, Foodbank, Special Needs Grant for Food

³ The two older children were in a shared care arrangement and spent time in both Liz and Daryl's household, and their father's household.

⁴ By halving the contribution of the estimated weekly food cost for the two older children who were in shared care this figure is reduced to \$168 – still significantly more than the self assessed disposable income after fixed expenses (excluding food) each week.

Introducing Christina

We cope. We just get on with it. We don't get into the 'poor me's'

Thirty-eight-year-old Christina identified as being of Māori ethnicity and shared a comfortable central city rental with her adult nephew, with whom she split the costs of rent and utilities. The two also shared the cost of shopping for a fixed range of staple foods in the weeks that Christina could afford to, but they each covered their own food expenses independently beyond this. The amount of money that Christina had left over after her fixed expenses each week varied between nothing at all and \$100, and her overall food security ranked as low. At the time I met with her, her main source of income during the previous year had been derived from a Student Allowance. However, in the year prior to that, her marriage had ended and she had given up full time employment in the corporate sector in order to retrain in a new professional field. She had recently suffered a back injury and was receiving a Sickness benefit over the university study break. These three events in combination constituted a significant change of income and lifestyle for her. She was able to supplement her benefit income from time to time with casual contract work, but only as the opportunity arose. Further, she was now limited in the forms of work that she could take on due to her injury. In the 12 month period prior to the interview she had accessed assistance via both the Special Needs Grant for Food and foodbanks.

Christina expressed a strong sense of personal responsibility around her current situation throughout her interview, and had implemented a range of strategies to which she adhered firmly. With a background as a professional chef, she had an excellent understanding of nutrition and food preparation.

Although she was not one of the more extreme cases I saw during the interview series, she provided some excellent comments on the impacts of food insecurity and the limits she felt this placed on her ability to extend hospitality in her home.

Table 5.4. Christina

DEMOGRAPHIC	
Gender	Female
Age	38
Ethnicity	Māori
Main occupational status	Student
Household composition	Single person living with one other adult
INCOME IN PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS	
Main source of income in previous 12 months	Student Allowance/Sickness benefit
Secondary income from other sources	Casual contract work
Self assessed annual income	\$10-15,000
HEALTH STATUS	
In receipt of a Disability Allowance	Yes
ACCOMMODATION COSTS	
Accommodation type	Private rental
Weekly cost	\$120
EXPENSES	
Debts	Hire Purchases (furniture)
WINZ debt	Yes
Other enforceable payments	No
Transport	own car
Communications	Mobile
FOOD SECURITY	
Self assessed disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	Approx. \$50
Number of people to feed	1 woman
Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at Basic level	\$47
Household food security scale ranking	low (3/6)
Services used in previous 12 months	Special Needs Grant for Food, Foodbank

Introducing Sandy

Today I'm fasting, because I know there's not much food in the cupboards, so I'll fast all today and just take fluids. And I've done that twice this week [interview was on a Friday].

Sandy was a bright 39 year old Māori woman, who I was finally able to interview after several failed attempts to meet. She made me welcome in the meticulous privately rented home that she had occupied for several years. A university graduate with an obvious talent for making the most of what she had, Sandy had left full time employment in order to undertake more concentrated parenting of her primary school aged son. As such, the Domestic Purposes benefit was her main form of income. After her fixed expenses, she had \$45 a week left over to cover any additional costs, including food, and her household food security ranked as very low. Sandy was notably lean in stature, and on the day I met with her she was undertaking what she referred to as 'fasting' – a practice that she engaged in several times a week in order to make sure that the food resources in the household would last.

Sandy had been a young mother with her first child (non-resident at the time of the interview) and referred to this experience as one that had initiated her acquisition of a versatile range of life skills that assisted her in managing food insecurity. She reported that she had close support from her parents and friends, but that pride and a desire to maintain her independence often hindered her from seeking help through these informal supports. In preference, she had had service interactions with both Work and Income (via Special Needs Grant for Food) and foodbanks in the previous year.

Sandy was in the process of establishing a part time home based business to try and improve her income stream. She was the first respondent that I interviewed who highlighted a spiritual dimension to the experience of food insecurity, and her account was responsible for alerting me to this theme in subsequent interviews.

Table 5.5. Sandy

DEMOGRAPHIC	
Gender	Female
Age	38
Ethnicity	Māori
Main occupational status	Beneficiary
Household composition	Single person with one dependent child (10)
INCOME IN PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS	
Main source of income in previous 12 months	Domestic Purposes benefit
Secondary income from other sources	None
Self assessed income	Approx \$360 per week
Self assessed annual income	\$15,000 - \$20,000
HEALTH STATUS	
In receipt of a Disability Allowance	No
ACCOMMODATION COSTS	
Accommodation type	Private rental
Weekly cost	\$260
EXPENSES	
Debts	Hire Purchases (white ware) personal loan (car)
WINZ debt	Yes
Other enforceable payments	No
Transport	Own car
Communications	Mobile, landline
FOOD SECURITY	
Self assessed disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	\$45
Number of people to feed	1 woman, 1 child (10)
Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at Basic level	\$87
Household food security scale ranking	Very low (6/6)
Services used in previous 12 months	Special Needs Grant for Food, Foodbank

Introducing Sheryl

I keep the food thing pretty much to myself really. I mean, you don't exactly want to run out and tell the world that you've just been down the WINZ office or the foodbank again, eh?

Sheryl was a 32-year-old Pakeha woman who lived with her school aged son and a paying boarder in an inner city rental. The amount of money that she had left over each week after fixed expenses was \$130. Despite this, the household's food security still rated as very low. She had accessed both food grants and foodbanks over the past year, usually because housing and utilities costs had been higher than anticipated, leaving insufficient money for food.

Sheryl's main source of income was from the Domestic Purposes benefit and she regarded herself as having a good knowledge about her entitlements through the social security system. Unlike many of the other respondents, she expressed a fair amount of animosity towards Work and Income New Zealand that appeared to stem from difficulties that she had had in accessing assistance over and above her core benefit, and her belief that she had been unfairly treated at times. She displayed no indication of any motivation to adapt her expectations or behaviours to improve her circumstances, and was extremely guarded in her references to the other people in her household, even on prompting. As such, Sheryl offered a fairly simple description of her situation and it was difficult to engage her in any deeper analysis.

Although the interview had suited her purposes as a forum in which she could safely be disparaging about Work and Income New Zealand and advocate for improvements to the way in which they administer their services, her commentary did identify a number of issues relating to limitations on people's choices about how they eat and personal shifts around the acceptability of practices to obtain food as a result of low income.

Table 5.6. Sheryl

DEMOGRAPHIC	
Gender	Female
Age	32
Ethnicity	NZ European/Pakeha
Main occupational status	Beneficiary
Household composition	Single person with dependent child (10) living with one other adult
INCOME IN PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS	
Main source of income in previous 12 months	Domestic Purposes benefit
Secondary income from other sources	Board received
Self identified weekly income	\$470 per week (declared)
Self assessed annual income	\$20,000 - \$25,000
HEALTH STATUS	
In receipt of a Disability Allowance	Yes
ACCOMMODATION COSTS	
Accommodation type	Private rental
Weekly cost	\$250
EXPENSES	
Debts	Personal loan
WINZ debt	No
Other enforceable payments	No
Transport	No car
Communications	Mobile
FOOD SECURITY	
Self assessed disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	\$130
Number of people to feed	1 man ⁵ , 1 woman, 1 child (10)
Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at Basic level	\$137
Household food security scale ranking	Very low (6/6)
Services used in previous 12 months	Special Needs Grant for Food

⁵ Sheryl also covered the food costs of the boarder that was living in her household.

Introducing Faye

Well, I always feel that there's someone worse off than me. Someone with kids and that, you know? I suppose too it's a pride thing. It used to be a pride thing, but I've got past that stage...

Faye was studying towards a Master's degree when I met with her in my university office. Confined to a wheelchair, her main source of income was an Invalid's benefit, and she incurred a variety of expenses in relation to her health condition that were not fully offset by the level of Disability Allowance she received. Faye had about \$65 a week left after her fixed expenses, but this money had to cover the unsubsidised part of the cost of the taxis she depended on for transport, as well as additional costs incurred as a result of her disability above those subsidised by the maximum allowance. These costs regularly cut into her disposable income, and overall her food security ranked as very low.

Faye lived independently in a modified Housing New Zealand dwelling, and was supported by one of her proximate adult children. Her younger grandchildren also visited regularly, and a paid caregiver assisted with shopping and daily meal preparation. Her most recent interactions with formal food support occurred after her refrigerator had failed, spoiling her existing food supplies. In this instance she was able to utilise a food grant, but she also spoke extensively of the food insecurity she had experienced in the past - particularly as a young mother, and later as a sole parent.

Faye struck me as a mature and assertive woman with an excellent variety of well established skills and strategies for addressing food insecurity that had been consolidated over many years. However, I was also left with the clear impression that she harboured a degree of bitterness about her circumstances, and the lack of independence that life on a benefit afforded her – at age 55 the permanence of her situation differed markedly from many of the other research respondents who viewed their own experiences of food insecurity as being transitory.

Table 5.7. Faye

DEMOGRAPHIC	
Gender	Female
Age	55
Ethnicity	NZ European/Pakeha
Main occupational status	Student
Household composition	Single person living alone
INCOME IN PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS	
Main source of income in previous 12 months	Invalids benefit
Secondary income from other sources	None
Self assessed annual income	\$10,000 - \$15,000
Self identified income	\$11,500-\$12,000
HEALTH STATUS	
In receipt of a Disability Allowance	Yes
Self identified health associated costs	Doctors visits, medication, medical alarm/landline, dietary, transport, heating
ACCOMMODATION COSTS	
Accommodation type	HNZ tenant
Weekly cost	Capped at 25% of income
EXPENSES	
Debts	Hire Purchase (vacuum cleaner)
WINZ debt	No
Other enforceable payments	No
Transport	Subsidised taxis
Communications	Landline, mobile
FOOD SECURITY	
Self assessed disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	\$65
Number of people to feed	1 woman
Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at Basic level	\$47 ⁶
Household food security scale ranking	Very low (6/6)
Services used in previous 12 months	Special Needs Grant for Food

⁶ It is likely that Faye's food costs were higher than the *Basic* level calculated here, as she had special dietary requirements related to a health condition that excluded dairy and gluten products.

Introducing Wayne

It's normal for me to just have one meal a day. That's my reality and I'm happy with that.

Once I got past Wayne's appearance, he was a real character. A heavily pierced and tattooed Māori man in his early fifties, he had just come out of hospital after undergoing a hip replacement operation when I met with him in his Housing New Zealand bedsit flat. His recent service interactions were with a foodbank and Work and Income for a food grant, and due to his health status he was having a daily meal delivered to him by Meals on Wheels to support his recovery. Wayne's food security ranked as very low, and he had about \$24 a week left after his fixed expenses were paid out of an Invalid's benefit. Beyond the limited financial resources with which he was able to access food, Wayne faced further challenges in terms of food security due to limitations on his physical mobility.

Wayne was frank and open about his status as a recovering addict and had a history of heavy marijuana use. He was extremely 'wired' when I met him and described hyperactivity as his normal state - the research interview took around three and a half hours during which he spoke at a rapid rate and expressed strong opinions about nutrition in general, and food poverty in particular. In addition to being conscious about keeping his weight down to relieve the pressure on his recovering hip, he had recently been suffering from stomach complications. A number of his commentaries related to fledgling interest in food politics – especially in terms of production systems, impacts on Māori health and wellbeing, and the relationship between price and quality.

Wayne appeared to have a reasonable social network around him, including his beloved cat. A female companion had delivered occasional cooked meals for a number of years - although he was quick to point out that she was good at reading his situation, and that he never had to ask.

Table 5.8. Wayne

DEMOGRAPHIC	
Gender	Male
Age	56
Ethnicity	Māori
Main occupational status	Beneficiary
Household composition	Single person living with one other adult
INCOME IN PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS	
Main source of income in previous 12 months	Invalids benefit
Secondary income from other sources	Casual board received (minimal)
Self assessed annual income	\$10,000 - \$15,000
HEALTH STATUS	
In receipt of a Disability Allowance	Yes
ACCOMMODATION COSTS	
Accommodation type	HNZ tenant
Weekly cost	Capped at 25% of income
EXPENSES	
Debts	No
WINZ debt	Yes
Other enforceable payments	Nil
Transport	Subsidised taxis
Communications	Mobile
FOOD SECURITY	
Self assessed disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	\$24
Number of people to feed	1 man
Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at Basic level	\$50
Household food security scale ranking	Very low (6/6)
Services used in previous 12 months	Special Needs Grant for Food, Foodbank

Introducing Rob

Compared with when I wasn't working, wandering the streets it was different... With where I am now it's a lot easier with food and being able to cook it and that, but some of those ones out there are still doing it pretty hard.

Rob had asked me to meet him in Hamilton's Garden Place (the central city square) and this was my first clue to his involvement with the homeless community. When I suggested to him that we could do the research interview in the public library he was initially reluctant: the previous winter library staff had made many homeless visitors unwelcome. He eventually agreed on the basis that I would contact the venue to make sure that we would not be 'moved on' during our meeting.

Rob proved to be a very gently spoken Māori male, aged 47. His food security status was very low, and he had accessed all three forms of formal food support in the previous 12 months. His preferred strategy was to attend regular community meals, which served both social and nutritional functions, as well as acting as a routine gathering point for many of his transient peers. He was demonstrably familiar with the homeless community hanging about on the day that I met him, and explained that he felt a deep obligation to talk about his situation as a voice for this 'community' - many of whom also regularly experienced food insecurity.

Rob had come to Hamilton from Wellington about two months prior to our meeting, and had a long history of sleeping rough and moving through shelters around the country. I gathered from some of his responses that substance abuse had been an issue for him in the past (although he did not speak of this directly) and I suspect that this contributed to his slow and measured responses to the interview questions. Rob was in 'transitional living arrangements' (a half-way house) when we met, but for him this constituted stable accommodation in which he felt safe – as evidenced by his delight at having a door on his room that could be locked from the inside.

Rob's income was derived from a combination of seasonal horticultural work and occasional stints on the Unemployment benefit. He preferred to avoid using social security if he could, and although he was without regular work when I met him, he had a good knowledge of crop cycles and did not think that this particular episode of unemployment would last for long.

Rob had impeccable manners and proved to be an eloquent and insightful advocate. It was my very great privilege to have been granted an opportunity to interview such an unlikely ‘gentleman’ who had gone to such great lengths to ensure that the concerns of his community could be voiced in this study.

Table 5.9. Rob

DEMOGRAPHIC	
Gender	Male
Age	47
Ethnicity	Māori
Main occupational status	Unemployed worker
Household composition	Single person living with three other adults
INCOME IN PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS	
Main source of income in previous 12 months	Unemployment benefit and seasonal work
Secondary income from other sources	None
Self identified annual income	\$12,000 - \$15,000
Self assessed annual income	\$10,000 - \$15,000
HEALTH STATUS	
In receipt of a Disability Allowance	No
ACCOMMODATION COSTS	
Accommodation type	Private board (excludes food)
Weekly cost	\$110
EXPENSES	
Private debts	No
WINZ debt	Yes
Other enforceable payments	Court imposed fines
Transport	No car
Communications	Mobile
FOOD SECURITY	
Self assessed disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	\$40
Number of people to feed	1
Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at Basic level	\$50
Household food security scale ranking	Very low (6/6)
Services used in previous 12 months	Community meals, Special Needs Grant for Food, Foodbank

Introducing Meredith

If there's just baked beans or something, then I'm just going to sit here and eat baked beans, and not moan. Because that's what there is. And there's nothing wrong with baked beans.

Meredith was a 39-year-old Māori woman who invited me to interview her in her rented eastside bedsit. Her main source of income was a Sickness benefit, and although a physical injury constrained her ability to work long hours, she was occasionally employed on a casual basis in the hospitality sector. With only \$10 a week left after fixed expenses, her food security was very low, and when I visited she apologised for not being able to make me a cup of coffee – there was literally nothing to make it with.

Having previously worked as a volunteer for a community meal service, and now heavily reliant on food support services herself, Meredith was in a unique position to provide a commentary about the experience of food insecurity that was both lived and observed, and once she relaxed into the interview she offered insightful accounts from both perspectives. My impression of Meredith was that she was recovering from a period where her life had been quite out of control in terms of relationship breakdowns, and her physical and mental health. With the support of Budget Advice and other help services, she was attempting to pick up the pieces with meagre financial resources. She provided an example of how vulnerable those on very low incomes are to minor shocks or fluctuations in expenditure (such as bank fees), let alone more serious ones.

Meredith used a variety of established personal strategies in conjunction with both formal and informal food support. She had used all of her food grant entitlement as well as foodbanks and community meals in the last year. She looked forward to visits from her two teenage children every second weekend despite the fact that these events stretched her resources to their absolute extreme. When her children were with her, Meredith relied on assistance from foodbanks and community meals in order to feed them.

Table 5.10. Meredith

DEMOGRAPHIC	
Gender	Female
Age	39
Ethnicity	Māori
Main occupational status	Beneficiary
Household composition	Single person living alone
INCOME IN PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS	
Main source of income in previous 12 months	Sickness benefit
Secondary income from other sources	Casual part time work
Self identified annual income	\$260 week (after enforceable payments)
Self assessed annual income	\$10,000 - \$15,000
HEALTH STATUS	
In receipt of a Disability Allowance	Yes
ACCOMMODATION COSTS	
Accommodation type	Private rental
Weekly cost	\$90
EXPENSES	
Private debts	Personal debt to relative, personal loan, bills arrears ⁷
WINZ debt	Yes
Other enforceable payments	Child support
Transport	No car
Communications	Mobile
Other	Contribution to church
FOOD SECURITY	
Self assessed disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	\$10
Number of people to feed	1 woman
Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at Basic level	\$47 ⁸
Household food security scale ranking	Very low (6/6)
Services used in previous 12 months	Community meals, Special Needs Grant for Food, Foodbank

⁷ The Budget Advisory Service had facilitated arrangements so that Meredith could make incremental payments on a number of utilities bills arrears.

⁸ Meredith was also responsible for meeting the costs of her two teenage children during their bi-weekend stays with her. This cost has not been assessed in this figure.

Discussion

The summary of key results presented in table 5.11 (see following page) confirms that in the year prior to the interview the main source of income for all respondents was from social security benefits, with three in receipt of a Domestic Purposes benefit, three being supported via a Student Allowance, two receiving Invalids benefits, and a further one each in receipt of Sickness and Unemployment benefits. In half of the sample the receipt of a benefit was supplemented by some form of paid employment, but only one respondent had any permanency in her paid work. A further two respondents supplemented their benefit income by taking in a paying boarder.

Half of respondents estimated their income as being between \$10,000 and \$15,000 in the year prior to the interview. Participants with dependent children tended to have slightly higher income than those without. The exception to this was a married couple with children (Daryl and Liz) whose combined income of \$20,000 - \$25,000 through a Student Allowance was proportionately less than that of their sole parent counterparts with fewer children who received the Domestic Purposes benefit.

The amount of disposable income that respondents had available to purchase food was dependent not only on the level of income, but on fixed costs as well as any unanticipated ones. Six of the ten respondents were servicing personal debt of one sort or another, and the same proportion (but not necessarily the same respondents) were repaying debts or benefit advances to Work and Income New Zealand. Half of respondents confirmed that they received welfare contributions towards meeting the costs incurred by a health condition in the form of a Disability Allowance (for either themselves or a dependent)⁹.

⁹ Disability Allowances are intended to cover additional costs directly related to a person's disability and are paid by work and Income New Zealand in relation to actual costs that are incurred on a regular basis. As at April 1 2007, the maximum rates of disability allowance were \$52.38 for an adult and \$39.41 for a child (Work and Income New Zealand).

Table 5.11. Summary of key results

Respondent	Main source of income in past 12 months	Self assessed annual income bracket	Disposable income per week after fixed expenses excluding food	Estimated Weekly Food Costs (Hamilton 2007) at <i>Basic</i> level	Household Food Security Scale Ranking	Services used in the 12 month period prior to interview
Kerry	Domestic Purposes benefit	\$20,000-25,000	\$100	\$99	Low (2/6)	WINZ SNG for Food
Daryl and Liz ¹⁰	Student Allowance	\$20,000-25,000	\$100	\$214 (or \$168 allowing for shared care of two children)	Very low (both 6/6)	WINZ SNG for Food Community meals Foodbank
Christina	Student Allowance	\$10,000-15,000	Approx. \$50	\$47	Low (3/6)	WINZ SNG for Food Foodbank
Sandy	Domestic Purposes benefit	\$15,000-20,000	\$45	\$87	Very low (6/6)	WINZ SNG for Food Foodbank
Sheryl	Domestic Purposes benefit	\$20,000-25,000	\$130	\$137	Very low (6/6)	WINZ SNG for Food
Faye	Invalids benefit	\$10,000-15,000	\$65	\$47	Very low (6/6)	WINZ SNG for Food
Wayne	Invalids benefit	\$10,000-15,000	\$24	\$50	Very low (6/6)	WINZ SNG for Food Foodbank
Rob	Unemployment benefit and seasonal work	\$10,000-15,000	\$40	\$50	Very low (6/6)	WINZ SNG for Food Foodbank Community Meals
Meredith	Sickness benefit	\$10,000-15,000	\$10	\$47 ¹¹	Very low (6/6)	WINZ SNG for Food Foodbank Community Meals

¹⁰ As a married couple, Daryl and Liz specified the combined income they received.

¹¹ No allowance has been made here for meeting the food costs incurred through visits by her children every other weekend.

For respondents such as Faye and Wayne, who had comparatively high costs associated with health status, the maximum rate of Disability Allowance offset the costs incurred partially rather than fully, meaning that any differences had to be covered out of the income derived from their main benefit. In the case of respondents with high costs associated with health or disability there is potential that any shortfall between actual costs and maximum levels of social assistance erodes the disposable income that they have left to cover other essential expenses – including food.

Housing costs also can consume a large proportion of the budget for households with low incomes. As noted in the *Quality of Life in Twelve of New Zealand's Big Cities* (Quality of Life Project, 2007) report, "Housing is the largest single component of many households' expenditure and is central to the ability of people to meet basic needs. When housing costs are too high relative to income, people have less to spend on essentials such as food, power, healthcare and education" (p. 106). Five of the respondents were living in private rental accommodation and all of these were paying well over a third of their estimated weekly income in rent. Faye and Rob (both of whom were Invalids beneficiaries) were in the fortunate position of being tenants of Housing New Zealand so that their housing costs were capped at 25 percent of their income. Rob's boarding situation meant that he faced a one-off cost each week to cover both accommodation and utilities. Daryl and Liz were the only respondents who owned their own home (as a couple), and had recently been able to negotiate with the bank to extend the term of their mortgage so that payments could be reduced to the level reported here. This had been prompted by the need to meet other expenses in the short term – particularly the cost of feeding a family of five without facing foreclosure on their home.

Respondents were asked to identify the amount of money that they had left over after their fixed expenses each week that was able to be spent on food. It should be noted that the amounts identified are subject to variation (most likely in a downward direction), as they assume that there will be no unanticipated or exceptional expenses incurred in a week that will absorb this disposable income.

Meredith (who lived mainly as a single person but hosted two teenage children on alternating weekends) and the married couple Daryl and Liz – with a family of three children to cater for – demonstrated the lowest levels of financial resources with which they could purchase food. As the qualitative results in the following chapters demonstrate, these were also households with few proximate social or familial networks to turn to for support, and both were heavily reliant on service providers as the main means of alleviating their respective food insecurity. Rob, whose social networks were predominantly transient rather than fixed, also utilised a comparatively broad range of formal food support services.

The USDA's six-item household food security instrument was used to verify and determine the level of food security experienced by each respondent. Although the short form version has remained relatively unchanged over time, in 2006 alterations were made to the names of the spectrum of categories used to describe food security, and it is these new classifications that have been applied in this research. It is worth noting that the contemporary classification of 'low food security' corresponds to the USDA's previous classification of 'food insecurity *without hunger*' - defined as "reports of reduced quality, variety or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake" (USDA, 2008). The new category of 'very low food security' has been used to replace 'food insecurity *with hunger*' – defined as "reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake." (USDA, 2008)¹². According to this measure, two of the ten respondents in this research profiled as experiencing 'low food security'. The remaining eight respondents all met the criteria for 'very low food security'.

With the exception of Faye (whose disposable income was eroded by meeting health expenses) and Christina (whose disposable income each week was highly variable), the amount of money with which respondents were able to purchase food fell below - and in some cases, well below - the Estimated Weekly Food

¹² It is interesting to note that on the advice of an expert committee, USDA classifications now refer to 'food security' as opposed to 'food *in*security' and any reference to the aspect of 'hunger' has been dropped in the new classifications. It seems that the political reframing of the discourse of food insecurity via the absence of a negative prefix is not limited to New Zealand.

Costs at the Basic level. It should be noted that the amounts of disposable weekly income identified were not used solely for purchasing food: they also had to cover any unanticipated expenditure that arose. The University of Otago's Department of Human Nutrition (p. 1) notes that "Most healthy families or individuals will meet their nutritional needs when spending the money specified as the basic costs. However, spending less than this amount increases the risk of not getting all the necessary nutrients... the chances of consuming an inadequate diet increase as the amount spent to purchase food falls below the basic costs." Those respondents who exhibited the largest gaps between their weekly disposable income and the Estimated Weekly Food Costs amount were more likely to engage with a fuller range of formal food support services than those whose weekly disposable income was closer to the Estimated Weekly Food Costs amount.

What underpins food insecurity?

I don't really have a food budget. Not really. What I tend to do is the automatic payments go out for the power, the phone, the rent, the loan. That leaves me less than fifty dollars, so then I might use some of the money for fruit and veggies and some of the money for petrol. (Sandy)

I only allocate myself a hundred dollars a week for food, which is never enough. It's always over that. But in saying that, any other money I make, it always goes towards the food. It's not a case of "Oh, what shall I spend this on?"- it's always "Oh, good, well I can get more of something that's on special or I can bulk buy something" – and it's always about the food. More money for food is always in the back of my mind. (Kerry)

I iron out the cents and everything now. Because even if it's ten cents it's still ten cents that you could have got something with. I'll go to the dairy to go get milk or something and straight away I've always gone for one of these particular lollies. They always get it ready – they sort see me coming. But now I think "Why should I give them the twenty cents?" because over the month that's maybe eighty cents or something, and that's eighty cents that I need! (Meredith)

I'm left with \$24 a week for food and anything else I might need. That's it when everything [fixed expenses] is taken out. And I've been living like that for quite a while now, so you'd think I'd be immune to it [laughing]... That's it – twenty four dollars and I'm broke! (Wayne)

Food insecurity is one dimension of a broader range of symptoms that characterise relative poverty in New Zealand. The definition that has been adopted in this research is one that highlights the correlation between foodlessness and the lack of adequate income with which to purchase food. In detailing the circumstances around the last instance in which they had accessed formal food assistance (generally as a result of some unanticipated expense that their budget could not address) respondents also identified a range of other factors that contributed to their low food security status over the longer term.

Food as a flexible cost

Most interview participants offered detailed descriptions of their fixed costs (including housing and utilities, regular medical expenses, debts, transport, etc.). Some were able to recite these by heart, while others reported keeping written records of their income and expenditure – an indication of the centrality of good budgeting as a strategy for surviving in situations of low income. Additionally, a number of respondents disclosed that they had engaged with Budget Advisory Services, usually as a result of needing to negotiate the servicing of debt repayments, and that this service had supported them in maintaining a budget and projecting cash flows.

With regard to budgeting for food, commentaries indicated that the amount of money spent on food each week was subject to variation depending upon the other fixed expenses that needed to be met. Accordingly, food costs – unlike other expenses such as rent, utilities and debt repayment - were regarded as being flexible rather than fixed. The following extracts make pointed reference to the idea that the money apportioned to expenditure on food had little relevance to the cost of food or meeting household food requirements, but rather, to the amount of money left in the budget after fixed expenses had been met.

It's because of out of all the other expenses food seems to be the one that I have a bit of leeway on, so I don't necessarily have to spend a hundred and twenty dollars on food. I'll just get the basics, and then I will pay the power. So food is a more flexible cost than some of the others we have... You tend to buy more food or less food just depending on how much money's gone out of the house already in bills. (Kerry)

Food is the only flexible part of the budget. It is the only thing you can go without. (Faye)

Prioritising fixed expenses

In tandem with regarding food as a flexible rather than fixed expense, respondents also made reference to the way in which they prioritised different aspects of their expenditure. The following comments are an indication that very often essential costs other than food took priority in their budgeting arrangements. Amongst those items prioritised above food were housing costs (in all cases but one this was the cost of rental accommodation), energy (gas and electricity), debt servicing (including personal loans, hire purchases, fines and debts to Work and Income New Zealand), transport (fuel, or public transport costs), and costs associated with maintaining health status (such as heating, medication and doctor's visits).

The mortgage and the bills have to come first. And the kids' bus money. Everything like that comes FIRST, before we even look at food. Food is the last thing that gets paid in my opinion, and always has been, because if we don't pay the mortgage and the bills then the debt collectors come along – knock, knock... and if you don't pay the mortgage you don't have anywhere to sleep. And if you've got nowhere to live then things start looking really hopeless... We had to put everything on to the mortgage. If we hadn't put everything over for the mortgage and the bills we would literally have been out on the street. That's what we are faced with. (Liz)

I try to stay on top of everything every week by allocating thirty dollars to all of my bills, and then of course the rent gets paid and stuff like that, and then after that we get the money that's left over for food. (Kerry)

That ten dollars a week [left after fixed expenses] – that’s food. When every essential ‘who’s got their hand out?’ sort of thing is taken care of, that’s it. (Meredith¹³)

It depends what people’s priority is. Like my priority is keeping warm. I must keep warm because otherwise I end up sick and that costs me more money. So the power takes priority over the food. (Faye¹⁴)

Juggling fixed costs

One strategy that respondents commonly applied to manage their fixed expenses was ‘juggling’ which ones they paid on a week-by-week basis according to how pressing they considered it was to meet a particular essential cost¹⁵. Although housing costs did not appear to fall into a class of expenditure that they considered could be juggled (perhaps because it was a weekly cost), other costs where payment was expected on a monthly basis could often be deferred or paid in part as a temporary strategy for addressing budgetary shortfalls.

I’m kind of juggling all the time. All the time. I think you have to be creative with that – with everything actually, not just the cooking [laughing]! (Kerry)

It varies randomly, the amount of money left over for food each week. It can be anything from nothing to a hundred dollars. It just depends, because I juggle things. That’s one of my coping strategies. (Christina)

The quote that follows highlights the problem with juggling – namely, that all the balls can only be kept in the air for a certain amount of time, and that ultimately, no amount of budgeting or careful financial management can stretch insufficient income indefinitely.

¹³ This respondent was attempting to service a high level of debt that included fines and repayments to Work and Income New Zealand. She was also paying child support. By law, all of these payments were able to be taken from her Sickness benefit and she received the remaining amount as income.

¹⁴ Because she was in a wheelchair, heating was a priority for this respondent in terms of maintaining her health and not incurring further medical expenses.

¹⁵ For example, if a person had been threatened with having their electricity disconnected due to non-payment they may decide that meeting this expense is a priority, especially if they wish to avoid incurring reconnection fees.

What I'm constantly doing is taking from Peter to pay Paul. Always. You know, I make sure that the basic things are done like my rent are done, so I don't get kicked out. So every week I'm having to make choices around, okay, well this tyre has to be fixed so I'm going to have to pay for that. So what am I going to do for petrol this week? Well, maybe I'll just walk everywhere so that I can pay for the tyre. I've got twenty extra dollars there [left over after paying for the tyre] – that will do two loaves of bread, a thing of milk, a couple of things of fruit and one packet of meat. So that's what I do. And that's absolutely constant. Yeah. There's never a week where I've got an extra twenty dollars after everything's paid. There's no surplus. It's always the case, every week, that I can't pay everything. So it might be that I pay Telecom this week, and then my power the following, and then the power gets behind of course because I've never paid enough, and then I'll throw some on the power and not pay for food. (Sandy)

As this quote illustrates, when essential costs are no longer able to be 'juggled', or the cycle of juggling is interrupted by an unanticipated expense, the relationship between prioritisation of expenditure and the regard for food as a flexible cost that can be minimised (or eliminated altogether in the short term) becomes evident, and the vicious cycle of food insecurity perpetuated by insufficient income begins.

Increasing costs relative to income

Another of the themes relating to insufficient income with which to purchase food was the observation by a number of respondents that the cost of food, along with other essential expenses (particularly electricity and transport) had undergone recent increases. Respondents also pointed to the way that these increases had eroded their purchasing power across the board, including a reduction in their capacity to purchase food.

Because living is going up, food's not cheap and I don't have a car, so transport around the city is also at a cost – and that's for everyone. (Meredith)

The thing is, everything's gone up, and I especially notice that with the food, you know? I mean I think you get like two bags and there's a hundred and thirty dollars, whereas that used to be about eighty. So

the food's increased, and everything else, but your benefit doesn't increase in line with it. So I've definitely noticed the pinch in that way. It's just crazy. (Kerry)

Respondents' observations about the increasing cost of food were not unfounded. A number of international drivers¹⁶, in tandem with local drought conditions in 2007, had impacted not only staple foods such as bread and milk, but also on the cost of locally produced fruit and vegetables - an event that at least one respondent correlated with increasing difficulties in trying to maintain some balance in his diet.

I would like to eat more of it [fresh fruit and vegetables], but it's the prices. Especially the fruit. I love my fruit, but geez! It's even worse this year because of the drought. The prices are higher. I never really buy fruit, and if I do it might be a couple of bananas and a couple of apples, because it's all just too dear for me. (Wayne)

Other shocks

In their responses to questions about the circumstances surrounding their last use of a formal food support service, participants highlighted how vulnerable those on low incomes are when there is any variation to essential costs. In particular, electricity bills that were higher than usual seemed to pose a challenge to the maintenance of the household budget.

It was because the last bill was an estimate reading. It was only a hundred. And then my boarder said "The next one will be an actual reading, so it will be about three hundred dollars", which it was. (Sheryl)

It's usually the power bill that's blown my budget out. It's usually always the power bill. Especially over the winter. There was something wrong with the hot water cylinder and it was continuously heating and so I'd get like two hundred and fifty dollar power bills for the month. And that's like - that could basically break you kind of thing. So

¹⁶In April of 2008, New Zealand's *Weekend Herald* produced a special issue entitled 'World Food Crisis', and reported that the cost of a trolley of 17 everyday food items had increased by 28.5 percent over the previous 12 months. Further increases in food costs were anticipated, and this assessment stated: "The soaring price of food in New Zealand is directly linked to the world food crisis" (Gower, 2008. p.B3). The global drivers behind some of the increases observed by respondents are discussed further in Chapter 9.

that was quite stressful. I've kind of been catching up ever since the winter [interview was held during the following summer] because the money has always come out. But the last time the money was due to come out for the power by direct debit I just rang them the week before and said, "Look, you can't take the money out. I need that money". It was ____'s [name of five-year-old daughter] birthday and I wanted to be able to at least make something special for that. That was an extra expense and I just wasn't going to be able to cover it.
(Kerry)

Kerry's commentary also highlights the strain that the desire to celebrate special family occasions – such as a child's fifth birthday - in accepted cultural ways can place on the household budget. This theme was reiterated by Sandy, who spoke with some distress about how difficult celebrating Christmas in the customary manner would be given her financial circumstances.

The thing is, I'm constantly looking for ways to cover things, and they're never getting covered. And we've got Christmas coming up now, and there's no money at all for Christmas presents. So it's like – oh, strewth! (Sandy)

Extending hospitality to family members who usually resided outside the household was another theme that featured in people's explanations about the circumstances in which they had last accessed formal assistance to obtain food. In Christina's case, her foodbank use had been prompted by her desire to be able to host a visit from her mother – leaving her with inadequate resources to buy food for herself in the weeks that followed. She expressed a strong sense of obligation towards this family member, to the extent that she was prepared to compromise her own food security in order to extend hospitality.

I had people coming to stay and I had an obligation to feed them... It was only one person – it was my mum, and I wanted to be able to show that hospitality. I still wanted to be able to do that for her. (Christina)

In Meredith's case, regular access visits from her two teenage children placed considerable stress on her already meagre resources, although in contrast to Christina, Meredith's obligations to provide for these visitors arose out of her

responsibilities as a parent rather than any sense of hospitality she may have wished to express.

I need food for myself as well as for my children. It's been quite difficult. They come here for visits during the week and at weekends and that's the primary reason that I do ask for food – for when they come. I've got two children and they come to stay at least every second weekend. And that's also the reason why I might get an extra food parcel, or extra tins or something like that. But I do need food for myself as well [when the children are not present]. There is a need there. (Meredith)

Another situation that had prompted accessing formal food support was covering expenses associated with a child's schooling. Most of the parents who participated in the interviews made reference to their children's education as a common source of unanticipated expenses, although in Sandy's case making the choice to cover the cost of a school trip for her son one week had eroded a budget that was already insufficient to cover food.

Actually, I just got a food grant last week... I get about three hundred and sixty dollars in the bank, and my rent's two hundred and sixty. So then you've got your power, your phone, your food, your petrol and then any other costs that come up. So out of that remaining one hundred dollars there was a payment for my loan, my son needed to have twenty dollars paid at school for a school trip so I paid that. It basically just cut it, but there was no money at all left for food. (Sandy)

As Sandy's comment also demonstrates, the cost of private rental housing often absorbs a significant proportion of the household budget for those on low incomes. Sheryl pointed out another less obvious cost associated with securing accommodation in the form of the 'letting fees' commonly charged to tenants by property management companies. This cost had contributed to her use of formal food support on more than one occasion.

If I've moved somewhere, finding the letting fees has been the reason for applying for a food grant. Because they [Work and Income New Zealand] will advance you the bond - but they don't pay the letting fee. (Sheryl)

Transitioning

Another of the recurrent themes with regard to the conditions that underpin food insecurity was its association with transitions in the life circumstances of the respondents in this study. Most interviewees identified some sort of major life change that had occurred for them in the recent past, including significant changes in family status, relocation, and changes in health or fluctuations in training or employment status. In most instances these transitions had also affected the level of household or personal income, and the adjustment to this change was a significant factor in prompting food insecurity, particularly where people had already entered into financial or lifestyle commitments when they had been in better circumstances.

Changes in family status

Changes in family status through marriage or separation impacted on the household economies of several respondents. For Christina, the decision to leave her marriage meant that she had also left many of her possessions behind, and the significant changes to her material security and lifestyle were a result of several transitional experiences occurring simultaneously - including the breakdown of her marriage, her decision to pursue study and changes in her employment and health status.

I've been able to pull some of the furniture out of the [matrimonial] house but I left most of it at the house for the family to use. I've worked in corporate industries before and earned very good money. So I've had some major changes in my life over the last year. Some really major changes. (Christina)

For Daryl and Liz, the decision to formalise their relationship by getting married had come at a significant cost in terms of changes to their combined income. Prior to their marriage, Liz had been receiving the Domestic Purposes benefit and Daryl had been receiving the single person's rate of Student Allowance.

Between being on the DPB and becoming married we lost about two hundred dollars a week between us both. That was hard... and it's made it harder to be able to afford to eat. (Liz and Daryl)

Changes in employment and training status

Although a number of respondents had part time work it was evident that the income they received from this was tenuous, and that the forms of work in which they were involved were highly casualised. This had implications for income security, working conditions and the household cash flow.

It's one day a week. I could work more if I wanted to, but it's just the one day a week at the moment. And sometimes I don't go out – like if the kids are sick or I have to be up at the university – then I don't go out. So I don't get paid for that. (Kerry)

At the moment I'm just trying to pick up casual work here and there. I've got a one off job tomorrow, so that will help. I'll be outside in the storm and the showers. It's just for one day though – there's nothing else lined up after that. (Daryl)

It's seasonal work. The place where I am [living] now they are workers. But three of us aren't working at the moment. There's one that's gonna start on Monday, and I won't be hanging round too far. So we're a working household and we know all the places so we just move around and follow the work – a lot of it depends on the time of the year. (Rob)

In Meredith's case, much of the debt burden that underpinned her food insecurity had been acquired due to an unscrupulous employer who had withheld her wages over an extended period.

My previous employer just sort of stopped paying me. I worked for nine weeks without wages, believing that promise that I was going to get paid. And so that put me in a huge debt. I moved out of a flatting situation – I couldn't afford to live there. So all of the debts have been on hold. And because of that, there's been a couple of extra debts [penalties] that have just been incurred recently. (Meredith)

Four of the respondents in this study were full time university students. For Christina, the decision to become a student had involved giving up well paid employment and relocating to rental accommodation in Hamilton.

This is my first year as a law student. I've been forced to rent a place closer to the university, and here we are... this is life. (Christina)

For Liz and Daryl, Daryl's status as a full time student meant supporting a family of five on the 'couple with children' rate of Student Allowance – at least during the university semester. While they were still adjusting to the financial ramifications of their decision to marry, Daryl had attempted to find work over the holiday period, but had struck barriers with local employers.

I've tried to get a job over the summer break, but every time they say "Are you going back to study?", and when I say "Yes" they say "Ahhh, no, we're looking for someone longer term"... because I'm not going to be there long enough they can't give me the job. (Daryl)

Unable to secure a job over the study break, the family had then encountered further problems establishing their entitlement to a Student Hardship benefit. With nothing in reserve, the difficulties they experienced transitioning between income types further exacerbated their financial situation and their food insecurity.

Transitions between income types

Several respondents highlighted that the transition from one form of income to another could be disruptive to household budgeting arrangements. This disruption could be caused by changes between benefit types (as in Daryl and Liz's case), particularly where assessments of eligibility were slow or inaccurate – leaving a shortfall in income which could make a critical difference to recipients' abilities to meet essential costs, including food.

Daryl: It was on the changeover time between the Student Allowance and the Student Hardship benefit. There was no money in the house. There was no money, and we were having problems getting stuff changed over with WINZ, and we just weren't going to get any money.

Liz: When we finally got the Transfer Grant, it was fifty odd dollars less [than they had been receiving previously]...

Daryl: So when we went to the foodbank that was what was happening. We were moving from one form of benefit onto another. And it was the straw that broke the camel's back – the difference.

Changes in income source could also be due to the transition between paid work and receiving a benefit, and in some cases this was prompted by other transitions such as reduced health status.

Changes in health status

Two of the respondents in this research were receiving Sickness benefits¹⁷ on the basis of recent changes to their health status. Meredith could only commit to casual part time work because of the fluctuating nature of her condition. For Christina, an injury that undermined her capacity to carry out pre-arranged work over the summer study break had thrown her future financial arrangements into disarray.

When I went to get that food [grant] I had just put my back out and I had just secured three contracts to keep me working so that I didn't have to go on the [Sickness benefit] – but I couldn't work because my back had gone out really badly, and I'd already projected all my finances from now until I got back into summer school. And that work was on a high income. Now it's all gone. So I went "I'm fucked. Oh no! Shit! What am I going to do?" So I have had to rely on the services that are available. (Christina)

Discussion

No one has ever really asked me before how this is for me. And I'm not about to put my hand up and tell them, am I? I don't want people thinking that I'm just feeling sorry for myself, or that I'm useless – I'm not! It's just that I've really not had anywhere to go with thinking about this or talking about it before. And it should be talked about really, shouldn't it? (Meredith)

The people who participated in this research by no means represent the full gamut of those who experience food insecurity in Hamilton. Superficially, the primary commonality amongst them is that they were all individuals who had accessed formal food support within the 12 month period prior to their

¹⁷ Sickness benefits are *temporary* forms of assistance received by people who have a non-permanent health condition that restricts their ability to support themselves through paid employment. By way of distinction, Invalids benefit is paid to recipients who have an *ongoing* health condition or disability that severely limits their participation in paid employment.

interviews who were prepared to share their experiences of, and strategies for, addressing food insecurity. However, there were several more subtle commonalities that made a striking impression about the respondents in this study. The first was how private, intimate and potentially isolating the experience of food insecurity was for many of them, despite the fact that its implications coloured much of their day-to-day existences. Secondly, in the majority of cases respondents' reasons for contributing to this research seemed to stem from awareness that there were others like them in the community for whom food poverty and foodlessness were an issue, and that it was valuable that this experience should be recognised in some manner. One respondent in particular (see Meredith's quote above) noted that she had never really talked about the topic too much before, largely because there were no sites in which such a discussion could be had without fear of stigma or judgement. Finally, interactions with the respondents confirmed that many of the popular beliefs about poverty in New Zealand society are imbued with fallacies. While food insecurity is usually articulated as an expression of poverty, it does not arise because people have low levels of life skills or education, because they are unable to manage their money effectively, they make poor lifestyle choices about how they exercise their resources, because they have too many children, or refuse to engage with the labour market. Rather, it occurs due to a lack of income and structural constraints on people's potential to improve their access to the resources that they require to achieve food security for themselves and their families. These constraints are both economic and social, and the stigmatising myths about poverty perpetuated by many of the current discourses and representations not only stifle the voices of those who are food insecure – they also undermine any progress towards addressing it as a social problem. Perhaps then, the voices found here can have their opportunity to inform, challenge and correct some of the existing misconceptions.

Despite the desirability of having a regular sum of money in the household budget that could be dedicated to purchasing food, the feasibility of this for respondents was limited because the amount budgeted would regularly be

eroded by the need to meet other essential costs that were, for one reason or another, considered to have priority. The term 'essential' is problematic in that it is subjective, but ongoing costs for accommodation, energy, debt servicing, transport and maintenance of health status were commonly referred to as forming a set of core expenses over which limited flexibility could be exercised. Conversely, the cost of food was regarded as a budgetary item that could be adjusted according to how pressing the need to meet other expenses was.

The findings also suggest that the food security of those on low incomes is vulnerable to a variety of shocks. For those who live 'hand to mouth' having already pared back essential expenditures to a minimum, there are limited opportunities to accumulate a backstop of resources to insure against the negative effects of fluctuations – whether these arise as a result of unanticipated essential expenses, through transitional changes in life circumstances, or through structural or environmental factors that undermine purchasing power. Despite the divergent circumstances of respondents, the definition of food insecurity that has been utilised in this study appears to hold true. Simply put, food insecurity in the Hamilton community is underpinned by inadequate income.

Thin Pickings: Endogenous Strategies for Addressing Food Insecurity

The data that respondents provided about the ways in which they addressed and managed their experience of food insecurity forms two broad themes. For the purposes of developing an analytical framework the strategies employed have been differentiated as 'endogenous' and 'exogenous'. The current chapter describes endogenous strategies – that is, the means by which participants were able to respond to food insecurity at the micro level. *Endogenous strategies* originate in the private context and are exercised by the individual or their household as part of the private day-to-day way in which food insecurity is managed. They include a number of generalised 'life skills' for economising on food costs or making food go further, but also extend to specific adaptive behaviours that denote personal shifts in response to food insecurity. In contrast, the subsequent chapter outlines the data that refer to *exogenous strategies*; those which occur in the public realm and involve interactions with other individuals and organisations. As much as possible, the strategies described in both chapters are considered in isolation from the economic arrangements made by respondents to cover a broader range of basic needs, and focus solely on those exercised to secure a constant food supply.

Tarasuk (2001) has identified a range of ways in which people attempt to address food insecurity independently at the micro level. The research questions that the current chapter seeks to explore are those which relate to the skills and cultural capital¹ that people exercise to manage food insecurity, as well as the shifts that

¹ Initially posited by Pierre Bourdeiu (1986), the term 'cultural capital' is used here to denote the forms of socially acquired knowledge and skills that people practise to improve their food security.

occur in patterns of production and consumption as a result of inadequate resources with which to acquire food. In presenting respondents' accounts of the range of endogenous strategies they applied, it is acknowledged that the utility of these is highly vulnerable to exhaustion in situations of insufficient income.

The usual way that food is obtained

With a view to gathering data that explored respondents' concepts of norms around obtaining food, interview participants were asked to identify what they considered to be their *usual way* of sourcing food. Of the ten respondents, eight considered that purchasing food themselves was the main way that food came into their households². Growing vegetables and fruit for themselves (albeit in varying and limited quantities) was a strategy that six of the ten respondents considered to be a usual method of accessing food, but this activity was consistently identified as secondary to purchasing food and was used as a supplementary measure rather than a primary one.

Grocery shopping as a usual way of obtaining food

The majority of respondents considered that the usual way that most food came into their households was through regular grocery shopping. Responses illustrated a spectrum of approaches to purchasing food - from undertaking a large shop either weekly or fortnightly on the day on which income was received, to shopping intermittently throughout the week for several days worth of food so that income that could be spent on other expenses was not 'tied up' until absolutely necessary, to shopping on a daily 'as required' basis for ingredients to make up a single meal.

The normal way [that food comes into the house] is through grocery shopping. (Kerry)

² Of the two remaining respondents one (Rob) reported that a combination of purchasing food himself and using community meals were the primary means by which he accessed food, and the remaining respondent (Meredith) had few financial resources available for purchasing food herself and was almost entirely reliant on food parcels and community meals. Interactions with formal food support organisations are regarded as exogenous strategies, and the data provided by each of these respondents in this regard is reported in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

I try to do a big shop once a week. And it tends to be on payday because things are always pretty thin at home by then. If there isn't enough money to do a big shop for the week then we will just scrape together whatever I can find in the cupboards and buy the odd thing that we need to be able to get a meal together. In those weeks what we eat tends not to be very flash, and if we get a few of those weeks that run together, well, it's not the best. (Sheryl)

We do our big shop once a fortnight. But we have to top that up with milk from the dairy, and with fresh stuff like bananas if we need to. (Liz)

I will go and purchase several days worth of food and just hope for the best. That's about it. (Sandy)

I only keep enough food in the house to get me through the day. I don't buy food to keep in the fridge. I buy food to eat... Like if I'm going to have a feed of bacon I'll go and get it, come home and put it straight in the frying pan and have it with eggs or maybe some boiled potatoes, and that's it. (Wayne)

I tend to just buy whatever it is that is going to allow me to make up what I already have³ into something to eat. The missing ingredient, whatever that might be... And I try to only buy enough of it so that it's just enough to make up whatever it is that I'm putting together for that meal. (Meredith)

Shopping strategies

Respondents exercised a range of strategies within their respective grocery shopping regimes to try to get the best value for money in their food purchasing. Value tended to be conceptualised in terms of the ability to purchase the *quantity* of food that would last until their next pay, being able to achieve some degree of *balance or variation* in their diet, or being able to purchase food that had negligible nutritional value but would enable them to *minimise the incidence of hunger*.

³ In Meredith's case the existing food that she had was usually obtained through food parcels.

Shopping to a list

One of the common strategies was shopping to a strict list for a limited range of staple products. Kerry's food insecurity ranked as less severe than many of the other respondents, and one of her strategies involved maintaining a store of core supplies and refreshing each item as it ran out if she was able to.

I just have a list. Usually I just tack it up on the fridge and if we run out of anything then I'll write it down. So I have a store pantry and if we ever run out of anything then I write it down. So I shop to a list and I'm really careful about sticking to that. That's how I buy stuff. (Kerry)

Respondents who exhibited very low food security tended to be more concerned about meeting their immediate basic food needs than maintaining a stock of core ingredients.

So when I go shopping I would make a list of the key essential things that I need in the household. You know, your milk, your bread, your butter... I work out the price before I go shopping so that I know that if I've got forty dollars, then I'll work out the rough price of each thing. So I know that out of that forty I can probably buy fifteen things. Then I would go along to the shop and buy those fifteen things. I never buy extra. I know exactly what I'm going in there to get. (Sandy)

I do my own shopping. You know, a lot of people write a list, but with me it's always just the basics so the list is permanently stored in my head. I don't need to write it down - it's always the same. Besides coffee, milk and sugar and teabags or tea leaves, you've got your bread, your butter, your meat and your veggies. And that's what you get. (Wayne)

Shopping around to get the best price

Respondents tended to have good knowledge about outlets where the cheapest sources of food could be purchased and several reported shopping across a number of suppliers in order to obtain weekly 'specials' and to get the best value for money in terms of both price and the quality of food. While supermarkets were the primary choice for staples, meat and fresh produce could often be sourced more reasonably from specialist green grocers or butchers.

I simply get paid and then I'll go straight down to the big veggie shop and down to The Mad Butcher's. I tend to shop around a lot. You know, I'll go where I know there's specials on. I'm always keeping an eye on the prices and looking for specials. (Sandy)

What we've found is that Pak 'n Save is the cheapest supermarket in Hamilton... it's supposed to be the cheapest supermarket in New Zealand. Often they will have the best prices because they are doing bulk buying and they can get the best wholesale price. But we've found that the quality of the meat there is not as good as going to Top Mark [butchery]... They have better quality meat at the same price. I did a test. I made two different mince dishes with mince from Top Mark that had hardly any fat, and the Pak 'n Save mince had so much I couldn't believe it. It was a lot of fat! So the price was the same, but you were paying for the fat. (Liz)

I use the specials at Bin Inn [bulk food store]. That's really quite neat because I can go in and buy fifteen cents worth of sugar or twenty nine cents worth of tea bags and stuff like that. And you can get quite a lot for two dollars there if you look at what you need as opposed to what you want – and if you don't get too hung up on having one in the jar and one in the cupboard. (Meredith)

For some respondents the ability to shop around for the best prices was limited due to transport. The relative cost of accessing cheaper food items in smaller amounts compared to the transport cost of getting to the outlet was also a consideration.

I don't have a car. I can usually get a lift to the supermarket with a friend, but if it's just for topping up then I will walk. The dairy is the closest and that's pricey. It's not a good way to do it, but sometimes, if I'm sore or if I'm tired... It's a hard call if you haven't had anything to eat. You put it off for as long as you can, and then you sort of get to a stage where you don't care that it's going to cost more because all you can think about is eating it. It's really easy to get sucked into that when you're hungry. (Meredith)

If I've only got ten dollars and its going to cost me three or four in gas to get to The Mad Butchers and back, then I'm not going to be saving anything, am I? If I was buying a larger amount then I would be, but usually I'm not in the situation where I'm going to be spending enough to make going all the way over there worthwhile. So I'll get it at the

supermarket or whatever else is closest, even though it costs more. You've got to do the maths carefully. (Kerry)

Monitoring the cost of purchases

Respondents commonly reported careful monitoring of their purchasing in two ways – using a calculator to keep a running total of the cost as they shopped, and counting the number of items that they purchased (such as fruit) with a view to rationing them over a particular time frame.

We use the calculator as we're shopping so that if we haven't got enough money for the good foods, then the treats have to go back before we get to the checkout. (Daryl)

What I do is count things. I count things so that I know how many apples there are, how many oranges I've bought, how many bananas there are, and how many days that will last. (Sandy)

Limiting the variety of purchases

For those with limited purchasing power a repetitive diet can be a strategy for ensuring that food goes further, and this was reflected in the purchasing decisions of several respondents.

There's a set menu that we shop to. It's just rice, mixed veggies and canned tuna. It's pretty monotonous, but anything outside of those is extra. Those are the main foods that we eat – that's our staple diet. That's what we eat day in, day out, but doing it like that is a good way of keeping the cost down. There's not a hell of a lot of variety, but it's pretty balanced. (Christina)

A number of respondents spoke about limiting the quantity or variety of fresh fruit and vegetables that they purchased. Christina had economised by purchasing frozen vegetables to help achieve balance within her set menu, and Wayne had adopted a similar strategy by purchasing tinned fruit.

If something's got to give then it's usually the fresh stuff. I go on about it a lot. I can't pay those prices... I do buy tinned fruit, but it's the cheap stuff. The syrup is all full of sugar and that's no good. (Wayne)

I've had to cut back in terms of vegetables – things like broccoli and cauli. Back in the good old days I could buy three of them, but it's actually cheaper to get them in those frozen mixed veggies – the ones with the broccoli and all those things in them. They're about two dollars, and it's a lot cheaper to buy them that way as opposed to buying individual fresh veggies. So I've kind of compromised on that.
(Christina)

Sheryl reported that she had stopped purchasing fruit and vegetables almost entirely and was aware that these food groups were the main components lacking from the household diet, mainly because they were too expensive.

I don't buy fruit or vegetables at all now. We don't eat them, and it's because of the prices. I know you're supposed to have it [fresh fruit and vegetables] but we pretty much just stick to meat and potatoes, bread and milk. I buy frozen vegetables every now and then, and I try to buy fruit sometimes, but it's not regularly. (Sheryl)

In preference to limiting purchases of fresh fruit and vegetables, one of Kerry's strategies for economising on food costs was to limit the amount of meat eaten in her household.

I think we just forego the meat more than anything. We'll probably end up vegetarians in the end [laughing]! I always seem to run out of meat. I never really buy a lot. I maybe just buy enough meat for a few meals and then that's it, because meat's quite expensive as well... I always try and make sure we've got plenty of vegetables, but the meat will generally be the thing that drops out. (Kerry)

Buying budget brands

It's always those budget brands. It's that cheap shit bread... I've been told that those cheaper brands are much higher in sugar and salt. They are not what you'd want to be eating if you had the choice.
(Wayne)

For Wayne, the limitations that price placed on his choices about the quality of the food that he purchased constituted a personal compromise. A number of other respondents also reported that they tended to shop for cheaper budget brands rather than high-end (and consequently, more expensive) commercial brands as strategy for increasing their purchasing power. In contrast with

Wayne's sentiments, Liz's observation of this practice was that it had minimal impact on the actual quality of the food.

Brand names to me mean nothing. I have no problem buying [name of budget brand] or something like that. I've worked in a supermarket, so I know that a [name of high-end brand] pie is exactly the same as a [budget brand] pie. There's just a different label. It's the same for lots of products – you just have to know the tricks of the trade. Half the time they come from the same factory – it's just a different label because it's a different company. Cheese is the same too. They just put a different wrapper on the machine, and away it goes! (Liz)

Bread as well. We'll buy the cheapest and go with [a] budget [brand]. We do both really like _____ [brand of high-end bread], but we've realised that we've had to cut that out of our budget. (Daryl)

Because we're on a tight budget anyway, well that's why they've got products that have got 'Budget' on it... That's how I strategically minimise the cost – by going for the cheaper brands, for obvious reasons. There's no point in going for the two dollar baked beans if I can get them for ninety five cents. (Christina)

You've got to buy what's cheapest. I mean, if you're faced with something that's going to cost you five dollars and something that's going to cost you three, then you're going to have to get the thing that costs you three. (Faye)

Bulk buying

Buying in bulk tended to be a shopping strategy that was exercised, where practicable, by the larger households in this research (generally those with more than one child).

I buy flour and sugar in five kilo bags. If we can, we buy a few of the big chickens when they are on special. That's what you have to do – when you've been on your own with three children, you learn the tricks of the trade. (Liz)

For smaller households, though, the cost savings that could potentially be made through bulk buying were considered to be minimal and could lead to food being wasted – an event to which many of the respondents in this research expressed a strong aversion.

The thing that really annoys me the most - and it can't be helped because that's just the way the world is - is that in a week I really only want about three carrots. But those three carrots will cost me as much as a whole bag... It was fine when I had the kids, because we'd eat the whole lot, but you know, if I get a bag just for me, half the things rot before I can use them up, and that really annoys me because of the waste. (Faye)

Minimising the cost of sundry items

Respondents expressed an awareness of the cost of purchasing sundry non-food items as part of their grocery shopping and acknowledged that the costs of these could impinge on the amount of money they had left to spend on food. Sandy had minimised the cost of cleaning products by purchasing a single product with multiple applications. Christina and her housemate both covered the cost of toiletry and other sundry items over and above food independently, rather than including them in the combined grocery budget.

I'll just downscale on things, like rather than buying a range of cleaning products, I just buy one and do everything with that one product that only costs two dollars. I mean, by the time you buy a few packets of meat there's twenty bucks gone, so yeah, I try to make savings on the other things so that I can afford the food. (Sandy)

I do the food shopping for both of us [referring to herself and her housemate]. I do that because we both contribute for our basic needs. Anything over and above that we get ourselves, like toiletries. We stick to our own for that. We can shop according to our means for those things and so I'm not compelled to spend money that I haven't got because of the things that he wants. (Christina)

Decisions about who goes shopping

All of the respondents reported that they were the primary shoppers within their households. Three who were parents preferred to exclude their children from shopping trips, mainly because children could inadvertently place pressure on them to make unintended purchases.

I avoid taking my son shopping with me. Occasionally when he does come I set down the rules before we get into the shop so that he knows how much money I've got and what I'm there to buy - and that there are no extras. (Sandy)

Sometimes we have to take the kids shopping with us, but it's just too hard really. (Liz)

[13 year old daughter] and [11 year old son] went round at the supermarket one time and we shopped to actually see how much we spend on food. And they both said: "But that's not enough food!". They both picked up on it. Within the budget that we had they were both shocked how quickly it went up and they said: "But we still need this and that and the other..." and that was a very hard thing. (Daryl)

Despite the fact that Liz and Daryl found shopping with their children a difficult experience, for them a useful strategy had been to take joint responsibility as a couple for food purchases and to make agreed distinctions between essential ('good') and non-essential ('treat') foods.

We do it together. We shop together. We balance each other out... if one wants something and the other wants something else we have to compromise and make a shared decision. It means we both have to be sensible. (Daryl)

I have tried shopping by myself in the past, but I know that if I have Daryl with me I have to balance with him, because he reminds me that if I buy treats I don't get the good foods. When we shop together we only buy the good foods. We're not in a situation where we can afford to be tempted into making mistakes. (Liz)

Gardening as a usual way of obtaining food

More than half of respondents reported that produce that they had grown themselves formed part of their usual means of accessing food, although the scale of their gardening endeavours varied from a few pots cultivated on the door step of Meredith's bedsit through to established fruit tree plantings.

I'll definitely grow things if I can. I've got a few pots out there with silver beet and stuff. (Meredith)

I have a little garden and grow cucumbers and silverbeet. But nothing in the winter. I do grow my own tomatoes. I love them - but I'm sick of them by the time they finish! (Faye)

I've got things in the garden – at the moment I've got plenty of celery and silver beet. (Sandy)

We've just dug up a veggie garden. We're just starting. We've got tomato plants and they just grow all by themselves and then they get harvested at Christmas. And we've got lettuces. And we've got peas and a bean vine. (Liz)

I'll grow broccoli and I'll always grow my own lettuce and herbs. And we've got apple trees down the back. We've got a grapefruit tree, and things like that. So I'll get those out of the garden as well. (Kerry)

Like Kerry, Daryl and Liz were fortunate enough to have a variety of established fruiting crops on their section and managed to maintain a good seasonal supply of fresh fruit that assisted in meeting their family's food needs.

We have fruit trees all over this property, and when they're in season we live off them! The kids like loquats and feijoas, and we have grapes on the property too. If there are grapes on the vine I'll go for those... When the fruit is ripe it's awesome. [Name of youngest child] for example loves his fruit. But in the grape season he can be a messy little guy because he will eat too many grapes! Now that we've got the vine on this side that ripens before the one on that side there's going to be a longer time of this! There's a white vine which was actually on the neighbours side which was cut back last year, and the red grapes in the back vine – they ripen just after it. And then we're into the feijoas... (Daryl)

The following comments from Kerry point to the range of other benefits beyond improvements to food security that gardening had provided for her family, including opportunities to eat food that was chemical free and being able to transmit inter-generational knowledge about gardening.

My mum and my dad were both keen gardeners, but I think that when I started renting this place about four years ago I just decided that I didn't really like not knowing what was going onto my veggies and stuff so I just decided I'd start growing my own. It's also a chance to teach the kids about nature, and for them to grow their own

strawberries and things like that. And the insects – teaching them about beneficial insects and harmful insects and stuff like that. So it's all a bit of a teaching experience as well... I'm really happy where I am here, and I enjoy gardening so I just maintain the place. And my landlord – I pay two thirty for this place, and I've paid that since I moved in four or five years ago, and he's just not interested in putting the rent up as long as I'm... yeah, as long as I look after the place.
(Kerry)

As noted, not all respondents practised gardening as a strategy for securing food. Kerry's comments, alongside those of some of the non-gardening respondents, point to a range of factors that can influence people's decisions about whether or not growing their own food will act as part of the range of strategies they adopt to enhance their food security. These include the required physical resources as well as skills and knowledge, and reasonably stable forms of tenure that cannot always be achieved in rental situations. Health status also prohibited some respondents from more expansive gardening.

I wouldn't know where to start with a veggie garden, and to be honest, I'm not that motivated. We seem to move around a bit so there's probably not a lot of point in putting one in. (Sheryl)

I had a veggie garden before when I owned my own place. It's a bit different when you're renting. And it's all concrete around here anyway. (Christina)

I love succulents and that's what I grow. I collect them. With my [health condition] I can't get up and down to look after a veggie garden. It's got to be low maintenance or no maintenance. (Wayne)

I can't put a bigger garden in because [indicates wheelchair]... I used to when I had the kids at home because they could help me, but I can't now. (Faye)

Making Food Last

There isn't anything that lasts. We just go for what is, and we just stick to our menu. For me, it's all about being sensible and having some restraint without starving yourself. (Christina)

In my experience, the only real way of making food last is not to eat it.
(Faye)

One of the major challenges for people who experience food insecurity is maximising the value of the food resources they have been able to acquire in terms of the length of time that these can be made to last. As a scarce resource, the longer food lasts – or the further it can be made to go around – the longer the threat of experiencing food insecurity with hunger can be avoided. With this in mind, interviewees were asked what strategies and skills they applied in order to achieve this.

Cooking skills

All respondents reported that they were able to cook for themselves and their households, although self-assessments of their skills in this domain varied.

I'd rate myself as a pretty basic cook. (Faye)

I'm not a fantastic cook, but it's edible. (Sheryl)

Oh, yeah. I'm a good cook. Nothing extravagant, but I'm a good basic cook. I'm a survivor, but I'm not a baker. I can do a roast and boil up. I can do goulashes and hot meals. (Wayne)

A number of respondents reported that they had baking skills and made a clear distinction between this skill set and that required to put a main meal together. Baking was seen as a means of making food go further because the cost involved was usually less than purchasing a similar product and simple homemade baking (largely flour based) could be used as a main meal replacement or, particularly in households with children, an accessible and cheap means of alleviating hunger between main meals.

I'm definitely a baker. I'd say I'm a baker rather than a cook. (Meredith)

Like if I'm hungry or something I'll make up pikelets or something instead of buying bread. I don't make cakes because I can't afford the ingredients. That's luxury. (Faye)

I'm a good baker. I worked at _____ [name of supermarket] for a couple of years in the bakery and picked up some skills, and I picked

up some others on my own as well. I mainly bake for the kids rather than letting them into the stuff that we've bought. If they get into the stuff that we've bought then it doesn't leave enough for the meals. I got given a bread maker as well, so I can always make a fruit loaf and put that into the freezer. (Liz)

We tend to bake a lot of things ourselves because (a) I don't like the additives and stuff in half the foods they've got now, and (b) it's just not economical for me to buy packet biscuits and stuff like that. (Kerry)

A number of female respondents talked about the ways in which they had acquired their cooking skills. For some, the process had been self-initiated, often at a time when they had begun their families. For others, skills had been acquired through occupational exposure or inter-generational transmission. One of the commonalities within their accounts was the emphasis they placed on the ability to make a meal cheaply, and with a limited supply and variety of ingredients.

Truthfully, I didn't know how to cook when I first got married. I was nineteen when I first got married, and I'm a Christian, so I just prayed about it. I searched on the Lord on that one. And around the time I did that, so many people I was working with came up to me and said, "Do you want a good recipe?" and I'd say, "Yeah!" So I started off with Maggi Cook in the Pots and learned how to do different meals cheaply and reasonably, and it just built up from there. And then I'd ask people for their recipes: "Oh, do you mind if I copy out your recipe?..." and I just learnt from that. (Liz)

I can get a bag of tomatoes and make a really delicious soup. I know all those skills – but I've been parenting since I was fifteen years old because I've got an older boy who is twenty two. I think really when I was a teenager and dealing with him, that it really gave me some excellent skills around how to make a range of meals with virtually nothing. You know, do the whole 'stone soup' thing [laughing]. You know, hey – it's good skills! I feel proud that I have that knowledge and that I am willing and wanting to create things using what I do have, including my garden. (Sandy)

I think I basically learnt about food from my father. He was a great cook and we always ate really well with Dad. But we always had a lot of veggies and stuff like that. So I think it was basically Dad that taught me to cook. And my sisters have both inherited the love of

cooking as well, and so have I. It's more difficult when you don't have a huge variety of ingredients on hand... so I just can't get too carried away. But I do love cooking. (Kerry)

I used to be a chef in the armed forces. That taught me that cooking staples in bulk is more economical, and that you can pad food out a long way if you use a staple. Like I use rice, and treat it in lots of different ways. I think there's definitely a skill set that you acquire when you are trying to live on a low income, and cooking skills are part of that. (Christina)

Rationing

One of the most common strategies referred to for making food last was rationing. For respondents, rationing took several forms. It could involve breaking down a bulk pack of raw ingredients (the most commonly mentioned being meat) so that the quantity of the ingredient available could be spread over a number of meals or days. Alternatively, cooking large amounts that could be consumed over time was also viewed as a strategy that constituted rationing. Finally, the size of meal portions could be limited as an intentional rationing strategy when food was in limited supply.

Rationing bulk foods

I break the packets of meat down when I get them home and freeze them in smaller amounts. (Sheryl)

I'll cut up meat packs. If I get a packet of mince then I'll cut it in half. If I get a packet of bacon – I might get two hundred grams of bacon – so I'll make that into two meals. So I might make macaroni cheese one night. The next night I might do bacon and eggs. (Sandy)

Sometimes I'll buy in bulk (but not very often), especially meats. So if there's a lot of meat, like if I went to The Mad Butcher's or something like that, then I would break that down and put it into meal sizes. Breaking down big packs and popping them into the freezer in smaller packs. (Kerry)

Several respondents reported counting or restricting fruit intake so that the number of pieces of fruit that had been purchased could be rationed over a required time frame.

I quite like my fruit, but if we have to buy it in I restrict myself to one piece a day because I know that that has to last over the fortnight. (Daryl)

Cooking in bulk

Another rationing strategy was to cook in large quantities and then portion a dish so it could be spread over a number of meals.

I try to have meals that I can have for tomorrow as well. Maybe three days even. I do my own cooking and I always try to cook enough to last for at least two days. (Rob)

The roasts we have, we make it go over two meals. Meatloaf – I can do that for two meals. I can store half in the freezer and save that for another meal. I do a lot of big meals so that we can save some for small meals later, and then I can just do potatoes to go with them. (Liz)

When you steam rice... you cook a large quantity, which is going to make it easier because you've already got something that you can use as a base for more than one meal. (Christina)

Although this kind of rationing is an effective strategy for making food last on the basis that economies of scale are at work, several respondents commented that restricting the variation in meals could make for fairly monotonous eating.

I quite often cook enough so that we can have the same meal for two nights. It's pretty boring having the same thing a couple of nights in a row, but it means that I don't have to stress about how I'm going to get something together for the next night. (Sheryl)

In the winter, we'll put the Crockpot on and nine times out of ten I'll make two meals out of it, but I'm easily bored with it – like the same meal and then same meal again... I do get really sick of eating the same food all the time. (Faye)

Where a large dish had been prepared with a view to making it last for more than one meal, extra portions were commonly frozen as a means of storing them for future servings – and removing the immediacy with which they could be consumed.

...I'll do things like if I make a vegetable and bacon hock soup, then I serve it for dinner. We might have some the next day, and the rest would get frozen. And I do that with stews and things too. So I might buy one packet of meat – I like to always get meat under five dollars – and so say if I get some blade steak then I'll make that into a stew which would be a serving for about four or five people, and then split it and freeze half. (Sandy)

...So I cook these big dishes, and then I freeze any servings that we don't eat on the day. I cool them down totally, and then when they're cool I put them in the freezer. If they're frozen then they can't just be used for grazing on out of the fridge, and they're more likely to still be there when we need them. (Liz)

Rationing serving sizes

A number of respondents reported monitoring serving sizes carefully as a means of rationing food to make it last. For Christina, this was a strategy which allowed her to avoid missing meals entirely, and in Daryl's case, feeling compelled to act as a role model for the children in his family with regard to limiting serving sizes.

I cut the size of my meals quite often, but I try not to skip. That's quite normal for me. I still get protein. I still get veggies, and I still get vitamins. So there's balance because I stick to my [set] menu. There just may not be quantity. (Christina)

There have been a lot of times that I've felt that I should have had some more, but I know that if I have some more the two older kids will want more, and then we'll just run out of food for that week. (Daryl)

I just basically ration it... I'm always aware of meal sizes and how much I can trim off where. You don't want to scrimp, but you don't want to waste anything that you could use another time either. (Kerry)

Kerry's comments about minimising waste were reinforced by other respondents. Given that their capacity to replace food was limited, rationing combined with proper storage were reported as being complementary strategies to maximise the utility of existing supplies – whether these were raw ingredients or potential meal servings.

I like to store food properly. It lasts better if you store it correctly, and you don't end up wasting what you haven't used yet. It's still there for next time. (Meredith)

Daryl and I are on our own regularly. The older kids are only here three or four nights a week, so we need two different sizes of meals [dishes] for when they're not here... it means we've got to plan how we're going to do our meals so that we have enough for when there's five of us here, and then enough for when we only have three. So we've got different meals for different arrangements. It means that nothing is wasted. (Liz)

Cooking from scratch

Overall, respondents reported that they made minimal use of packaged, prepared or takeaway foods as one of their regular strategies for addressing food insecurity. Sheryl's rationale for using pre-prepared baking mixes was that she was able to avoid the cost of having to purchase multiple ingredients. This was also her rationale for using packaged risotto and pasta in sauce as the basis for a meal with some frequency.

I use packets a lot for baking and stuff because it means that I don't have to buy a whole range of ingredients to make something. It's all in the packet and there's only one or two things you have to add. I use things like the rice risotto and pasta in sauces quite a bit too. You don't have to add much to those to make them into a meal, and then I only have to buy the one packet instead of all the ingredients individually which would work out to be more expensive. (Sheryl)

Sandy confirmed Sheryl's assertion that packaged foods such as rice risotto could easily be converted into a full meal with the addition of a few extra ingredients. In Sandy's case some of these could be derived from her garden, and even though she had to compromise her dislike of packaged foods on the basis of some of the ingredients, this practice provided her with a cheap meal option.

I don't really use packaged food or prepared foods a lot because I don't like the concept. All the different key ingredients that start with numbers and no one knows what the heck they are... but with me the money side probably has to take priority over the health side, and I do do pre-packaged foods in the sense that I might get a rice

risotto for under two dollars – like a dollar seventy or less I'd pay... but then I've got things in the garden – I've got celery, silver beet. I would punch out a pre-packaged rice risotto with vegetables that I've either grown or... so I'm adding on to it. Like I say, with the two hundred grams of bacon – which is only four slices – cut up two slices of it and put that through a rice risotto with some vegetables, and to me that's a meal. Well, you've actually got a double meal really, for two people. You can sort of put another serving away and then have it the next day if my son wants that for lunch on a Saturday. I might do that tonight. I've got about four dollars, and I've got no coffee or milk or anything, so perhaps I'll do a rice risotto tonight [laughing].
(Sandy)

Kerry also expressed a dislike of packaged foods, but given that her food security status was higher than that of Sheryl and Sandy, she potentially had more options about how often she resorted to them. The quote below also illustrates her preference for using them as a side dish, rather than as the basis for a meal.

I would use packaged foods very rarely. Every now and again. I don't like the beef stroganoff mixes and all of that crap. It's usually if, like for instance last night, I was just starting to struggle to find things to cook and we had a packet pasta and sauce because someone had left it here from the weekend. And so it was like – "Well, that's easy: we'll just cook that up". It was great that we had that in the house. And I just made a stir fry to have with it, so that was good. (Kerry)

Respondents reported minimising their reliance on takeaway or fast foods. In contrast to the resistance to using pre-prepared and packaged foods on the basis of concerns about their components, commentaries tended to point to takeaway foods as an option that was simply not economical to employ as a regular strategy.

I always cook now. I try to. I don't buy takeaways. (Rob)

Very rarely would I bother with take-away foods. Mainly because of the cost. You go and spend ten dollars on a Chinese takeaway, where that would get me at least two litres of milk, two loaves of bread and I would say some oranges and apples. (Sandy)

Very, very rarely [do we have takeaway foods]. If we wanted hot chips we would only get the minimum two dollars worth – and that's for all [5] of us. We would use that as a filler to go with a meal. In terms of the cost of takeaways, it's just not an option for us. (Liz)

Fast food was generally regarded as a 'treat' rather than a regular feature of respondents' diets, but Meredith's commentary in particular points to an awareness that not being able to access the kinds of food experiences enjoyed by the majority of the community was a marker of deprivation.

I'm tough on myself. I don't treat myself. I don't go to McDonalds. I don't go to Kentucky Fried. I don't do any of that. (Wayne)

We have a treat thing, so every once in a while they can get a kids meal from McDonald's or something like that. But that's very rarely. Every now and then we'll have fish and chips. No, it's not something we rely on as one of our regular meals. The kids go to athletics and sometimes on a Thursday they can buy a couple of sausages in bread, and that's always nice. But that's about it. (Kerry)

I love takeaways and I love junk food! And sometimes I can yearn for it just like anyone else would. On certain days I just feel like a Snickers bar or KFC or something. I struggle with those, but that's just normal... I try and resist the temptation [to eat fast foods and takeaways] because of the money situation, and I'll try and think logically about it. Like I'll say to myself, "Well, if I go and get a cheese burger then that's two dollars and I'll be two dollars down...". It's those times where you kind of think, "Things are so far gone already, what difference is it going to make?". Sometimes it's just nice to feel like you are doing normal things like everyone else, that you can make the same kinds of choices as other people, and not feel guilty or beat yourself up about it later. (Meredith)

Strategies for eating while away from home

Many of the endogenous strategies reported relied on being able to prepare and consume food within the home. For some respondents – particularly those who were studying – this was not always possible. They reported taking food from home to eat in preference to purchasing it while away, or abstaining from eating outside of the household altogether.

If I'm up at uni, I'll take mine from here. That's pretty much constant.
(Christina)

I don't eat at all while I'm up at university. It's rare for me to eat outside of home full stop. (Faye)

Kerry avoided buying individually packaged foods in favour of repackaging food at home to make up children's school lunches.

I tend to package food at home for the kids' lunches rather than buying the pre-packaged foods. They don't get that very often. That's kind of like...that's a really big treat. I mostly use those EasyYo yoghurts, so that's made at home and then I package it up, and they'll get a sandwich and a couple of bits of fruit and a biscuit. They have a pretty good lunch. I don't really like chips or anything like that, so they don't get stuff like that. But we make popcorn, so sometimes I'll put that into a container and they'll take those. We don't ever have cheese slices or anything like that... (Kerry)

For Liz, though, ensuring that there was adequate food for her children to be able to take lunch to school meant that her own food intake was regularly compromised.

I cut my meals right back, or I've gone without lunch just to make sure the kids have got sandwiches for their lunches. I probably do that about three times a week. (Liz)

Thin Pickings

Respondents were asked to outline the strategies that they use when food first starts to run out and there is no money to buy more. The endogenous practices that they identified included 'bulking out' to make the food they did have left go further, and 'making do' by compromising on accepted meal standards.

Bulking out

One of the preferred strategies to make food go further was to find ways in which more expensive 'flavouring' ingredients could be 'bulked out' with cheaper staples (generally high carbohydrate foods such as breads, pasta, rice and potatoes) in order to achieve a sensation of fullness.

You don't always have to have plain steamed rice. You can fry it, and that's always tasty, and you've got all the cheap additives that you can put in there in small amounts to flavour it up. It's simple stuff really, and you can fill up in this way. (Christina)

I make scones. Pikelets. I eat a lot of pasta and rice. I tend to go for things that will fill me up. Hot chips? They fill you up. It may not be good, but it's something. (Faye)

I am just more thoughtful about what I'm cooking and how I'm preparing our meals when things are becoming a bit thin. Also I'm just constantly thinking of where I can even scrape together five dollars maybe, for a couple of loaves of bread... I'll start bulking foods out, like using more potatoes maybe. Even though it's really thin pickings – we might just have more pasta and the meat will drop out. Like tonight, we're just going to have macaroni cheese. We'll fill up on that, and I'll get stuff out of the garden to make a salad. (Kerry)

'Making do' with what's there

A number of respondents talked about 'making do' with what was left in the house when there was no money with which to purchase more food. While they may not have been able to assemble a preferred meal, they were prepared to work with the meagre resources that they still had in order to feed themselves and their children.

I just make do. Like I am creative enough with my cooking that I will always try and make sure that we've got a meal. I try really hard, and I'm continuously thinking about how much food we've got, what I'm going to create... I'll just make sure that I've got like, maybe hamburger buns in there, so that if I run out of food and I've got no more money I will be able to give the kids a burger bun with lettuce and tomato and stuff on. (Kerry)

I don't think I've ever really been in a position where there is absolutely no food in the house. It might not be the food that we want to eat, but there's always something in the cupboard that I can make for my son at least. Whether it's having Weetbix for dinner, or porridge, or toast. It's something. There's always something that I can make do with. (Sandy)

For Meredith, whose capacity to purchase food was extremely limited, ideas about 'making do' extended beyond the scope of her pantry. A quite different skill set that relied on her ability to utilise the resources of the community environment – both natural and manmade - is referred to in her commentary.

There's fruit trees out there [within the community], or I'll just drink a lot of extra water or something like that – and that's good. I've always thought that, well, here we've got the river and we've got the community gardens and they have lots of fruit and veggies down at the gardens so there's always fruit trees and stuff. I go fishing. A bit of hunter gathering. I definitely go in that direction. (Meredith)

Going without

Going without a regular meal (i.e. breakfast, lunch or dinner) was a strategy that was referred to by almost all respondents. Wayne's concept of food security involved ensuring that he had access to at least one substantial meal a day. Faye also reported that she usually only ate one main meal, and that if this was not achievable, she would replace it with something less substantial.

With me, it's as long as I get a meal a day. I would never miss that meal because I don't allow that to happen. That's how I solve those problems – as long as I get a meal a day. Now that meal could be breakfast, lunch or tea – but for me it's just that meal a day. (Wayne)

I don't usually eat until night time. If food's running low I cut that evening meal out as well. Or I'll have something that's not a balanced meal. Like a sandwich or something. That happens more often than not. I'll have a sandwich for dinner. I only eat dinner. So I'll replace it. There's always Weetbix and marmite... I quite often have a coffee instead of an evening meal. And my luxury is perked coffee. But it's not expensive because I make it and a packet lasts me. It costs me about six bucks a month, so if I use it for replacing meals, it's not expensive. (Faye)

Replacing meals with fluids, or using fluids (and in some cases, cigarettes) to alleviate hunger was a strategy that was commonly reported amongst those who regularly missed meals.

I do two meals a day. I miss lunch. Sometimes I miss them [lunch and breakfast] altogether and just have dinner. Dinner is my main meal. I find that when I'm working I don't eat as much. It keeps me busy and spares me a meal... I just go and have a cigarette and a cup of tea and that's it – I'm back in there. (Rob)

In the evening I fill the time with cups of tea and coffee if I'm hungry. Just hot drinks. I drink hot water occasionally. (Wayne)

In Sandy's case, replacing meals with fluids had become almost a ritualised response to not having enough money for food to feed both herself and her son.

I'm sort of in a routine with the situation where I make a conscious decision and say to myself, "Right. This is where we're at. I'm going to fast", and I'll just take fluids for the day... When I'm fasting I'm preserving food to meet my son's needs. I will avoid doing the food because I know that there will be enough for him if I go without. Even when there is food that's always a consideration. For example, if I do bacon and eggs as a meal then my son will have the bacon. I don't have the bacon – I just have the eggs and some toast. (Sandy)

Similarly, Liz reported that she limited her own food intake to try and ensure that the food needs of other members of her family were met.

If there's not enough to go around at dinner time, then I just go without. (Liz)

Although the intention of this research was to examine experiences related to adult food insecurity, the data show that the adult members of families were not the only ones whose food security was compromised. Several parents reported that they carefully controlled their children's access to food as a strategy to make sure that it lasted.

They know that they're not to go to the cupboard and just pull stuff out – they have to ask me before they're allowed to eat anything. (Kerry)

He wouldn't just go and help himself to the food because he knows that there is only so much there. He knows that he must check with me... He would always check with me. (Sandy)

For Liz and Daryl, trying to cater to the food tastes of three children posed a challenge, and they were at a point where adequacy – rather than preference – had become the deciding factor in what the children were served.

We all have the same meals. Even the little fellow... at three and a half he's old enough to be eating what everyone else is eating. He still complains every time there's peas and veggies, but I think he's mainly learnt that off the other kids and we just tell him to sit there and eat them. We've had to teach them that they have to eat what's on their plate, because that's all that's going. They have a choice between that or going hungry. (Daryl)

Giving the kids what they need rather than what they want are two different things. (Liz)

Discussion

The majority of respondents in this research reported that the main way in which they obtained food was through grocery shopping. A number supplemented this with growing produce themselves – although health status and tenure type were factors that could place limitations on this. Resorting to networks within the community, including formal food support, was certainly *not* the primary strategy that most respondents used to address food insecurity – rather, they exercised, as far as they possibly could, a range of approaches to make the food they were able to purchase (or grow) last for as long as possible *before* they engaged with exogenous strategies to alleviate their situation.

One of the clear themes observed across the data was the care that respondents took to maximise their purchasing power and minimise any inefficiencies in their patterns of consumption and production. This was reflected in shopping practices, where choices about what would be purchased, who would purchase it, in what quantities and from where were all made before purchasing commenced. Strategies such as rigidly shopping to a list, buying ingredients in larger packs that could be broken down to achieve savings, limiting the variety of purchases or the cost of sundry items, and even purchasing the minimum amount of an ingredient required to complete a single meal, all demonstrate detailed planning

of purchasing decisions. Food preparation also involved strategies drawing on skills based in cultural capital that aimed to maximise the utility of food as a resource. For those who experience food insecurity making food last is a priority, and to achieve this food was commonly rationed, bulked out with staples, or made to 'make do' in one form or another. A good number of respondents made a point of expressing their intolerance for wastefulness, and many of the strategies described had been developed to carefully minimise any unnecessary losses.

In terms of food production, the data point to the importance of home based preparation and a dependency on basic cooking resources in the form of a working kitchen being available in order for most strategies to be actualised. Respondents reported an aversion to purchasing takeaway foods or food for eating while they were away from home on the grounds of cost rather than any nutritional concerns. Interestingly though, packaged foods such as rice risotto and pasta and sauce mixes were used despite concerns about their component ingredients. Although these foods were generally regarded as nutritionally negligible, respondents rationalised their use on the basis that they provided a low cost option and could be utilised as the base for a flavoursome and filling main meal with the addition of very small amounts of other more expensive ingredients such as meat or vegetables. This is an example of the compromises those who experience food insecurity within the context of relative poverty are faced with: choices about the nutrition required to maintain health in the longer term are subjugated by the need to avoid hunger in the short term. Further, where food insecurity places limitations on the nature or quality of the food that is able to be acquired, or the experience that the consumption of food carries with it, individual preferences based in cultural norms are also compromised. Adaptive behaviours such as limiting the number of meals consumed in a day, replacing main meals with nutritionally inadequate substitutes (such as cereals and fluids) or abstaining from eating entirely point to shifts in micro level patterns of consumption that offend the cultural norms of both the individual on which they are imposed, and arguably, wider society.

The data also support a number of the physiological and experiential themes that have been identified elsewhere in the literature. The nutritional requirements for maintaining health are potentially jeopardised by many of the strategies reported. It should be noted that these strategies and their health consequences are *imposed* as a result of inadequate economic resources with which to purchase food (Else, 2000), rather than *elected* as personal or lifestyle preferences. Further, they are driven by the desire to maximise food's utility in order to avoid the experience of hunger, or to protect others in the household from the experience. The results here also support Olson's (2005) findings with regard to women compromising their own nutrition in order to mitigate the impacts of food insecurity for their children.

In situations where food resources are limited by insufficient income, no repertoire of skills and strategies is able to transform a finite resource into an infinite one. As one third sector organisation has observed, "The best budgeting in the world can't solve the problem of not having enough money" (Downtown Community Ministry (1999), cited in Wynd (2005), p. 36). When the efficacy of endogenous strategies inevitably expires, food insecurity compels people to look beyond their own means for solutions. It is with this fact in mind that the thesis now turns to an examination of the experiences associated with those strategies that rely on exogenous means.

Stone Soup: Exogenous Strategies for Addressing Food Insecurity

The title of this chapter draws upon a well known food fable. *Stone Soup* has been adapted in many different parts of the world, and despite many culturally specific retellings, themes around the strength of community and means-based contribution in pursuit of the common good have remained relatively constant over time. This chapter addresses a number of questions about the interaction between social capital and micro level strategies for addressing food insecurity that do not appear to have been considered extensively within the literature relating to affluent nations¹. In considering the relationship between formal and informal strategies, it also examines people's experiences of the structural mechanisms (in the form of formal food support services) intended to alleviate foodlessness, and the complex interaction between these and the use of informal strategies based in social relationships. The results demonstrate that food insecure people tend to move through a hierarchy of strategies according to the cultural and social capital that they are able to expend. Respondents' perceptions about the stigma associated with not being able to meet their food needs independently also influenced the kinds of exogenous strategies they applied.

As well as highlighting a range of responses to addressing food insecurity that were based in personal and household strategies, the respondents in this study

¹ Two notable exceptions to this are: Martin, Rogers, Cook and Joseph (2004), who found that social capital was associated with decreased levels of hunger in a sample of low income households in Connecticut; and Walker, Holben, Kropf and Holcomb (2007), who found that household food insecurity was inversely associated with social capital in a sample of Appalachian (Ohio) households that received assistance through the Special Supplemental Program for women, infants and children.

also identified strategic interactions, both formal and informal, with a range of social networks and organisations based within the community. These responses have been termed *exogenous* on the basis that they occur externally in the social or public domain. The previous chapter has already noted that exogenous strategies are generally only pursued when the resource constraints that determine access to food are such that endogenous strategies become unsustainable – although as the presentation of results that follows demonstrates, exogenous strategies can also interact with and support endogenous ones.

Informal exogenous strategies - social and community networks

Respondents reported a range of social networks that they considered provided informal assistance to alleviate food insecurity. The most commonly mentioned were friends, non-resident family members, and other community members such as neighbours.

Friendship networks

The most commonly reported social networks through which people accessed informal food assistance were based on friendship relationships. In some instances support was monetary (money being either given or lent), but in the majority food assistance arrived by way of a 'gift' of either purchased or home prepared items (including full meals and baking), or seasonal home grown produce.

I've lent money off a friend who's not very well off herself to buy food.
(Meredith)

I do have several friends who will always help me with five dollars or ten dollars, so there's a little bit of that... I'll do things like take fruit or vegetables from others. So I'll come away from friends' houses with things like lemons. I got a big bag of lemons from someone the other day, and a cabbage from another person. So then I can make lemonade, stuff like that... In summer, as we come into fruit trees and that, then I'll certainly be around at different people's houses that I know picking up all their feijoas. I've got a few friends who garden as

well. Yesterday I stopped in and saw a friend and she had some lovely cabbages, and so I said, "Oh, I'll have one of those!" Then I cooked it up with some silver beet as well from my own garden. (Sandy)

This friend of mine, she's always cooked for me. She's always provided meals – and how can I say no? Whether or not she knew I couldn't buy groceries... she would quite often just sort of turn up with food. (Wayne)

One of the interesting consistencies across the commentaries that referred to friendship networks as a means of alleviating food insecurity was that while friends could be approached for assistance, largely the contribution that they made appeared to be spontaneous and was most often not prompted by any request for assistance on the part of the recipient.

Someone might stop over for a coffee. I have a couple of friends who will always bring a thing of milk. You know, I never have to ask them – it's not something that's a condition of coming. But I do have a couple of friends that will rock up and say, "Oh, you know, I was here half the night the other night and drank all your milk, so here's another milk for you...", so I'll accept it. I would never ask specifically. Just pride really. (Sandy)

Yep, one of my friends in the past has helped quite regularly actually without even thinking of it like that. With a meal, and money, food, and just generally checking in that I'm OK. And my neighbours, they are always looking out for my children. (Meredith)

Like Meredith, Kerry was fortunate to have neighbours who demonstrated some empathy with her situation and to whom she could turn if she needed to borrow an ingredient that would allow her to complete a meal. However, she was also conscious of which neighbours would be more likely to respond positively to her requests.

I've always got lots of people – if I do run out of things – like I'll just go across to my neighbour and ask her if we can borrow a couple of potatoes until pay day or something like that. Or I'll go down the road, because they're quite tight around here. (Kerry)

Respondents also provided commentaries that indicated their perceptions about informal food support as a process of reciprocity. Shared meals with friends were

a regular feature of Kerry's social life and enabled her to participate in a manner where she was able to contribute according to her means as well as providing some respite from food insecurity.

I've got good friends, so I tend to do a bit of cooking for my friends and bits and pieces. So they'll bring food along as well, and it's kind of reciprocal because when I go and have dinner with them I'll bring food too. So it's more of a social thing and it's reciprocal. It's not an obvious thing about bringing someone else food because they don't have enough. We all put something in and we all get something out according to what we've got to work with on the day. (Kerry)

Sandy had clear personal values around the processes of reciprocity and making a personal contribution. She had a number of skills that she was able to exploit through her social networks as a basis for exchanges for food.

Sometimes I'll exchange physical work, like gardening, or I might help a friend with their book work. Recently I've edited someone's university work and did an exchange like that with meat. Or I'll babysit and take some baking for babysitting – whatever they want to give me... I equate it to 'there's no such thing as a free lunch'. I'm obliged to contribute in some way – you never take without giving. So that's probably a personal value that I hold. (Sandy)

Family networks

Half of the respondents reported that non-resident family members acted as a form of informal food support, although for some of them utilising other social networks was preferable to approaching family members. Parents in particular seemed to form the main source of support.

Mum and Dad, well they've always got a stocked pantry. So Mum might have done a dozen muffins or something like that and so I'll freeze those and then pull out a muffin everyday for my son's school lunches. But I don't like to let them know that we're struggling if I can possibly help it. (Sandy)

My mum did help us out, but there was no meat. It was anything we needed at the supermarket and she gave us the money to pay for it and there was no meat in that at all, and that was hard. But that's one network we have used to help us get through it. (Liz)

One respondent with adult children living in close proximity was determined that they should not be burdened with her food insecurity on a regular basis, although she would approach her daughter - in the same way that Kerry had approached her neighbours - if she needed a small amount of an ingredient that would enable her to complete a meal for herself.

I don't go to my kids because I don't think that would be fair, you know... I'm not down there having my meals all the time. It's not so bad because I can say to my daughter - "Hey, have you got any carrots?", and I can top up. But for people who don't have that, it must be hard. (Faye)

Both Kerry and Meredith referred to the importance of the contribution of their respective ex-partners (and fathers of their children) in assisting to ease food insecurity within the household. For Kerry, the time her children spent with their father and his parents provided an opportunity for her to free up money that would otherwise have to be spent on food. Meredith's children would usually arrive for their visits with her bearing food that had been sent by their father. Both women also referred to attending family meals hosted by their ex-partners on a regular basis.

I rely on ____ and _____'s [names of children] dad, because he has them every second weekend, so then I'll know that for two weekends a month I don't have to have any food in there. I could just eat a sandwich and I'm happy kind of thing. So I kind of budget for him having the kids. And sometimes we'll go over and we'll have dinner with him. So maybe once a week I'll know that I'm going somewhere else for dinner, so that's a meal that I don't have to cover. Also, his mum and dad are really good with ____ and _____ [the children], so during the Christmas holidays I'll know that they'll be going off and spending a week with them, so that frees up a bit more money over Christmas that doesn't have to be allocated towards the food and can be spent on paying bills or other stuff. (Kerry)

My ex-husband, he helps out with little bits too [when the children are staying with her]. You know, we do share like that. And we all have dinner together at his place quite often. There's no pressure there for me to take anything, but if I can, I will. (Meredith)

Community networks

Besides friends and family, there were several other less obvious community networks that respondents identified as playing a role in improving the food security of their households. For Liz and Daryl, a relationship that they had formed as a result of their church membership had provided them with support.

We've had someone that we know from church give us stuff from time to time. Last time she gave us some meat. She said "I want you to go into my freezer and I want you to get out all the roasts in there that you want to get out", and that was like - WOW! (Liz)

Although Rob was living in stable accommodation when he participated in the research interview, his sense of identity was still very much based in his previous experiences of the homeless community, and he spoke of the way in which food support is both received and distributed within this alternative 'neighbourhood'.

It's sort of a unit. It's close knit. They look after each other... There's a lot of sharing. A lot of sharing of food. What I used to get in the shelter was bakery. Bakery is given [donated]. The new way is sometimes we have none and sometimes we have some, and the food gets wasted. So the guy that used to look after the place says, "Just take everything. We don't want to see anything [left] inside. So just do it". So I'd bag it up, and bring it up here, and bring it for these other ones. I don't know where they live. I know a couple of them live on the river... (Rob)

For Meredith, the lack of proximate family and breakdowns in family relationships had led her to develop other relational networks that could be utilised to improve her food security, including that with her general practitioner.

I don't really have many family around here. There's just my ex-husband and a couple of children... It used to be my mother – I'd go back to my mother. But that relationship has had its ups and downs, and she's a long way away now... so now it's the doctor or

the foodbank. The doctor has been...like I see him as a place that I can go to talk to because things are on my mind or I'm struggling with my health. He's helped organise things and direct things. He's helped set me up with services - letters to WINZ, letters to whoever really. Through his church he has organised food parcel deliveries and he's made calls and they've actually delivered before I've got home! So I tend to go to him now before I go to family or friends. (Meredith)

Meredith also reported accessing produce from a community garden² initiative, although she did not consider this to be one of her primary strategies or food support resources.

There's the community garden down the road. I can go and get something out of that if I really need to. I only do that very occasionally when I am totally stuck because if everyone relied on it, it wouldn't last long, would it? I know they have had some problems down there with big amounts of stuff disappearing. It's not locked up or anything so anyone can go in there, and there are a lot of students and other people on low incomes around here. (Meredith)

Like Meredith, Liz and Daryl's absence of proximate family networks had prompted them to look for other avenues of support within the community. In their case, a social service agency (with whom they were already clients) had eased the path to accessing a food grant by facilitating contact with a Work and Income New Zealand social worker.

We got one [a food grant] recently. I rang up _____ [name of social service organisation] and they put me in touch with their social worker at Work and Income, even though I said that I didn't think we were entitled to anything. She said, "Don't you worry about that - I'll get hold of someone", and then she rang me back and said, "I've got you an appointment at two o'clock at WINZ", and I told her again that I didn't think we were entitled to anything, and she said "Don't worry about that - we'll get you something anyhow". (Liz)

² The concept of community gardens has been explained in Chapter 3.

Barriers to accessing social, familial and community support networks

The data indicate a number of reasons why respondents tended to favour the informal support that could be accessed through friendship and other social networks within the community, rather than through familial networks. One of the reasons for this preference was the need for *proximate* support on the basis that family networks that were at a distance limited the immediacy with which assistance could be accessed.

My family is in Auckland so we don't see them on a day-to-day basis. We haven't asked them for help. They're too far away really... There is no one here that we can specifically call on for help if we don't have access to those [formal food support] services. Not really. No. (Daryl)

The cost of transport in order to seek assistance from family that was geographically distant could also be a hindrance.

I do have family members in Huntly on my mother's side within Tainui³ that I've only just recently met, and I wouldn't have a problem going over there to have something to eat. They grow their own veggie gardens out there. They've always got heaps, and every time I visit they give me all these veggies. But that's only if I've got the gas to get out there in the first place... (Christina)

Whether respondents preferred to utilise friendship or family networks as a means of support could also be determined by their perceptions about the limits of other people's resources. The data demonstrate the reluctance expressed by some respondents about requesting assistance on the basis of not burdening others, but their simultaneous preparedness to accept assistance if it was freely offered.

With my friends it's different because in my house it's just me, but they have their families at home with them so most of them are already really under it and I don't want to add to that burden. If they notice and say, "Well, would you like to come round for a meal?", or if they offer me something I won't say no, but I won't usually ask. (Meredith)

³ Tainui is one of the largest tribal groups (or *iwi*) in the Waikato region.

You've got to take into consideration that whanau⁴ have their own responsibilities too with their own children or grandchildren or whatever... (Christina)

If I was in a situation where I couldn't get help through those services and I had no money, I'd call my mum. But that would be way down the list. I'd put my mum at the bottom of the list because she gets all worried with what she has got to pay herself. She's on her own, so she hasn't got the largest bank account in the world, and we can't really rely on her. She used to be my first port of call, but not anymore. (Liz)

Respondents reported that a sense of personal pride and the desire to maintain secrecy around food insecurity could both act as barriers to requesting assistance through social and familial networks. The data also suggest that, along with the other limitations to accessing support through social networks, the desire to avoid stigma was a significant reason for turning to formal assistance⁵.

_____ *[name of housemate] has got a bit of money. But I won't go begging to him because that is just not gonna happen! He will volunteer if he so desires, but it's not an expectation. He's got his own life...and I've got my pride. (Christina)*

I don't have a lot of contact with family...and most of my friends here are in the same boat as me. There's no way that I would ask friends or family for money to buy food... no way – not for food! To start with, I wouldn't want them to know. I'd rather go to WINZ or a foodbank if I had to. (Sheryl)

Formal food support services as a usual way of obtaining food

The sample of respondents in this research was limited to those who had accessed food support through a formal service in the year prior to their interview. The type of service (or combination of services) they were likely to have used tended to be correlated to the severity of their food insecurity. Those who were classified as having low food security reported having made use of Special Needs Grant for Food, sometimes in combination with foodbank use.

⁴ The Māori term *whanau* refers to the extended family group.

⁵ The themes of pride and secrecy are explored in greater detail in the following chapter which considers the impacts of food insecurity.

Respondents with very low food security were likely to have used up all of their Special Needs Grant for Food, and as a result, had often moved into dependency on foodbanks and community meals. The data also indicate that those respondents who were lacking in proximate family networks or who (for one reason or another) considered that their social networks could not provide the level of support they required were more likely to have regular interactions with formal food support providers.

Special Needs Grant for Food

The eligibility criteria for accessing Special Needs Grants for Food have been reported in Chapter 4. The level of difficulty that respondents experienced in securing a food grant varied and appeared to be related to the Work and Income New Zealand personnel they encountered and their entitlement history. The ease with which Kerry had been able to access a food grant for the first time contrasts with the experiences of several other respondents who were more regular recipients.

Well, I'd gone in to see them about something else, and my case manager – I've had her for a while, which is unusual for WINZ – so we've got quite a good rapport, and I was just saying that I couldn't get food – or enough food – because I had to pay this big power bill that had come out. And she said "Oh, hang on...", and then she looked it up and she said, "You've never had a food grant before". This was about six months ago, and I'd been with WINZ for about four years on the DPB. And she goes, "You've got four hundred and fifty dollars allocated a year, so maybe you should take some of that". So as soon as she told me, I think in the last six months, I've used all of my food grant entitlement... (Kerry)

It's quite difficult to get a food grant from them, but I do get a letter from them for the foodbank. (Meredith)

They [Work and Income New Zealand case managers] don't tend to make it any easier for you than they have to. It seems to depend a lot on who you hit on the day... If they decline me they usually send me off to the foodbank with a letter. (Wayne)

A few respondents reported instances where they perceived that case managers had not been as sympathetic as they could have been to requests for assistance in exceptional circumstances. For Liz and Daryl, a series of ongoing issues about the correct level of benefit entitlement had compromised the household's fragile financial situation and food security, and they had a sense that the implications of not having these issues resolved quickly were lost on Work and Income staff.

They were like: "We don't think you'll get it [a food grant] for the things you've written down there." And we're like, "Well, we've been waiting for WINZ to sort our payments out. What are we supposed to do about food for our three kids?" They'd already decided before we even put the form in. (Liz)

Faye had also experienced difficulties in the past with trying to communicate the complexities of her situation to Work and Income New Zealand staff. For her, the challenges of not receiving a weekly payment that was due to her were compounded not only by the fact that she was confined to a wheelchair, but also by the expectation of staff that she would present at their office in person in order to have an error on their part resolved.

I rung them [Work and Income New Zealand] and told them I had a problem, and they said: "Oh, well, it's a computer glitch", and I said, "Well, we haven't got any food". And she said, "Well you can get a bus down here", and I thought: "What part of this message is not being received?" (Faye)

Wayne had some advice for Work and Income New Zealand personnel about their approach to communicating with him.

I've got a lot of respect for them [Work and Income New Zealand staff], but like I often say to them: "Talk to me. Don't talk at me." (Wayne)

Wayne and Sheryl had both been regular food grant users over an extended period of time. For Wayne, the food grant entitlement had become a means of easing some of the financial pressures that had accompanied the progressive loss of entitlement to other welfare payments. Sheryl also had a sense that over time assistance through the welfare mechanism had become more difficult to obtain.

Ninety nine percent of the time I use it [the food grant] because I know I've got entitlement there. It's my entitlement and I'm going to use it... They've cut me right back on my other entitlements now. Other than my disability allowance, they've cancelled all my Special Needs entitlements. They've cut it right back. Using the food grant has kind of been a way of kind of catching up after losing those other entitlements. (Wayne)

I use it [food grant] fairly regularly, and I do it reluctantly. If I do, I put on the tears. I know it's the only way I can get it off them. They're very strict with me at the moment. I don't know why...it's a lot harder than it used to be. (Sheryl)

Christina's experiences of accessing a food grant contrast with some those reported by other respondents. Although she had no complaints about her interactions with Work and Income New Zealand, as a first time applicant she had a sense of resentment about being reduced to this measure as means of accessing food.

I've used the food grant just once before... Getting that food grant was a one off, because I was forced to go there. I went there begrudgingly – not voluntarily - begrudgingly. Because going in to ask for a handout doesn't do you any favours. It's not the best feeling, and it's not an experience I'm keen to repeat in a hurry. (Christina)

Foodbanks

While grocery shopping was the primary way in which food came into the majority of respondents' households, two interviewees provided exceptions to this. The money that Meredith had left over for food each week was extremely minimal and food parcels were the most common means of meeting her household's food requirements.

The main way that food comes into the house is through the foodbank. I'd still visit a supermarket or something like that once or twice a week for other things that generally aren't covered in a food parcel. I still have to top up with bits and pieces to be able to put something together normally. But those parcels, they're a blessing anyway. (Meredith)

Overall, all respondents who had used foodbanks reported their interactions with these services in a positive light. Accessing a food parcel was perceived as being a less invasive process than obtaining a food grant through Work and Income New Zealand⁶.

Foodbanks don't ask as much from you as WINZ do. There just aren't as many questions. They just want a WINZ print out of your income.
(Sheryl)

You have to have a letter from Work and Income saying that you've used up your food grant for the year. In my experience they usually have a bit of talk with you, but what you share with them is up to you. Other than the WINZ letter, the information you give them is voluntary. They don't have that same kind of hold over you as WINZ.
(Sandy)

Wayne's recent surgery and the fact that he was well known to personnel at the social service organisation that he usually accessed food parcels through had saved him from having to go through the usual process of dealing with Work and Income New Zealand.

I was in there last week, just after I came out of hospital... and they knew who I was and they were more than happy to give it [a food parcel] to me because they know that I don't abuse it. Even though I told them I still had twenty dollars left in my WINZ entitlement they said, "We know who you are, and you're already here, so why not? And we'll bring it to you, OK?" (Wayne)

One of the common administrative problems that places pressure on the resources of foodbanks is the practice of 'double dipping' – where clients attempt to access multiple food parcels through more than one foodbank. An awareness of this practice amongst the two services in Hamilton has led to better sharing of information about who has received assistance and how often. Although Wayne had benefitted from the exceptions noted in his commentary above, he also acknowledged that potential exploitation of services by clients had prompted changes in service provider protocols over time.

⁶ Part of the reason for this perception may be that Work and Income New Zealand has already attested to the eligibility of the client by providing a letter to the foodbank confirming that the applicant is unable to access further support in the form of a Special Needs Grant for Food.

Because you're on this side of town, you've got to go to the one [foodbank] over here now. You can't go here, there and everywhere like you used to. Not anymore. At the end of the day it can become a cycle of abuse... Maybe people are spending their money on things they shouldn't be and then they go off crying to some of these places because they've got no money for food. I was a substance abuser and I know about systematic abuse. So I don't abuse those systems and those foodbanks. I only use them if need be. (Wayne)

One of the key limitations that respondents identified in using foodbanks as a strategy was that in contrast to the Special Needs Grant for Food, which allowed them to make purchases to suit their needs or preferences, there was little control over what they received in a food parcel. Despite the absence of fresh food and a lack of variety, recipients reported being prepared to compromise their preferences in order to avoid hunger.

With the food parcels, because it's already pre-paid for and pre-prepared, you just get what's given... Some of it is not the type of food that I would usually eat regularly, or that I would eat if I had a choice. But I'll still take it... It's OK – I mean don't get me wrong: if you're hungry you'll eat it. (Christina)

They're sufficient [food parcels]. Yeah, they're pretty good. I'd say we'd be lost without them... It's usually the fresh things that are missing. Meat, fish, fresh fruit and vegetables. Through the foodbank you get a lot of stuff that is tinned stuff and dried stuff. But beggars can't be choosers, eh? (Meredith)

Community meals

Rob reported that a combination of purchasing food himself and regular attendance at community meals were the main ways in which he usually obtained food. For him, interaction through community meals was a means of both maintaining his connection with Hamilton's homeless community, and a strategy to limit the amount of money he had to spend to meet his food requirements independently.

I think the community meals would be my main one [strategy for accessing food when money has run out]... When you use the community meals you're not paying money out of your pocket – you're saving it. That's not a good way to think, but that's the way it is. Instead of you buying a ten dollar meal, you can go and have a free one. I mean you can give money to them. It's like a two dollar coin, a koha system. Some of them will leave a two dollar coin. (Rob)

The observational reflections that Meredith shared about her experience of running a community meal programme affirm that Rob's strategy is not unique.

There are people that are there because they have a genuine need, but there are others that are just going because it's free and they don't have to buy food, so then maybe they can spend more money on booze or whatever their buzz is. I mean, everyone's got their little quirks for something. But there will always be some that are just trying to get by on not much, and this is one of the things that they can use to help them make ends meet. There's definitely a fine line between those that take it for granted and ride the wave for all that it's worth. There's those that have spent whatever money that they had on rubbish or something, and that take those services because of that – they're there for the ride. And there's those that are in need and all the rest of it, and they're prepared to eventually do dishes and meet people and hang out, and before you know it they become part and parcel of a thriving community around those meals. (Meredith)

The community building aspect of these meals was a dimension that appealed to Meredith.

Some of it's about having an outing and somewhere to go and meet people... When I first came down here and I wanted to do some voluntary work I found that there were a couple of shops that I could go and volunteer myself at... and one of the girls that managed the shop at the time invited me along to a meal when I was just beginning to struggle mid week. So I'd load up the kids and go in there. It's been good for the fellowship and the company, and not having to cook – it's a treat all in one! And we call it "The Sally's Restaurant" [laughing]. (Meredith)

Rob confirmed that community meals are well attended by people who experience homelessness and that these services play an important function in the maintenance of the social networks amongst the transient community.

Well, they all know. The people on the streets. They know everywhere [that offers community meals]. The times, when's the next one, where they are. Yeah, it's quite funny 'cos you all meet in those dinners [community meals]. You won't see each other [during the day], but you'll see each other at dinner... That's another thing. It's a meeting place. It's a good way to get off the street for a little while before everyone settles down for the night. You might be trying to catch up with someone you've been looking for, so you can ask them "Where's that money? Where's that money?", or whatever...it's all there. (Rob)

He also noted that there was good attendance by other members of the community, including working people and families with children.

I don't mind sharing the meals with families. There's one Māori family that comes along with six kids. I do know some people work as well and still go. Maybe they've got bills and it's still hard... (Rob)

Daryl and Liz are an example of one such family. At the time of the interview they had recently been referred to community meals by a foodbank, and they were excited about the prospect of this new strategy, both in terms of the food relief it provided and the opportunity for a social occasion.

It was two weeks ago and we went in there [to a foodbank] for a food parcel. That's when we found out about this study, and that we could use the [community] meals. That was the first time that we'd tried a community meal. We got a list of just about every day of the week except Saturday. You can go and get a feed, and that's been a real boost. That's been a night out!... It also gives us a bit of release from the stresses of day-to-day survival. (Daryl)

We've only been on Thursdays and Fridays so far, but I found that they've been an awesome time. When we've been in there we've really needed it... We look forward to the meal because when we go on a Friday they actually give us a little bag of food to take away – a little doggie bag, and it's like we get a treat. And that's awesome!

The kids go: "Oh, where'd you get this from?", and it's like, "Oh, we were given it..." (Liz)

Daryl and Liz also referred to a number of other elements of this form of food support that had appealed to them including the concessions made for their youngest child, the absence of formal assessment, and the opportunity to spend time in an environment that fostered empathy, rather than judgement or stigma.

And it's that they care about the children too. If people are lining up for their seconds and we come in, it's: "Go ahead, go ahead... you've got a child." They let you go in first. If you've got a child with you he's like a little meal ticket [laughing]... (Daryl)

It's nice meeting the people there. The people who work there too. There are no forms to fill out... It's a place that people can share their stories, and that helps us all to know that we're not the only ones. (Liz)

The level of provision at community meals was another aspect that impressed those respondents who attended them.

They have very awesome food, I must say! It's more than just a soup kitchen thing - it's a big meal! (Liz)

I enjoy the food at the community meals. They're really really good meals. Some of them are better than others – they're all different. Some have lots of vegetables or salad and not much meat. Other than that, they're pretty good though. (Rob)

Hamilton's regular community meals are provided by faith based social service organisations. Rob shared some reflections on his experience of this aspect.

The religion? Not so much. I mean, they do have a prayer, but that's brief – it's not on and on and on. It's brief, to the point, and then you have your meal. No, they try not to influence you to be the way they are... I have to say I don't really care, but it doesn't go down good with me if you start sermoning on, eh?

Knowledge about formal food support services

Respondents were asked to describe how they had found out about the services that they used. Those who had experienced food insecurity over the longer term

tended to have knowledge of a broader range of services, including more detailed understandings of procedural requirements and levels of entitlement than those for whom food insecurity had been a more recent development.

For me, with the food and the money, things have been like this for a long time. I know where the foodbanks are, I know where the food clubs are, and I know my entitlements. (Wayne)

Liz and Daryl were examples of respondents who were new to using formal food support services, and had initiated this process themselves by contacting a range of social service agencies.

Calling upon agencies and finding them. I hadn't really had to do that before, so when we did start to it was like a step out – "Okay. I will do the ring around and find out...", so finding out what services are actually out there and what you're entitled to. We just didn't really know, and we're still in the process of getting our heads around it all really. There's no one that really sits down with you and gives you a range of options in this situation. (Liz)

Sandy had a previous employment history which had involved liaising with Work and Income New Zealand, and this experience had provided her with a good knowledge of the assistance available through this agency. The depth of knowledge she had also allowed her to keep track of her remaining entitlements.

I used to work in the employment sector and worked a lot with Work and Income over the years... so having had those dealings, I'm now very familiar with all of the different systems that are there in place with Work and Income, and what people are eligible for... I know what I'm eligible for, and I know what I can apply for. I wiped out my whole [food grant] limit for the year last week, but I can keep a track of it so I know that there's fifty dollars that will be made available to me from tomorrow for more food grants. Knowing that kind of helps me to be able to plan ahead for next week. After that's gone we'll be back to day-by-day until there is more [entitlement] available again. (Sandy)

Although the requirements of Work and Income New Zealand were generally well known amongst respondents, there was evidence of confusion and inconsistencies in knowledge about accessing assistance through foodbanks.

I found out about the foodbank here through the _____ [name of social service provider]... so I just wandered in there. I didn't know about the process though. You have to go through WINZ, so [I had to go] back to WINZ to get the paperwork. (Rob)

Several respondents had contrasting ideas about the entitlement process for food parcels, particularly about the limitations on the number of times that food parcels could be accessed over a set period.

I just know about foodbanks from the community work that I've done over the years. I've always known that you can go to _____ [name of foodbank] and get a food parcel. You have to have a letter from Work and Income saying that you've used up your food grant. I don't think I'm eligible for that at the moment though because you're only allowed one food parcel for the year. I thought about it recently, about going back there again, and then I thought, "Oh no, I'm only allowed one food parcel a year", and I'm not sure that I can get another one yet. (Sandy)

I'm not really sure how many times a year you can get a food parcel. I always thought it was two, but recently I've heard of people getting it more often than that. If that's true, then I think that there have been times in the past that I probably haven't gone for help under the false impression that there's no assistance... I prefer the foodbanks [to food grants], but they should have it more, instead of just two [parcels per year]. I think they should put it up a bit. (Sheryl)

Knowledge about community meals was even less widespread than knowledge about foodbanks, and appeared to be limited to those respondents in the sample who experienced the highest levels of food insecurity.

They're at a different place every day, so you kind of have to be in the know about that to be able to use them. Up until recently we really had no idea that they even existed. We only found out about them through one of the foodbanks. There's a list you can get. It would be good if that list was more easily available. We sure could have used them before now. (Daryl)

Strategies of last resort

The findings of the previous chapter pointed to the exercise of exogenous strategies only when the utility of endogenous means of addressing food insecurity had expired. The current chapter has also noted that exogenous strategies that make use of friendship networks were preferred to those which make use of familial networks. Respondents were asked to identify their *least preferred* exogenous strategy from the range they had identified. For Sandy and Kerry, if social networks could not be utilised, then parental support was sought, either covertly (as in Sandy's case) or overtly, as an intermediary step before seeking assistance from formal services.

I tend to do things like I might for instance know that I'm out of food. I'll ring up mum and I know she'll probably say, "Oh, come over for dinner. We've got this on... blah de blah". Yeah – I'd probably ring mum. I'd ring Mum before I went to Work and Income. Other than Mum, I would probably be looking at Work and Income, or going to The Nest. (Sandy)

Probably one of my parents. It's only once I've ever had to ask Dad for money for food. But I don't ever want to do it again. That was before I knew about the food grant. (Kerry)

Despite Kerry's positive experience with Work and Income staff when she was initially introduced to Special Needs Grant for Food, over time her attitude towards applying for it had changed to the extent that she now regarded this as less desirable than accessing assistance through the informal strategies available to her. The basis for this shift appeared to stem from her experience of the *process* of applying for a food grant, rather than any negative experiences of Work and Income New Zealand staff.

The WINZ food grant is probably the least desirable thing. Just the having to go and ask them for money, and then tell them why, and them having a look in your bank account to make sure. But it's not like you're hiding money in there or anything like that. So I'd say that's definitely the least desirable [strategy]. It's quite invasive. It's demeaning. (Kerry)

Rob preferred to minimise his interactions with Work and Income New Zealand and utilised social security entitlements only when he was unable to find work or exercise informal strategies for meeting his basic needs - including asking other people within his community for money.

I don't like asking people for money. If I do have to, I know I'm down to my last resorts. When things are real bad, that's when I'll go to WINZ... because I like my independence and you have to jump through a lot of hoops in there with the paperwork and stuff. I like to think that I can stand on my own feet and pull my own weight. That's just me. That independence is a big big thing for me – I don't like relying on anything from anyone... I have to say I'd rather stick it out. I go all out. Living on noodles and stuff. Cutting back to right on the edge. (Rob)

Faye also reported that approaching Work and Income New Zealand was her least preferred strategy for addressing food insecurity, but her basis for this was related to the potential delay in receiving assistance in situations where a more immediate response was required.

It's not because they're mean or anything – I've never struck that. It's because you ring up and ask and can wait two weeks for an appointment. That's no help. (Faye)

Discussion

Stone Soup

A kindly old stranger was walking through the land when he came upon a village. As he entered, he noticed that the villagers moved towards their homes, locking the windows and doors. "There's not a bite to eat here. We are weak and our children are hungry. Better to keep moving on" they called to him. "Oh, I have everything I need" he replied. "In fact, I was thinking of making some stone soup to share with all of you". He produced a large cooking pot, filled it with water and set it over a fire in the middle of the village. Then, with great ceremony, he drew an ordinary looking stone from a silken bag and dropped it into the simmering water. By now, hearing the rumour of food, most of the villagers had gathered to watch. As the stranger sniffed the broth and licked his lips in anticipation, hunger began to

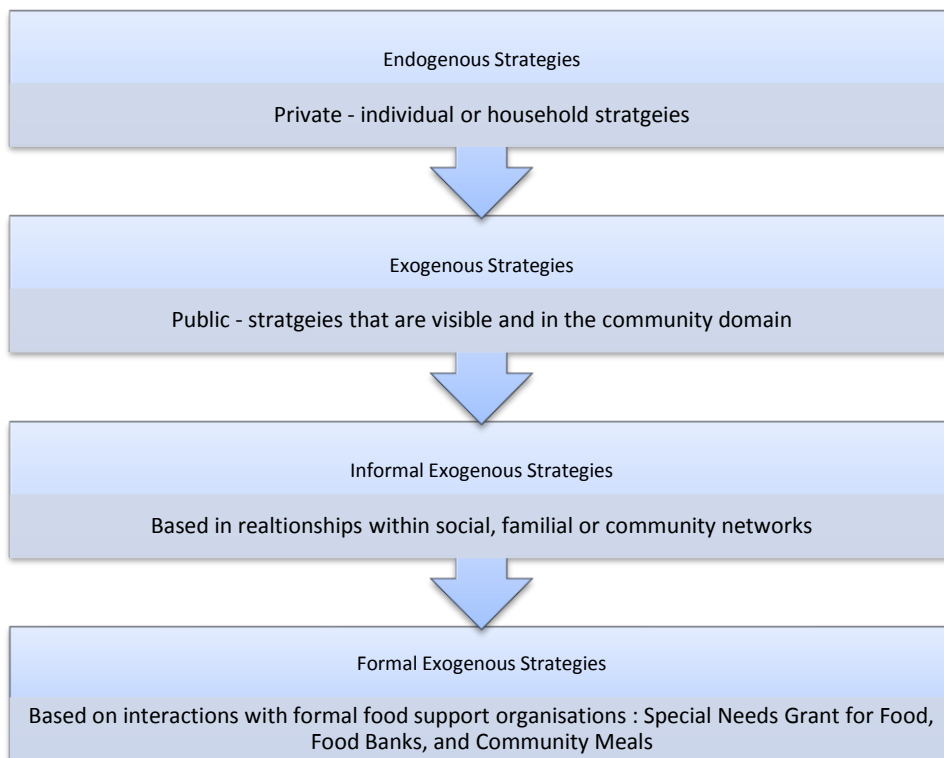
overcome their fear. "I do rather like a tasty stone soup" he said to no one in particular. "And of course, stone soup with cabbage, well that's pretty hard to beat". Soon a villager approached, holding a small cabbage he had been hiding, and added it to the pot. "Wonderful!" cried the stranger. "You know, I once had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of salted beef, and it was a meal fit for a king". The village butcher arrived soon after with salted beef, and so it continued as more villagers arrived with potatoes, pumpkin, onions, carrots – until there was indeed a delicious meal that everyone in the village could share. The mayor of the village offered a great deal of money for the magic stone, but the traveller refused to sell it and moved on the next day. On the fringe of the village he encountered a group of children playing near the road. He gave the silken bag to the youngest child, whispering to the group that it was not the stone, but the villagers themselves, who had performed the magic (Traditional).

In contrast with the endogenous strategies that are exercised in the private realm, exogenous strategies are those exercised in the public sphere. Exogenous strategies – the ways in which support is sought to alleviate food security via relationships and interactions with the wider community - are generally only implemented when the viability of endogenous strategies expires and there are no further means by which a person can make the resources available to them enough to meet their individual or household food requirements. The data show that the range of strategies that respondents applied tended to be hierarchical (as shown in figure 7.1 on the following page) in terms of both preference and the order in which they were exercised.

In terms of the social mechanisms and resources that respondents made use of to alleviate food insecurity, interactions with social and community networks were core to *informal exogenous strategies*. While much of the food support that they were able to access in this way was based on friendship or familial relationships, respondents were conscious about becoming over-dependent on these as a primary method for addressing their situations. Further, there appeared to be a number of barriers to maximising assistance based on informal networks, including geographical proximity and immediacy, and perceptions about the finite nature of the resources that others had available to them. In

contrast with endogenous strategies, there is an element of visibility attached to the exercise of exogenous strategies. Secrecy, pride, fear of stigma and the experience of shame around their evident lack of food security could also act as a barrier to respondents accessing informal assistance through social means. These themes and their micro level impacts are explored in more depth in the following chapter.

Figure 7.1. Hierarchy of Strategies



With regard to addressing questions about the relationship between the strategies based in social capital and structural mechanisms for addressing food insecurity, there are limits to the conclusions that can be drawn about the reasons that people resort to *formal exogenous strategies* in the form of Special Needs Grants for Food, Foodbanks and Community Meals. However, the data supplied by the indicative sample of respondents in this study point to two factors. Firstly, the range of formal services that respondents interacted with tended to correspond with the severity of food insecurity they experienced. This in turn related to shortfalls in the amount of disposable income that could be spent on food after other essential fixed expenses had been met, as well as the

range of endogenous strategies that they were able to implement in order to maximise the utility of the food resources they did have access to. Those respondents with 'very low' food security tended to utilise a fuller range of formal food support services than those whose food security was measured as 'low'. However, from the data explored to inform the current chapter, it appears that there are further mitigating factors that occur in the social context. Respondents who had more extensive and immediate social, familial and community networks were more likely to be able to exercise informal exogenous strategies to a larger degree than those who had fewer networks, thus offsetting their need to engage with as many formal services as regularly as those whose social networks were less dense and less proximate. While state and social service approaches to addressing food insecurity provide important modes of support for those whose capacity for accessing assistance through informal exogenous means is limited, these findings highlight that community based social networks also make a critical contribution to addressing the issue of food insecurity.

In Poor Taste: The Implications of Food Insecurity

This chapter responds to questions about the ways in which the experience of food insecurity impacts on individuals as members of households and families, the community, and wider society. Particular attention has been paid to describing the limits that are imposed on social and cultural participation. Although this aspect arguably attracts a social cost, it appears to have attracted little attention within the dominant literary discourses that have been used to theorise food insecurity. The themes that emerge from the experiential accounts provided here are intimate, insightful and, in some aspects, unsettling. However, they also provide a portrayal of resilience and quiet optimism for both personal and social transformation.

Like other living organisms, we are 'hard wired' to experience adverse responses when our food intake is compromised. These responses include a range of physiological and psychological sensations that can be collectively referred to as 'hunger'. All of us will experience a degree of hunger at some point in our lives – it is an innate reflex that reminds us that we need to replenish our nutritional stocks, and within the context of wealthy industrialised nations at least, it is usually transitory in nature. However, in situations of food insecurity people's options about responding to hunger are compromised, and imposed or involuntary hunger can be considered a more pervasive condition.

Radimer, Olsen and Campbell (1990) assert that the term 'hunger' must be defined within a social context, and note that while there has been extensive debate around the exact parameters of its meaning (at least within the American literature on the topic) consensus about what hunger is and how it should best be assessed has remained elusive. Based on the findings of an extensive study of

the experience of hunger in food insecure households and individuals, the same authors propose a framework (reproduced in table 8.1) that classifies conceptual understandings of hunger to aid in better understanding what the term implies in common usage.

Table 8.1. Dimensions and components of a conceptual definition of hunger

Component	Dimension	
	Household	Individual
Quantity	Food depletion	Insufficient intake
Quality	Unsuitable food	Inadequate diet
Psychological	Food anxiety	Feeling deprived Lack of choice ¹
Social	Unacceptable means of food acquisition	Disrupted eating patterns ²

Source: Radimer, Olson & Campbell (1990), p. 1545.

The framework provides a useful template for guiding a thematic analysis of the implications of food insecurity within the current study. Further, the corresponding definition of hunger as “...the inability to acquire or consume an adequate or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” (*ibid.*, p. 1546) sits comfortably alongside the observation that “The risk factors, coping tactics and physical consequences related to hunger are therefore part of the conceptual framework for hunger, but are not part of hunger per se” (*ibid.*). In acknowledging this differentiation, what follows is an examination of respondents’ experiences of hunger as one aspect of food insecurity, as well as a descriptive account of the coping strategies they exercise as a result of these experiences.

Constantly worrying about food

The basis for worrying about food is the human aversion to hunger. In food insecure households this sense of anxiety is heightened and can absorb significant psychological energy because the potential for hunger to occur is

¹ The authors of this table note that whether or not the respondents in their study interpreted quantity, quality or social components of hunger as being problematic was influenced by psychological considerations: primarily, whether a person felt deprived or without choice about the way in which they ate.

² This refers to not eating the socially prescribed three meals a day (Radimer, Olson & Campbell, 1990)

continually imminent where there are few or no resources to replenish food stocks as they dwindle. The strategies reported by respondents with regard to maximising the utility of their food resources (see Chapter 6) also require a high degree of continual and concentrated coordination that can manifest as stress and influence other areas of personal and familial wellbeing.

Yeah, food's a big issue and it's something that I spend a lot of time thinking about. It's constantly an issue – but you just learn to live like that, don't you? I mean, I think there's a certain kind of stress that comes from the worrying and you have to try and keep a lid on that in your own head because otherwise it can just gnaw away. It can really unhinge you if it's not kept in perspective. (Faye)

Yep – it's [obtaining food] on my mind all the time. I just have to be positive. I have to be really, because you can spend too many days worrying or freaking out about it. (Meredith)

It's fairly stressful. I'd say on a scale of one to ten it's probably a seven and a half. It's always in the back of my mind. All the time. How can I put something together? ...I think it's just constantly worrying that you never have enough, and it's always worrying about your children having enough. I just think it makes everything a bit more stressful, and when it's more stressful for me it's more stressful for my children, and the whole household is affected. (Kerry)

Food insecurity and parenting

Kerry's comments point to a theme identified by most of the parents in this research – that is, the concern that they had about the impacts of food insecurity on their relationships with their children. Parents were aware that their own preoccupations in worrying about food could be transmitted to their children, and for the most part they aimed to minimise this by balancing an almost contradictory awareness of household 'food rules' with assurances that the scarcity of food should not concern them. The need to conserve food meant that parents had to rigorously oversee children's access to it as part of their strategies for making existing resources last, and this could provide a basis for tensions within families.

In our house, food is the thing that causes the most arguments between us, between us and our kids, and between the kids as well. We're constantly having to play referee and making sure the rules we have about food for the kids are followed. Everybody has to do their bit, and if one gets something the other hasn't got you know there's going to be trouble. We try and make sure everything is fair, and that's hard – especially if you've got a sneaky one! The stress it causes affects all of us. (Liz)

I try hard not to let it impact on them [son and daughter], but obviously it does. I always try really hard to make sure that they have enough to eat. But they always have to ask me first... and sometimes that can be a source of tension between me and the kids... So it's a struggle. It's always a struggle (Kerry)

There's that loss of control. It definitely affects my sense of security in my ability to be an effective mum. Like my son is ten now and he notices that we're not buying lots of groceries all the time and I know that sometimes he gets a bit upset with the lack of food that's in the house... I think he worries about it. He knows that he must check with me before he eats anything. And I know that sometimes he's a bit...it's just different comments that he makes. And I'll just have to say to him: "Look Love, you know that mummy's always going to feed you. Don't worry about it..." (Sandy)

Hunger

Although considerable research attention has been paid to the cumulative nutritional impacts of food insecurity, the respondents in this study regarded hunger's most significant impacts as being psychological in nature. The data point to the anticipation of experiencing hunger as well as the event of being hungry itself as being accompanied by a range of psychological stressors. Interestingly, both dimensions of the experience of hunger were often described in a second person narrative (using "you" rather than "I") – perhaps an indication that respondents felt more comfortable in distancing themselves from even the recollection of these events.

You know that even though you've had something it won't be long 'til you're really hungry again. You try not to think about it but there's always that threat hanging over you, and you just have to suck it up and sit with it. (Daryl)

Running out of food makes you feel weak. Weak in the body. Weak in the spirit. And then you look at the other effects that go with it – the depression side, and all of that. (Rob)

There's a difference between comfort food - soul food – and eating for hunger. There are times where I get hungry because I miss my mid-day meal. Like yesterday, I didn't get a meal till nearly half past five, so then I had to sit there all day just feeling my guts. That's what I don't like. (Wayne)

Distraction strategies for coping with the experience of hunger

Amongst respondents who experienced enforced hunger on a regular basis the dominant strategies for coping were distraction techniques. Key to these was alleviating boredom through focusing thoughts on an external activity or entity.

You're thinking about your guts all the time, 'coz it's boredom. That's part of it. Keeping your mind busy with other things is a good way of stopping you from thinking about hunger... (Rob)

It's because you're bored or you've got an empty void. You think that's a hunger pain, so you think you need to go and fill it with food. No – fill it with spirituality; fill it with Jesus, or whatever. With me, I go and put music on. Or I write letters. Boredom and hunger go hand in hand. (Wayne)

I'll just pray and try and focus on other things. I sort of do anything to try not to preoccupy myself with thinking about food as much as I could do. (Meredith)

I just try to keep really busy. I clean the house. I'll just go and go and go until I'm exhausted. The exhaustion part is a combination of things, I think – from physical work, and from being hungry. When I can't go any more then I'll try to get to sleep quickly after that – just down tools and crash on the couch or whatever, because the other thing I've noticed is that being hungry throws your sleeping patterns all out of whack. It's too hard to get to sleep when you're lying there

listening to your stomach. But sleeping can pass the time...and you don't need to eat when you're asleep. (Sandy)

Sandy's comments about sleeping as a strategy for coping with hunger were reiterated by Meredith, who took more dire measures to achieve respite from hunger.

I have sleeping pills because they help me. They take the edge off so that I can go to sleep. Sometimes I've taken extra and just gone to bed for the weekend to sleep the weekend off because there's no food. Or I'll sleep until payday. Yeah, lots of things... I've just basically knocked myself out. I've been exhausted and sort of just felt so tired. (Meredith)

Meredith was conscious that using the extreme measure of sleep medication as a strategy to address hunger potentially posed risks in terms of both social isolation and personal safety.

Not seeing family or friends. Yeah, I've done that. I've had people that have wondered why I haven't answered the door and they've thought I've been home - and I'm sleeping. But on the other hand, what if there was a safety risk? I don't know... It's scary when you think of it. (Meredith)

Another common strategy for coping with the event of hunger was making temporal adjustments. Respondents reported trying to distance themselves from the present when they were hungry by projecting to the past, or to a point in the short term future at which they felt there was more certainty of not experiencing hunger.

I tend to think about how hard things were when I had the kids at home... You know, it was worse then because we [referring to herself and her children's father] went without a lot to feed the kids. We were always hungry, and quite often so were they. Looking back on it, it was really stressful and it went on for quite a long time... At least now it's only my own hunger I'm dealing with. It's more of a solitary thing. It's not a time I like to think about, but if you look back it kind of helps to remind you that somehow you've managed to get through worse, and you can find a lot of strength in that to get through the now. (Faye)

...you just have to believe that you're going to be fine the next day to get through it. Just think: "Oh yeah – that's going to be me". (Rob)

To get through it you just have to look forward and think that surely something's going to happen, that there will be food or more money come through the door somehow or whatever... (Sandy)

Rationalising disrupted eating and hunger

Another psychological strategy apparent in the data was the development of rationalisations for not adhering to socially accepted norms with regard to food adequacy and eating patterns. This theme was noted in respondents self-talk³ around the experience of hunger, and in some of the justifications they provided that sub-consciously downplayed the aspect of food insecurity in limiting food consumption.

People have got it wrong when they say you need three meals a day. No, that three meals a day thing – that's crap. I look at it like this for me. I tell myself that I haven't done a hard day's work, so what have I got to be hungry for? (Wayne)

In a way, I'm just living healthier – that's all it is. I'm eating in smaller portions, so really I'm just eating consistently healthier. And you just don't really need the range of elaborate foods that everyone thinks you do... But I've been forced to think like that, which is kind of fucked actually. It's rather...depriving. (Christina)

I think to myself that part of the reason that I'm fasting is that I want to master the hold and the addiction that my body has on food. (Sandy)

Stigma, Secrecy and Pride

Although the respondents in this research had all come forward voluntarily and were recent users of formal food support services, it was evident from their comments that food insecurity and its impacts are intrinsically private experiences which are often surrounded by a great deal of secrecy. Most respondents were concerned about not making their circumstances visible to others and many were particularly sensitive to family and friends knowing about

³ This term refers to respondents' descriptions of their internalised thought processes.

their situation. In some cases the event of accessing food support was even kept from other household members.

I've got a gentleman friend and he has no idea about my situation. He takes me out for dinner here and there, but it's really none of his business. (Christina)

I like to try and get through it on my own and I don't reach out unless I absolutely have to. I will go to service providers only because that's what they're there for, rather than putting that onto friends or family. (Faye)

I mean if I go to the foodbank there is no way – and I have gone – I would never tell anyone. Never. I certainly wouldn't confide in any of my family. I would not tell my son where the food's come from... (Sandy)

For Liz and Daryl, the need to keep service use a secret from their older children took on another dimension. Liz feared that revealing the family's food insecurity could lead to scrutiny about her care of the children by their (non-resident) father, and eventual loss of her status as a custodian.

We haven't been [to a community meal] with the older children yet – it's just been when it's the three of us... because of the issues that would come through from my ex. I don't think he would be that big on that, so I don't really want to put the kids in that situation with their dad. They would get questions from my ex-husband, so I kind of keep it quiet. If I was faced with that the two older ones would probably have to go to their father. I don't think I could handle that. It would break up the family. (Liz)

Part of the desire to maintain secrecy was fear of stigmatisation. Respondents spoke of the stigma that they associated with food insecurity and the use of food support services as having both externalised and internalised facets; that is, that it could arise in an external form through the responses of others, or it could involve reinforcement of negative concepts through means such as self-talk and feelings of hopelessness about their situation.

My friend came over, and he said “Bro, how come you’ve got no food in the cupboards? Bro, your fridge is empty! Are you eating? What do you eat?” And I said to him “Leave it alone. Don’t go there”. But he keeps questioning me about it. (Wayne)

I guess you just don’t want to be seen as not coping, and you don’t want to feel like you’re not coping. You kind of just work at keeping things looking good from the outside looking in. You’re doing your best, you know. And when you’re doing your best and still not cutting it, then you don’t really want other people rubbing your nose in it. (Sheryl)

Yeah, I feel that there’s a stigma attached to using a foodbank. I mean I think it’s a wonderful service and I’m grateful that I can access it in the times that I have, but for me it makes me feel that, OK, this is hopeless. I’m not even able to buy food this week. What the hell is going on? It just feels like...well, it makes you feel lousy. (Sandy)

The five parents in the respondent group were also concerned about the impacts of stigma on their children, especially in circumstances where they had opportunity to compare the food resources and practices of their own homes with those in more affluent households.

If he goes to most other houses – his father’s or nana, or whoever – you know, there’s bulk baking supplies, there’s a freezer full of meat and fish outside as well as inside, and several different types of frozen vegetables. There’s cans galore. Whereas, you come to my house and you might be lucky if there’s a tin of spaghetti. There might be tomato sauce but that’s just depends on the day... So where he sees at other people’s houses that there’s three or four packets of biscuits to choose from, he would be lucky if there’s ever one packet at home because I see them as being a luxury, and I know that he notices that difference. (Sandy)

Parents consistently referenced school as a site where their children would make comparisons about the contents of their own packed lunches with the foods that other children had access to. Although parents reported going to great lengths to ensure their children had food to take to school (including going without food themselves) they were concerned about the potential for observable distinctions and their children’s resulting sense of deprivation and stigmatisation.

Providing the kids with school lunches is a bit hard. Especially with the two older children that want the bars, they want the cakes, they want the chips... They see everyone else having that at school, and they think: "Why can't we have that?"(Liz)

I'll say to him, "Look, there's enough there for sandwiches for lunch, you've got a piece of fruit – that's heaps!" But you know, he doesn't get fizzy drinks, he doesn't get Raro, and he doesn't have the little chippies or anything like that. So I guess when he's at school comparing... It does cross my mind, but I try not to let myself worry about it. For me, his concern is around...he will always get a lunch because I will always give him something to take to eat. It just might not be what he wants – he wants to have a pie, because other kids are buying pies and you can buy hot chips at school. You can get a juicy [frozen fruit juice] for about eighty cents at school. So he wants those sorts of things, but to me that is not a priority. So I kind of just concentrate on covering the basics... (Sandy)

Faye's retrospective comments about the impacts of long term food insecurity on her own children provide an interesting contrast in terms of an approach based in children coming to terms with their experiences of food insecurity as adults.

It probably affected them in the respect that they saw what other kids had, but the kids were very good. They didn't complain a lot. And if they did, I'd just say to them: "Well, at least you've got a roof over your head". They weren't angels and I suppose they'd come home occasionally and say: "Ohh, we never get...". And I'd just have to say, "Well think of what you have got. Daddy went to work this morning with no breakfast, you know. You kids had breakfast". And people used to say to me that you shouldn't make the kids feel guilty, but I think that children have got more brains. No, I wouldn't say brains – more compassion - than we give them credit for. And I don't think it hurts them to know, because they're going to grow up and all of a sudden be hit with it. You know - that sense of "Oh, I had a crap childhood because there was never enough food." (Faye)

Pride

Respondents frequently identified personal pride as a limitation to seeking assistance from either formal or informal food support services, although seeking

formal support in secret was considered a means of maintaining standing within social networks.

I don't go begging. There's a lot of pride there. It's all about pride with me. My attitude is that I don't need to go dumping my problems onto other people - friends or whatever. So for me it's quite a personal issue. (Christina)

I'm quite stubborn so I don't really like having to ask people... Just pride really. (Sandy)

For many, though, pride had been eroded by the eventual visibility of their food insecurity to others, and this appeared to correspond with a transition associated with feelings of humility and a more open personal acceptance of their situation. There was also acknowledgement that others could be empathetic rather than judgemental.

It used to be a pride thing, but I've got past that stage... (Faye)

I don't feel there is any stigma in going to a community meal now. We've got over any feeling of pride on that side. (Daryl)

You just kind of get to a point where things are so bad that there's no way you can't put your hand up. I've struggled with that, but it wears you down eventually. You can't keep up the pretence forever. There's that constant battle to keep a lid on things, and then in the end you just have to swallow your pride and admit that this is your reality. You just have to get a bit more...humble. (Sandy)

I've learnt a lot about pride and stuff like that, and that's all quite humbling – but really good. It's almost a relief when you make that step. (Meredith)

Implications for Health and Wellbeing

Several respondents had pre-existing health conditions and for these individuals there was a realisation that food played an important part in maintaining their existing health status or supporting their recovery in the longer term.

I've got a big thing about food, and it's probably just been over the past three years that I've thought that food is really important to my physical health... I know that food plays a big part in my recovery, and

it's bloody hard to accept that when you've got limited means to make sure you're eating properly. In the moment, you quite often sort of end up just kind of concentrating on dealing to the hunger side rather than thinking too hard about what it is you're actually eating.
(Wayne)

Meredith was conscious of the effects of taking her medication on an empty stomach and shared Wayne's awareness that adequate nutrition was important to improvements in health status.

Not having food, especially the right food, really affects my energy. The one thing that I find is hard is that I have to have something to eat with my medicine otherwise I'll spin out. It's really important that I have food to have with the medicine to be able to be well and get well... (Meredith)

Most respondents shared an awareness that both the quality and quantity of their food compromised nutritional adequacy and limited their ability to eat regular or well balanced meals. Parents tended to be more concerned about the nutritional impacts of this on their children than they were on themselves.

The effects of it [food insecurity] on our nutrition aren't that good, I suppose. We really try to give the kids a balanced main meal. We try to get veggies in our evening meals and we try to have a piece of fruit for them to have every day - even if that means we have to go without.
(Daryl)

I just go without and make sure that my son has got what he needs for his school lunches, breakfast, dinner. And if there's not enough then I will skip a meal. (Sheryl)

When I'm counting food I'm counting it in regards to my son's needs. So I will avoid doing the fruit myself because I know there's enough for him for a week. (Sandy)

Parents' comments about compromising their own nutrition by foregoing foods (such as fresh fruit or meat) to ensure that their children were provided for correspond with a strategy that is well recognised, especially amongst mothers in

food insecure households⁴. However, the data also point to this practice as one that has the potential for psychological as well as nutritional impacts.

I try to bake for the children, and if the kids are at school and I've baked for them I tend to stay away from it, even though it is hard. I will do some for me and then I'll always make sure that they've got the most. If I don't have all the treats [referring to baking] and everything then there's more to go around. I just go without... but I can feel resentful. (Liz)

Two respondents in particular were aware of fluctuations in their body weight which they attributed to disturbances in their eating patterns. In both of these cases, binge eating when food was available was identified as an impact that followed enforced food deprivation.

I've lost a little bit of weight [laughing]. I'm up and down, up and down. If it's a day when I've done the shopping and the kids aren't back yet, then sometimes I'll binge. If there's a bag of chips or something in there then I want them. I won't want to share them. Everyone goes through their highs and lows – that's part of life. It's just how you handle it... but I have done that. If food's been short and I've been going hungry, I have done that when there's food in the house. (Liz)

I know what it's like to be fat, and I know what it's like to be skinny as well. I've been the shape I am now for the last three years. My [female] friend said to me "You're too thin! You should have a man's body!" and she was trying to make me bulk up with pastas and all this food. But, you know, you're always watching the clock when you're hungry, and then when you do eat you overdo it. You binge. (Wayne)

Perhaps more concerning in this regard was the observation by one family of emergent patterns of binge eating in their teenage daughter. In their view, this development was potentially correlated with a change in the household's food security status.

She's thirteen, and we actually think she's losing weight because of the fact that she's not wanting to eat sandwiches because she thinks they are going to make her fat. She's not eating any other foods

⁴ See also Chapter 5, and Olsen's (2005) study of food insecure women in Canada.

instead [of sandwiches] because we don't have the money to provide them. So she's going hungry... Her father gives her pocket money fortnightly and she can go out and spend it on whatever she wants. So she gorges on junk food – ice cream and lollies and chocolate. All her concerns about putting on weight go completely out the window. There seems to be a kind of pattern there, and that worries us. We have wondered if it's because she's not really getting some of the foods she would like to be eating the rest of the time. We're managing with her. We're doing what we can. (Daryl)

Implications for Social Wellbeing

Across history and within all cultural domains, the sharing of food has been regarded as a symbolic event where important exchanges take place. Food is a significant means by which a host will extend hospitality to guests. In return, guests are expected to acknowledge the extension of the host's resources by contributing some sort of reciprocal offering – whether that be ascribing social status or a material token. However, in the circumstance where people have few or no resources with which to enter such exchanges, limitations on this important form of participation can occur, resulting in experiences of social exclusion and marginalisation.

The ability to demonstrate hospitality in their own homes was particularly important to many respondents. Offering food to visitors has a cultural significance (particularly for Māori⁵) and respondents felt that their ability to host others in socially acceptable ways was compromised by low food security, sometimes to the extent that they would avoid having visitors in the house.

It's embarrassing to have somebody come for a visit when you can't even have a cup of coffee with milk in it with them. I used to find that difficult, but not anymore. I've had to get over it... It's just a small part – there's much more to focus on. (Meredith)

⁵ The concept of *Maanakitanga* – the ability and obligation to extend hospitality - remains an integral cultural value within the Māori context. The traditional proverb “Tangata takahi manuhiri, he marae puehu” – the person who mistreats his [sic] guests has a dusty Marae (meeting house) - confirms this ethos (Maori Proverbs - Whakatauki, 2010), and the traditional exchange or gift giving system of *koha* reflects the expectation of reciprocity on the part of guests.

I'm not in a situation where I can have people over home to eat... Friends might come over for a coffee or whatever, but I never invite them for a meal because it's hard enough to make the food last as it is. (Sheryl)

For me, there's that obligation there. That's just how it is where I'm from. That's how I've been brought up - it's part of who I am. If people turn up, you feed them no matter what. (Christina)

Some respondents reported that household food insecurity also impacted on their capacity to cater adequately to the expectations of younger guests as well.

My kids love vegetables... so it's a lot easier to feed them because they've always had that and they don't know any different. They like to have their friends over and I find that really difficult. There's some kids – some of their friends – and they just can't face vegetables. I find it very hard to cook meals for these kids because they're more interested in the packet foods – the chicken nibbles and that kind of stuff. (Kerry)

Respondents also reported feeling unable to reciprocate adequately when it came to events that involved food outside of the household. Constraints on their resources could exclude them from participating in activities that were important to maintaining their social networks.

I don't go out that often. If it's an activity that's around food, like a pot luck dinner or something, then that's not a form of socialising that's open to me anymore. If I can't be seen to be contributing, if I can't give something back, then I won't go. That's changed my social life dramatically. And that bites, because I need those people and I want to be able to contribute to keeping those relationships alive... (Christina)

You know, you're kind of expected to take something or return the invitation at some stage or people think you're rude... I usually make up some excuse, like tell them my son's sick or something. We just sit those kinds of things out and hope people take the hint and stop asking after a while. (Sheryl)

Due perhaps in part to the secrecy that respondents aimed to maintain around their food status, they could perceive others as being intolerant of their

circumstances. This intolerance – albeit unintentional – could lead to situations where they felt compromised in responding to socially prescribed expectations in relation to providing food.

The kids have these shared lunches at school from time to time, and they all have to take something. I bet it doesn't even occur to the teacher the stress that causes for some parents – including me.
(Sandy)

While many of the limitations on social participation were externally imposed by the inability of respondents to conform to widely accepted norms about food as a basis for social exchanges, social withdrawal could also be self imposed. Several respondents were conscious that the experiences of food insecurity and hunger somehow differentiated them and impacted on their abilities to engage with others.

I know I can isolate myself when I'm doing it hard. I don't want to be bothered with other people. It kind of breaks your concentration on getting through. You just want to get on with it really, and not have to explain yourself to anyone. You just don't have the energy and other people tend to piss you off for no real reason. (Wayne)

If you do go to something - like a meeting at our church or something - and there's food there...you don't want to look greedy but you kind of spend the whole time with your eye on it waiting for them to stop talking, you know? You're not really engaging with what's going on – you're just smelling the food and dealing with what your stomach is doing. (Daryl)

Daryl's observations align with Meredith's reflection that those who experience food insecurity and hunger could enter into a mindset or state of existence that distinguished them as somehow different from other social actors. Further, the data on this point indicate respondents' views that this process could culminate in a sense of social deprivation.

The whole food [insecurity] thing can just put you in a very different space from other people, especially from those ones who...don't really get it. No one likes missing out – sort of feeling like they can't enjoy life in the same way as other people. I've been thinking about this a

lot with the situation I've been in, and in my experience food can be a really big thing when it comes to showing up those kinds of differences. (Meredith)

Deprivation and injustice

Beyond social exclusion, respondents identified a range of other social processes in which they considered themselves to be disadvantaged as a result of food insecurity. The themes presented below confirm that the subjective experience of deprivation is not necessarily defined by material conditions. It can also take the form of limitations on civic participation and expressions of citizenship, resulting in feelings of injustice, alienation and disempowerment.

Food insecurity and inequity

The Waikato region - in which the Hamilton community is located - is recognised as New Zealand's most abundant food production area. Amongst respondents, expressions of frustration about the seeming unfairness of the limitations they faced in accessing this abundance were common.

I don't understand how people can be hungry in New Zealand when we've got a fucking freezing works full of meat! (Wayne)

A number of respondents considered that although New Zealand is commonly portrayed as a 'land of plenty', it was paradoxical that much of the food production serviced overseas markets, and affordability was increasingly determined by global rather than local drivers.

All the good stuff gets sent off-shore and we end up paying international prices in our supermarkets for the scraps. I mean, I've heard that you can buy our fish cheaper in Australia than you can here. Something's not right there, eh? (Christina)

I was in the supermarket on Friday, and I wanted to get two blocks of butter for my daughter's special birthday cooking... Eight dollars for two blocks of butter! That's almost ten dollars! And I said to this woman, "If you think about where we live, that's crazy, isn't it?" It's like, "What is going on here?" (Kerry)

Inequities were also observed in the ability of respondents to access healthy foods, the cost of which could put these out of reach of those on low incomes.

... that's something that really annoys me – I think it's disgusting (and it's been like that for quite a few years) that you can go and buy a bottle of coke cheaper than you can go and buy a bottle of milk. And chips and that are cheaper than fruit. (Faye)

Exclusion from new food movements

A good number of respondents had a burgeoning awareness of the contemporary dynamics of food production systems. However, they also considered that their options were limited in terms of being able to respond to any concerns they had in this regard by changing their purchasing patterns. To some extent this minimised their abilities to participate in new food movements which challenge intensive, global and industrial modes of food production. It also meant making personal compromises on the acceptability of some foods.

When you're just pushing it to get a meal on the table you don't have that luxury of choice. Sure, we'd all love to eat organic – you'd be stupid not to! But it's just not an option when you're on a low income. Even those farmers' markets and things 'round the place now – the idea behind them is great, but have you seen the prices? That's food for other people as far as we're concerned. (Kerry)

I'm a lot more conscious now about what it is that I'm eating as my knowledge about food has developed. It makes me angry about what they're doing to our food. Again, on that subject I have a tummy problem now. I talked to the dieticians, and they said: "It could be what they're injecting the meat with", and I said: "Well what the hell are they doing injecting the meat in the first place?" (Wayne)

I try to buy local brands from New Zealand or Australia. To start with you know the food is going to be pretty safe... There's that whole food miles thing too now – it's supposed to be better for the environment and all that. The problem is that a lot of the stuff that's produced here [New Zealand and Australia] is more expensive than the stuff that comes in from overseas. Tinned tomatoes and things like that. I've noticed it in the fruit and vegetables as well. If you're going for price

you just have to go for the cheapest. So even if you don't really agree with it you're stuck with eating it anyway. (Sheryl)

Dependency and disempowerment

With regard to their interactions with formal food assistance, respondents referred to an imbalance in power that existed in the relationship between themselves as 'recipients' and services as 'providers'. The powerlessness they experienced as part of these interactions appeared to be accompanied by a feeling of being beholden to benevolence, regardless of whether assistance was administered by third sector organisations or by the state.

You've just got to play the game and jump through the hoops to get that help from any of them really. Don't get me wrong - it's good that the help's there, but sometimes you feel like they just want to move you along because you're just making more paperwork for them. It's like – "Next please!" (Sheryl)

There was also a sense that those actors charged with administering assistance had little consideration for the ramifications of their decisions if support was withheld or denied.

She [WINZ case manager] just didn't want to bother. And because she can't be bothered we have been bothered with struggling (Daryl)

Liz and Daryl were keenly aware that their absolute reliance on formal provision as a means of addressing their food insecurity had rendered them dependent on charitable aid, and further, that the implications of this dependency were not fully recognised in the annual shut down arrangements of service providers.

It's going to be hard over the next few weeks. We only recently found out that they're [foodbanks] only open until the fourteenth [of December]. Then they don't open again until the week of the seventh [of January]. It's the hardest time of the year. I know they need a break and I understand that they work very hard and you can't really call upon people... I have no idea how we're going to manage through that. (Liz)

The comments of other respondents indicated a sense of entitlement based in citizenship in their approaches to dealing with formal food support services.

I'd bloody demand it from them if I had to – I wouldn't leave until I got something... But I would like to hope that if I had to go to that measure that I'm actually representing fifty thousand other people – not just myself. (Christina)

The experience of political alienation and powerlessness with regard to resolving their situation was also highlighted.

...this woman we voted for – what's she doing about it? She's trying to solve other countries problems – but what about our own? I get angry. It makes me angry. (Wayne)

It's the government's fault. They don't give us enough money to survive on as students, and they don't give beneficiaries enough money to live on - full stop! I don't blame any one person in particular, but I do blame the government...but there's not a lot you can do about that, is there? (Christina)

Christina's sense of injustice about the 'one size fits all' manner in which state benefits were set was explained in further detail by Daryl and Liz, who were attempting to maintain their family of five on a Student Allowance.

There's an imbalance within the government system for Student Allowances – an unfair imbalance - once there's a family involved. And at the moment what we're getting as a family is not enough. They're still treating the Student Allowance as if it's always an eighteen year old coming straight from school, rather than if it's a married couple with a family, which is a very different situation. (Daryl)

In the majority, respondents perceived either the circumstances that had brought them into food insecurity, or the experience of food insecurity itself, as being characterised by injustice and unfairness. Coupled with powerlessness, these perceptions could culminate in anger and resentment.

I don't mind that it's not all easy because I think it helps with character and it helps you appreciate life a bit more, but in saying that I just don't think it's fair that food should be one of the things that you should need to struggle with really.(Kerry)

The employer that owes me, and I've been thinking about this a lot now – is he putting food on the table at night time for his family? And why can't he show us the same courtesy to think that we wouldn't be

wanting the same? I feel angry about that a lot. I feel angry when we have to go without those basic necessities. (Meredith)

Yeah, I can get angry about it sometimes. That comes from frustration mainly, I suppose. It wears you down, and you can start feeling like you're something less if you let it get to you too much. (Faye)

Resisting perceptions of exclusion and marginalisation

Although respondents reported experiencing deprivation and exclusion as a result of their compromised food status, the data demonstrated two strategies that were used to assist them in coping with these impacts.

Comparing with those who have less

Rather than consistently comparing themselves with others who they perceived as having more access to resources than they did, respondents reported making comparisons with those who had less or whose situations they identified as being worse than their own. This strategy alleviated their personal sense of deprivation and helped them to position their own experiences on a continuum where they were not the extreme point.

I know that there's worse out there. There's people out there who've got a whole range of issues going on and food's only one part of that. (Christina)

Some of those people there [attending community meals] we've seen in town later and they're just sitting by themselves with their hand out trying to get a few cents in their pockets. They're in a worse situation than we are. They don't even have a roof over their heads. (Liz)

You know, you can see from coming into my home that I'm not living in chaos. It's not like I'm living in a tent, and I feel that there are a lot of people who are much worse off than me. (Sandy)

Yeah, well, I always feel that there's someone worse off than me. Someone with kids and that, you know? (Faye)

...I don't see us as being poor – well, not poor to the same extent that people that use some of those meals and stuff like that are. I think that that help needs to go to the people who really need it... I'd feel like I was taking the food off somebody else who needs it more than

we do - somebody whose situation is worse than ours, because I know that there is much worse out there. (Kerry)

If you spend your time looking at everyone who has more, of course you're going to make yourself miserable! The trick is to try and look at those who have less, and to count your blessings for what you do have. (Meredith)

Identifying opportunities for making a contribution

Although respondents had limited material means, a number of them reported the sense of satisfaction they gained from being able to assist other people in situations similar to their own in some way – whether this was through sharing of resources, providing support and information, or through giving their time.

We just had a friend come around and pick up a bag of loquats because the loquat tree is over full. It's just too much for us to handle! It's nice to be able to share them round, because we feel like we've been on the taking end quite a lot lately... (Daryl)

It's quite infectious really, because you want to help people even though you can't help yourself... You don't want them to have to go through what you went through trying to find things. It's best finding someone that knows where everything is. People take them along and show them things. What I do - what I used to do when I was in the shelters - was help people get through so that they don't miss out. (Rob)

I was the sole cook for [name of community meal service] a few years ago when that first started, and we cooked for between ninety and over a hundred people. There were twice as many people as that there for dinner last night. I was the sole cook – did everything on my own – and now to see these little teams based on the team that I originally trained when I come back periodically – it's really neat to see those sorts of things. (Meredith)

Resilience, self determination and optimism for change

It would be a critical misrepresentation of the data if the participants in this study were portrayed as being passive actors in their circumstances or 'hapless victims' of food insecurity. To do so would also be at the expense of neglecting

their frequent references to themes of self-determination and personal accountability.

As much as temporal shifts have been identified as contributing to coping with immediate hunger, regarding food insecurity as a transitory state rather than a permanent one was a common strategy. Accordingly, a number of respondents highlighted temporary 'sacrifices' which they had implemented as strategies to address their financial circumstances. Rather than constructing these adjustments as depriving, they were viewed as short term compromises that were necessary in order to achieve the longer term gains that would bring an improvement to their material conditions.

I know that this is probably a long course, but this is just a temporary situation and I still have had choices and there's some debts that won't be there forever. Like, my budget won't always be like it is at the moment - I'll be able to pay those bills off eventually. So I can see an end to it – it's not always going to be like this. (Meredith)

I'm sure I'll be all alright in the long run. I've just had to adopt positive thinking to get through it. This is not forever. Honestly. This is definitely temporary. But this is the decision that I made when I gave up a good salary to go and study, and to become a poor student... Even though I'm still housebound it's not the end of the world because I'll make sure that I survive. If I can't get my hair done and all those other things that I used to do regularly, then so be it. And if it means that I can't go on holiday it's OK – I don't mind. It's a good sacrifice. I'm sure other people in my situation have to make those decisions – they have to go without in order to reap the rewards somewhere else. (Christina)

We've had to cut our budget for now, and we're prepared to do that until Daryl gets a job. We've dropped our mortgage right back, and it's going to take longer to pay off... That's something that's a temporary measure, but it was the best measure that we could come up with over the period that Daryl is studying. It's added extra years on but things are a little easier for us to handle now than they have been for the last five months where we couldn't get groceries until the mortgage was paid and we knew what was left. (Liz)

The sense that food insecurity was a temporary condition underpinned the view of the majority of respondents that they were actively responsible for instigating future improvements in their own conditions.

At the end of the day shit happens. You've got to get on with it. That's life! I'm not one that promotes dwelling on your problems. I promote seeking solutions and being responsible for yourself... We're all responsible. It's like having a debt: "Can you pay my debt?" - "Nah, sorry". I have to remind myself of that because that's what I say to others: "You got yourself in there, and you've got to get yourself out." (Christina)

I want to stand next to my husband and know that he's supporting us, that he's trying to do what he can to help, and that as a family we are taking responsibility for getting ourselves out of the situation we're in at the moment. (Liz)

Not to be ignorant about it, but being in the situation I was, that's all my own doing as well. That's the way I was. With what I'm doing now I've got my own money. I'm sort of getting myself back out there. I'm living on my own funds at the moment so that's good. I'm covering myself. (Rob)

For Sandy, concentrating on retaining a strong sense of personal identity despite her conditions was a strategy that assisted in averting internalisation of the perceived characteristics of the 'beneficiary' or the 'DPB Mum', and this process supported her determination that positive change would eventually be possible.

I sort of feel like, yeah, OK, it is a struggle, and yes, I am a single mother - but that's not really who I am in my heart of hearts. To me, that's how my life is operating at the moment but I don't want to be fitting into that stereotype – you know, the single mum on the benefit – forever. I hang on to that, and knowing that things will change: my son will be older, and I'll go back to work eventually. That kind thinking keeps me going and helps me hang on to who I am. (Sandy)

Advocating for change

At the end of each interview respondents were asked to identify one thing they would change in terms of improving their access to food. While the most obvious themes within the data centred around increases to income and purchasing

power, more considered responses clearly fit into three categories: those things which respondents felt it was within their own power to address, conditions over which it was perceived there was no element of control by either themselves or a third party, and those things that they regarded as being outside of their control but which they would hope to see occur as part of broader systemic changes.

The obvious answer would be more money. That and being able to keep expenses down – the costs of all the other things you need over and above food. (Faye)

Well the obvious one is more money, isn't it? More money and less bills. (Sandy)

Faye and Sandy's assertion that the answer to food insecurity was simply increasing levels of personal income and reducing essential costs was reiterated in some form by almost all respondents. Respondents were also aware that this was unlikely to occur as a result of changes to benefit rates within the state welfare system, and that the only real way of increasing personal income in the longer term was via attachment to the labour market.

If there was one thing that I could change? I'd just want more money. That would be it! [laughing], but I realise that's probably not going to come through the benefit system... the only path I can see out of this and towards more money is by graduating and getting a good job really. That might be a few years... but I'm hopeful that that's what our path out of this is going to be. (Kerry)

Probably just being able to work full time. That is the only option. You've got to generate some form of income in order to meet your expenses, and food is one of those. That's the only solution, unless food is going to drop out from the sky – which isn't a reality. (Christina)

I don't know how long it's going to take or what kind of work there will be out there after all this time of not working, but I'd like to be able to go back to work to earn my keep, because that's what it's all about, and then you can buy better food... (Wayne)

Respondents' experiences of receiving a social security benefit highlighted that the income that they derived in this way was insufficient to meet their fixed costs

of living, and they advocated for changes to the levels of entitlement that were applied to food, both through adjustments to Core benefits and additional forms of assistance such as the Special Needs Grant.

Getting a little bit of extra support for food from WINZ would be helpful. Being on a Student Allowance is not easy. (Liz)

The only thing that I would like to add, just in regards to being a beneficiary, is that I think that they need to look at maybe giving you more of a food grant, or have that coming into your [Core benefit] money. You just can't buy enough food now on a benefit, so that for me is a struggle... They need to recognise that is just not enough money to live on, and you can't realistically be expected to in the long term. (Kerry)

Christina considered that the punitive restrictions on undertaking part time work while she was receiving a benefit could be addressed as a means of both incentivising work and improving the living standards of beneficiaries at no cost to the state.

While I'm on the disability thing [benefit] it would be good if I was allowed to work more part time without losing a whole lot. They're pretty tough down there [at WINZ], so you've got to weigh up the pros and cons. If you take on part time work you can end up paying back more than you earn by the time WINZ has taken a cut, and you've paid tax and student loan out of it. I think that probably encourages lots of people who could work not to, but at the same time, if they let you keep a bit more of it, it would make life financially easier. It's almost like they want people to suffer when they're on a benefit. (Christina)

Sheryl was conscious that the level of financial detail that Work and Income New Zealand required of clients who sought assistance with food costs could be extensive and advocated for a more user friendly approach to state administered food aid.

I suppose not taking your bills into WINZ and having to justify your existence. That would be great... just making the food grant system a bit more accessible. Yeah. (Sheryl)

In terms of formal food support through community based services, Wayne advocated for further funding of community meals.

There's all sorts of people use them [community meals]. All sorts...they need more funding. I don't know where that would come from. All I know is that it would be a good thing. (Wayne)

Wayne was also keen to see the range of community meal options expanded.

It would be lovely to have a breakfast. There is one lady I know of that's been trying to kick it off with one of the churches. The winter can be pretty hard, and yeah, even hot soup for the mornings in winter would be really good. She asked me, "Would it be feasible if they had a breakfast?" I said "Yeah". I just did a little bit of a survey in town around here with people I knew. They were all into the idea, and had lots of encouragement for her. (Rob)

Faye's limited mobility meant that there were restrictions on the range of formal services she could utilise with ease. Her diet was also often lacking in variety and fresh produce, and her wish was for new and innovative forms of food assistance.

Probably someone to deliver fruit and veggies every week. For fruit and veggies to just magically appear on the doorstep. (Faye)

Like a number of the other respondents, Meredith's focus was on improvements to her physical health, but an important contrast is also notable in her desired path to change. It seems poignant to conclude this description of the data with an extract which highlights that the solutions to food insecurity are not necessarily material in nature.

My health. To be able to endure regular hours like I used to. I'd improve my health so that I could go back into full time work. That would improve my standard of living. Also, I'd heal those issues, whatever it is with my family, to improve those networks. I think if you don't answer those questions then you are kind of choosing to stay there. And I don't want to choose to stay there... (Meredith)

Discussion

The literature review that informs this study has highlighted that accounts of food insecurity have predominantly been couched in third sector, academic and policy discourses. Historically, these perspectives have provided limited consideration of micro level implications. While there is acknowledgement of some of the psychological impacts (such as ‘food anxiety’, or constantly worrying about food⁶), far less attention has been paid to the social implications that accompany the experience.

Food insecurity has been correlated with low self-perceived health status (Walker, Holben, Kropf, Holcomb & Anderson, 2007). It is without dispute that insufficient or inadequate nutrition resulting from disrupted eating patterns, limited variation and poor quality of food have long term implications for health. For respondents who identified as having pre-existing health conditions the implications of food insecurity pose a double edged sword: recovery or maintenance of health status is likely to be compromised, and the costs associated with deterioration in health status (in terms of extra health expenses and potential loss of earnings) can worsen the level of food insecurity still further. The rationalisation strategies that respondents used to justify disrupted eating patterns demonstrate a form of psychological justification that helped to relieve anxiety about their immediate situations. However, these rationalisations also constitute concerning personal shifts that have implications for nutrition and health over the longer term. In examining the relationship between food insecurity and health status, it is the conclusion of Pheley, Holben, Graham and Simpson (2002) that “... health professionals must be able to identify individuals at risk for food insufficiency; policy makers must develop more effective programmes for alleviating the basic causes of food insecurity” (p. 447).

Although children’s accounts of food insecurity have not been a focus of this research, parents consistently reported prioritising the health and wellbeing of

⁶ Recently the term ‘food stress’ has made an appearance in discussions about food insecurity within the context of the recession environment. See for example Coveney (2010), who introduced the term at the Dieticians New Zealand Conference 2010.

their children over meeting their own food needs. The results indicate that there are implications in terms of tensions in child/parent relationships arising from the need for parents to control their children's access to food, in their desires to insulate them from food anxiety, and in their efforts to avoid their children experiencing the deprivation and stigma associated with food insecurity as an identifiable marker of poverty. There are also implications for parent's own sense of security in terms of feelings of inadequacy that can arise from perceived threats to their identity as provider. Overwhelmingly though, respondents (whether parents or not) were less concerned with the long term impacts on their physical health than they were with the more immediate ones on their psychological wellbeing – particularly the stress associated with worrying constantly about food and the anticipation of hunger, as well as its eventuation.

A person's capacity to share food, either as host or guest, is both an internal and an external marker of status and social standing. New Zealand's own *Social Report* (Ministry of Social Development, 2009) acknowledges this by monitoring "The proportion of the population who had friends or family over for a meal at least once a month" (p. 116) on the basis that "the extent to which people are in regular contact with family and friends is an important reflection of social connectedness"⁷ (*ibid.*). The results indicate that social exclusion can occur both directly as a result of having inadequate food resources with which to participate, and indirectly through respondents' desire to maintain secrecy within their social and familial circles due to fear of stigma and erosion of social status. In more extreme cases of food insecurity, where avoidance of ongoing hunger necessitated visibility, this fear appeared to dissipate over time and could result in a personal acceptance of the food insecure identity. This acceptance interacted with seeking out (and in some cases, developing dependency on) formal food assistance, although this act in itself was one which was viewed as a

⁷ According to the New Zealand Living Standards Survey, in 2004 70 percent of adults aged 18 years and over had friends or family over for a meal at least once a month, although people who were aged 65 years and over with little income other than New Zealand Superannuation, families where the main income earner was not in full time employment and sole parent families were less likely to host visiting family or friends for a meal. It is considered likely that these results reflect the lower income status (and accordingly, lower food security) of these groups.

marker of deprivation and stigma. For the most part, though, respondents in this study considered the experience of food insecurity as something which was intrinsically private, and which impacted profoundly on their abilities to participate by sharing in many of the 'normal' social transactions that take place around food. These transactions are contextually altered when a resource that must be guarded rather than shared is at stake, particularly when one of the actors is hoping that this realisation is not evident to the other parties involved. Although impacts on social participation have seldom been explored in the literature on food insecurity, they have important consequences for expressions of inclusion and of citizenship.

Respondents' perceptions about inequity, alienation and powerlessness form notable themes within the results. In all cases, the benefit incomes provided by social security were simply inadequate to guarantee food security. Treating beneficiaries of welfare or food support as 'clients' rather than 'citizens' alters the dynamics of any debate about how food insecurity can best be addressed. Regarding access to adequate safe food and freedom from hunger as a fundamental human right necessitates asking questions about whose responsibility it is to secure these conditions. While respondents agreed that developing successful strategies for managing the limited resources available to them was a personal responsibility, there was also clear consensus that it was the job of the state to ensure that levels of provision were adequate. There is an observable imbalance in power between those who 'provide' and those who 'receive' food support, regardless of whether provision is made via the state sector or community based initiatives. The vulnerability of food insecure citizens within this power structure is complex. Decisions about access made on the basis of entitlement undermine challenges premised on citizenship rights, particularly when the recipient is dependent on the authority of the decision maker in terms of having essential needs met. Although these results have concentrated on presenting the implications of food insecurity at the micro level, at the macro level achieving food security is essentially a political concern. For those rendered vulnerable by imbalances in power there are a lack of sites in which to safely

challenge political decision making about perceived inadequacies in levels of provision. Further, little opportunity is afforded to those with limited material resources to participate in new food movements that challenge the political power structures that are entrenched in the global-industrial model of food production. This imposes limits on the capacity of those who are already disenfranchised with regard to 'food capital' to join the contemporary conversation about what constitutes 'safe' and 'culturally appropriate' forms of food.

Another of the themes that permeated the data was human resilience. Deprivation is a subjective phenomenon, and while it forms one dimension of the experience of food insecurity, it is overly simplistic to conclude that it is encountered in a universal manner. Respondents had developed a range of empowerment strategies to mitigate constructing themselves as deprived individuals. They reflected on the positive achievements that they made in managing their resources with a sense of personal satisfaction and responsibility, alleviated some of the immediacy of their situations by making temporal adjustments, and examined the opportunities that they had for making longer term improvements with optimism. The majority of respondents regarded the lived experience of food insecurity as being a relatively transitory condition, and drew some comfort from identifying others whose situations were perceived as being more permanent and multi-faceted than their own.

The data reviewed in the results chapters of this thesis points to the complexities of addressing food insecurity at both the micro and community levels. Although the implications of the experience have largely been examined at the level of the individual, the costs of food insecurity arguably accrue at the social level by placing extra pressures on health infrastructure, undermining productivity and impeding the development of human capital, and jeopardising social participation and cohesion. These costs are borne across all of society – not just by those who experience food insecurity. Both organisational and individual accounts point to the issue as one that cannot be resolved without strengthening its visibility within the wider socio-political context. In order to achieve this, a

more coordinated approach to understanding and addressing the 'wicked problem' of food insecurity is urgently required.

Unjust Desserts: The ‘Wicked Problem’ of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity within the context of affluent societies is not new, nor is the problem of attempting to develop means by which it can be addressed. State distribution of free (or heavily subsidised) grain and oil to adult males was recorded in the city of Rome in 71 BC. In the third century AD Severus Alexander decreed that the people should have readymade bread rather than grain, and later rations of pork fat and wine were added to the *annona* in what Tannahill (1988) has described as “the first widespread, and in the end, self-defeating – social welfare scheme”(p. 71)¹. By acknowledging the historical, cultural, structural and critical factors that underpin food insecurity, this chapter proposes that there is potential for thinking about an old problem in new and more enduring ways.

In considering the socially constructed nature of social problems, Seidman and Rappaport (1986) observe that “the definition of a social problem is time, place and context bound” (p. 1). The fact that different societies throughout history have attempted to address the persistence of food insecurity is acknowledgment that it can be regarded as a social – rather than an individual – problem. What is more, it is a problem of the kind that is highly resistant to solution, and one in which definitions are contested and, consequently, proposed solutions value laden. While this thesis certainly makes no claims to offer a ‘quick fix’, ultimately it must supply a synthesis that makes sense of the findings and attempts to

¹ Karl Polanyi (1952) describes a similarly self-defeating approach to social welfare in eighteenth century England, where the Speenlandham Laws provided “subsidies in aid of wages [that] should be granted in accordance with a scale dependent on a price of bread, so that a minimum income should be assured to the poor *irrespective of their earnings*” (p. 82) (original emphasis). These laws were eventually overturned due to a resulting decline in productivity that undermined the advancement of the capitalist project.

extend current theory within this area of practise. In wishing to make use of a perspective that maintains the grounded orientation of this work while drawing together the multiple dimensions that underpin the experience of food insecurity, a relatively recent addition to sociology's theoretical tradition in the form of the 'Wicked Problem' framework has shaped the analysis that follows.

The 'Wicked Problem' Framework

The streets have been paved, and the roads now connect all places; houses shelter virtually everyone; the dreaded diseases are virtually gone; clean water is piped into nearly every building; sanitary sewers carry waste from them; schools and hospitals serve virtually every district; and so on. The accomplishments of the last century in these respects have been truly phenomenal... But now that these relatively easy problems have been dealt with, we have begun turning our attention to others that are much more stubborn. The tests for efficiency that were once so useful as measures of accomplishment are being challenged by a renewed preoccupation with consequences for equity. (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 156)

While the early literature referencing the challenges of problem solving and decision making in ambiguous spaces is often attributed to Lindblom (1959), Simon (1962), and Cohen, March and Olsen (1972), the first published use of the term "wicked problem" is credited to Churchman (1967), whose guest editorial in *Management Science* referred to the content of a seminar delivered by Professor Horst Rittel. Rittel and Webber² (1973) went on to describe the concept more comprehensively in a paper titled *Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning*. Almost four decades on, this work remains widely cited and has been used as a framework for facilitating consideration of complex social issues across a broad range of disciplines³. Its conceptual utility has been recognised in theoretical

² By way of background, Horst Rittel was a German-born architect and design theorist. He held the position of Professor of the Science of Design at the University of California, Berkeley, in the Departments of Architecture and City and Regional Planning from 1963 until 1990. Between 1973 and 1990 he was also Director and Professor at the University of Stuttgart Faculty for Architecture and Town Planning. Melvin Webber was an urban designer and theorist, also at the University of California at Berkeley. He is credited with pioneering work that considered new possibilities for cities of the future – and particularly, for introducing the notion of 'community without propinquity'.

³ These include (but are not limited to): social and public policy, environmental science, urban

explorations of climate change, terrorism, obesity, indigenous disadvantage, land degradation and drug and tobacco regulation (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007). More recently, it has also made an appearance within the sociological literature, fitting well with the call from some quarters of the discipline for a more 'public sociology'⁴ that encourages re-solution processes which engage a wider range of publics in problem definition, agenda setting and the critique of stakeholder structures⁵. In addition, the framework is compatible with the post-modern concern of sociology to represent a range of 'truths'.

Policy problems cannot be definitively described. Moreover, in a pluralistic society there is nothing like the undisputable human good; there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems cannot be meaningfully correct or false; and it makes no sense to talk about "optimal solutions" to social problems unless severe qualifications are imposed first. Even worse, there are no "solutions" in the sense of definitive and objective answers (Rittel & Weber, 1973, p. 155).

Given its utility for multi-disciplinary explorations across a range of contemporary issues that interact with power, stratification and social inequity, the framework can be regarded as a conceptual means of structuring the sociological imagination. Although it does not appear to have attracted significant attention from within the discipline until relatively recently, examples are found in Wexler's (2009) exploration of the moral dimension of wicked problems in the *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, and in Murphy's⁶ appeal for a disciplinary reframing of 'wicked' challenges at the World Congress of Sociology (Murphy, 2010). Although the framework could be considered a contemporary rebranding of much of what sociology has always sought to do, these instances (and optimistically, that which follows) confer

design and human geography, systems analysis, leadership management and population health.

⁴ Michael Burawoy is widely recognised as one of the leading sociological figures in advocating for public sociology. See for example his 2004 presidential address to the American Sociological Association (Burawoy, 2005).

⁵ Within the context of this analysis, the term 'stakeholder' is used to denote any person or group with a direct interest or investment in a problem.

⁶ Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Ottawa, and President of the International Sociological Association's Committee for Environment and Society Research.

recognition of its suitability for addressing the increasingly complex social contexts with which the discipline finds itself occupied⁷.

What is a ‘wicked’ problem?

The classical systems approach... is based on the assumption that a planning project can be organised into distinct phases: ‘understand the problem’, ‘gather the information’, ‘synthesize the information and wait for the creative leap’, ‘work out solutions’ and the like. For wicked problems, however, this type of scheme does not work. (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 161)

Rittel and Webber’s characterisation of ‘wicked’ problems was initially developed in response to the observation that a range of issues in social planning could not be successfully addressed by using the same linear analytical approaches that scientific methods had adopted to understand and solve ‘tame’ problems. Wicked problems can be differentiated from ‘tame’ ones (see table 9.1 below) on the basis that tame problems are empirically ‘knowable’, their solutions are characteristically definitive and there will always be a ‘one best’ answer.

Table 9.1. The tame problem/wicked problem distinction

Tame problems	Wicked problems
Relatively easy to define and can be treated as separate from other problems and the environment	Relatively difficult to define and cannot be easily separated from other problems and the environment
The information needed to solve the problem is readily available, well-structured and easily put into use	The information needed to solve or make sense of the problem is ill-structured, changing and difficult to put into use
There is a consensus not only among problem-solvers over what the best method is, but those with the problem also agree with the legitimate problem solvers	There is neither a consensus among problem solvers over what the best method is, or a clear agreement over who is and is not a legitimate problem solver
This class of problems has precedents from which one can learn or take advice from others in order to become a “bona fide” problem solver	These problems are unique and changeable; therefore attempts to solve them make learning difficult and progress towards a solution erratic
Stakeholders to the problem defer to the expertise of the problem solver and seek little or no say in the process beyond that requested	Stakeholders to the problem join the problem solvers in possessing conflicting views of the problem, its solution, and the degree of involvement of the problem stakeholders

Source: Wexler (2009), p. 533.

⁷ The author notes that the University of Southern Utah is using the framework as the conceptual basis for its ‘Introduction to Sociology’ course.

The original ten criteria⁸ that Rittel and Webber described for determining wicked problems have remained relatively stable across multiple disciplinary reiterations over time. Based on a review of the growing literature in this domain, a comprehensive description of typical characteristics has been provided by the Australian Public Service Commission (2007) for consideration within policy contexts. While acknowledging the work of Camillus (2008)⁹, Logue (2009) outlines a more concise rendition¹⁰.

The ten characteristics [of a wicked problem] are: (1) there is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem; (2) wicked problems have no stopping rule, it is unclear when a solution is reached, and so (3) the search for a solution never stops. Also (4) that solutions to wicked problems are a matter of judgement of whether they are good or bad, rather than true or false. It is (5) difficult to measure the effectiveness of a solution to a wicked problem, and (6) the solutions may generate unexpected consequences over time. Solutions to wicked problems (7) have consequences that cannot be undone, and (8) there is not a set of exhaustible describable solutions available. Wicked problems are (9) essentially unique and (10) have the added difficulty of being considered as symptoms of other problems (p. 42).

It should be noted that the conditions for identifying a problem as wicked are not entirely prescriptive. In highlighting this Camillus (2008) comments that rather than providing a set of tests that mechanically determine wickedness, the criteria should be used as a guide to provide insights that assist in determining whether or not a problem is wicked.

Social messes and super wicked problems

Ackoff (1974) has also considered the nature of wicked problems, but conceptualises them in a slightly different manner by inclusion of reference to the following difficulty: "...no problem ever exists in complete isolation. Every problem interacts with other problems and is therefore part of a set [or *system*]

⁸ See Chapter 3, footnote 26.

⁹ The subject of this author's work is strategic analysis in business, providing a further example of the interdisciplinary portability of the wicked problem framework.

¹⁰ Logue uses the framework to examine the 'brain drain' as a wicked problem. The fact that the situations of people emigrating is defined as a 'brain drain' is itself an indicator of the process of problem definition and the struggle over the meaning of phenomena.

of interrelated problems” (p. 21). Such systems, he suggests, can be referred to as ‘social messes’.

In expanding Ackoff’s concept with a view to developing strategic solution-based approaches, Horn and Weber (2007) assert that the complex interconnectedness of the systems that make up social messes are what makes them so resistant to analysis and resolution. They propose that the characteristics of social messes are similar to those of wicked problems but emphasise that most problems of this nature are interconnected ‘systems of problem systems’, and that data about these systems will often be missing or uncertain. Social messes are also characterised by multiple values conflicts, resistance to change and constraints on the ideological, cultural, political and economic commitment to addressing them. Finally, Horn and Weber (*ibid.*) assert that one of the most significant barriers to effective resolution lies in the fact that those with the authority to make decisions about how the mess is managed often do so from a vantage where they have little direct experience of it, and are unlikely to be affected by the consequences of any decisions they take with regard to achieving solutions.

A further differentiation has been made between wicked problems and ‘*super wicked* problems’, such as global climate change (Bernstein, Cashore, Levin & Auld, 2007). Super wicked problems pose additional challenges for resolution on the basis that the time available to solve them is running out and there is no central authority that can be held responsible for the problem solving process. In addition, the human propensity to choose smaller rewards that can be obtained over the shorter term overrides choices that could lead to larger gains in the longer term¹¹, and the same parties that seek to solve the problem have conflicting interests in that they are also a part of its cause.

Social problems of the wicked kind are not necessarily evil or malevolent. Rather, it is the *nature of their complexity* that forms the basis of their wickedness (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Because the parameters of wicked problems are interrelated and difficult to distinguish, the significance and definition attributed to a

¹¹ This effect is known as ‘hyperbolic discounting’.

problem is often contested amongst the parties with an interest in it. Strategic representation of the dimensions of the problem is driven by competition for acceptance of each stakeholder's preferred solutions, resulting in a struggle between them to have their interpretation dominate the problem solving agenda (Clemons & McBeth, 2009). With regard to food insecurity, all of this then raises questions about which groups have a stake in the problem and exactly whose voices should be heard in attempts to define it. Further, given that the respondents in this study identified that the experience of food insecurity had implications for social and civic inclusion, a critical examination of the assumptions that have informed current definitions and correspondingly, the existing range of intervention solutions, is required.

Contextualising the Experience of Food Insecurity

One cannot understand the problem without knowing about its context; one cannot meaningfully search for information without the orientation of a solution concept; one cannot first understand, then solve. (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 161)

Wicked problems are, by nature, problems that cannot be easily defined. It is difficult to discern their beginning and end points, and the inter-relationships between their component parts are complex. For these reasons it is often useful to depict their attributes visually and spatially as 'maps'¹², rather than textually. This presents some challenges when working within the constraints of a medium such as an academic thesis. In order to make the task achievable, an approach that examines the dimensions of the problem within the macro, meso and micro contexts has been adopted here as a strategy for suppressing the non-linearity of the various facets of food insecurity. While taking this approach risks exclusion of a seemingly inexhaustible number of additional themes that would have made an equal contribution to framing the issue as 'wicked', in the end some limit has had to be applied that conforms to the scope of this publication.

¹² Kunz and Rittel's (1970) seminal paper on developing Issue Based Information Systems (IBIS) refers to the use of 'issues maps' (p. 6), an approach which has been methodologically refined by Conklin (2006) in the form of 'dialogue mapping', and by Horn and Weber (2007) as 'mess mapping' and 'resolution mapping'.

Examining the Macro - Global Food Security

With regard to questions about the social, economic and political conditions that have influenced patterns of production and consumption in the current era of food insecurity, it would be remiss to conduct an analysis of the results without acknowledging the influence of the global context. At the macro level, food security (and correspondingly, food insecurity) poses a 'super wicked' problem of global proportions. The answer to the Malthusian question of how to service the growing demands of population while simultaneously addressing the impacts of human activity on the natural world remains elusive. Time, it seems, is of the essence in achieving some form of re-solution¹³ of these apparently conflicting objectives.

By now, most people have conceded that climate change is a reality, although characteristically, contention amongst commentators about the causality and significance of this problem remains. Gwyn Dyer, author of *Climate Wars* observes: "...the first and most important impact of climate change will be an acute and permanent crisis of food supply" (cited in King, 2010). Seasonal changes that impact on harvests have already been observed, and it is considered likely that projected temperature increases will affect the distribution and proliferation of horticultural pests and diseases. Although the impacts of climate change loom large, they are not the only issues of the environment that threaten global food security. Sustainability of food production is compromised as land becomes denigrated through salination and overuse, and water sources essential to food production retain contaminants - or simply disappear altogether as a result of persistent drought. Oceans are depleted of their stocks through over-fishing, and less robust habitats that once provided the essential ecosystem services¹⁴ which fed many of the planet's poorest citizens are

¹³ The use of the terms 're-solved' and 're-solution' throughout this analysis is in recognition of Rittel and Webber's (1973) assertion that wicked problems are never conclusively solved, rather they require constant re-solving as new information about their changing dynamics emerges.

¹⁴ This term refers to services provided through ecosystems which may have a direct or indirect economic value because people derive utility from their actual or potential use. The planet's poor are disproportionately dependent on these services to provide for their systems of small-scale agriculture, grazing, harvesting, hunting, and fishing (UN Millennium Project, 2005, pp. 3-4).

progressively destroyed. Urban sprawl devours land that could otherwise be used for food production, and land use change prompted by large scale planting of crops to service new biofuel industries impose further constraints on the amount of arable land available for food production¹⁵. Competition over increasingly scarce natural resources (including arable land and clean water) inflates values and leads to intensification as producers strive to achieve the economies of scale required to remain competitive in a globalised market, while still satisfying the demands of capital¹⁶. Intensified modes of production perpetuate further environmental degradation, although the direct consequences of this are infrequently borne by those who profit most.

Globalisation has a hand in altering the dynamics of food security as well. The ease with which international trade now takes place and growth in demand from nations that have recently achieved advanced economic development (such as China and India) de-localise consumption and prices for local produce soar to match those that can be fetched in the global commodity market. The threat of multi-national companies relocating capital undermines the ability of nation states and their governments to control the systems of food production that occur within their respective jurisdictions. Political pressures to achieve the economic growth required to sustain improvements in standards of living further constrain the regulatory abilities of governments, and protectionism with regard to achieving food security at the population level is frowned upon by powerful international financial institutions (such as the World Bank and the International

¹⁵ India is the world's second largest exporter of rice – a commodity that is a staple part of the diet in many of the world's poorest nations. In October 2007, responding to concerns about rising inflation and domestic food insecurity, the Indian government banned rice exports, contributing to international prices almost tripling between January and April 2008 (Mitchell, July 2008, p.13). Although there appear to be a number of other culpable factors (this event in itself constitutes a wicked problem), the growth in the proportion of arable land now being used for biofuel crops globally has been identified as a key contributor. A World Bank policy research paper (Mitchell, July 2008, p.1) concluded: "The contribution of biofuels to the rise in food prices raises an important policy issue, since much of the increase was due to EU and U.S. government policies that provided incentives to biofuels production, and biofuels policies which subsidise production need to be reconsidered in light of their impact on prices".

¹⁶ This process has been documented within the context of the Waikato region in Cameron, Barrett, Cochrane and McNeill's (2009) examination of changing agricultural practices - including land use change. One of the significant drivers for intensification was servicing debt that had funded expansion.

Monetary Fund) compromising food sovereignty¹⁷ in the absence of challenges from a central authority. Large scale speculative¹⁸ buying and selling of food commodities create food ‘cartels’ that have the ability to control access and price, adding further complexity to the dimensions of affordability (Robles, Torero & von Braun, 2009).

There are obvious tensions in achieving the goals of sustainable development in a way that balances economic and environmental concerns. Short term eradication of poverty through economic growth challenges the ability of the environment to meet the needs of future generations¹⁹, and these tensions are even more pertinent within the context of developing nations (UN Millennium Project, 2005). The capacity of poorer members of affluent societies to respond to economic shocks of environmental and global origins is also limited. If predictions of an expanding world food crisis are correct, the experience of food insecurity may no longer be relegated to the poorest citizens. The impacts of new issues based in securing food supplies are likely to stretch across all ranks of society, with the potential to generate social instability and conflict²⁰. As such, global food insecurity poses not only a ‘super wicked’ problem – it also constitutes a *social mess*.

Respondents in the current study were conscious that the individual issues they faced in securing food were melded with macro level forces that existed outside of their direct observation and experience. The export of much of New Zealand’s food production means that local price setting is determined by the demand of

¹⁷ The term ‘food sovereignty’ was initially coined to refer to a policy framework which claimed the right of peoples to define their own food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries systems, rather than having these shaped by international market forces. See: Forum for Food Sovereignty (2007).

¹⁸ “In the context of food markets, speculators are relatively risk-tolerant individuals who are rewarded for accepting price risks from a more risk-adverse hedger. A risk-adverse trader who is or anticipates holding the commodity (such as a farmer with a crop of wheat approaching harvest) may hedge selling now, in a forward or “futures” market, for future delivery at a currently determined price” (Robles, Torero & von Braun, February 2009, pp. 2-3).

¹⁹ In many ways this tension is indicative of the ‘hyperbolic discounting’ which is characteristic of super wicked problems.

²⁰ The food riots that rippled across the world (in Italy, Uzbekistan, Morocco, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal, West Bengal, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Yemen, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Mexico, Argentina and Haiti) in 2007 and 2008 are a manifestation of this (McMichael, 2009).

international markets – a point that was commented on with particular regard to meat and dairy products. Respondents also noted price increases in wheat based staple items such as bread, although there was no explicit acknowledgement that this was a consequence of international grain shortages arising from drought and land use change. Respondents did, however, make a connection between unseasonably high prices for fresh fruit and vegetables and meat as a result of local drought conditions around the time that the interview series took place. Although a good number of them were critical of the way in which the global food supply chain operates (citing examples such as concerns about food safety and food miles) they also identified that, because of low income, there was little scope for making alternative purchasing choices and their ability to resist this model was limited²¹. The events that occur in the macro context also have implications for the formal food support sector in terms of elevating the demand for assistance as real incomes in the lower ranges fail to keep abreast of increasing food costs. Given the limitations on state funded assistance that were in place during the period the data was collected, there is a residual impact on communities in terms of the level of generosity required to support the increased resource requirements of third sector aid responses as people use up their food grants more rapidly and turn to charitable means of formal support.

Examining the Meso – Responding to Food Insecurity in the Hamilton Community (and beyond)

While many of the issues that exacerbate the occurrence of food insecurity in wealthy nations are influenced by the global context, the research presented in this thesis examines the dimensions of food insecurity within the Hamilton community. Thus, a significant narrowing of the contextual focus is required at this point. In constructing existing responses to food insecurity as an element of the larger ‘wicked problem’ it is worth noting that the formal approaches identified in Hamilton are replicated in many other urban New Zealand communities²² in the form of Special Needs Grants for Food administered via the

²¹ These themes are addressed in Chapter 8.

²² The author has verified this in other research undertakings across a range of communities in

national system of social security, and foodbanks and community meals coordinated by third sector social service organisations²³. Consequently, while the analysis presented here is conversant with the findings of the Hamilton ‘case study’ it also provides an indicative account that assists in framing the ‘wickedness’ involved in addressing food insecurity at the community level in Hamilton and beyond.

Consistent with the tensions between different stakeholder groups in terms of defining and responding to wicked problems, the meso-level strategies that this study identified are informed by divergent perspectives with regard to food insecurity as a social issue. Correspondingly, the significance and scope of the problem is contested as state and third sector stakeholders look to one another to take responsibility for providing solutions. Further, the identified range of meso level solutions for addressing the problem are informed by the very different ideological motivations.

State responses to food insecurity

Whilst UN conventions require ratifying governments to meet the basic needs of their citizens, in the New World Order hunger is again a matter for charity and not for state or collective action. Hunger in western wealthy societies, it would seem, has effectively been depoliticised with profound personal, moral and social consequences. (Riches, 1997, p. 2)

The state’s most direct response to food insecurity in New Zealand is the provision of the Special Needs Grant for Food. Access to this form of support is controlled by statutory limits on eligibility and prescribed rates of entitlement²⁴.

the Waikato, Taranaki and Bay of Plenty regions. See: McNeill (2008), McNeill & Cochrane (2009), and McNeill & Cochrane (2009a).

²³ There is variation between communities (used here to denote sub-regional areas) with regard to the availability of foodbanks, but the eligibility criteria identified in the Hamilton case study appear to be fairly universal. In the author’s observation, the presence of community meals (coordinated between a range of organisations or otherwise) tends to be dependent on the range of socio-economic conditions present and population density. Arterial towns, for example, may have a small foodbank service or ‘community pantry’, but no availability of community meals whatsoever, whereas city centres are likely to offer highly coordinated foodbanks as well as community meal services.

²⁴ See results in Chapter 4.

Provision is motivated by the state's obligations under international law which endorse the right of citizens to food security. Since 1976, Article 11 of the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1966) has formed the basis of all international law upholding the right to food, binding signatory states - including New Zealand - to "recognise the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself [sic] and his family, including food". Further, the Covenant explicitly highlights "the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger".

Like other signatory nations, state parties of New Zealand must report to the United Nations every five years on how the rights outlined in the CESCR are being implemented. The most recent report²⁵ (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2009) makes scant reference to food insecurity despite the findings of two consecutive National Nutrition Surveys²⁶ demonstrating that 20 percent of households with children were impacted. However, the same report is quick to promote progress on other aspects of Article 11, including improved public health measures to provide education about nutrition and a tightening of food safety regulations – but both of these do little to protect the interests or reform the behaviours of those whose right to food is compromised by absence. The state (by way of responding to a criticism that had been made in the UN committee's appraisal of the state party's previous submission²⁷) was also fast to claim improved reporting on social indicators in the form of the *Social Report* which is now produced annually by the Ministry of Social Development. Although the 2001 and 2002 editions both made use of 1997 data to report food insecurity at the population level, from 2003 until the present this indicator has been

²⁵ Submitted to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in April 2009, covering the period 1998 to 2007.

²⁶ These were carried out in 1997 and 2002, and reported in 1999 and 2003. See: Russell, Parnell, & Wilson, (1999), and Ministry of Health (2003), cited in Gorton, Bullen & Mhurchu (2009), p. 1.

²⁷ See: UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2003).

mysteriously omitted, suggesting that out of public sight is perhaps out of political mind²⁸.

There is a more concerning aspect, though, to the problem of ensuring citizen's rights to be free from hunger. If state provision of the means to achieve this were adequate then delegation of the task to third sector social service organisations who receive no funding from central government to provide food support would cease. The state's reliance on charitable food aid as part of its welfare strategies assists it in evading any real commitment to achieving food security, and effectively passes many of the costs associated with fulfilling this responsibility back to the community. This approach is further confirmed by the accounts of the respondents in this study with regard to the preparedness of Work and Income New Zealand to supply them with the required paperwork to access foodbank assistance once their food grant entitlement had expired.

To a critical observer, the Special Needs Grant for Food could be perceived as a token gesture on the part of the state to convey to international spectators that the New Zealand government takes its role in achieving the right to food and the freedom from hunger seriously. There is a lack of transparency about how maximum levels of entitlement have been established as adequate to ensure these rights. Levels implemented in 1994 remained unaltered until August 2008, when they were effectively doubled by halving the period over which the maximum could be accessed (Ministry of Social Development, 2008)²⁹. No explanation has been offered for setting levels in such a way, and given that reliable sources of data that report the cost of food are reported regularly the decision with regard to the setting of current rates of entitlement seems bureaucratically arbitrary. Further, there is no indication when or if further reviews will be made, and no suggestion that the annual adjustments that take

²⁸ The omission of food insecurity as an indicator in the *Social Report* is discussed more comprehensively in Chapter 2.

²⁹ The cost of emergency food grants jumped by 75 percent in the one year period following this change, with the average number of grants approved nationally increasing from 23,730 a month over the three month period April to June 2008 to an average of 39,122 a month over the same period in 2009 (Collins, 2009, August 18).

into account changes in living costs for Core benefits will be applied to Special Needs Grant for Food. Given that the Salvation Army reported a 40 percent increase in the number of food parcels it had distributed nationally over the first year of the policy change (Collins, 2009, August 18) the state's determination to realise the right to food through easing the burden of provision placed on third sector services appears to have been minimal.

Third sector responses to food insecurity

The focus in the Christian theology of food (and consequently food aid) is that we have no right to food but rather an obligation to be thankful for the provision of food and to show this gratitude by extending an offer of food to others – to meet their physical, social, moral and spiritual needs. (Buckingham, 2000, p. 23)

Since colonial times, Christian churches have entrenched themselves as part of the 'fabric of welfare' in New Zealand (Tennant, 2007). In the contemporary setting, organisations such as The Salvation Army, the Methodist Mission, the Anglican Care Network, as well as other affiliates of the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services - although much more corporate in orientation than their previous incarnations would have required of them - dominate the third sector social service landscape³⁰. The community based services that supply formal food support in Hamilton via foodbanks and community meals are – without exception - organisations whose activities in this regard are motivated (either overtly or covertly) by an ethos that draws on the Christian tradition³¹. Rather than asserting a right to food, provision is premised on a redistributive *moral obligation* to share God's bounty with those who have limited resources as a means of displaying gratitude for the same. While the redistributive aspect of this mission is clearly demonstrated in the form of foodbanks, community meals derive their significance in a slightly different manner. Sharing in the group consumption of food or 'breaking bread together' builds relationships, social

³⁰ Collectively, the six affiliate churches of the NZCCSS are responsible for around 500 social service delivery sites throughout New Zealand (New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, n.d.)

³¹ In the author's observation, this attribute is prominent across the foodbank and community meal sectors at the national level as well.

capital and ultimately, community³². As Buckingham (2000) observes: “Feeding the poor would bring them into community and thus the poor would come to enjoy the benefits of community life and interaction as well as no longer being hungry” (p. 19). In this light it is perhaps unsurprising that in some instances the hosts of Hamilton’s community meals reported an expectation that attendees would participate in other aspects of the church community’s life. The two-fold benefits outlined by Buckingham are confirmed by the accounts of the respondents in this research who frequented these meals as both social functions and as an exogenous strategy for meeting their physical food requirements. Unlike the Special Needs Grant for Food and accessing food parcels, the absence of a judgement of eligibility (and the corresponding threat of stigma) was also highlighted as an attractive aspect of these occasions.

With a complete absence of government funding, the reliance of third sector food support services on philanthropy in the form of donated food, money with which to purchase food and voluntary labour constitutes a precarious existence. Although the organisations that provide Hamilton’s two main foodbanks have implemented different operational approaches to securing resources, both reported that they were compromised in their ability to meet demand and that the primary reasons for this were constraints on resources and funding³³. Despite providing almost 25,000 meals in 2006-2007 year, it appears that (unlike foodbanks) community meal services are not well supported by the corporate sector in Hamilton. They have, however, been innovative in developing other income streams, although these too are ultimately reliant on the community generosity³⁴. While some providers reported constraints on their ability to meet demand arising from a lack of material resources, this experience was not universal and the main challenge that community meal services faced appeared to be a reliance on volunteerism in the absence of secure funding with which staff could be paid.

³² This aspect of these services was commented on by a number of respondents in this study. See Chapter 7.

³³ See Chapter 4.

³⁴ A number of community meal providers fund their activities by running opportunity shops. See Chapter 4.

Historically, third sector organisations have played an important social advocacy role. However their ability to continue this work in the contemporary operating environment is increasingly compromised by competitive and conditional funding regimes³⁵. With regard to the issue of food insecurity, third sector stakeholders have been unable to attract the level of public and political influence required to secure state funding for the services they provide. Consistent with the characteristics of a wicked problem, there are deficiencies in the data available to them to make persuasive arguments about the cost and extent of their responses to the problem, and this is exacerbated by the absence of a standardised instrument for data collection that would allow reporting to be carried out on a sector wide basis, as opposed to an organisational one. However, it is also pertinent to recognise that the core business of food support organisations is not data collection, nor advocacy. Given the disinclination of the state to take seriously its responsibilities with respect to the rights to food and freedom from hunger, the costs of maintaining third sector food support will continue to fall on New Zealand communities. Discharging the task of feeding the hungry to charity based welfare exploits the moral obligation to provide food which these organisations observe.

Examining the micro – the experience of food insecurity

At the personal and household levels, the experience of food insecurity is intrinsically private. The desire of those affected to maintain secrecy about their status contributes to the social invisibility of the issue and compounds associated senses of stigma and deprivation. The endogenous strategies that respondents in this study utilised counter popular myths about the causes of food insecurity. It does not occur because those on low incomes (particularly social security benefits) make poor lifestyle choices, squander their money or are averse to participating in paid employment. The range of strategies described with regard

³⁵ For example, recent changes to the criteria for Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS), a source of funding which is well utilised amongst third sector providers, have introduced an *explicit stipulation* that political advocacy will not be funded (Department of Internal Affairs, n.d.).

to acquiring food and making it last also demonstrate that food insecurity is not a product of deficiencies in life skills. What this research does confirm, though, is the vulnerability of those with low incomes when confronted with shocks - including changes to health, family and employment status, and housing arrangements. Further, there is no buffer within benefit level incomes to counter even minor economic shocks. Within constrained budgets, money that would otherwise be available to spend on food is more susceptible to being eroded by unanticipated expenses than a range of other fixed costs. Respondents also observed that the purchasing power of their incomes with regard to food had decreased over time, and given the global context identified previously, this factor appears pertinent. Simply put, the findings of this study reiterate those of many other authors: the root cause of food insecurity within the context of wealthy societies is inadequate income.

One of the important findings of this study is that food insecurity impacts on people's relationships, both within the household (particularly those between parents and their children) and beyond. Although the term 'food capital' is not delineated in any of the existing literature on the interaction between social capital and food insecurity, the results of the current research indicate that the absence of food has implications for social participation in terms of people's perceptions about their ability to fulfil the social norms attributed to the host or guest role. Social withdrawal was a common response amongst those who experienced hunger, as was avoidance of situations subject to expectations of hospitality or reciprocity. This research does, however, support the existing literature with regard to the exercise of social capital as a means of enhancing food security and avoiding hunger³⁶. Respondents who had dense proximate social networks (friends, neighbours and extended family) demonstrated a lower level of engagement with formal food support providers, although they were conscious of not 'burdening' others, and in instances where they did not wish to compromise their social standing or risk stigmatisation, the 'food seeking' aspect

³⁶ See for example: Martin, Rogers, Cook & Joseph (2004), and Walker, Holben, Kropf, Holcomb & Anderson (2007).

of the interaction was discreet rather than overt. This study points to a more confounding relationship between social capital and food insecurity than has been documented elsewhere. Without food capital to begin with, people are compromised in their abilities to establish and maintain the relationships which allow them to accrue the social capital which, in turn, could assist them in offsetting food insecurity.

The health paradigm has been applied in much of the research on food insecurity. While this offers a useful lens for examining the nutritional consequences, consideration of the implications for social and psychological wellbeing is often neglected. These dimensions were certainly highlighted in the experiential accounts of those closest to food insecurity, particularly in terms of social exclusion, the energy absorbed and relationship tensions caused by the stress associated with constantly worrying about food, and adjustments to temporality as strategy for coping with impending or actual foodlessness and hunger. Further, although respondents were aware that their ability to achieve recommended dietary intakes was compromised, this concern was consistently secondary to that of avoiding or alleviating hunger. The realisation that the quantity and quality of food are inadequate and being unable to conform to social food norms such as achieving the expected number of meals a day, or eating the prescribed number of portions of fresh fruit and vegetables, can manifest as deprivation. Descriptions of rationalisations for disrupted eating that assist in alleviating this sense represent entrenched personal and behavioural shifts, and these can develop into routines of disordered eating that are difficult to counter and resistant to contradictory information promulgated by public health 'expertise'.

Although food insecurity is caused by a lack of income, not all respondents considered themselves to be 'poor' – an indication that at the micro level the identity of 'poor' and that of 'food insecure' are not necessarily synonymous and that, like other wicked problems, food insecurity can be considered a 'unique problem' in its own right. Conversely, the experience of food insecurity was universally accompanied by a sense of inequity and social injustice expressed through exclusion and deprivation. Exclusion due to one's food status, whether

consciously self-imposed or inadvertently imposed by others, has implications for expressions of citizenship through civic participation. What is more, exclusion contributes to alienation from community processes, as well as political ones.

Food insecurity is disempowering in that there are limits on the capacity of those most affected to dispute the authority of the dominant stakeholders that have dictated the definition of the problem, and accordingly, its solutions. The responses offered by the state, the third sector and public health experts are premised in understandings of the problem informed by paradigms and discourses that preclude consideration of many of the micro level impacts that the experiential accounts presented in this study have highlighted. Food is an essential need, and the risk that any challenges to the status quo will be construed as 'biting the hand that feeds' is not one that those who are reliant on the existing measures to meet this need can easily afford. This assertion is borne out in respondent's accounts of their dependency on the benevolence of decision makers when seeking assistance and in their observations about the imbalances of power that occur in situations where they are identified as 'clients with limited entitlements', rather than 'citizens with inalienable rights'.

The secrecy and shame that accompany food insecurity at the micro level contribute to its invisibility as a social issue. There is a lack of safe sites in which the perspectives and insights of those whose day-to-day lives are marred by the experience can be voiced, let alone heard without fear of stigmatisation, judgement and reprisal. While the contribution of this study is a very small start, there is much, much more to be done.

The Wickedness of Food Insecurity

Wicked problems are ill-defined, ambiguous and associated with strong moral, political and professional issues. Since they are strongly stakeholder dependent, there is often little consensus about what the problem *is*, let alone how to resolve it. Furthermore, wicked problems won't keep still: they are sets of complex, interacting issues evolving in a dynamic social context. (Ritchey, 2008, pp. 1-2)

Commonly, some of the criteria used in identifying wicked problems are closely related or intersect. While authors such as Ritchey (2008) advocate for the resurrection of a purist application which does not reduce the initial set of 10 criteria outlined by Rittel and Webber (1973), this is in seeming contradiction to the original author's first stipulation that: "There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem" (p. 1). The framework in its contemporary usage tends to expand or collapse criteria through integration depending on whether synergies can be achieved. In taking the latter approach, the five points that follow examine the dynamics of food insecurity and its persistence as a 'wicked problem'.

1. ***The contextual factors that contribute to food insecurity are complex and have many interdependencies.***

Food insecurity, like other wicked problems, is characterised by complexity across all levels of analysis. The findings of Gorton, Bullen and Mhurchu's (2009) comprehensive review of sources identifying influences on food security in wealthy nations (summarised in table 9.2 on the following page) provide an indication of the scope of the environmental factors that contribute to the problem. While the factors that influence food security are able to be broadly classified as economic, physical, political and socio-cultural, the relationships between the various dimensions occur in a range of different contexts across the macro, meso and micro levels.

Table 9.2. Environmental influences on food security in wealthy nations

Factor	Dimensions
Economic factors	Income Wealth Employment Living expenses Housing tenure
Physical factors	Health Household facilities Home gardens Transport Rural/urban location Associated factors ³⁷
Political factors	Government policy Welfare support
Socio-cultural factors	Cooking and financial skills/nutrition knowledge Cultural obligations Education level Housing composition Immigration and acculturation Social networks Media Embarrassment

Summarised from: Gorton, Bullen & Mhurchu (2009).

The multiplicity of linkages between different aspects of the problem creates difficulties in clear identification of its basis, and accordingly, its parameters and those of any proposed solutions. For example, while the respondents in the current study considered that their experience of food insecurity was underpinned by micro level income inadequacy, this can be linked to meso level issues based in professional judgements about what constitutes ‘adequacy’, and consequently, the rates at which entitlement to social security benefits ought to be set. Simultaneously, meso level considerations in this regard sit within a macro-economic framework which stipulates that residual welfare should provide a safety net for those who are unable to attach to the labour market, but

³⁷ Includes factors such as food desserts, food pricing, availability of healthy food, and presence of local takeaways or supermarkets.

should not incentivise benefit uptake by setting entitlements at a level that replicates the earnings of waged workers.

Rittel and Webber (1973) assert that: “Every wicked problem is essentially unique” and that “despite long lists of similarities between a current problem and a previous one there always might be an additional distinguishing property that is of overriding importance” (p. 164). While food insecurity can be considered as symptomatic of a range of other problems – such as poverty arising from income inadequacy and limits on the capacity to accumulate and exercise social capital - it can also be constructed as an ‘essentially unique problem’ in its own right on the basis that the environmental determinants which contribute to it are distinguishable from those which contribute to other related, but distinctive, problems.

- 2. There are contradictory stakeholder views on the scope of the problem. This has implications for determining how food insecurity should be identified, described and measured to inform a definition.***

Although income inadequacy is generally considered to be the primary cause of food insecurity, there are varying understandings of how this arises and the degree of contribution this circumstance makes to the problem. According to different stakeholders the deficiencies in income which lead to food insecurity may be caused by setting social security benefit levels that are punitive, changes in the nature of employment over time, the impact of housing costs on real disposable incomes, the erosion of purchasing power, or levels of personal indebtedness³⁸. In summary, views on the significance and extent of the problem will vary according to which stakeholders have been asked. While each of the assertions made is likely to be correct in part, the choice of explanation favoured will influence the possibilities examined in developing re-solutions and different stakeholders will represent the problem in different ways to suit their own agendas and win support for their preferred course of action.

³⁸ Including debts arising as a result of over-payments and advances made to beneficiaries by Work and Income New Zealand which are compulsorily recovered.

Amongst stakeholders, there are also differing levels of ‘investment’ in the problem, and hence different perceptions with regard to its dimensions. If, for example, the respondents and third sector food support services considered in this study are treated as separate stakeholder groups, then we note quite different concerns: one set informed by first-hand experience of the implications of the problem, and the other informed by experiences of attempts to respond to it. Those who experienced food insecurity directly viewed it through a lens coloured by elements such as stigma, the potential to impact on relationships, and hunger, whereas those who provided relief mechanisms viewed the problem as one of a humanitarian obligation to secure charitable resources and manage as best they could to meet demand for their services.

Another aspect that prohibits establishing a clear definition of the problem is that of quantification. The demand for food parcels is often cited as a proxy measure to indicate the presence of food insecurity within a particular community, and there are a good number of instruments that can be administered at the individual or household level to ascertain whether or not food security is present. Some of these provide international benchmarks, while others (such as that used in New Zealand’s National Nutrition Surveys) are refined to allow sample based estimates at population level that take local conditions into account. Each of these measures is informed by a different set of motivations on behalf of those reporting the outcomes, and a lack of continuity precludes agreement between stakeholders about an overarching definition of the problem that can be applied at national, community and individual levels. Further, the range of terminology used to indicate food insecurity and inconsistent usages within this range undermines a universal conceptualisation. Examples of common descriptors include ‘food poverty’, ‘food insecurity with (or without) hunger’, ‘low (or very low) food security’, and ‘nutritionally compromised’. To add to the confusion, definitional terms and their usage are constantly evolving. A recent example of this has been the addition of the term ‘food stress’ – which, rather than denoting ‘food anxiety’ or ‘worrying constantly about food’ as one might expect, describes a situation where the costs of

securing healthy foods are high relative to household income^{39,40} (Coveney, 2010).

3. ***There are a variety of different sites in which interventions can be implemented, but stakeholders have different views on which of these should be prioritised influenced by the paradigm through which they view the problem. The choice of definition determines the nature of the approach taken to re-solving the problem.***

What is particularly useful about the schema proposed by Gorton *et al.* (see table 8.1 in point 1 above) is that it suggests a variety of different sites at which interventions to alleviate food insecurity can take place. Consistent with the nature of wicked problems, though, these sites are multiple and interactive, and there will be different stakeholder views about which of them should form the basis for interventions depending on the paradigm each uses to define the problem. Third sector stakeholders, for example, often examine food insecurity as part of the larger problem of relative poverty and advocate for interventions based in structural changes that hope to improve the conditions under which economic redistribution takes place. In contrast, stakeholders examining the problem from a health paradigm may consider that the nutritional implications of food insecurity are paramount, and consequently that targeted education programmes about food choices which hope to achieve changes in behaviours across those groups who are most vulnerable should receive priority as an intervention measure.

The literature around taming wicked problems points to the success of approaches in which the various stakeholders who have an interest in a particular problem agree to commit to coordinating a range of interventions across multiple sites (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007). Although the findings of this study indicate some degree of coordination between different

³⁹ This concept imitates that of 'housing stress'- generally regarded as a condition in which households spend over thirty percent of their income on housing costs.

⁴⁰ See also Chapter 5, where changes in the titles of the classifications used by the USDA to describe the various levels of food security are discussed.

third sector organisations that provide similar kinds of services⁴¹, strengthening the links between the organisations that make up stakeholder groups *as well as* those between the various stakeholder groups that have an interest in the problem could greatly benefit the process of re-solution. The challenge of achieving a cohesive and coordinated approach to addressing the problem of food insecurity is not one that has so far been met. Rather, there exist a range of fragmented responses that have failed to tame the problem with any degree of durability.

4. ***Amongst stakeholders, there is no party that takes ownership of the problem, or responsibility for re-solving it. Food insecurity persists because approaches to re-solving the problem have failed, and there are no effective processes of accountability in place.***

Resolving social inequities – whether in income, food status, or the capacity to express citizenship – requires a broad commitment on the part of stakeholders to achieve change. One of the characteristics of wicked problems is that such change is often resisted because of stakeholders existing perceptions of, and investment in, the problem. The formal measures taken to address food insecurity that have been observed in this study are largely reactive ‘bottom of the cliff’ responses. Further, an almost universal pattern of provision in New Zealand communities suggests that the two key stakeholder groups (the state and third sector social services) who administer these responses have neglected consideration of alternative means by which the problem could be more enduringly re-solved. There are ongoing difficulties in determining whose responsibility the problem is, and consequently, who should be accountable for re-solving it.

Contemporary New Zealand governments from varying points on the political spectrum have consistently neglected to prioritise policy or apply a level of resourcing that indicates any real commitment to the food rights of citizens. The

⁴¹ Community meal providers coordinate the provision of meals so that there is availability of one service or another throughout the week, and foodbanks share client information to police the practice of ‘double dipping’.

state's direct means of addressing food insecurity is limited to meeting the cost of the Special Needs Grant for Food at levels that are clearly insufficient to address the problem adequately. In attempting to cover the shortfall, third sector providers assume responsibility on the basis of moral obligation, effectively aiding the state in dodging the issue, and transferring the cost of service provision back to communities. Although this approach constitutes a decentralised form of redistribution, there are sometimes deficits in the community's capacity to respond which leave these services stretched in terms of meeting a demand for which they have no mandated responsibility. In common with many other wicked problems, there are constraints on the ideological, political and economic resources that limit existing perspectives on how the problem of food insecurity can be understood and re-solved.

Assuming that the person who is food insecure should take full ownership of a problem that is rooted in structural inequalities challenges concepts of social justice. The respondents in this study overwhelmingly demonstrated that endogenous strategies for addressing the food insecurity are not infinite: there are limits on what can be achieved within the scope of constrained resources that no amount of budgeting will ameliorate. The expectation that stakeholders who are already marginalised by disparities in power should take full responsibility for their own predicament is rather like blaming the victim. What the findings of this study confirm, though, is that the people who are closest to the problem have much to offer in terms of insights which could contribute to more successful and enduring re-solutions - if only they are provided with safe opportunities in which to share them.

5. ***The problem of food insecurity is not stable, and requires constant re-solving.***

Because wicked problems are made up of complexes of factors, they are characteristically unstable. The inter-relationships between factors mean that if one shifts then others will respond accordingly - and not necessarily in ways that have been anticipated. In this regard, decision makers about potential strategies for re-solving the problem face the challenge of trying to focus on a 'moving

target' where information about the problem is evolving at the same time that attempts are being made to address it.

The dynamics that form the backdrop to the aspiration of food security in affluent nations are changing. A global economic model that favours unhampered capital creates difficulties in insulating local conditions from the effects of events that have occurred elsewhere, and central governments and consumers have little local control over food production systems or the price-setting activities of multi-national producers and speculators. Global, it seems, has become the new local, and it is increasingly difficult to extricate what occurs nationally with regard to food insecurity from events which take place beyond New Zealand's borders. Further, problems of the environment continue unabated and the long term implications of these on global food insecurity have yet to be fully realised. The uncertainty that accompanies future scenarios contributes to the instability of the problem and creates impediments to approaching it in a planful way.

The relationship between the effects of what occurs at the macro level and that which occurs at the meso are clearly illustrated by the impacts of a global financial crisis that commenced in 2007. Although the crisis was initially triggered by a liquidity shortfall in the American financial system, the tightening of credit criteria created economic ripples which continue to be felt worldwide. Three years on, unemployment and benefit receipt in New Zealand have spiked in response to the recession, rendering an increased proportion of the population vulnerable to food insecurity. Competition amongst an oversupply of work-ready employees erodes wages and conditions, resulting in increased patronage of foodbanks by the 'working poor'⁴² at a time when these services are already overburdened with newly redundant workers and economic conditions preclude the community's ability to provide usual levels of support (Collins, 2009). While the global recession provides one example, changes to political priorities and the consequences of policy decisions (whether predicted or unforeseen) in the

⁴² By way of example, Williams (2008) reports on this trend in South Canterbury, where only half the people using a Salvation Army foodbank were beneficiaries and the rest were families with at least one full time income earner, and in some cases, two full time workers.

domestic realm can also create instability as the problem moves around in response⁴³.

At the micro level, food security fluctuates according to changes in circumstances and the resilience of the strategies that are able to be implemented to accommodate these shifts. For those with very low food security the experience and its implications appear to be pervasive. Conversely, respondents in this research who reported low (as opposed to very low) food security generally implemented less onerous exogenous strategies based in a preference for utilising social networks, rather than formal services. These strategies successfully limited – but did not entirely mitigate - some of the more extreme impacts. Food insecurity within the context of wealthy societies can be regarded as an experiential spectrum rather than a constant or absolute state. For individuals and households the extremity of the problem moves around in response to the interaction of macro, meso and micro level factors, and, in the absence of income adequacy, the capacity to exercise a range of endogenous and exogenous strategies is critical to reflexive re-solution.

Re-solving wicked problems

Roberts (2000) offers a helpful way of thinking about the nature of problems in her development of a problem typology. She firstly differentiates wicked problems from ‘simple problems’ in which there is consensus about both definition and solutions, and ‘complex problems’, where an element of conflict is introduced because even though problem solvers may agree on how a problem should be defined, they are unable to achieve a consensus about how it should be solved. Wicked problems distinguish themselves from both simple and complex problems on the basis that they “... engender a high level of conflict amongst the stakeholders. In this instance there is *no agreement on the problem*

⁴³ At the time of writing an intensive review of the way in which New Zealand’s Social Security system is funded and administered was being undertaken on the basis that more economically sustainable approaches to welfare provision are needed. The Welfare Working Party’s recommendations to government are due to be released in February 2011, although two existing discussion papers indicate that the options being considered could further alter the policy dynamics that interact with the experience of food insecurity. See: Institute of Policy Studies, (n.d).

or its solution” (p. 1) (emphasis added). In a reiteration of many of the themes that have already been identified in this chapter with regard to framing food insecurity as a wicked problem, Roberts concurs with Conklin and Weil’s (n.d) points about the complexities of the problem solving process. In summary, these are that:

1. There is no definitive statement of the problem; in fact, there is broad disagreement on what ‘the problem’ is;
2. Without a definitive statement of the problem, the search for solutions is open ended. Stakeholders... champion alternative solutions and compete with one another to frame ‘the problem’ in a way that directly connects their preferred solution and their preferred problem definition;
3. The problem solving process is complex because constraints, such as resources and political ramifications, are constantly changing;
4. Constraints also change because they are generated by numerous interested parties who come and go, change their minds, fail to communicate, or otherwise change the rules by which the problem must be solved (p. 1).

In responding to Conklin and Weil’s observations, Roberts proposes three generic strategies for dealing with wicked problems and examines the advantages and limitations of each⁴⁴. *Authoritative strategies* are essentially ‘taming strategies’ that diminish the level of conflict inherent in wicked problems by placing responsibility for defining and developing solutions to a problem in the hands of a few stakeholders, while others agree to abide by the decisions of this ‘anointed’ group or individual. While reducing the number of stakeholders directly involved in decision making has the advantage of increasing the efficiency and timeliness of the problem solving process, authoritative strategists risk ‘getting it wrong’, both in terms of defining problems and in developing ‘expert’ solutions which do not necessarily meet the needs of end users. *Competitive strategies* are premised on acquisition of power and influence and

⁴⁴ See also Australian Public Service Commission (2007), pp. 9-10.

the extent to which a stakeholder can maintain a power base that will allow them to exert dominance over both defining the problem and imposing their preferred solutions. Stakeholders that follow this strategy assume a zero-sum game (a situation in which the only possibilities are winning or losing) and by accumulating a series of wins over time a player is able to resort to authoritative strategies.

The literature supports *collaborative strategies* as being the most effective way of dealing with wicked problems in instances where there are many stakeholders and a dispersion of power (see Bardach, 1998; Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Gray, 1989; and McLagan & Nel, 1995). Collaborative strategies are premised on the principle that by working together (the literal translation of the French verb *collaborer*) parties can accomplish more than they could if they worked individually. According to Roberts, “Rather than playing a ‘zero-sum game’ that seeks to distribute ‘pie shares’ based on winners and losers, they [collaborative strategies] assume a ‘zero-sum game’ than seeks to ‘enlarge the pie’ for all parties involved” (p. 6). The advantages of collaborative approaches include higher stakeholder commitment, the ability to develop more comprehensive and effective solutions, and fewer resources having to be expended by any one stakeholder. Collaborative approaches are also regarded as being more effective where part of the solution to a wicked problem involves sustained behavioural changes by many of the stakeholders and/or citizens. Alliances, partnerships, joint ventures and whole of government (or ‘joined-up government’) approaches can all be considered as examples of collaborative problem solving strategies (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007, p. 10).

Advocating for a collaborative approach to re-solving food insecurity

Social problems are never solved. At best they are only *re-solved* – over and over again. (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 160)

Whatever the level of analysis applied, food insecurity constitutes a wicked problem. There are difficulties in isolating its dimensions because each of them, to some extent, interacts with the others. The problem becomes larger rather

than smaller, and reductionist approaches risk exclusion of contextual influences. The best that one can hope for at this point is to highlight that the while the persistence of food insecurity in New Zealand society (and arguably, societies in other wealthy nations) cannot ultimately be solved, it can be re-solved in a manner that accommodates the current and future conditions of the problem in an informed and reflexive way.

If this thesis is to take the role of 'claims-maker' (Rochefort & Cobb, 1994), then it should also make some recommendation about how such a process could be actualised. As a methodology, General Morphological Analysis (GMA)⁴⁵ has much to offer in this regard, and responds to Rosenhead's (1996) observations that resolving wicked problems requires a methodological approach that can:

- Accommodate multiple alternative perspectives, rather than prescribe single solutions;
- Function through group interaction and iteration rather than 'back office' calculations;
- Generate ownership of the problem formulation through transparency;
- Facilitate a graphical (visual) representation for the systematic group exploration of a solution space
- Focus on relationships between discrete alternatives, rather than continuous variables; and
- Concentrate on possibility rather than probability.

Ritchey (2008) stipulates that the process of creating morphological inference models should occur through a facilitation process that engages as many stakeholders as possible in the work of establishing a common terminology, problem concept and modelling framework. The GMA method enhances the potential for stakeholders to collectively structure as much of the problem space

⁴⁵ General Morphological Analysis (GMA) is a 'non quantified problem structuring method' which results in an inference model that seeks to capture the total problem solving space and as many of the potential solutions to a problem as possible (Ritchey, 2002). As a methodology, it has been widely used in both the private the public sectors throughout Europe to address problems such as economic crime, peace enforcement, the management of radioactive waste and poverty reduction. Thus far, it does not appear to have been used widely in Australasia. For a comprehensive description of GMA, see Ritchey (2008).

as possible, synthesise solution spaces, explore multiple solutions on the basis of different drivers and interests, and analyse stakeholder structures. As a conciliatory method, Ritchey notes: “The different stakeholders do not have to agree on a single common solution, but must be encouraged to understand each other’s positions and contexts” (p. 6). Within such a process, no great leap of faith is required to consider the potential for responding to appeals for a more ‘public sociology’, or to the possibilities of pursuing praxis approaches via ‘action research’.

The authoritative and competitive strategies that have been exercised to address the persistence of food insecurity in New Zealand have thus far failed, but collaborative approaches hold promise for taming what is essentially an intractable problem. The potential for developing collaborative re-solutions will be determined by the ability of existing stakeholders to achieve a significant shift in mindset. If, as Rittel and Webber (1973) propose, there can be no unitary concept of a public welfare and to aim for such is considered anachronistic in the face of plurality, then re-solving food insecurity requires the involvement of a much broader range of stakeholders than those who have thus far dictated the range of definitions and solutions. Any reframing of the problem *must* include those groups in society who have been identified as being most vulnerable to the experience, and those who are most directly affected: food insecure people themselves.

Improving the Pudding: In Conclusion

The initial questions that this research proposed aimed to assess food insecurity by examining the historical, cultural, structural and critical factors that underpin its presence within the New Zealand context. These factors appear to be strongly interrelated across all levels of analysis, and the presentation of each in isolation from the others poses the risk of replicating the very limitations that this study has critiqued in other reductionist descriptions.

Advocating for structural changes that focus on improving social equity by attending to the deficiencies of the social security system, insisting that the state recognise the right of citizens to be free of hunger, or urging policy decision makers to endow the third sector services that provide responses of last resort with sustainable funding would be obvious points with which to close this text. These conclusions, however, are neither original nor feasible. They have been consistently reiterated in one form or another by successive advocates and activists, academic authors and researchers since the impacts of neo-liberal restructuring first began to make themselves felt in New Zealand in the late 1980s. Poorer members of New Zealand society do not appear to have fared well under these changes. Contemporary discourses about food insecurity have been impacted by the rise of political mantras that promote individual and community responsibility, regardless of whether or not the outcomes individuals and communities face have been structurally imposed. What is more, in an era where there are already tensions between central and local governments about exactly whose responsibility it is to address a range of social issues at the community level¹, and in light of evidence that suggests New Zealanders have become

¹ This tension has been described by the author elsewhere and is informed by a consultation process that involved staff and elected representatives from various local government organisations. See: McNeill (2008), and McNeill & Cochrane (2009).

increasingly tolerant of inequity over time², such recommendations are likely to be both socially and politically unpalatable. New and innovative ways of addressing the presence of food insecurity in Hamilton (and elsewhere in New Zealand) that mitigate the limitations of the socio-political environment are required.

Within the context of affluent nations, the dominant discourses that have been used to assess food insecurity most often construct it as one symptom of the larger problem of relative poverty, or frame it as a public health issue based in concerns about nutrition. While neither of these perspectives should be disregarded, this thesis has argued that food insecurity is a unique problem, and that the social impacts that accompany its presence have been under-acknowledged. The experiential accounts presented in this study have been valuable in demonstrating that food insecurity is accompanied by stigmatisation, exclusion, and a general sense of alienation from a range of citizenship processes. As a theoretical principle, the social contract provides an important medium for maintaining the cohesion necessary for the stability of civil society. However, this concept is premised on the availability of opportunities for civic expression. The research findings have been used as a basis for proposing that re-solving food insecurity at the community level could be approached more democratically in future. Broadening the existing range of 'expert' stakeholders to include 'those who talk with their mouths half full' opens up opportunities to develop definitions of the problem grounded in first-hand experiences that could more helpfully direct future re-solutions.

Such a recommendation needs to be carefully balanced with a critical and reflective evaluation of the limitations and strengths of the work that has informed it. It is also helpful to suggest how any deficiencies in the current study could be remedied, and how strengths could be incorporated or developed in future undertakings that hope to add to the process of re-resolution. In taking a mixed-method approach based in grounded theory and interpretive field

² A comprehensive summary of this evidence is provided by Laugesen (2010).

research, this project was carried out in two distinct, but complementary, stages. As such, it is appropriate in the first instance to address each of these in isolation.

The primary strength of the quantitative dimension – a survey of formal food support provision in Hamilton City - was in achieving sector wide representation across the community. This approach avoided duplicating the organisational micro-reporting that has limited other commentaries, and offers some basis as a methodology for future endeavours in this area. By amalgamating the data of all providers a more accurate empirical portrayal of the demand for, and estimated costs of, food support services was able to be amassed. This achievement was supported by the commitment of *every* formal food support provider to contributing to the survey research. The initial investment of time in exploring community networks and briefing service providers about the project is considered to have been well worthwhile.

In terms of responding to some of the critical questions that this research has posed, the survey was useful in ascertaining the socio-political vulnerabilities that exist across the provision sector, and the ideologies that inform the rationale behind existing responses. There were clear themes across the data in this respect and identification of these has been particularly constructive in informing an analysis that captures the relationships between different stakeholders (in the form of state and third sector parties) in a manner that is consistent with critical research. The survey design also allowed some capture of qualitative data that relied on the grounded intelligence of respondent organisations. Although subjective, this was helpful in assisting with the contextualisation of quantitative responses.

Although the rapid growth in the number of foodbanks observed in New Zealand in the 1990s has slowed, demand for these services, along with the uptake of Special Needs Grants for Food, does not appear to have dissipated over time. This study recognises that both of these measures now constitute structurally embedded responses to food insecurity in New Zealand. The 25,557 community meals, 4,232 food parcels and \$1,157,623 worth of Special Needs Grants for

Food evidenced by the survey in the 2006/2007 year confirm the assertion that despite apparent affluence and abundance, the problem of food insecurity is not something to which the Hamilton community is immune. If one agrees that demand for provision of food support services is an indicator (rather than an absolute measure) of the prevalence of food insecurity, then the approach taken in this study has provided a useful basis for legitimising the thesis's contention that the incidence of food insecurity at the community level constitutes a social issue that must be exposed.

While the survey achieved its core aims, there are limitations within the data which should also be acknowledged. Firstly, in accordance with the set of criteria developed for the purposes of identifying 'formal responses' to food insecurity (described in Chapter 3) a number of 'non-formal' responses were excluded, although in most cases the point of exclusion occurred because these particular services (such as those provided by schools) did not have data. The results are limited in that they do not describe or account for those services that were deemed 'informal'. Accordingly, estimates of both demand and provision will actually be *lower* than the real levels present in the community. Secondly, the data provided by formal services was not entirely well aligned in terms of time frame as the reporting periods of provider agencies varied according to their internal requirements for accounting and funding purposes. There were also different levels of detail across the data set, as well as missing data. As noted in the presentation of the survey results (see Chapter 4), these problems were addressed through processes of averaging and informed estimation. Thus, the results must be viewed as indicative rather than absolute. A final issue was that in asking agencies to state the nature of their organisation the range of choices provided were 'church based', 'community based', 'social services based', and 'other' (specified). The survey design could have been improved in this respect by giving organisations an opportunity to identify as 'secular' or 'non-secular' (or something similar), as most identified as social services despite the fact that they openly operated under the umbrella of a faith based organisation.

While the survey instrument had initially been designed to test a number of hypotheses that were anecdotally informed, this phase of the research also yielded three quite unanticipated results. In the first instance, the frequency with which 'quasi-formal' responses to food insecurity were revealed warranted the addition of this category alongside more clearly differentiated forms of food support. Although the eligibility criteria for accessing formal food support was fairly consistent across similar service types, a good number of organisations offered quasi-formal assistance alongside foodbank and community meal services. This approach allowed them to retain some flexibility in responding to the needs of applicants whose eligibility could not be evidenced in the usual ways, particularly where they were vulnerable to 'falling through the cracks' because of emergency needs, transience or a circumstantial inability to interact with the social security system.

Secondly, the response provided by the Ministry of Social Development showed that after Domestic Purposes beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries formed the second largest group of food grant recipients. Presumably, this client group derives their main income from paid work that offers inadequate income or security to insulate them from unanticipated budgetary 'shocks'. This finding confirms that attachment to the labour market provides no guarantee against food insecurity, especially the low paid and often precarious employment that has been offered as a result of recent growth in service sector industries.

The role and extent of community meals in Hamilton provided another unexpected result. The six organisations that work in coordination to provide these services run almost exclusively on volunteer labour using food donations and shoestring budgets to supply almost 500 meals a week. A number of respondents in the qualitative dimension of this study observed that the quality of the food offered through these services was of a good standard, and because of the limitations that food insecurity can impose on social opportunities the occasions these meals offered were also regarded as helping to ameliorate exclusion. Despite these dual functions, it appears that community meals have received no research attention and there is certainly potential for future

consideration of their contribution to alleviating food insecurity, building social capital and countering marginalisation.

In terms of the qualitative aspect of this study, the users of formal food aid services made a ready pool of potential interview candidates. Community members who utilise these forms of support have already adopted the 'food insecure identity' to some extent, and are well acclimatised to being questioned about their situations as part of the conditions of service use. While it was certainly not the objective of this research to make judgements about the way in which respondents had come to be food insecure in anything other than a descriptive sense, the fact that participants were prepared to speak up about an issue which is highly personal and socially stigmatised may well have been aided by their previous contact with formal services. This approach was also positive in that the relationship between endogenous strategies, informal exogenous strategies and service use could be explored. While it is clear that seeking out formal food aid is usually secondary to the exercise of strategies based in cultural and social capital, the desire of respondents to maintain secrecy about their food situations within their social circle often acted as a motivating factor in their use of formal food aid. Respondents who had less social capital upon which they could draw were also more regular users of formal services. It is considered likely that there are many other community members who are measurably food insecure and have been excluded from this research on the basis that they do not interact with food aid services. This group may well prove a useful focus for further research as their strategies and experiences could be quite different, bringing new possibilities to the process of re-solution.

In-depth interviews were carried out with ten people across nine households. While this sample can be considered relatively small, the intimacy of the interviews provided a richness of data that is evident throughout the chapters in which respondents describe their experiences and highlight some of the subtleties that have not been widely explored in other larger scale work on the topic. The interview data were particularly fruitful in terms of evidencing the psycho-social strategies that respondents used to cope with food anxiety and

hunger, as well as documenting impacts of food insecurity on interpersonal relationships and social capacity. When analysed thematically the data were relatively consistent, but where commonality was unable to be achieved because of divergence, this has also been acknowledged. Food insecurity is a complex state, and further work is needed to discover what influences are at play with regard to differences of experience.

It is worth noting that the respondent group was treated in a relatively homogenous way. The primary characteristics they shared were use of a formal food support service in the year prior to being interviewed, normal residence within the boundaries of the Hamilton City territorial authority, and low or very low food security as measured by a robust instrument. There was limited scope within such a small group to examine experiences in light of other social and cultural variables. However, a reasonable articulation of the challenges faced by families with children and those with compromised health has been achieved. To a lesser extent, some of the cultural implications that held relevance for respondents who identified as Māori have also been acknowledged³. Some differentiation was also able to be made on the basis of whether respondents were measured as having low or very low food security and this point appears to interact with the severity of impacts and the kinds of strategies that are applied. Further work is required to understand how variables such as age, family composition, employment status, ethnicity and cultural expression impact on the experience of food insecurity. The findings also propose a new concept in the form of 'food capital' which offers scope for future research to advance what is already known about the dynamics involved in the acquisition and maintenance of social (and potentially cultural) capital as a micro level strategy for alleviating foodlessness and hunger.

In terms of presenting an analysis of the findings, the wicked problem framework has provided a medium for theorising an 'essentially unique' problem that is complicated by a range of interrelated contextual influences and therefore not

³ As a Pakeha (European New Zealander), the researcher has been cautious about making cultural assumptions on behalf of Māori respondents.

well suited to examination using linear approaches. The framework has been particularly useful for drawing together the findings of both the component stages of this study and managing the task of exploring food insecurity as a multi-causal phenomena with dimensions that span and interact across global, societal, community, household and individual levels. The analysis acknowledges that the problem cannot be treated as stable and that there are difficulties in isolating its parameters. Different stakeholders and their respective paradigms impose agendas that undermine agreement about definition, and consequently debates about the most effective sites for, and means of, intervention ensue. In recognising that ideological, social, political and resource constraints act as barriers to eliminating or curtailing food insecurity in New Zealand, this thesis has advocated for a collaborative approach to developing reflexive taming re-solutions. Facilitation based on a General Morphological Analysis has been recommended as one way of engaging with a fuller range of stakeholders with a view to establishing shared problem definitions that could better inform future responses and support more coordinated interventions within and across stakeholder groups.

As this thesis draws to a close, it is appropriate to consider what sociology could contribute to new approaches to understanding and re-solving food insecurity. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu (1984⁴) demonstrates that food preferences are a socially constructed and reinforced marker of stratification along the lines of class - matters which are at the very heart of the discipline. As a sub-discipline, the sociology of food has already been successful in recognising that the activities surrounding food form an important means by which the individuals that make up social groups - families, communities and nations - negotiate interactions and share meaning. The concept of the sociological imagination outlined by C. Wright Mills (1959) has assisted practitioners in assembling a comprehensive knowledge base about the processes around food and eating which continues to grow in breadth and depth as the discipline matures. What food sociologists have not been so successful at,

⁴ Originally published in French as *La distinction* in 1979.

however, is recognising the impacts that foodlessness has in terms of alienating individuals from participation in the social, cultural, historical and critical processes to which Willis's (1999) template of the sociological imagination refers. As such, it is the author's petition that rather than continuing with a tradition that specialises almost exclusively in examining the *symbolisms of presence* that surround food within the context of affluent nations, *the discipline must also concern itself with the dimensions of absence and enforced foodlessness*. Given that re-resolutions of the problem of food insecurity are likely to involve multiple stakeholders informed by a variety of disciplinary paradigms, the sociological imagination also needs to be prepared to negotiate its path through and within multi-disciplinary contexts – an approach which Beardsworth and Keil (1990) began advocating for much earlier in the history of food sociology.

It would seem high time for sociologists to begin the work of building an integrated view of the whole human food chain. Sociology is in a unique position in this respect, being the only discipline that could attempt to assemble the various inputs from within its own traditions and perspectives, and those of related disciplines like social anthropology, economics and human geography, as well as those of ecology. Such a task is an ambitious one, but it is one which is long overdue. (p. 151)

In the wake of global economic recession there is a growing tide of support for realising such an aspiration, and this thesis sits comfortably alongside a somewhat larger collection of references on the matter of food insecurity than it did when the initial review of the literature was carried out in 2007. Internationally, there has been a concentration of work that considers the issue within American, Australian and Canadian societies, and although many of these accounts continue to be characterised by the absence of the voices of food insecure people, the range of disciplines through which the problem is being examined has extended beyond health and nutrition paradigm to encompass others including economics, policy, demography and geography. Within emergent work there is increasing recognition of the interaction between divergent socio-cultural dynamics and food insecurity, the vulnerabilities of

specific population groups and the need for targeted interventions that cater to pluralism.

The literature within the New Zealand context has also expanded. In 2008, the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services updated the Poverty Indicators Project by addition of longitudinal analysis of foodbank use across three services⁵ to establish a benchmark for monitoring progress on the Ministry of Social Development's Foodbank Strategy⁶. Winsome Parnell, an author with a long history of drawing the attention of the health fraternity to the nutritional impacts of food insecurity, has recently co-authored work that examines barriers to acquiring affordable and nutritious foods in New Zealand households (Smith, Parnell and Brown, 2010). There are also new researchers with fresh theoretical and methodological approaches joining the fold. The *Enhancing Food Security and Physical Activity for Māori, Pacific and Low-income People's* project (Bowers *et al.*, 2009)⁷ has reported on the findings of a comprehensive mixed-method multi-disciplinary study that recognises the need for collaboration as part of the way in which improved outcomes associated with lifestyle factors can be achieved for some of New Zealand's priority groups for health. Interestingly, focus groups with low income, Māori and Pacific stakeholders were included to inform conclusions about problem definitions and possible interventions⁸. Other outputs of this project have included Gorton *et al.*'s (2009) examination of environmental influences on food insecurity in wealthy nations (utilised in the

⁵ In Hamilton, Dunedin and Invercargill.

⁶ Formally implemented in December 2002, the strategy aimed to reduce and ultimately eliminate the need for foodbanks over a period of three to five years by improving practices to ensure that Work and Income New Zealand clients were receiving correct benefit entitlements. The NZCCSS questions the Ministry of Social Development's commitment to the strategy on the basis that the number of people accessing foodbanks across the three services they monitored was similar between the quarters ending December 2004 and December 2007. One significant change noted was that rather than the small group of recurrent users observed in 2004, by 2007 foodbanks were being patronised by a larger group of less frequent users.

⁷ The project was jointly funded by the Health Research Council and the Ministry of Health and led by the Clinical Trials Research Unit at the University of Auckland.

⁸ It is worth noting that one of the theoretical frameworks used to inform the *Enhance* study is 'complexity theory'- an approach that shares a number of features of the wicked problem framework as a means of thinking about non-linear multi-causal phenomena, but an iteration which appears to have come into vogue recently to meet the needs of population health and related disciplines. Detailed discussion about the application of complexity theory within the health paradigm can be found in Gatrell (2005), Rickles, Hawe and Sheill (2007), and in Sheill, Hawe and Gold (2008).

previous chapter), and a number of the original members of the *Enhance* research team have explored gendered differences in the determinants of food insecurity in New Zealand using data from SoFIE⁹ (Carter, Lanumata, Kruse & Gorton, 2010). Te Hotu Manawa Māori, one of the original *Enhance* partners, has developed a “by Māori for Māori” tool kit in collaboration with the Obesity Action Coalition with a view to promoting measures that improve access to healthier foods in some of the most deprived areas of New Zealand (Obesity Action Coalition and Te Hotu Manawa Māori, 2009). The list of contributions from these new interests will no doubt continue to grow.

At the local level there have also been developments over the duration of this study. In 2009, growing client lists prompted foodbank representatives from all over the Waikato to gather together for the first time to respond to a summary report that presented the findings of the survey undertaken as part of the *Talking With Their Mouths Half Full* project (McNeill, 2008a). A number of recommendations made in that document with regard to establishing a more sector-wide approach to documenting the demand for food support (particularly streamlining data collection across organisations) has prompted the formation of a more cohesive regional food support network and discussions about the possibility of standardised data collection across all local foodbank services are ongoing. From the researcher’s perspective, these outcomes – while not solely credited to the research itself – are certainly positive in terms of the critical role that the project initially hoped to achieve. Further, in early 2010, Poverty Action Waikato (PAW)¹⁰ received a significant funding grant with the intention of monitoring the impacts of structural and policy change on regional poverty and social exclusion. The project is tasked with informing future funding decisions with regard to community identified initiatives, and depending on local priorities, there is scope for exploring community determined ways in which food insecurity could be addressed. Both of these initiatives go on without interacting

⁹ The longitudinal Survey of Families, Income and Employment.

¹⁰ PAW is a research based advocacy project carried out on behalf of third sector social service organisations and communities within the Trust Waikato catchment. The author developed the proposal that attracted the initial funding, and is a member of the Kaitaiki/steering group that oversees the development of the project.

with any state apparatus or policy decision makers. Rather, they are attended to by a combination of secular and non-secular organisations and individuals, who, like the author, believe that imposed food insecurity is an experience for which there is no place in an affluent society. The evidence base and social capacity for having conversations about food insecurity in the Hamilton community - as distinct from 'community food security' *per se* - is evolving.

The stranger who knocked on my door in 2005 to ask for food will probably never know that his visit inspired the questions that my work over these last years has sought to explore. What chain of historical events and structural changes had reduced people's dignity to such measures in order to meet their basic food needs and avert hunger? What were the implications of not having enough food for cultural and social wellbeing? What mechanisms did they apply to cope, and what critique of this problem could sociology offer? This research has confirmed that my visitor was not alone in his condition. There are others amongst our community who are similarly affected – a few of whom we have acquainted ourselves with on these pages in an attempt to find answers to these questions. Their courage in speaking out about a matter that continues to be marginalised by more powerful agendas deserves to be acknowledged. I hope that readers will hear these voices and recognise them as personal expressions of indictment with regard to the nature of inequality in New Zealand society, and the way in which this can be symbolically metered by food.

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Appendix I

Research Instruments for Survey of Formal Food Support Organisations

Department of Societies and Cultures

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Te Kura Kete Aronui

The University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

[Date]

[Name of Contact Person]

[Name of Organisation]

[Address]

Dear [insert name of contact person],

I am undertaking research into organisations that provide food assistance in the Hamilton community. This project is being supervised by the Department of Societies and Cultures at the University of Waikato and is a component of my Doctoral thesis. The project aims to provide a better understanding of the strategies which people have for addressing food insecurity. The results of the research may also be presented in a number of journal articles and conference papers.

You are invited to participate in the first part of this study by completing and returning the enclosed survey, which explores the way in which your organisation provides food assistance and how this is resourced. A summary report of the survey findings will be available to all organisations who participate in the survey.

There are some important points for you to note in order that the collection of data for this research remains as viable as possible.

1. Following data collection any information pertaining to the name of your organisation will be removed and individual agencies will remain anonymous in the data analysis and results presentations. Surveys are coded for the purposes of monitoring return rates and to enable the researcher to make follow up contact where required.

2. The researcher can be contacted at any time on 07 846 6626 or by email at kellie.m@xtra.co.nz. Please contact me if you require support in completing the survey, or have questions or further comments. Alternatively the researcher's supervisors Dr Ted Ninnes and Dr Maxine Campbell can be contacted on 07 856 2889.
3. A form is attached to the survey. This gives permission for the release of information and must be signed by the appropriate representative of your organisation and returned. This form also provides an opportunity for your organisation to indicate that it would like to receive a copy of a report outlining the findings of the survey, and to register an interest in participating in subsequent parts of the research by displaying advertising directed at clients who may be interested in participating in an interview about their experiences of food insecurity. The aim of these interviews is to examine their strategies for addressing this experience.
4. Ethical approval for this research has been granted by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. Any ethical concerns you have can be directed to the secretary of the committee, Charlotte Church, at charl@waikato.ac.nz

I thank you for considering participation in this research. Your efforts are valuable to the outcomes of this project.

Yours sincerely,

KELLIE McNEILL

PhD Candidate
Department of Societies and Cultures
University of Waikato.



Postal Survey of Organisations Providing Food Relief in the Hamilton Community

Please complete and return this survey and the Authority to Release Information on Behalf of an Organisation form (attached) in the postage paid envelope provided by [researcher to insert closing date].

Section A. Nature of the Organisation

1. Is your organisation primarily:

- 01 Church based?
- 02 Community Support based?
- 03 Social Services based?
- 04 Other. Please specify: _____

2. What services other than food assistance does your organisation currently provide in Hamilton? Please tick all boxes that apply.

- 01 None
- 02 Budget advisory services
- 03 Life Skills Education – parenting, cooking, etc.
- 04 Counselling and guidance
- 05 Material assistance – clothes and furniture, etc.
- 06 Financial assistance
- 07 Rehabilitation or residential care
- 08 Employment training or adult education
- 09 Advocacy and information services
- 10 Support groups
- 11 Other – please specify: _____

Section B. Resourcing Food Assistance

3. Does your organisation receive specific funding to supply food assistance?

01 Yes

02 No

**4. How does your organisation obtain or pay for the food assistance it supplies?
Tick all boxes which apply.**

01 External funding from state organisations (such as the Ministry of Social Development or the District Health Board)

02 External funding from community organisations (such as community trusts or other charities)

03 Personal donations of money from individuals

04 Personal donations of food from individuals

05 Donations of money from businesses or the corporate sector

06 Donations of food from businesses or the corporate sector

07 Fundraising activities

08 Other – please specify

5. In the last financial year of your organisation, what was the actual total cost of providing food assistance? Please exclude overhead costs such as staffing and amenities.

\$ _____

This figure covers the period

_____ to _____

6. Are the staff who work in your food assistance programme:

- 01 Paid?
- 02 Volunteers?
- 03 A combination of paid and volunteer staff?

7. What other costs does your organisation have which relate to the provision of food assistance? Tick all boxes which apply.

- 01 Distribution costs
- 02 Amenity costs such as power and phone
- 03 Rent for buildings
- 04 Other costs – please specify below

Section C. Description of Food Assistance Service(s):

8. Please identify the year your organisation began to supply food assistance in Hamilton.

01 _____

9. Please indicate the kind of food relief that your organisation currently provides. Tick all boxes that apply.

- 01 Food bank
- 02 Community meals
- 03 Other. Please specify: _____

10. Please provide a brief description of:

(a) What the food assistance that your organisation supplies is comprised of.

For example:

“Food parcels are supplied to feed a four-person household for three days.”

“We provide an evening meal consisting of a set menu of meat and potatoes plus two seasonal vegetables followed by a dessert of fruit and custard or similar.”

(b) The frequency of your organisations service.

For example:

“Our food bank is accessible all year round. We are open Monday to Friday between 10am and 4pm and also respond to emergency after-hours requests for assistance.”

“We provide an evening meal in town every Tuesday.”

(c) The quantity of food assistance which your organisation has provided in the previous 12 months for which you have available figures.

For example:

“We supplied 423 food parcels in the year to March 30, 2006.”

“At the end of our last reporting period (November 2006) we had supplied 1,264 evening meals.”

IMPORTANT: if your organisation does not have this kind of information you may wish to supply other details. Please comment, to the best of your knowledge, on the quantity of food support which your organisation supplies.

For example:

“We have distributed 20 sacks of potatoes and 30 2kg packs of frozen meat in the last month.”

“We provide a fruit and vegetable box and 6 loaves of bread to about 10 households per week.”

Section D. Client Sourcing and Eligibility

11. How do the clients who use the food assistance offered by your organisation usually present? Tick all boxes which apply.

- 01 Our clients are self-referred
- 02 Our clients are referred to us from within our organisation
- 03 Our clients are referred to us by other organisations

12. How does your organisation determine the eligibility of clients for food assistance? Tick all boxes which apply.

- 01 We assist all clients who present to us without considering eligibility
- 02 We require clients to verify hardship or their personal circumstances
- 03 We require clients to verify that they have exhausted all other formal means of food assistance available to them
- 04 Eligibility is determined by the resources we have available to us
- 05 We determine eligibility in some other way. Please outline this below:

Section E. Client Referral Practices

13. Does your organisation require clients to participate in any other services (either in-house or elsewhere by referral) in order to access food assistance?

Please complete the answer which best reflects the practices of your organisation. Additional comments (if required) can be made at the end of this question.

- 01 We do not require clients to access any other services

- 02 In all cases we require clients to use one or more of the other services we provide. Clients are referred to our _____ service(s).

- 03 If clients regularly approach us for food assistance we refer them to one or more of the other services we provide. After supplying food assistance _____ times, our organisation refers clients to our _____ service(s).

- 04 We require clients to attend services provided by another organisation if they frequently approach us for food assistance. After supplying food assistance _____ times, our organisation refers clients to _____ service(s).

Please make any additional comments in the space provided below.

Additional comments:

Section F. Ability to Meet Demand

14. Please respond to each of the following statements with regard to your organisation's food assistance programme

(a) The demand for food assistance through our organisation is higher than we have the resources to meet.

- 01 Never
- 02 Sometimes
- 03 Often
- 04 Always

(b) Our organisation has to ration or compromise the quantity of food supplied to clients due to resource and/or funding constraints

- 01 Never
- 02 Sometimes
- 03 Often
- 04 Always

(c) The resourcing of our food assistance programme is dependent upon our organisation supplying other services as well

- 01 Yes
- 02 No
- 03 Our organisation supplies food assistance only

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY.

PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU HAVE ALSO COMPLETED THE AUTHORITY TO RELEASE INFORMATION ON BEHALF OF AN ORGANISATION FORM AND RETURN IT WITH YOUR COMPLETED SURVEY IN THE POST PAID ENVELOPE ATTACHED NO LATER THAN [researcher to insert date].

Authority to Release Information on Behalf of an Organisation

Please complete and return the following declaration

Name of Officer _____

Position _____

Organisation _____

I declare that I have checked this completed survey and that I am authorised to release this information as a representative of the above organisation.

I am aware that this study has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato.

I understand that the information will be used in a PhD research project which aims to understand strategies for addressing food insecurity. The above organisation will remain anonymous in any publication of results or findings which may include journal articles and conference papers

I understand that participating in this survey in no way obligates our organisation to participate in any other aspect of the research. I have indicated below our wishes to be contacted/not contacted with regard to assisting in the recruitment of interview participants for further research.

Yes – our organisation would like to be contacted with regard to advertising for interview participants prepared to participate in additional research

No – our organisation does not want to be contacted with regard to the above

I understand that our organisation is unconditionally entitled to a copy of a summary report pertaining to the results of this research and have indicated below our wishes with regard to obtaining this.

Yes – our organisation would like to receive a copy of this report

No – our organisation would not like to receive a copy of this report

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Department of Societies and Cultures

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Te Kura Kete Aronui

The University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

May 30, 2007

Irving Young
Work and Income New Zealand
Hamilton

Dear Irving,

I am writing to follow up on your earlier discussions with my doctoral supervisor, Maxine Campbell, at the University of Waikato. I understand that she has given you some background into my research on food insecurity in Hamilton. I have enclosed a copy of the survey which I have sent out to organisations that provide formal food support to give you an indication of the kinds of data that I am interested in collecting. I would also like to be able to incorporate information from Work and Income New Zealand in my assessments of the levels of local provision which are occurring.

I would greatly appreciate any information which you can provide with regard to Hamilton specifically, rather than regional or national breakdowns.

- The total number of Special Needs Grants applied for in Hamilton over Work and Income's most recent reporting year
- The value of payments of Special Needs Grants in Hamilton over Work and Income's most recent reporting year
- The total number of Special Needs Grants for Food applied for in Hamilton over Work and Income's most recent reporting year
- The total number of Special Needs Grants for Food approved and granted in Hamilton over Work and Income's most recent reporting year
- The value of payments of providing food grants in Hamilton over Work and Income's last reporting year
- The budgeted cost of providing food grants in Hamilton over Work and Income's last reporting year
- A breakdown of the reasons for declining applications for Special Needs Grant for Food in Hamilton if available
- Any recent data which correlates Special Needs grant for Food with benefit type
- Any longitudinal trend data for Hamilton relating to Special Needs Grants for Food (similar to the National breakdown in The Statistical Report – June 2005, p 143).

- A document (or externally accessible reference for a document) which outlines Work and Income New Zealand's process for assessing eligibility for Food Grants
- Whether or not there is any requirement that food grant recipients participate in other services provided by work and Income New Zealand or another agency or organisation.

Any contribution which Work and Income New Zealand is able to make in locating these data sets would be most appreciated and very valuable to this research.

Many thanks in anticipation,

KELLIE McNEILL

Doctoral Candidate
Department of Societies and Cultures
University of Waikato

Appendix II

Research Instruments for Interviews with Respondents who Experience Food Insecurity

Recruitment Poster and Flier

Food Bank?
Food Grant?
Community Meals?



We know it's not always easy to feed everyone.

We'd like you to tell us how you do it.

Get more information from one of our fliers here, or contact:

Kellie McNeill

Phone 846 6626

Text/Mobile 027 243 9220

Email kellie.m@xtra.co.nz

Free Post 214066
PO Box 5483
Frankton
Hamilton 3242

**Food Bank?
Food Grant?
Community Meals?**



**We know it's not always
easy to feed everyone.**

**We'd like you to tell us how
you do it.**

Enquiries to:

Kellie McNeill, Department of Societies
and Cultures, University of Waikato,
Private Bag 3105, Hamilton.

Phone 07 846 6626, Text/mobile 027 243
9220, Email: kellie.m@xtra.co.nz



In the past twelve months, have you obtained food in one of the following ways:

- Through a food bank?
- Through a food grant from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ)?
- At a community meal run by an organisation?

If so, the things that you can tell us will help with a community research project about how people in Hamilton cope when they don't have enough food - how this affects their lives and our community.

Why participate?

Having your say could help us to work out how we can make things better.

What will I need to do?

If you are interested in sharing your experiences in a research interview, then please complete the next panel of this flier, seal, and return by freepost.

We will be in contact with you soon to give you more information about the research, so that you can make an informed decision about your participation.

Returning this flier does not place you under any obligation to go any further if you do not wish to.

Who can I contact for more information?

The contact details for the researcher are on the front of this flier.

Name: _____

Postal address: _____

Phone number: _____

Do you normally live in Hamilton?
(Please tick)

Yes

No

Which food services have you used in the past 12 months?

Food banks

WINZ food grants

Community meals

BE IN TO WIN!!!

Your time and effort is valued. Complete and return this flier by 15th January 2008 and go into the draw to win 1 of 5 music voucher.

Return of this flier is an expression of interest only and does not commit you to participating in this research.

Advertisement for school newsletters



Research Participants Wanted

Have you used a food bank, received a WINZ food grant, or eaten at a community meal in the past twelve months?

If you would like more information about participating in community research concerning how people cope when they don't have enough money for food, please contact Kellie McNeill:

Phone 846 6626, text 027 243 9220, or email kellie.m@xtra.co.nz

Press Release

Hunger in the Community an Issue for Hamilton Researcher

Not having enough to eat is something that we don't usually associate with the New Zealand way of life, but Kellie McNeill, a doctoral researcher at the University of Waikato, has found that food insecurity in the Hamilton community is more common than we would like to think.

- Work and Income New Zealand approved \$1.15 million worth of food grants to people living in Hamilton in the 12 month period ending March 2007.
- Hamilton charitable organisations currently provide in excess of 25,000 community meals annually
- Together, two of Hamilton's larger food banks presently distribute more than 80 food parcels weekly
- At least a quarter of Hamilton's 54 schools report having arrangements in place to feed students who come to school hungry.

Food insecurity (a lack of food or access to food of good quality) can impair learning and development in children and affects health and productivity in adults. Ms McNeill's research - appropriately titled *Talking with their Mouths Half Full* – explores food insecurity through accounts provided by people who are experiencing it. She says: "We know that there are services in our community to help those who don't have enough to eat. Recent closures of food banks in other parts of the country demonstrate how vulnerable these services are in terms of resources. The research intends to find out about other strategies people have for coping in situations of food insecurity, and see if these can be developed in order to generate some sustainable alternatives."

One of the problems associated with research on food insecurity is that individual agencies collect data for their own purposes, but there is no existing avenue for bringing all the data together to provide an overall picture. Ms McNeill's research on the networks which service Hamilton's hungry has collated multi-agency data and provides a more accurate and compelling picture of the extent of food insecurity in the community. She maintains that New Zealanders need to be encouraged to think about hunger and foodlessness as a local issue rather than something which only happens in other places.

Ms McNeill is currently recruiting people who have used a food bank, received a food grant or eaten at community meals to tell their stories, and welcomes enquiries from anyone who is interested in finding out more about the research.

Contact:

Kellie McNeill

Department of Societies and Cultures, The University of Waikato. Phone (07) 846 6626, Mobile 027 243 9220. Email: kellie.m@xtra.co.nz

Recruitment Pack

Department of Societies and Cultures
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Te Kura Kete Aronui



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

[Insert date]

[Insert name]

[Insert address]

Dear [insert name],

At the end of last year you returned a flier which told us that you had used food grants from Work and Income New Zealand, food banks and community meals in the last 12 months. I am writing to invite you to participate in research by telling us more about the ways that you cope when you don't have enough money for food.

I have enclosed an information sheet which tells you more about taking part in the study. Participation is voluntary, and any use of the information you share in an interview will not identify you. If you decide that you would like to participate then please return one copy of the Consent for Research Participation form (the other copy is for you to keep) in the enclosed freepost envelope and I will be in touch with you soon to organise a time that suits you to talk.

This is your opportunity to have your say about an issue which affects you. If you have any questions about the research please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

KELLIE McNEILL

Doctoral Candidate, Department of Societies and Cultures



INFORMATION FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

About the research

My name is Kellie McNeill. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Societies and Cultures at the University of Waikato. My research focuses on the ways that people cope when they don't have enough food, and how this affects their lives and our community.

Why participate?

Even though we know that there are many people who don't have enough to eat, little research about their experiences has been done in New Zealand. Having your say could help us to work out how we can make things better.

What are your rights if you decide to participate?

You have the right to remain anonymous, so any information that you provide will not identify you when it is used. Your participation is voluntary, so if you change your mind about the research using your information you can withdraw your permission up to two weeks after your interview. Ethical approval for the research has been granted by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant you can contact the secretary of the committee, Charlotte Church, by phone on 856 2889 ext 4608, or by email at charl@waikato.ac.nz

If you decide to participate, what will happen?

When you feel like you have enough information to make a decision about participating in the study, you need to fill out the blue consent form and return it. I will be in touch to organise a time and place that suits you to talk. Interviews will take about an hour and will be recorded on tape so that I can include exactly what you tell me in the research. You will not need to write anything. Some of your comments will be included in my Ph.D thesis, and possibly in journal articles and conference papers.

Continued over page...

What if you would like to participate but have care responsibilities, work, or need help to get to an interview?

Part of my job is to make sure that people who want to participate can do so. If you would like to participate but are worried about childcare, time, transport or other support please let me know and I will attempt to assist where possible.

Not sure or need more information?

If you think you would like to participate, but have more questions, please contact me.

Kellie McNeill

Phone 846 6626, Mobile or text 027 243 9220, email: kellie.m@xtra.co.nz



CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact phone number: _____

I declare that I have read the information sheet provided to me and understand that:

- My participation is voluntary. I can choose not to participate in an interview. I can also decide up to two weeks after an interview that I do not want my information used in the research
- The interview in which I participate will be tape recorded
- Information which I share will be used in Kellie McNeill's Ph.D thesis, and may also be used in journal articles and conference papers
- I will not be identified in any way in the presentation of the research
- I have been provided with contact details for the secretary of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Ethics Research Committee at the University of Waikato
- I have been provided with an opportunity to have any questions about my participation answered, and this has been done to my satisfaction
- Both the researcher and I will retain signed copies of this form

I give my informed consent for participation as an interview respondent in the research

Participant

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Researcher

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Question Schedule for Semi-structured Interviews

[Interviewer to open. Check informed consent, tape recording, establish rapport, etc.]

1. Demographic data

1.1 Demographic attributes

So that we can understand your personal situation I would like to ask you some questions about yourself and how your household operates.

- For our records we will identify you as [insert gender].
- What ethnicity do you identify yourself as?
- What year were you born in?

1.2 Household

Can you tell me who you live with?

Interviewer to clarify nature of relationship of respondent with any persons named, and identify dependents: partner, children (clarify how many, and their ages), other family, other non-family.

1.3 Income

I'd like to talk to you now about the ways that money comes into your household, and the ways that money goes out. First of all, thinking about the money that comes into your household regularly. What is your main source of regular income?

Employment – full time/occupation

Employment – part time/occupation

Student allowance or student loan

WINZ Benefit – benefit type

Other

Are there any other ways that money comes into your household? *Prompt as appropriate to include:*

<i>Employment – part time/occupation</i>	<i>WINZ Benefit – benefit type</i>
<i>Student allowance or student loan</i>	<i>Payments via IRD</i>
<i>Accommodation supplement</i>	<i>Child support</i>
<i>Payments from boarders, etc.</i>	<i>Gifts, casual work, other.</i>

I'd like you to think about the combined annual income of your household (that's your income plus the incomes of the other people who live with you) over the last year from all sources. Please stop me when I read out the amount that you think is closest.

\$0-10,000	\$10,000 - \$15,000	\$15,000-\$20,000
\$20,000 - \$25,000	\$25,000 - \$30,000	\$30,000 - \$35,000
\$35,000 - \$40,000	\$40,000 - \$45,000	\$45,000 - \$50,000...

[Interviewer to continue in \$5000 intervals up to \$60,000, then at \$10,000 intervals to \$90,000, then note as \$90,000 and above]

1.4 Expenses

Thinking now about the ways that money goes out of your household: where you usually live, do you pay rent, mortgage or board? *(Get interviewee to specify. If renting: private or Housing NZ?)*.

Thinking about the other regular expenses and financial commitments that you/your household have to meet, what are the main ones?

Interviewer to prompt for inclusion and explanation of any of the following, particularly where there is an obvious debt scenario:

Utilities such as rates, power, communications and insurance

WINZ debts?

Hire Purchases or other debts being paid off over time such as credit cards?

Fines?

Costs associated with work such as childcare?

Costs associated with an ongoing medical condition in the household?

Child support?

Transport?

Financial commitments to church, school or other non resident family members

1.5 Money left over for food each week

After the expenses you have just told me about, how much money do you usually have left over per week with which you can purchase food?

2. USDA Standard 6-Item Indicator set for Classifying Households by Food Security Status Level:

These next questions are about the food eaten in your household in the past twelve months. People do different things when they are running out of money for food so that their food money will go further.

2.1

In the last 12 months, since (date 12 months ago), did you (or any other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

Yes

No

2.2

ASK ONLY IF 2.1 = YES. How often did this happen? Choose one of the following:

Almost every month?

Some months but not every month?

In only one or 2 months?

2.3

In the last twelve months did you ever eat less that you felt you should because there wasn't enough money to buy food?

Almost every month?

Some months but not every month?

In only one or 2 months?

2.4

In the last 12 months, since (date 12 months ago), were you ever hungry but didn't eat because you couldn't afford enough food?

Almost every month?

Some months but not every month?

In only one or 2 months?

2.5

Now I'm going to read you two statements that people have made about their food situation. For each of these statements please tell me whether the statement was often, sometimes, is never true for you (or the other members of your household) in the last 12 months.

The first statement is:

"The food that I/we bought just didn't last, and I/we didn't have money to get more"
Was that often, sometimes, or never true for the last 12 months?

Often

Sometimes

Never

2.6

The second statement is:

"I/we couldn't afford to eat balanced meals" Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the past 12 months?

Often

Sometimes

Never

3. Household food strategies and the impacts of food insecurity

I'd like to talk to you now about the ways that your household gets food and some of the things that you do when food runs out.

3.1

Which members of your household have responsibility for:

- (a) Buying food?
- (b) Preparing food?

What would you consider to be the 'normal' ways that food comes into your household?(or that the members of your household get fed?).

Probe: what about food that's eaten outside of the household?

3.2

What sorts of things do you do to try and make sure the food that you have lasts, or is enough to go around?

Probe all answers, especially restricting intakes and changing consumption (switching to poorer quality food or foods which provide bulk) or cooking habits

3.3

When you sent back the flier you told me that you had used a food bank/WINZ food grant/community meal (as applicable) at some time in the past year. How did you find out about this service?

Thinking back to the last time that you used a food bank, got a food grant or ate at a community meal (as applicable), can you describe what was happening which lead up to there not being enough food.

Probe for circumstances and unusual events or expenses

Is this usually the situation when you need to get extra help with food?

Yes = move to next question.

No = What has been happening some of the other times that you have had to get extra help with food?

3.4

I'd like you to think about what you do when food first starts to run out and there isn't enough money for more. What are some of the things that you do to manage before you go for help from a food bank, WINZ or a community meal (as appropriate)?

Probe for strategies which occur inside the household, and then for strategies which occur through interactions outside of the household (buying food on credit, reliance on family or neighbours, etc.). If informal assistance is provided from outside of the household interviewer to establish the nature of the respondents relationship with provider.

Interviewer note: If use of ready to eat foods is identified as a strategy (such as foods purchased from bakeries or takeaway outlets) then establish what these are.

- If the food in your house has run out and there isn't any money for more, then what do you do?
- Have you ever been in a situation when you couldn't access extra help with getting food through either WINZ, a food bank or a community meal?

No = move to next question

Yes = (a) Can you tell me what the circumstances were which meant that you couldn't get help in one of these ways? and (b) then what did you do?

3.5

Of all the things that you just told me about (interviewer to summarise previous answers back to respondent) which ones are you more comfortable with doing, and why?

Out of all the things that you do when food has run out, which is the one that is your last resort? Why?

3.6

In your experience, what are the effects of running out of food?

(a) for you personally?

(b) for the other people in your household?

Probe: effects on health and nutrition, wellbeing and self esteem, social participation and education (including school), self esteem, shifts in attitudes, etc.

3.7

If there was one thing that you could change so that you always had enough food to feed yourself and the others in your household, what would that thing be?

Interviewer note: if the answer to this is along the lines of “get more money into the household” probe to find out whether this would be a change in the economic arrangements of the household, or a change in external factors.

[Interviewer to close: thank participant, leave contact details, etc.]