



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

# Falling through the net

## An exploratory qualitative study of food poverty and insecurity in Sweden

Master's Programme in Social Work and Human Rights  
Degree report 30 higher education credits  
Spring 2021  
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Wordcount 32438

## **Abstract**

**Title:** Falling through the net: An exploratory qualitative study of food poverty and food insecurity in Sweden

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**Key words:** Food poverty, Food insecurity, Poverty, Welfare State, Sweden

When thinking of food poverty, Sweden may not be the first country that comes to the forefront of your mind. Indeed it appears as a somewhat neglected field of study in a country that while maintaining a presentation as a social democratic welfare state, is experiencing a growth in the number of those not able to feed themselves. In examining this topic through a recognition framework, this study systematically reviews the available research on the subject that focuses on Sweden itself, revealing a dearth of available studies and data. The study then critically analyses the methods used to measure the levels of food poverty in Sweden, to try to establish if there is a consensus on the figure or a uniform way of comparing this internationally. There is not. It finally discusses the issue with a purposive sample of eleven social workers and charity workers who are engaged with supporting those in food poverty in some way. Their divergent experiences and roles were thematically analysed and point to a stratification of the welfare state, with many gaps and bureaucratic measures that lead to people falling through the proverbial net. Further research is indicated around how to more effectively measure the levels of food insecurity and an exploration of how stigma around this is created.

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**Acknowledgements:**

To my advisor who indulged my obsession with this subject I give thanks, as well as the many people who kindly responded to my repeated emails and requests for small pieces of relevant information. My strongest thanks however goes to those who participated in interviews, all of whom presented as compassionate and caring workers of various fields, assisting those experiencing food poverty. They have not only my appreciation but also my deepest respect and admiration.

*“There is an ethical obligation to use the privileges one has as a researcher to study phenomena that are relevant, and where there might even be a chance that the results of the study may improve the world.” (Brinkman 2013)*

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

From the research focus outlined above, the study presented here concentrates on a social problem that affects vulnerable people in Sweden in their ability to feed themselves. A most basic of necessity, food is essential for survival and is indeed recognized as a human right. (United Nations 2021) However, the basic amount for survival is not necessarily enough for the health and wellbeing of the individual and the states duty to ensure its citizens are fed is somewhat abstract, not focusing on the everyday experiences of the individual. (Ibid) The inequalities in society mean that some are consigned to taking handouts from charities as they cannot afford to meet their own basic food needs. (OECD 2015; Sveriges Stadsmissioner 2019) This situation is one that is happening in a social democratic welfare state, where social protection systems are meant to ensure that it doesn't happen. (EAPN 2020) It is also something that predates the Covid-19 pandemic, which the Food and Agricultural Organization to the UN (FAO) warns is going to have a detrimental effect on levels of food poverty throughout the world. (FAOc 2020) This research therefore examines the subject of food poverty as a hidden phenomenon in Sweden, and tries to capture the reasons why people are falling through the safety net of the welfare state.

## **Chapter 2 Research aim and purpose**

The purpose is a qualitative exploratory study of the levels and nature of food poverty in Sweden, and how this is addressed by statutory and voluntary agencies. It aims to gain accounts of the practical experiences and reflections of those working in social services and NGOs as well as critically analyse the empirical data around the levels of food insecurity in order to triangulate a coherent reality of the situation. In examining the experiences of the workers, the aim is to gain an understanding of how in an established welfare state such as Sweden food poverty can exist. Its intention is to challenge the concept of this being “out there” as a social problem belonging exclusively to economically poor countries, but rather one that can affect all of humanity albeit to varying degrees.

### **Research questions:**

What are the practical experiences and reflections of those working with people experiencing food poverty?

How do those working with people experiencing food poverty assess the current situation of food insecurity in Sweden?

What statistical data and empirical evidence is available on the levels of food insecurity in Sweden and in what ways is it measured?

**Limitations of the study:**

This study is acknowledged as being limited in its conclusions by the number of interviews undertaken, given the capacity of a Masters thesis timescale. The results may therefore not be widely generalizable to the wider population, and provide instead key points of attention, which may be explored in further research. The systematic review of literature is also limited by language, which is discussed later.

**Relevance for social work and human rights:**

This research is of key relevance for social work due to its focus on the vulnerability of individuals and groups and discusses the way charitable organizations and social services interact with them to support a basic survival need. This research therefore has the potential to guide practice changes and improvements. It also discusses a human right to food as recognized by the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights and how this is addressed within Sweden, who ratified this in 1971. (FAO 2021)

**Definitions of key concepts:** These are defined by the writer in reflection of the contents of the thesis.

Food poverty – To lack the means of accessing food of your choice that meets your nutritional needs.

Insecurity – Lack of confidence or assuredness

Food insecurity – To have an inconsistency in your ability to provide food for yourself or your family.

Practical experiences (practical knowledge) – To have witnessed or worked with a problem or situation so that you are able to talk about it with first hand knowledge.

Reflections – To think about your experiences and what they might mean.

Workers – Employees or volunteers engaged in work.

## Chapter 3 Background

### *Food insecurity and hunger as a social problem*

Food insecurity has been increasing throughout the world, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. (FAO 2020) Amidst this, the Swedish government made the claim that absolute poverty does not exist in Sweden, and that social protection measures in place protect the most vulnerable. (Sveriges Stadmissioner 2017) This would suggest that food insecurity would be managed under these measures. Indeed the discussion of food insecurity in Sweden appears to be one that focuses on those experiencing hunger outside Sweden. (Burns 2020) This directs it as a problem belonging to other countries, while this does not necessarily appear to be the case.

The FAO gathers data provided by states regarding levels of food insecurity. (FAOa, 2020) This appears to indicate that over the last several years, there has been a steady increase in levels of food insecurity in Sweden. (Ibid) The question is, if the social protections are indeed adequate, then why does this situation appear to be worsening?

In what is termed the global south, causes of hunger can more readily be linked to incidences of “conflict...climate shocks (and) unpredictable events”. (World Food Programme 2020) However, Sweden if measured in Gross domestic product per capita (GDP) is the eighth wealthiest country in Europe. (n.a. 2020) Therefore, the idea of people not being able to eat becomes more anachronistic. A similar effect appears to be happening in other European countries, with the UK having seen a proliferation of food banks providing food to those in need. (Human Rights Watch 2019) There the subject appears to have spurred not only scrutiny from the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights, Human Rights Watch and Unicef, (Human Rights Watch 2019; UN General Assembly 2019; Storer 2020) but also a keen research interest about the reasons behind it. (Lambie-Mumford 2012; Lambie-Mumford & Dowler 2015; Garratt 2020)

However, if the statistics of the FAO are to be taken on face value, then they indicate that levels of food insecurity in the UK have been falling. (FAOa, 2020) In contrast Swedish levels have now increased, surpassing that of the UK. (Ibid) We would expect in response that considerable public attention and research in Sweden would reflect this. This does not however appear to be this case, leading the writer to ask why not?

The World Food Summit describes food insecurity as follows:

*“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. (FAOb, 2006)*

Given their connection of the concept to economic ability to access food, it appears to

indicate that it is related to the idea of food poverty and both terms are often used interchangeably, and are thusly used in this study. (Caraher & Coveney 2016) While the Swedish government argued against the idea of absolute poverty existing, and hence food poverty, charitable organisations have questioned this based on their reality of what they see. (EAPN 2019; Stadsmissioner 2017) A boy relating his story argued that

*“I think you should drop the idea that Sweden is a rich country, because then all children in Sweden would be rich, but that is not the case you know, because there are quite a lot of children who are living in poverty”.* (Save the Children 2013)

The flaw in his argument is that Sweden is by international standards objectively a wealthy country. (n.a. 2020) Yet this has not translated into the outcome that its citizens are immune to food insecurity.

### *The Swedish Welfare State*

The idea of food poverty taking place within Sweden is a curiosity in part because of the status that the Swedish welfare state has along with the other Nordic countries as being particularly egalitarian. (Bäckman & Nelson 2017) Whether originating with Swedish farmers utilizing their significant influence in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or the working classes gaining political power in the 1930s, Sweden has established a system of social distribution that is a key feature of its welfare state. (Valocchi 1992) The concept of a welfare system that supports the poor is one derived as part of the industrial revolution, with capitalist systems attempting to ensure their continuation by protecting workers and lifting them from impoverishment. (Castles 2010) These took different forms and in Sweden this was the social democratic model, described by Esping Anderson as requiring a low level of income inequality and positive distribution of wealth. (Bäckman & Nelson 2017) The principle is one of all having social rights, due to an interdependence of the people and state, both contributing through taxation and being supported when in need. (Kuhnle & Alestalo 2017) This system was designed in a sense to limit poverty and has meant Sweden has often been near the top of polls of countries in terms of equal distribution of income. (Kuhnle & Alestalo 2017)

However, this ideal of the Swedish welfare state is one that has become tarnished as levels of poverty increase, with only the UK and Belgium having higher rates of older people living in poverty. (Bäckman & Nelso 2017) The OECD (2011) gives an indication of a concerning change in the dynamic of redistribution as *“inequality has increased more in the Nordic countries than anywhere else since the 2000s”*. (Bäckman & Nelson 2017, p26) This data was gathered prior to the immigration crisis of 2015 and the State of the Nordic region report (2020) advised that from having the second lowest level of inequality in the year 2000, Sweden now has the highest level. (Nordic council of ministers 2020) This coincides with reductions in benefits such as unemployment insurance, pensions and social welfare provision, which have been

reduced to two thirds of their original levels. (Beckman & Nelson 2017)

### *Legislation and human rights*

The legislation around food poverty is one that is ingrained in international law as part of the International covenant on economic, social and cultural rights. (United Nations 1999) The core of the right to food places the responsibility on the state to ensure availability of food, that it is affordable and satisfying the nutritional needs of the population. Additionally this should take the future need for food into account and operate in a sustainable way. (OHCHR 2021) Should an individual not be able to meet their food needs, this right means in practice that the state has the obligation to step in and provide this. (Eide n.d) Within Swedish legislation, the Social insurance code outlines what individuals are entitled to in terms of support. (Government Offices of Sweden n.d.) This is split into those entitlements based on residence in Sweden and those accessed through employment, both offering degrees of financial assistance. Sweden is also subject to EU Community law, set out in regulation (EC) no. 883/2004 where the co-ordination and integration of social protection measures across the European Union is outlined. (Ibid)

### *NGOS in Sweden*

Civil society organizations (CSO) in Sweden while once being seen as integrated with the state, have since the 1980s placed an emphasis on autonomy. (Defourny & Pestoff 2008) The environment in which they operate is relevant as it illustrates how they can finance themselves and how they gain a sense of legitimacy with the population. (Matthies 2006) In this case, they appear to gain this through being separate from the Swedish government. In terms of food poverty, multiple NGOs attempt to address this issue through distribution of food services. This is also managed through churches that as of the year 2000 are no longer governed by the Swedish state. (Svenskakyrkan 2020) NGOs have the advantage of not having restrictions of who to support, being able to provide this to undocumented migrants or those not meeting the criteria for state assistance. (Government Offices of Sweden n.d) The influence they have and the level of social capital they can foster is emphasized by the UNs recognition that NGOs can play a significant role in communicating the risks during the Covid-19 pandemic. (United Nations 2020) This crossover between state and independent organization can be seen as a form of “collaborative governance” between certain NGOs and the Swedish state, where they come together in planning or coordination. (Ansel & Gash 2008,p544) However, not all charities receive this level of recognition and are therefore excluded from this collective.

## Chapter 4 Literature review

In order to explore the issues regarding food poverty and insecurity in Sweden, it is necessary to assess what is already known on the subject, to establish a general understanding of the phenomena within a wider perspective. (Denny & Tewksbury 2013) The means of enabling this is through reviewing relevant material and analysis of its meaning. (Ragin 1992) There are a variety of methods of conducting reviews, from having a narrow focus to a more exploratory stance. (Holloway & Todres 2003) In this instance, due to the desire to discover what information was available that may aid our understanding of they dynamics of food insecurity in Sweden, a narrative approach with a thematic presentation appeared logical. (Braun, Virginia & Clarke 2006)

Thus a search was undertaken through the SCOPUS database and the Web of Science databases, due to these being among the largest information sources in the social sciences and multidisciplinary resources. (The top list of databases 2020). A series of synonyms were used for food security as follows, using Boolean operator OR between them:

“food security”, “food poverty”, “food insecurity”, “hunger”, “starvation”, “food deprivation”, “malnutrition”, “want of food”, “food need”, “food hardship”, “malnourishment”, “food bank”, “food provision”, “soup kitchen”, “food insecure”, “food shortage”, “lack of food”, “food scarcity”, “food shortfall”.

These the writer deemed to be sufficient in formulating the focus of the search given that this was likely to yield a substantial number of results. Additionally the terms “Europe” OR “Scandinavia” OR “Nordic countries” were added as extra search parameters to relate the issue to the research question. The time dates selected were January 1<sup>st</sup> 1996-31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. The reason for this choice was in the belief that food insecurity is a phenomenon which has occurred throughout human history (Skrimshaw 1987) and would therefore produce a high volume of articles, while the writer wished to keep the analysis on food insecurity after the definition was solidified at the World Food Summit in 1996 up until the most recent available. (Patel 2012)

In the SCOPUS search given the high volume of articles this resulted in, the field was narrowed to the subject area of social sciences. This resulted in 428 documents (n=428). After exclusions based on duplication or not adhering to the criteria of the research question, 34 remained (n=34). Of these 26 (n=26) remained as being accessible through Gothenburg University library, Google scholar or by contacting the journal authors directly.

In the Web of Science search this again resulted in a high number of results with the same search parameters (n=1192). These were then refined to those the writer deemed to be of some relation to the research question – these categories were political science, social sciences biomedical, social work, sociology, health care sciences services, social issues, social sciences interdisciplinary. This resulted in 42 articles. A high number were duplicates of the Scopus search and of those that remained after their removal and title searching then abstract searching, only 2 were identified as having relevance for the study. (n=2)

Additional articles were located using the terms “food insecurity in Europe” OR “food poverty in Europe” OR “food bank in Europe” in the Gothenburg University library search engine. Seven additional documents were found to be relevant to the study of which seven were accessible (n=7).

These 35 articles were then backward searched to identify any further articles of relevance. This resulted in 21 additional articles (n=21). An additional article regarding food poverty in Sweden was provided through a general Google search bringing the sum total to 57 (n=57). These comprised of peer reviewed journals (54), one Non governmental organisation report, one comparative study by the European Economic and social committee and one book chapter.

Given the substantial number of articles, summarising each in a literature review would likely cause excessive repetition and fail to draw together the data in a meaningful way. Instead the writer concluded that analysing the discourses thematically would better serve to illustrate the key arguments and discussions surrounding food insecurity in academic literature during this time period. (Braun et al. 2006)

On reviewing the literature key pieces of information that appeared relevant to the study were selected and once this had been completed for all 57 articles, they were then reviewed again and open coding was used to categorise the information according to themes that emerged from the literature. (Bryman 2016) This can be seen as both inductive due to its development of a number of codes, but also deductive in that they were selected with the research questions specifically in mind, and with the aim of being able to develop knowledge on this topic. (Linneberg & Korsgaard 2019) This resulted in 12 key themes, which may offer insight into our research question. These are hereby outlined and discussed below. The figure **n** accompanies each category to indicate the number of articles that discusses this theme, and in this way can suggest the significance or weight given by the research field.

## **Themes**

1. Effects of food insecurity on health n=6
2. Legislation issues and problems n=6

3. The Human right to food and development goals n=9
4. Academic research on the issue. n=14
5. Who experiences food insecurity? n=18
6. Stigma, shame and other reasons for people not going to food banks n=19
7. Food waste, sustainability and the physical supply of food n=20
8. Language and framing of food insecurity. n=21
9. Statistics of food insecurity and the various ways of measuring it n=25
10. Poverty and socioeconomic inequalities n= 29
11. The relationship between food security and the welfare state n=33
12. Changes in the levels of food insecurity n=35

### **Effects of food insecurity on health n=6**

In the discussion of how food insecurity affects health, only 6 of the 57 articles mentioned this. It was coded as significant however as it was evident that food insecurity does not end with a meal. It has physical and mental health effects that can affect the wellbeing of an individual. (Loopstra, Reeves & Stuckler 2016; Mook, Murdock & Gunderson 2020; Melchoir et al. 2021) This can occur in a variety of ways. The mental health of the person appears to be impacted by food insecurity, whether for depression related to worry, anxiety or fear. (Caraher & Furey 2018) It can in turn also occur in reverse, that mental ill health is linked with people becoming food insecure, due to difficulties associated with this. (Melchoir et al. 2020) For those who already have physical ill-health, Smith & Wesselbaum (2020) argue that there is historical precedence for hunger or poor quality food worsening this, especially during pandemics which is particularly relevant now. Statistically in the United States research has indicated a correlation between food insecurity and a multitude of chronic and acute health conditions, which means that it cannot be dismissed as solely an issue of immediate need. (Smith & Wesselbaum 2020) It is no surprise then that food insecurity increasing is described as “an urgent health problem”. (Loopstra et al. 2016, p2041)

### **Legislation issues and problems n=6**

Nations have not remained completely ignorant of the issue of food insecurity as indicated by the meeting of 196 countries in 1996 to discuss it at the World Summit. (Aliaga & Chaves-Dos-Santos 2014) There are a number of legislative measures that states can put in place to try to mitigate or at least address structural causes of food insecurity. (De Pieri et al. 2017) These include tax benefits or relief for companies providing food donation, as well as a limit to the liability the food provision organisations would have to be accountable for in using the donated food. (Aliaga & Chaves-Dos-Santos 2014; European economic and social committee 2014) This is specifically titled the “Good Samaritan” legislation and is designed to encourage companies to donate their excess food, and the food banks to face less legal burden in distributing it to those in need. (Caraher & Furey 2018)

In terms of donating food, many countries do not charge VAT on these goods, but some do, which means that it is actually more expensive to donate food than to throw it in the bin. (De pieri et al. 2017) Perhaps surprisingly, Sweden is one such country that continues to do this. (European Economic & Social Committee 2014) Additionally no Good Samaritan legislation or other such benefits are available in Sweden suggesting additional pressures on food distribution centres, as they are subject to the same legislation as every other food store in Sweden. (European Economic and Social Committee 2014)

Another piece of legislation that may impact those in food insecurity is the sugar tax, one meant to increase the cost of foods that can cause obesity and poor health. (Penne & Goedeme 2020) While the intention of this may be positive, those with low income have little alternative than to purchase the cheapest food, which often is higher in caloric intake and sugar. In this sense, it can be viewed as a tax on the poor rather than a positive promotion of their health. (Penne & Goedeme 2020)

### **The Human right to food and development goals n=9**

The literature of food insecurity would present as being one that would be framed through the right to food as stipulated in the UN convention on human rights. (United Nations 2015) However, of this group of articles, only nine of 57 (n=9) discussed the issue in this way, making specific reference to food as a right of human beings. Penne & Goedeme (2020) critique the research on food insecurity, arguing that it should always be framed through the human right to food. Riches (2011) similarly highlights that 160 countries of the world ratified this right to food as part of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and therefore are legally accountable regarding this. The three responsibilities around this are to “respect, protect and fulfil” (Riches 2011, p 773), meaning states should not actively cause food poverty, they should protect individuals from others who would and provide social and legal policies that prevent people from experiencing it. While on the face of it this is a powerful statement of commitment to the right to food, the sovereignty of the state makes challenges to other states regarding failure to comply not only diplomatically difficult but with little legal consequence in terms of punishment. (Therien & Phillippe 2014) Given the complex power dynamics acting upon those suffering food poverty, it would appear that the UN stating that the individual has a right to food offers little recourse to complain when suffering from hunger.

### **Academic research on the issue n=14**

The academic research into food insecurity is significant because it not only allows us to measure academic interest and empirical data available, it can also serve to reflect how it is seen politically in a state. (Borch & Kjaernes 2013) Fourteen of the authors discussed the academic research or interest in the topic as significant (n=14).

Academic interest can be utilised for a number of reasons, including to better understand the issue and why it is occurring. (Lambie-Mumford & Dowler 2015; Galli, Hebinck & Carroll 2018) However, it could similarly be a means by those in power to justify inequalities in food security, or in contrast for those looking to promote social justice. (Borch & Kjaernes 2020) The research therefore cannot exist outwith its own political environment, and will therefore be subject to the forces within it.

There appears to be a substantial variation in the amount of research being undertaken in this field, across nations and on what aspect. The UK for example appears to have a high level of academic research focussing on the issue of food insecurity in general. (Lambie-Mumford 2012) Borch & Kjaernes (2016) state their view that the research is focussed on food aid and the nutrition levels of what people eat. Other authors indicate that the interest in the factors leading to food poverty and its consequences is something that is generally growing across Europe. (Lambie-Mumford & Dowler 2015; Garthwaite 2016; Caraher & Furey 2018; Galli, Hebinck & Carroll 2018; Garratt 2020)

However, there appears also to be evidence of severe limitations in the academic research that has been undertaken, with the interest levels being deemed to be low or inadequate. (Webb et al. 2006; Mordgan 2014; Gonzalez-Torre et al. 2017; Galli et al. 2018; Borch & Kjaernes 2020; Garratt 2020)

Areas where further research is needed again is not unanimously agreed upon in the literature, but include the need to examine how data is obtained on food insecurity and the impact of economic crises such as recessions. (Webb et al. 2006) Some highlight a need to measure the social impacts of food poverty such as shame and stigma (Garthwaite 2016), while others emphasise the need to research the growing use of food support services such as food banks (Mumford & Dowler 2015). Crucially there appears to be little evidence of research on finding possible solutions to the problem. (Galli et al. 2018; Caraher & Furey 2018)

### **Who experiences food insecurity? n=18**

While the subject of food insecurity is analysed in a number of different ways, perhaps surprisingly only 18 and not the entire group attempt to address who the people are experiencing it (n=18). The descriptions cover a wide range of the population, although some argue that women have a higher likelihood of suffering from food insecurity in comparison with their male counterparts. (Patel 2012; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Grimaccia & Naccarato 2020; Garratt 2020; Power et al. 2020) Additional risk factors suggested by the researchers were low income or unemployment (Fouarge & Layte 2012; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Garratt 2020; Power et al. 2020), which may be an unsurprising conclusion. However the idea of gender

being a factor in this suggests an intersectionality of discriminating factors affecting women around the issue of poverty and food insecurity.

This link can be further seen as intersecting with another factor affecting your likelihood to experience it- mental & physical ill health. (Garratt 2020) Food security is seen in this context as both a cause and effect of ill health, (Melchoir et al. 2009; Garthwaite et al.2015; Power et al.2020) with mothers who are experiencing mental illness and are single parents acting as further contributing factors. (Melchoir et al.2009; Karlsson 2019;Power et al. 2020) Even without mental health issues to consider, mothers are a group present as vulnerable particularly when in low-income groups or are lone parents. (O'Connor et al. 2016; Hebinck et al. 2017;O'Connell et al 2019)

A further group raised by the researchers as being affected was that of immigrants or refugees (Silvasti 2014; Borch & Kjaernes 2016; Hebinck et al. 2017; Hebinck et al. 2018; Karlsson 2019) who are likely also to be subject to layered discrimination on a variety of levels. The remaining groups and factors identified included education level (Fouarge & Layte 2012; Grimaccia & Naccarato 2020), being a pensioner (O'Conner et al. 2016; Garratt 2020), being single (Fourage & Layte 2012), having a high number of children (Grimaccia & Naccarato 2020) or having a disability (Garratt 2020). What we can see is that there is a significant variability in who the researchers see as being subject to food insecurity. This can on the one hand be entirely justifiable if they are talking about food poverty in different countries and contexts, and this in turn may demonstrate that there is no typical or definitive depiction of an individual experiencing food insecurity other than the description that they are hungry.

### **Stigma, shame and other reasons for people not going to food banks n=19**

Even with the increasing numbers of people utilising food banks, soup kitchens and alternative food provision services, these are not the only people experiencing food insecurity. (Tarasuk et al.2019) Before reaching this point, individuals and families will use a variety of other means to avoid using these services, including not paying rent or utility bills, or borrowing money from friends and relatives. (Davis & Geiger 2017; Caraher and Furey 2018; Snell et al. 2018; Penne & Goedeme 2020) Snell et al. (2018) describe the cycle of debt and poverty that can emerge from taking small loans at high interest rates from questionable sources, meaning the attempt to manage their budget becomes increasingly difficult. Individuals can also be forced to reduce their food intake or skip meals entirely. (O'Connor et al. 2016)

The various strategies people use to attempt to manage their limited income has the consequence that many of those who are food insecure will never approach a food bank or soup kitchen. This has the subsequent effect of making these people somewhat invisible to statistics measuring food poverty through use of these services. The reason for not attending appears to be due to a feeling of shame, fear or stigmatisation, which appears to have been created by national discourse. (Garthwaite

et al. 2015) Garthwaite (2016) describes media caricaturing of the poor on television, newspapers and by government politicians in the UK for example as “poverty porn” (Garthwaite 2016, p277). These discourses characterise the users of food banks as shameful and “undeserving”, which can only serve to imprint this view on the national consciousness.

So, when people do experience food poverty and approach these alternative services, it is usually after attempting every other way to avoid it and they are now left with no other option. (Silvasti 2014; Caraher & Furey 2018; Tarasuk et al. 2019) Those in need are faced with a double-edged sword in terms of choices, as they either face the shame of attending the food service for help, or they have the alternative social and physical consequences of hunger, at not being able to feed themselves and their children. (Mook et al. 2020) This emphasizes the role food plays in our society, not simply as sustenance but as an indication of our status with the way we access food and what type. (Caraher and Furey 2018) This may then also relate to feelings of degradation within political systems in the Global North that place status on independence and individualism as admirable goals. (Silvasti 2015). Hence not achieving this and requiring support may leave people with feelings of failure and worthlessness in a society that is telling them this is the case.

### **Food waste, sustainability and the physical supply of food n=20**

Food insecurity does not indicate a lack of food in the vicinity of the individual. (Riches 2011) There appears to be abundance in the supply of food in the Global North, the difficulty comes in being able to access it. (Webb et al. 2006; González-Torre et al. 2017; Borch & Kjaernes 2020; Hossain 2021) This contradiction was exemplified by Amartya Sen who described that in the incidences of famine that took place in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there had been a supply of food in the area where people died of hunger. (Sen 1983) Webb et al. (2006) describe a shift in the discussion of food poverty following Sen’s work, to discuss the individual’s ability to get to the food rather than the national level of food supply. It appears that simply increasing the amount of food there is in a country does not transfer to less food insecurity among populations. (Hossain 2021) This can perhaps indicate a potential reason why seemingly rich countries can still have people unable to eat.

What this abundance of food alongside restrictions on access results in inevitably is the accumulation of food waste, with around a third of all food discarded. (Bellia 2015; Coque & González-Torre 2016) This has led to the development of enterprises to develop resource distribution services to transfer this wasted food to people who are in food poverty. (Silvasti 2015; Vittuari et al. 2017; Galli et al. 2018; Power et al. 2020) This frames food supply as part of a sustainability model which nations are advocating to use as part of managing climate change. (DEFRA 2006; Mordgan 2014; Silvasti 2015)

However ethical issues are raised within this, in a number of ways. To not utilise this spare food to support those in need appears wasteful and morally wrong. (Silvasti 2015) However there is the danger that this creates the acceptance and even promotion of a food class system that uses “leftover food for leftover people” (Dowler in Caraher & Furey 2018, p34). Silvasti (2014) argues that allowing those in food poverty to live in a situation where there is an abundance of food is anachronistic and difficult to justify.

### **Language and framing of food insecurity n=21**

The definition of food poverty is a feature of a number of the journal articles (n=21) with the authors attempting to specify what it means as part of their analysis. Borch & Kjaernes (2020) focus on both the restriction of quantity of food as well as the unpredictability of being able to ensure you have adequate amounts in the future. They discuss that this includes being able to access the food in ways deemed acceptable by society, which interestingly enough they do not assess as including food provision services. This issue of “social acceptability” in the way people access food was emphasised by a number of authors when defining the problem (Garthwaite et al. 2015; Pfeiffer et al. 2015; Galli et al. 2018; Garrett 2020; Grimaccia & Naccarato 2020). This frames food insecurity as part of a social dynamic, implying a variety of tiers of food acquisition.

Prominent features of the various definitions were *ability to access food* (DEFRA 2006; Webb et al. 2006; Patel 2012; Aliaga & Chaves-Dos-Santos 2014; Davis and Geiger 2017; Smith and Wesselbaum 2020; Mook et al. 2020) as well as *uncertainty about being able to obtain food in the future* (Pfeiffer et al. 2015; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Galli et al. 2018; Borch & Kjaernes 2020; Mook et al. 2020; Grimaccia & Naccarato 2020; Garratt 2020). The specification that this should be food that is of a *high nutritional standard* or of *high quality* was also highlighted by some. (DEFRA 2006; Webb et al. 2006; Patel 2012; Aliaga & Chaves-Dos-Santos 2014; Pfeiffer et al. 2015; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Borch & Kjaernes 2020; Mook et al. 2020; Grimaccia & Naccarato 2020)

A small number of authors chose to centre their definition on that of the World Summit in 1996 (Webb et al. 2006; Patel 2012; Aliaga & Chaves-Dos-Santos 2014; Borch & Kjaernes 2016; Snell et al. 2018; O’Connell et al. 2019) while others also argued that no singular definition could be obtained. (Webb et al. 2006; Torre et al. 2017; Hebinck et al. 2017) This lack of consensus on how to define the issue would appear to present a problem for researchers in attempting to address it. (Hebinck et al. 2017) However, it could also be said that focussing too much on defining the problem can consume researchers at the expense of forming solutions to social problems. (Priest & Gass 1997)

It is not possible within the scope of this thesis to highlight the nuanced differences in definitions the group had presented, but what is worthy of note is the significant

commonalities while still adding or removing elements as was central to their own perspectives.

### **Statistics of food insecurity and the various ways of measuring it n=25**

Given the discussion of levels of food insecurity the researcher discuss, this would seem to suggest that there is a coherent technique for measuring the phenomenon. However in contrast, the empirical data appears very limited, with no clear focus. (Lambie-Mumford & Dowler 2015; Davis & Geiger 2017; Borch & Kjaernes 2020; Mook, Murdock & Gundersen 2020) This has the effect of fragmented research that use different criteria and standards of measurement. (Mook et al. 2020) To measure the levels in a uniform way offers a number of advantages, including the ability to confirm something exists and predict how and when it might occur. (Webb et al. 2006) However what appears to be the case is that a single indicator of food insecurity or question is used in analyses such as whether the person could afford to eat meat often, or how often they worried about food. (Dowler 1998; Loopstra et al. 2014; Tarasuk et al. 2019; Hossain 2021) A further difficulty in the statistics is who to sample in order to be fully representative, as surveying those using food aid for example will not indicate the levels across the country as a whole. (Vittuari et al. 2017; Snell et al. 2018; O'Connell et al. 2019)

Europe as a whole appears to be falling short of others throughout the world in terms of forming a consistent measurement of food insecurity in order to gather data. (Grimaccia & Naccarato 2020) Norway for example has not had any surveys of food insecurity in households for decades. (Richards et al. 2016) There is a difficulty of measuring certain aspects of food poverty, namely the perceptions and lived experiences of people whom it affects that are difficult to quantify. (Webb et al. 2006) However, the United States and Canada for example utilise yearly surveys of their populations aiming to understand the levels and nature of food poverty in a multi faceted way, so that they can target resources in these areas. (Lambie-Mumford & Dowler 2015; Mook, Murdock & Gundersen 2020) This presents as an opportunity for researchers and policy makers in Europe to replicate this style of questionnaire in order to similarly explore the data and try to act upon it.

### **Poverty and socioeconomic inequalities n=29**

That poverty is linked to food insecurity is not a ground breaking connection, but one that bears scrutiny on how exactly it drives and interacts with the issue in the modern era given it has been intrinsically linked historically. (O'Connell et al. 2019) Amartya Sen (1999) highlighted that hunger and poverty can stem from a lack of freedom rather than insufficient food being available. (Sen 1999) Patel (2012) takes up this torch arguing that the power dynamics and structural inequalities have a direct effect on people not being able to access food. Fouarge & Layte (2005) stratify the groups of poor into categories ranging from those who experience poverty over an extended

period and others who are described as having “escaped” (Fourage & Layte 2005 p411). While no doubt describing justified scenarios, the writer sees a risk in forming such categories as being a modernised interpretation of the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. This simply reinforces the structural inequality, which those in poverty are subject to.

Within this there appears to be a subtext of some degree of condescension or emphasis on the lower educational status of people in food poverty resulting in them making poor nutritional decisions. (Trichopoulou et al. 2002) This *may* be true, but it also may be true that could be interpreted as victim blaming or paternalism. In contrast to this position Dowler (1998) and Powell et al. (2020) describe that in fact those in food poverty have developed sophisticated strategies around appropriating food, through travelling to a large number of different shops and sourcing the cheapest available food. Dowler sums up the ultimate reason for poor people not eating nutritionally beneficial food as being that they “simply have less to spend on food”. (Dowler 1998, p61) Those in poverty may make poor nutritional choices, but it is usually not through ignorance but to subdue or manage hunger. (Martin & Lippert 2012)

Being food insecure appears to have a relationship with the likelihood of being poor over a long period of time. (Bellia 2015) The experience may be given immediate relief through the use of food provision services, but these ultimately leave the underlying poverty issues unsolved and intact. (Tarasuk et al. 2019)

Critically the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) (2013) spoke about those in the middle classes struggling to meet their nutritional needs and falling into poverty. This suggests the impact on those who were already below the poverty line is likely to be greater, and will find it all the more difficult to overcome the poverty barrier. (IFRC 2013) A difficulty in addressing food insecurity through focussing on poverty related interventions however, is that food insecurity occurs at sporadic intervals and is not consistent according to poverty level. (Borch & Kjaernes 2016) As discussed previously the alternative methods people use to manage their poverty means that food is seen as a more flexible need which can be adapted, in contrast to for example heating. (Snell et al. 2018)

### **The relationship between food security and the welfare state n=33**

If we accept the general consensus from the cohort of authors that the levels of food insecurity in Europe in general are increasing as outlined below, then the question turns to how each state manages this within their respective welfare systems. In response to the 2008 crisis for example many countries imposed strict cuts in services and tax increases in order to bring down the deficit levels. (Lambie-Mumford 2012; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Lambie-Mumford & Dowler 2015; Snell et al. 2018) These included punitive social policies directed at the poorest in society, which had a consequence on the ability of people to feed themselves. (Pfeiffer et al. 2015;

O’Connell et al. 2019) For nations such as Sweden, which proclaims to be a social democratic welfare state, this would cause a conflict between the ideal and implementation of policy as universal food security may be taken for granted. (Richards et al. 2016; Borch & Kjaernes 2016) In terms of how welfare systems such as Sweden may have managed this, there is some evidence that those countries that spent more on social security systems and supplementing the incomes of the vulnerable were able to mitigate certain effects such as suicide. (Loopstra et al. 2016) Loopstra et al. (2016) highlight however that this research has not included the impact on food insecurity, which presents a difficulty in assessing if social safety nets adequately manage this problem. Welfare regime theory would suggest that at the very least investment in social security systems would not only support those in need during the crisis, but also speed the individuals’ escape from poverty. (Fouarge & Layte 2005; Nelson 2012) This raises the question then of the reasoning behind the rise of alternative food provision services such as food banks and soup kitchens within welfare states as opposed to increasing social security payments.

The development of food banks in particular has been described as being somewhat a victim of its own success. (Riches 2011; Lambie-Mumford 2012; Galli et al. 2018) In attempting to fulfil an emergent need, their existence has allowed policy makers to avoid implementing changes on a broader scale to address the underlying issues. (Silvasti 2014) This appears to have the potential to be cumulative, with the more responsibility the charities take on; the more states can argue that their resources are not needed. (Riches 2011; Lambie-Mumford 2012; Galli et al. 2018)

In Nordic countries such as Finland, there was an expectation that the welfare system was a “catch all” system where the needs of the citizens would be provided for and food insecurity would not be created. (Silvasti 2015; Richards et al. 2016) However, Silvasti (2015) argues that what economic crises and recessions do is illustrate the weaknesses that are existent in the system, when issues such as food poverty become visible in society. However what we may assume from this is that the weaknesses have always been there, meaning there may be either a fundamental flaw with the welfare system, or a misperception of its ability and function.

### **Changes in the levels of food insecurity n=35**

Of our cohort of articles, a significant number chose to discuss a change in the levels of food insecurity existing in Europe occurring over time (n=35). While differing in their justifications given for this, as well as variation in location and specificity in details, all of the authors who discussed the issue presented a common notion that food insecurity has risen over time. (Riches 2011; Lambie-Mumford 2012; IFRC 2013; Silvasti 2014; Mordgan 2014; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Loopstra et al. 2015; Silvasti 2015; Pfeiffer et al. 2015; Borch & Kjaernes 2016; O’Connor et al. 2016; Loopstra et al. 2016; Richards et al. 2016; Garthwaite 2016; Gonzalez-Torre et al. 2017; Vittuari et al. 2017; Coque & González-Torre 2017; De pieri et al. 2017; Davis

& Geiger 2017; Hebinck & Oostindie 2018; Hebinck et. al 2018; Galli et al. 2018; Gödacke et al. 2018; Snell et al. 2018; Schoneville 2018; Caraher and Furey 2018; Karllson 2019; O'Connell et al. 2019; Tarasuk et al. 2019; Akter 2020; Smith and Wesselbaum 2020; Mook et al. 2020; Grimaccia & Naccarato 2020; Garratt 2020; Power et al. 2020; Penne & Goedeme 2020)

In looking at the historical backdrop of food insecurity in developed nations, the impact of recessions is one that can be seen as at least exacerbating existing levels. (Mumford 2012; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Coque & Gonzalez-Torre 2016) From the recessions of the 1980s (Mumford 2012), 1990s (Silvasti 2015) to as far back as the Great depression in the 1930s (Loopstra, Reeves, Stuckler 2015) there appears to be some correlation of food insecurity with wider economic shocks on the nations.

The impact on the countries in Europe of economic crisis does not appear to be uniform (Loopstra et al. 2016) with countries dating the rise in food insecurity differently. For example in Finland the levels of food insecurity are dated to the 1990s (Silvasti 2015), while in Germany researchers date it to 2005 and relate it to a change in social welfare provision. (Pfeiffer et al. 2015) Still others specify the 2008 crisis as being a catalyst for changes. (Mumford 2012; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Coque & Gonzalez-Torre 2016)

The International Federation of the Red Cross view that particular recession as only the beginning of a food disaster, when they describe looking back at that time at the increasing problems they were witnessing. They state bleakly that

*“five years ago it would have been unimaginable; so many millions of Europeans lining up for food in soup kitchens, receiving food parcels at home or being referred to social groceries ...Former middle class citizens living in trailers, tents, railway stations or in shelters for the homeless.”* (IFRC 2013 p9)

The 2008 economic shock may have exacerbated the problem of food security, but the end of the recession did not end the rise in need for food provision services linked to food insecurity, in fact they increased. (Mook et al. 2020) This suggests perhaps that the underlying issues that create food insecurity are not solved by the economic stability of the nation.

Whether there is an actual increase that is measurable through data is a difficulty highlighted by Galli et al. (2018), however they indicate that what is not disputed is that it has become more noticeable through the proliferation of food banks. They also appear to be becoming normalised, a regular feature among high streets all over Europe (Schoneville 2018). Rather than being a visible and concerning reminder of the levels of poverty in a country, they in fact appear to becoming an integrated part of the social support system.

In spite of the numbers indicating millions of people throughout Europe experiencing

food poverty (Riches 2011), there seems little political will or urgency in addressing it directly, instead governments appear willing to allow the food provision services such as food banks to fill this gap. (Riches 2011) In the UK to exemplify this point, the government has appeared unwilling to acknowledge the growing number of food banks as being in any way related to policies of austerity, even when these have been evidenced using empirical data. (Garthwaite 2016) This could be seen as an abdication of responsibility by the state in fulfilling its duties to its citizens.

In examining the possible future levels, of keynote is that inflation during the Covid-19 pandemic has appeared to cause food prices to increase once more. (Akter 2020 ;Smith & Wesselbaum 2020) This is likely to compound existing issues for those already experiencing food poverty. Add to this the panic buying that was witnessed in many European countries, this can only sharpen the divide between those who are able to stockpile goods and those who cannot. (Power et al. 2020)

## **Conclusions**

In summation, there exists in the literature a wealth of information on food insecurity in Europe and throughout the world. However, there is a great deal of inconsistency as a result of lack of specific measurement, which can adequately capture who it affects and how. It appears to be connected to a number of other factors such as gender, disability, migration status and class which can all compound to create an intersectionality of discrimination impacting on individuals. That all the authors indicated a view that there was an increase in levels of food poverty or services dealing with it indicates that this is not an issue that is confined to Sweden, but one occurring at an international level. To describe poverty as being linked to food insecurity is an obvious link, however as is demonstrated through the literature its relationship is multifaceted. There appears additionally to be a discourse that has been created to individualise and blame the victims, rather than focussing on the obligations of states to fulfil the needs of their citizens.

The literature is sporadic in its focus over the years, which may be attributable to different economic and social crises motivating research at that particular time. To this end the writer composed a timeline of literature to discover where the research may have changed or developed. (See appendix 1) What the results of this demonstrated was that only 10 of the 57 articles reviewed were between the years 1998-2011, a thirteen year period, while 47 were in the ten years following. This suggests a growing research interest in the subject of food poverty and insecurity. 2016 saw the highest number of articles produced in a single year (9), which may perhaps be unsurprising due to crises in immigration that was happening throughout Europe giving rise to questions about food insecurity. From 2013-2020 it is notable that *increases* in food poverty are consistently a part of the research on the subject, indicating not only that levels may be rising but also there is recognition amongst researchers of this. The discussion of food waste is also a consistent factor from this

2014 onwards, perhaps indicating a method of solving the problem or a contrasting incongruity. What is clearly persistent throughout the years of research is the link between food insecurity and poverty, mentioned in all but 2 of the 18 years where papers were published in this cohort. Six years are unrepresented by any papers at all in the early years of the turn of the century. This along with the pursuit of the Millennium development goals to combat poverty and hunger may have indicated a belief that these concepts may soon be defeated.

While there appears to be a greater research interest in the field as discussed by the authors, Sweden is seldom mentioned within this. It is in fact mentioned in only 5 of the 57 articles. One is a specific study of food poverty in Sweden examining the use of food aid at the city missions and attempts to measure the levels there. (Karlsson 2019) To the writer's knowledge and from the literature search, it presents as the only example of a study undertaken attempting to measure food poverty in Sweden alone. The levels in Sweden *are* covered by a study of the Nordic countries, as part of a comparative analysis where the level of people having experienced food insecurity was assessed as being 27.8%. (Borch & Kjaernes 2016) While this is noted to be the lowest level of the Nordic regions, it is also emphasised to be extremely high in relation to other countries in Europe and the United States. This presents a somewhat startling impression that there are a high number of people experiencing this issue in Sweden, with little research or focus given to it to date.

An unusual aberration that exists in Swedish legislation is highlighted by De Pieri et al. (2017). It is noted that Sweden is one of the few countries that maintain legislation that means companies who donate surplus food must still pay VAT taxation. (De Pieri et al. 2017) This is a curious anomaly in addressing food poverty to have policies that penalise companies for NOT throwing away food that could be used by those in need. In other articles, Sweden is discussed as part of the wider European context and even when placed as a positive example, it is highlighted that food poverty is still prevalent there and the levels of social protection are not enough to alleviate this. (Penne & Goedeme 2020) The International Federation of the Red Cross write regarding Sweden that there was a surge in people living below the poverty line between 2008-2014 and that economic crises and mass immigration had contributed towards additional vulnerability. (IFRC 2013)

These depictions of Sweden, few that they are, do not paint a problem free state where food insecurity has been eradicated, but more one where it does exist but goes unexplored. This suggests a more in depth analysis is required of both the literature available on Sweden, the methods used in measuring food poverty there and accounts of those who manage the problem on a day to day basis. In this way we can attempt to address some of the issues and gaps outlined in the literature.

## Chapter 5 Theoretical framework

In order to examine the problem of food insecurity we must select the lens through which we are looking, as this will shape the outcome and also serves to identify any theoretical gaps existing around the topic. (Barczack 2014) Social recognition theory has been selected as being relevant due to the somewhat invisible status individuals experiencing food poverty have in Swedish society. Sublimated in this are sociological, social psychological and social philosophical concepts: trust, stigma and recognition in its various forms, landscape to construct a theoretical framework for the analysis. These will be used to analyse the qualitative element only due to the systematic review and critical analysis of statistics providing a contextual base for the exploratory interviews.



Fig 1.

### Social Recognition Theory

Social philosopher Axel Honneth (2001) describes how the act of social recognition is a sign of respect and status bestowed upon the receiver, and to ignore or disregard an individual is in contrast a conscious act of degradation. To be recognised as a person, with needs and desires appears to be one that is shaped by a variety of social structures, which determine how we are seen by society. (Honneth 2001) This places human beings as part of wider social groups, being given meaning only in relation to how we are perceived and perceive ourselves in relation to the wider group. (Honneth 2001) This has implications to our study in examining how elements of society such as governments, social service agencies and even individuals themselves respond to the issue of food poverty. It allows us to reflect whether both the underlying issues and the people experiencing it will be socially recognised and supported, or allowed to experience the humiliation of invisibility that Honneth (2001) describes.

Social recognition is emphasised by Honneth (2004) in a later work as including the social protective mechanisms to assist an individual in times of economic difficulty.

This would seem to suggest that to acknowledge the problem, and offer social assistance such as is provided to an extent through social service agencies *is* a form of social recognition of the individual. However, our social recognition of ourselves he argues is shaped in relation to others, even to the extent of the oppressed believing in the arguments of an oppressor:

*“the slave, in any case comes to believe the masters desires and beliefs trump any first order desires that he, the slave may have.”* (Honneth 2001, p133)

Here we can identify that people who are experiencing food poverty may be akin to Honneths description, in this case the master being the state wherefrom the individual takes both his definition of himself and his status recognition. The binding nature of this alliance, is further explored by Honneth (2012), where he argues that the social norms and expectations connected with them are so powerful, that people will do anything to maintain them. Rossiter (2014) argues that Honneths definitions of social recognition are particularly useful in the field of social work as they make a connection to the ideas of social justice. He does this by rejecting individualism and promoting the idea of human beings being part of an interdependent society. (Rossiter 2014)

Garrett (2010) however, critiques social recognition theory for not taking into account the wider role of the state and focusing too much on individual experiences. This would appear to be somewhat contradictory to Rossiter’s viewpoint but it is the relationships of the individuals and their interactions which Honneth emphasises, rather than the idea that human beings are “independent and self determining” (Rossiter 2014, p93) Fraser (2003) too disputes Honneths perspective as being overly dependent on a “psychologization” of the individual. This she argues appears to place social recognition as subject to ownership and limited to the individual themselves which ignores the structural and economic determinants of injustice which may be used to blame the victim for their own circumstances. (Fraser 2003, p31)

However, Honneth (2012) also describes a change in societal conditions meaning that an increase in numbers of unemployed means that less people can gain their social recognition through their employment, limiting the ability of the individual to gain social acceptance by the wider group. This would seem to at least imply state involvement and acknowledge that the issues may be wider than first viewed. What could be useful in this case is an adaptation of social recognition to one which both is subject to and interactive with the state, where the individual can experience social recognition from various actors and that the state itself can foster this. In this way, we can combine Honneths ideas with a structural perspective, integrating social recognition as part of a wider reality for the individual. Hence for the purposes of this study, the writer utilizes the definition of social recognition outlined by social philosopher Axel Honneth but with the view that it can be utilized to describe wider interactions and denying the paradigm that social recognition necessitates a blaming

of the victim, but instead illustrates the interactions people have with the state that can lead to this.

## Stigma

Closely linked with the idea of social recognition is the concept of stigma. One of the most prominent definitions of this phenomenon is proposed by social psychologist Erving Goffman. He argues that originating with the Greeks, the word stigma referenced something negative about a person that would be marked on their body to indicate they were a slave, criminal or other disfavoured person. (Goffman 2016) This definition evolved then to retain the connotations without the need for a physical attribute of the negative association. (Ibid) It is still ultimately a label, a means through which people can be categorised which is something human beings do by nature in order to make sense of the world around us. (Loseke 1999) Goffman (1963) argues that this idea of stigma is a variation of our understanding of what a whole and complete person should be, and on meeting a person with a notable difference, our estimation of that person is reduced and categorised as other. However, an important point he highlights is that this perspective of difference varies according to the perceiver, what is usual for one group may not be for another. (Goffman 1963) This then places stigma as a social construct, one based on the interaction with others and development of social norms by groups.

A critique of Goffmans definition is that those creating the criteria may not have an active understanding of those experiencing it, being themselves not on the receiving end of its effects. (Link and Phelan 2001) This creates then a privileged overview of what the stigmatised individual may experience, and creates stereotypes. Goffman (1963) however counters this point arguing that most people have experienced a degree of stigmatization in their life, which would aid this understanding. To label or categorise too much is argued by Link & Phelan (2001) as creating the belief that the stigma belonging to a group or individual is the essence of that person, giving rise to predictions of how they may behave or act. Others have developed Goffman's concept of stigma to analyse it on a psychological and sociobiological level, with the argument that

*“stigma serves sociobiological functions by categorizing and excluding individuals who may threaten a community through the spread of disease or perceived social disorder”.* (Clair 2018, p2)

Goffman's focus was however on the micro level experiences of the individual, and affects how people may be reticent of trusting in others who may not understand their stigma. (Clair 2018) It also concentrates on how others respond to the stigmatized person, behaving in negative ways towards them affecting their daily life. (Ibid)

With regard to food poverty, the stigma attached to the individual not able to feed themselves is in this study described through Goffman's ascription of a label denoting a negative connotation. Lack of food is described in the literature review as having a particular status of its own, revealing through how we access it our wealth or lack thereof. (Caraher & Furey 2018) To not have the means to access food would appear to place individuals on the lowest rung of status level, as they are not able to meet this most basic of needs, therefore leading to a stigmatization. While the critiques of Goffman argued about stigma being viewed through the eyes of those perpetuating the stigma, the writer views that this does not invalidate its existence, but rather serves to caution interpretation of it. The views that excessive use of this can lead to stereotypes and fear of others do not appear contradictory to Goffman's arguments, but rather illustrate his point of its negative consequences.

## Trust

In Sweden there is a high level of trust by citizens in the government and welfare systems. (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser 2016) Trust that individuals have in the state is but one form, and is a concept that relates to food poverty in a number of ways. Here the definition selected is that of sociologist Niklas Luhmann who describes an inevitability of our need to trust, in order for society to function,

*"We put our trust in the self evident matter of fact 'nature' of the world and of human nature every day. At this most basic level, confidence is a natural feature of the world, part and parcel of the horizon of our daily lives"* (Luhmann 2014, p5)

Trust presents as an essential part of any society, as it allows the creation of structures and relationships on which we depend, allowing us to predict how people and agencies will act. (Luhmann 2014) Sztompka (1999) and Simon (2013) concur with this definition. Similar to the discussion around social recognition, Luhmann (2014) argues that there is a connection at the individual psychological level, but also one that is part of a social relationship. These he argues vary in how they take shape. (Luhmann 2014) For example a parent or spouse may be trusted more than a Facebook friend. Behnia (2008) agrees with this assertion stating that it depends on the experience the individual has with the trustee.

Luhmann (2014) takes a humanist perspective emphasising the ability of humans alone to understand and comprehend the world around us, and so form trust relationships as part of a survival mechanism. However, he also appears to reduce the ability of humans to interact with our world to familiar participants in our close environment. (Luhmann 2014) This presents as a limiting belief of Luhmann and a contradictory one given his stance that human beings have a unique perspective on the world's complexity. The writer would argue that our capacity for social interaction has expanded significantly through globalization and our use of social media

platforms, meaning that trust is a variable that could also be expanded beyond traditional interpretations.

Another critique of Luhmann's approach is the emphasis of trust being produced through the lens of our own personality, that this can predict its occurrence. (Luhmann 1979) This limits the individual's ability to trust others that fit into the narrative of that person's life story. (Christoffersen 2018) The difficulty with this idea is that it falls dangerously close to creating a stigmatizing belief, one that cannot hope to be altered without someone changing both their personality and circumstances in life. This again places a limitation on trust, which the writer holds is not self-evident. Christoffersen (2018) asserts this also, that trust in future behaviour should also be emphasised as having positive relational benefits, allowing groups to build on these towards combined endeavours.

Trust in ones self is related to Luhmann's definition as it links to the idea of belief in historical facts underpinning our present, trusting in our own memories. (Luhmann 2014) Becker (1996) and Sztompka (1999) both reinforce this assertion that trust stems from our willingness to believe in the future actions of individuals and groups, having confidence in our own view of the world. Self-trust or lack thereof, questioning your own experiences can result in an individual placing blame on themselves for actions by others. This could be seen as a survival mechanism as Luhmann described. (Luhmann 2014) For example, Govier (1993) describes this in a very specific case of rape victims appearing to blame themselves for violence inflicted upon them, questioning their role or guilt in their own attack. This in a sense gives the victims a false sense of control over an uncontrollable event. The same could be said of those experiencing food poverty, as by blaming themselves and decisions they have made, they are able to retain an idea that they may effect the situation in the future. This can be seen as then reinforced by the ideas of stigma and social recognition. If however, due to their poverty and the structural barriers at play they are in fact *not* able to actively change their levels of food poverty to a meaningful degree, this appears to be an abuse of trust by society and a misdirection of blame against the individual themselves. So in analysing the issue of food poverty, Luhmanns definition of trust shall be employed to the extent that it accepts that human beings interpret their surroundings and interactions through beliefs in future expectations. However, the writer argues that this can be expanded to wider groups at a societal level, due to the development of more complex forms of social communication and networks.

## Conclusions

The concepts of trust, stigma and social recognition all concern who we are as individuals and how we operate in relation to others in response to constructed forces around us. These ultimately impact on our life experience, choices and outcomes and appear to create what Goffman describes as a "virtual identity" (Goffman 1963,p3). In

this study, the social problem of food poverty and insecurity is analysed through the definitions by Honneth, Goffman and Luhmann but with a number of key moderations to their views as outlined above. Social recognition the writer views as not necessarily constrained to the individual relationships but one that can occur at a wider societal level across groups. The writer would also argue that attribution of individual blaming is not something that must occur as part of social recognition, but one that coincides with it, with society and individuals having a greater degree of self determination than is suggested. To argue otherwise abdicates responsibility and limits our capacity to change. Regarding stigma, Goffmans description of a negative connotation is accepted as a relational interaction, which varies according to the perceiver, and is accepted also as having negative effects on those affected. The writer would also concur with the sociobiological assessment of the possible reasons behind this, but be wary of placing too much weight on this as this again serves to limit accountability for negative behaviour. Trust the writer accepts as Luhmann describes is a form of relationship used to produce social cohesion and stability, providing confidence in what we can expect from people in terms of their behaviour and actions. However, the writer contends that his view of its limitations are out-dated given the extensive progress of globalization and social communication which must allow for the possibility that trust can develop and manifest across wider stratas and groups.

## **Chapter 6 Methodology**

### **Overview**

The study is delineated into three sections, which attempt to address the research questions. The methods include a systematic review of literature specific to Sweden, a critical analysis of the statistics used to measure food insecurity and qualitative interviews with workers involved in this issue. By gathering information on the subject in a variety of ways, it was hoped to gain a richness of data from which to analyse. The methodology component of the study has been broken down therefore into three individual chapter methodologies with an overarching ethics section covering all aspects of the study.

### **Methodology of Part 1: Systematic review of literature**

The review aimed to ascertain what literature examines the issue of food insecurity in Sweden, during the time period January 1<sup>st</sup> 1996- December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020. The purpose of this was to undertake a separate and more thorough review of literature pertaining to Sweden specifically. It is also hoped the systematic nature of the review will provide a more comprehensive analysis of this research base for future research.

In order to analyse the available data, the PRISMA protocols and specifications were utilised to approach the review in an academically rigorous way. (PRISMA-P 2015) As part of this, specific eligibility criteria were required in order to determine inclusion. The discussion of food insecurity being such that it discusses the persons ability or inability to meet their daily food requirements for a non health related reason was used to determine this.

The time period January 1<sup>st</sup> 1996- December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020 was selected on the basis that it begins at the time when the definition of food insecurity was introduced by the World Food Summit until the latest research that is available at the time of writing. The country of analysis is Sweden, and while studies on European countries, Nordic countries and Scandinavian countries more generally were explored for inclusion, they were only included if there was an element which examines food insecurity in Sweden itself. Similarly if literature on a synonym of food insecurity that we were looking to examine was discovered, then it was only included if it was decided that it is linked to the idea of an inability to access food. The reasons for these stipulations is that the review sought to understand what literature exists on the concept of food insecurity related to factors that were not physical or medical disorders.

The language of inclusion was English, having considered that “universities across Europe have increasingly adopted the use of English as an academic lingua franca.” (Bolton & Kuteeva 2012, p429) However the non-inclusion of Swedish texts is a

recognized limitation, which is discussed later. The study sought both peer reviewed journals as well as grey data to form a picture of the existing literature on this topic. In order to fully explore what is available the following synonyms or related topics to food insecurity were searched:

“food security”; “food poverty”; “food insecurity”; “hunger”; “starvation”; “food deprivation”; “malnutrition”; “want of food”; “food need”; “food hardship”; “malnourishment”; “food bank”; “food provision”; “soup kitchen”; “food insecure”; “food shortage”; “lack of food”; “food scarcity”; “food shortfall”.

The additional factor using the Boolean operator AND is the term “Sweden”.

It is acknowledged that this list is not exhaustive but provided a substantial number of synonyms or equivalent phrases to the specific issue we are looking to research.

The sources used to locate literature were databases deemed to be relevant to the issue, specifically SCOPUS and PubMed as it is acknowledged that food insecurity could be seen not only as a social issue but also as a health concern. These are deemed to be among the largest databases focusing on these issues. (The top list of Academic databases 2020) Following this, Google scholar was used as secondary data to search the titles of the articles that have been screened for inclusion to ascertain any related articles.

In order to search each database, a strategy was employed of searching for the above group of synonyms in each database according to limitation of the criteria of 1996-2020. Following this, the documents were combined in a library group using citation manager Endnote. Duplicates were then excluded using the algorithm for Endnote to do this developed by Bramer et al. (2016). A search of those remaining was undertaken to assess if each one was relevant for the research question. After excluding based on the titles, if uncertainty arose as to its relevance the abstract was reviewed. If again there was uncertainty as to its possible inclusion, the entire article was reviewed. Once this was undertaken, a backward and forward search was used on each relevant article to establish any further relevant material.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion:**

The articles were included on the basis that they fit the criteria discussed earlier, and excluded if they do not. If there was any indecision about whether an article warrants inclusion, err was given to the inclusion rather than exclusion of the work. Given that it is a qualitative systematic review, there was no meta analysis to be conducted and the sole purpose of the review is to give an overview of the data.

Any specific bias of studies was not be deemed relevant, as the review does not aim to synthesise the arguments to answer a specific question, rather to detail what is available.

### **Limitations of the review:**

The condition of only selecting articles in English is a clear limitation that the writer acknowledges given that Swedish is the primary language of the country in question. The difficulty of including Swedish translations of the synonyms around food insecurity is that the terms do not always readily translate word for word, as some terms may differ in meaning and use. Therefore it is the writer's view that it would be of greater benefit to undertake a separate systematic review using Swedish equivalents, rather than attempt to include direct translations in order to maintain a uniform search strategy.

### **Methodology of Part 2: Critical analysis of statistical measurements**

In this chapter, a critical analysis of the statistics available regarding food poverty in Sweden was undertaken. From the narrative literature review, a number of the authors made mention of statistics and data that are used to measure food poverty (n=25 of 57). These included the FAO (Hossain et al. 2021) and the Gallup Poll (Grimmaccia & Naccarato 2020), while others made mention of specific surveys such as the Food insecurity experience survey (FIES) (Hossain et al.2021; Grimmaccia & Naccarato 2020) and the Statistics on independent living conditions (SILC). (Galli, Hebinck & Carroll 2018; Pfeiffer, Ritter & Oestreicher 2015; David & Geiger 2017) Many of the authors mentioned other sources, but only those discussed that may be relevant for Sweden were selected for examination. A further general search for sources of statistical data on food poverty was undertaken by a Google search using the term "statistics Sweden" to gain the highest possible opportunity to find something of relevance.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion:**

The first four pages of Google results were reviewed, and those relevant for food security or food poverty were chosen. After four pages, the writer deemed that the results did not provide further relevant sources and so the limit was placed there. Outwith those discussed by the authors that were deemed relevant (n=4), nine further sources were found (n=9). Three were excluded as outlined below, with a remaining total of ten for analysis (n=10) which are summarised under 7 categories below.

A number of organisations were excluded from the analysis due to their data originating from other sources, which are already included in the writer's analysis. The World Bank provides a substantial data catalogue of information. (World Bank 2020) However, in terms of examining food insecurity, their data appears to be obtained from other agencies such as the FAO. Regarding malnutrition, there is a cross collaboration that takes place between Unicef, the World Health Organisation and the World Bank. (World Bank personal communication February 16<sup>th</sup> 2021)

Given this is the case; no new primary data could be obtained regarding food insecurity in Sweden. They were therefore excluded on these grounds.

The WHO as discussed collaborates in outlining statistics on malnutrition, but this does not stipulate food insecurity. (WHO 2021) The WHO was therefore excluded.

The OECD statistics on individuals' ability to make ends meet is derived from the EU SILC survey, which is already included in the analysis. (OECD n.d) The OECD was hence also excluded.

## **Methodology of Part 3: Qualitative interviews**

### **Planning the interviews**

In order to coordinate the available information on food insecurity in Sweden it was deemed necessary to conduct interviews with those having knowledge of food poverty. This method was used in order to move beyond a rudimentary knowledge that Flyvberg (2006) argues we would be consigned to if we relied solely on written information. This choice of interviewing workers was preferable to interviewing the recipients in this case not only due to the ethical concerns of questioning vulnerable people, but the wider overview the workers could provide. An interview can be defined in a number of ways, but generally includes the idea of being face to face with the participant where the interviewer gains information through questioning. (Knox & Burkard 2009) While we can accept that there are instances where other forms of interviews could take place, for example via telephone or email exchange, this definition is the one that is utilised in this study.

### **Type of interview**

The type of interview chosen as part of the study is an integral part of how the information will be gathered and shaped. (Coughlan & Cronin 2009) To this end a number of options were considered. A quantitative survey sent to the participants would have the potential to give them space and time to reflect and answer, while gaining uniformity in the categories of results. (Bryman 2016) This could make analysis more straightforward. (Coughlan & Cronin 2009)

However, there is a limitation to this that is posed by the bound nature of the survey to the questions formulated by the writer. (Flick, Kardorff & Steinke 2004) Given that this is an exploratory study, the writer was keen to discover information and ways of thinking through interacting directly with those involved. (Brinkman 2013)

Another alternative considered was that of focus groups which have the benefit of gathering participants together at once. (Smithson 2000) Additionally it could also provide greater insight through the discussions between those involved in different

aspects of food insecurity, thus contributing to greater knowledge development for all. (Flick et al. 2004) However, there are pitfalls with focus groups in the sense that the dominant voice can overpower or silence those without the same degree of confidence. (Smithson 2000) Rather than have a collective viewpoint, the writer was more interested in how these individuals view the part they play. (Josselson 2013) It was felt therefore that interviewing them one at a time would offer the greatest opportunity for them to feel more at ease in expressing themselves. (Knox & Burkard 2009)

Therefore the type of interview chosen was that of individual semi-structured interviews. These are where the researcher composes a guide to the interview with a series of points they wish to address. (Cohen & Crabtree 2006) There was potential that a more unstructured approach would allow the participants to have greater freedom to explore their feelings and views, and using semi-structured interviews may have limited this. (Gibson 1998) However, given the broadness of the topic, and the difficulty with which people can often have in articulating experience the writer viewed that a degree of structure was beneficial. (Polanyi 1966) This also allowed the writer to have a greater deal of control over managing the responses and steering it towards the research question. (Brinkman 2013)

### **Preparation and interview schedule**

To guide the interviews the writer composed an interview schedule, following the model used by McIntosh & Morse (2015), which inspired the writer in their comprehensive approach. They utilize in their particular study a schedule that is split into three elements – categories, items and stems. (McIntosh & Morse 2015) The use of these places the questions to be posed into sections that follow consequently from the other, from the general to the specific. (McIntosh & Morse 2015) In essence this means that the questions must sublimate the research topic at large into coherent and direct questions, which build on the knowledge of both the interviewer and participant so that further knowledge can be ascertained. To this end an interview guide was produced for the purposes of interviewing. (Appendix 3)

### **Method of interview**

Due to Covid-19 the interviews were not deemed safe to be conducted in person. Therefore web meetings through the use of the interface forum Zoom was assessed by the writer as being a useful tool to conduct the interviews. The company themselves describe Zoom as an “easy, reliable cloud platform for video, voice, content sharing, and chat runs across mobile devices, desktops, telephones, and room systems.” (Zoom 2021,p1) The use of this method in qualitative research is a relatively new phenomenon and one that has a variety of advantages and disadvantages. (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey & Lawless 2019) These are similar in nature to the use of other

interfaces such as Skype or video conferencing in that they can offer the opportunity to see the person you speak with. (Deaken & Wakefield 2013)

The increased flexibility of location and the time and money saved through the lack of need to travel can also offer potential participants more reasons to accept the invitation for an interview. Additionally being able to see the non-verbal cues of the person you are interviewing, could contribute towards greater understanding.

(McIntosh & Morse 2015) Some research suggests that in comparison to traditional face-to-face interviews, meetings via the Internet can actually allow those involved a greater sense of freedom to express their views. (Deaken & Wakefield 2013) This could be due to the individual having more control over the environment around them, making it a more informal experience. (Gray, Wong-Wylie, Rempel & Cook 2020)

The negative aspects of face to face interviews of any sort include the participants potentially feeling inhibited by the presence of writer listening, possibly meaning they are more likely to provide socially acceptable responses. (Archibald, Ambagstheer et al. 2019) Given that the research question does not pose an in depth intrusion into their personal lives, but more on their employment it is hoped that this may mitigate any sense of need to provide answers deemed to be appropriate.

### **Pilot interview**

To ensure the robustness of the interview guide and determine if there were any flaws or necessary additions, it was beneficial to test this through a pilot interview. (Majid, Othmam, Mohamad, Lim & Yusof 2017). While this is traditionally a process used in quantitative studies, it offered the opportunity to practice the questions and gain confidence. (McIntosh & Morse 2015) In doing so it highlighted the feasibility of the study and allowed for any changes to be made prior to the actual interviews. (Majid et al. 2017) Hence a pilot interview was conducted with Participant 1. The same protocols of participation were followed including written consent and transcription of the interview, however their details have not been included in the data analysis.

During the pilot interview, the writer noted that the categories worked well in staging the discussion, and offered a logical progression through the issues. What was noted however is that often the questions in the guide were answered before being asked, as they fell within the parameters of the larger topic. This was beneficial to understand, as during the actual interviews, the writer was more able to anticipate this and allow greater flexibility outwith the boundaries of the set questions. (Josellson 2013) The questions therefore offered a verbal map to navigate through the issues, while giving the participant the freedom to steer. Following this, the writer believed that no further pilot interviews were needed as the main knowledge gained was that the participants can veer from the main points of the schedule, but that this was not only to be anticipated but also even welcomed if it led to new sources of information and knowledge. In addition, pilot studies in qualitative studies are generally smaller in

nature and designed essentially to test the process, which here had been completed. (Malmqvist, Hellberg, Möllas, Rose & Shevlin 2019)

### **Sample size and saturation**

The sample selection was derived from those the writer viewed as having knowledge and practical experience of food poverty and that could contribute to knowledge development. (Byrne 2001) This use of purposive sampling is a common one in qualitative research given the ability to focus on the participants who may most likely assist with answering the research aims. (Gentles, Ploeg & McKibbin 2015)

To begin this a process of criterion sampling was undertaken with the specification that the participants must have had a working knowledge of the issue and a willingness to discuss their experiences of this. The criteria to have working knowledge of the issue was to ensure quality data was gathered that was based on actual experience with food poverty. (Cleary, Horsfall & Hayter 2014) The contacts were gained through a number of sources –email contact to a variety of NGOs throughout Sweden that may work with food poverty; email to municipalities in Sweden and requests through Swedish social work groups on social media. From these initial acceptances for interviews, further participants were gained through snowballing as recommendations were given for people in other agencies. (Bryman 2006) Consideration was given to whether these would duplicate the findings of the original interviews, but these were diverse enough in location and in the type of agency, that this method was deemed acceptable. (Brod et al. 2009)

Following the pilot interview, 11 participants were selected. Their designations will not be stated in order to maintain confidentiality but they represent a cross section of both charitable and statutory social work bodies and include volunteers, employees, researchers and people at a variety of levels of the organizations. This illustrates their selection as relating clearly to our research topic. (Cleary et al. 2014). They work with a number of different groups of people including homeless people, asylum seekers/refugees, children and families or more generally with people in poverty. Their common feature was their knowledge of food poverty in Sweden specifically. This attempt to provide “maximum variation” in sample selection can be seen as valid due to the exploratory nature of the research question. (Byrne 2001)

This figure of 11 interviews was reached in part due to the practical time constraints imposed on a Masters dissertation timetable but also due to the repeated patterns of response that began to exist in the interviews. (Gentles et al. 2015) This indicated at least a degree of knowledge saturation at least around the key focus of the interview points. (Cleary et al. 2014) This does not necessarily mean that a full saturation was reached, but only that the writers interpretation was that a level had been met, which was sufficient for the research purpose. (Saunders, Sim & Kingstone 2018)

## **Transcription and Codification of the interviews**

Following the completion of each of the interviews, they were then transcribed by the writer verbatim. (Brod, Tesler & Christensen 2009) Advanced levels of conversational analysis tools were not used in this instance as the writer was focussing on the content rather than their expression of what they said. (Werner 1996) The interviews were then read a number of times in order to review their content, assess if there were immediately visible themes, but also to assess if the techniques for questioning were open ended enough to allow full exploration of the topic. (Belotto 2018)

After all interviews had been transcribed, the information was delineated into usable data for the study using coding. This can assist researchers in interpreting large amounts of information so that we can then analyse the meanings within it. (Elliott 2018) The option of utilising computer software such as NVIVO was considered in order to aid coding of qualitative data. The benefit of this is that it can absorb the large amount of data and assist with categorising and presenting these visually, in addition to saving time. (Alfasoft 2021)

In order to gain as much in depth understanding and insights into the issues as possible, here it was considered beneficial to be as close to the data as possible. (Bryman 2006) So, in this instance I chose to code by hand using a colour coding system in a Word Document. There were both advantages and disadvantages of this approach, the negative aspect being the obvious problem of insufficient colour choices, which then can limit your number of codes. (Bryman 2006) The advantage however was that it focussed my attention on each line of text, making me ask what the participant had said and their meaning behind it. (Skjott, Linneberg & Korsgaard 2019) It also assisted me in immersing myself in the information, and reduced the distance between the data and myself. (Brod et al. 2009)

In a sense elements of code had already been pre-selected through my use of questioning as outlined in the interview guide/schedule. (Appendix 3) The specific and repeated use of several of the questions, including around type of occupation and the participants interpretation of food poverty lent themselves to formulate codes. However, there followed from these a wide variation in responses and a divergence from the set questions. This meant that allowance was made for codes to develop organically from the data, rather than being fully pre-prescribed, a form of coding known as “emergent codes” (Elliot 2018, p 2855).

Stages of coding were utilised, firstly open coding was used to go through the data line by line to give broad outlines of the discussion. (Brod et al. 2009) Then axial coding was used to merge these smaller aspects into groupings – for example “Number of people using the service” and “Changes in levels” were merged into one

code of “Levels”. (Ibid) The original colour codes remain in the codebook to illustrate the linking of codes into larger codes. (Appendix 4)

After completing this process, 21 codes were identified. These were then categorised using pattern coding in order to sublimate the micro data into a larger more abstract series of themes. (Punch 2014) This resulted in 7 categories deemed to be relevant to the research question.

For these interviews information that did not present as relevant to the research question were not coded, including the introduction and ending of the interviews. If uncertainty arose over which code to use, an element of the text was given both codes, for the purpose of ensuring the best representation of the data. (Brod et al. 2009) In terms of reliability and to ensure quality, a blank copy of the first interview was coded again following completion of the coding, a method used by Bellotto (2018) in order to attempt to ensure consistency. The result of this indicated minor differences in coding only, which did not impact on either the number of codes or where the information would be categorised. Both the colour choices and the categorisation are outlined in the codebook constructed to file the results. (See appendix 4)

## **Ethics**

Research ethics are in no way a new phenomenon, but have been codified in law following the Nuremberg Code of 1947, due to inhumane acts committed in the name of research. (Wolff-Michael 2018) With this in mind, the ethical considerations for this study are focussed on the qualitative interviews, due to their involvement of human participants. (Bryman 2016) Both the systematic review and critical analysis chapters used only referential data that is available for open access to the public. The location of the research was in Sweden, which necessitated adherence to Swedish legislation regarding research ethics. (Good research practice 2017) This provides protective measures around any research involving people, and how their data will be used. (Ibid) These are the two foci of most ethical stipulations, and are a critical element of ensuring the integrity of the study. (Ferguson & Clark 2018)

In order to ensure that the participants were fully aware of the nature of the study and what was involved, an information letter was created to contribute towards informed consent. (Good research practice 2017) This also contained a place for the individual to sign their consent, while providing details of the writer and advisors contact details. It was stated both in writing and prior to the interviews that they were free to change their mind at any point about being involved, including afterwards. (Ibid) While it is not always possible to be absolutely sure of a participant’s full understanding of the process, this was attempted through discussion in email, then via the information letter, then again prior to the interview asking also if they had any questions before beginning. (Pittaway 2010) The Swedish guide to research practice describes this type of practice as not only expected but one that demonstrates the morality of the research conducted. (Good research practice 2017)

In terms of data storage, the recorded interviews were held in an electronic file on the writer's computer to which was secured using password authentication. (Penn State 2021) The interviews will be deleted following completion of the thesis, and then removed from the computer. This acts in accordance with their right to privacy and reflect the trust placed in the writer to maintain this content in a safe way. (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden 2001)

The locations, names and any specific details of the organisations that may identify the participants were removed. (Good research practice 2017) While anonymity and confidentiality were discussed almost interchangeably during discussions with the participants, Woolf-Micheal (2018) points out that true anonymity only exists when the researcher themselves is unaware of the identity. Therefore in this case it is more appropriate to discuss confidentiality. In addition, any information that they discussed as sensitive or appeared uncertain about sharing was not included in the analysis or discussion. (Woolf-Michael 2018) This was in consideration of any potential negative effect that being involved may arise for them, and to eliminate this risk as much as possible. (Andanda 2009) Orb et al. (2001) discuss how the researchers use of the data in analysis must consider how this may affect the participants, and acknowledge that this is their interpretation only of what is said. It is so hereby acknowledged that this is the case.

## Chapter 7 Results:

### Part 1: Systematic Review of literature

*What research exists on the issue of food insecurity in Sweden?*

#### Results:

After removal of duplications, this left 1697 articles for consideration. Two were excluded even though they met the criteria of discussing food insecurity in Sweden as this was in a historical context of early 19<sup>th</sup> century food poverty. After exclusion through non-relevant titles, then examined through abstract and then finally through reviewing the full article, two articles remained that had some relevance to food insecurity as defined previously in Sweden.

A backward search and forward search was performed on each, examining the bibliographies for articles, which may be relevant for inclusion. In forward searching the citation function was used through Gothenburg University website or if not available the citations listing from Google scholar was used. No articles were considered relevant for inclusion from these searches.

Following this a secondary data search was undertaken using the titles of the two articles through Google Scholar for related articles. Through this, two additional articles were found. These were similarly backward and forward searched and analysed for secondary data through Google Scholar. In total this resulted in 3 additional articles. No further relevant articles were discovered at this point. So in total 5 articles were found with some relationship to food insecurity according to the description earlier as discussed in the context of Sweden during the time period of 1996-2020. These included two systematic reviews (2,5), two commentary articles (1,4) and a cross sectional study (3).

These were as follows:

1. *Pace, Paola 2010 What can be done in EU Member States to better protect the health of migrants? Eurohealth Vol.16 No.1 pp5-10*

This article discusses the right to health for migrants and within this makes note that this specifically includes access to “an adequate supply of safe food, nutrition...”(Pace 2010,p5) as per the Committee of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. While the article generalises to EU countries, it does raise Sweden as the subject of a 2006 visit by “the Special Rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health” (Ibid, p6) which it linked previously to the “determinants of health” which includes access to food (Ibid,p5).

2. Chrichton, Megan; Craven, Dana; Mackay, Hannah; Marx, Wolfgang; De Van der Schueren, Marian; Marshall, Skye 2019 *A systematic review, meta-analysis and meta-regression of the prevalence of protein-allergy malnutrition: associations with geographical region and sex, Age and Ageing* 2019; 48 pp38-48

This systematic review attempted to examine older adults who lived in the community with relation to their level of malnutrition, seeking to understand causal links to this. Sweden is mentioned in the author's discussion of the levels of malnutrition where they state that Sweden had a rate of 0.8%. (Chrichton et al. 2019)

3. Andersson, Lena, Hjern, Anders, & Ascher, Henry. (2018). *Undocumented adult migrants in Sweden: Mental health and associated factors. BMC Public Health*, 2018, Vol. 18, Iss. 1369, 18(1369), *BMC Public Health*, 2018, Vol. 18, Iss. 1369.

Of the five studies found, this was the sole article that pertained to Sweden specifically. It is a cross sectional study of undocumented adult migrants in Sweden that took place during the years 2014-2016. In it, the authors discuss that of those surveyed "57 percent experienced food insecurity". (Andersson et al. 2018, p1) Their conclusions surround the idea that impinging on the human rights of undocumented migrants including the right to food, has an impact on their mental health.

4. Aiking, Harry. (2014). *Protein production: Planet, profit, plus people? American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 100(Supplement), 483S-489S

This article discusses food insecurity through the lens of its argument around the changes required in protein production to make a more sustainable future. In referencing Sweden they highlight that it is among a number of countries that have produced documents outlining "food security, sustainability, and health combined". (Aiking 2014, p483s) Aiking (2014) argues that "socioeconomic factors such as sex and poverty are likely to constrain access to food". (Ibid)

5. Besora-Moreno, M., Llauradó, E., Tarro, L., & Solà, R. (2020). *Social and Economic Factors and Malnutrition or the Risk of Malnutrition in the Elderly: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Observational Studies. Nutrients*, 12(3), 737.

This review had very limited relevance to the criteria but made mention of social and financial reasons for malnutrition in the elderly and this included two Swedish studies as part of its systematic review. The review's main objective was to "assess and determine the magnitude of the relationship between socioeconomic factors and the malnutrition or malnutrition risk in the elderly" (Besora-Moreno et al. 2020, p2) On examination of the paper, the articles it uses which are the Swedish studies are studies on the effects of living alone, rather than specific analysis of food insecurity in the country.

**Discussion and conclusions:**

As the discussion around these few papers indicates, to locate literature that examines food insecurity in Sweden according to the criteria set out has not only very limited results, but also only tangible association to the issue when looked at in detail. Two of the five discuss food insecurity in relation to the experiences of migrants, two link age to the issue and the last describes gender and financial deprivation as potential connections. This demonstrates that for an issue that is stated could affect wide swathes of the population through gender, age, financial circumstances or migration status, the limitation of research in Sweden is a significant research gap. The issues underlying food insecurity in Sweden, given that levels appear to be increasing, therefore warrant further study and analysis.

## Part 2: A critical analysis of statistics

### Introduction:

The narrative review highlighted was that there are a variety of different measurements and data, which presented difficulties for the authors to provide an adequate analysis of what the reality of food poverty in Sweden actually is. (Borch & Kjaernes 2020; Lambie-Mumford & Dowler 2015; Mook, Murdock & Gunderson 2020) The writer noted therefore that there was a need to attempt to create more coherence in the understanding of the information available, as well as scrutinise whether it is enough to create an accurate representation of the levels in Sweden. To this end, the writer attempted to gather the data sources in order to critically examine the extent to which they can assist in providing this picture.

### Statistics Sweden

The official statistics provider of Sweden, Statistics Sweden (SCB) gathers statistics from a variety of sources that is then coordinated through 28 Government agencies. (SCBc n.d) It is notable that the agency describes itself as providing data to the government to assist in the formation of decisions, (SCBa n.d) and these statistics are titled the Official Statistics of Sweden. (SCBc n.d.) Swedish legislation under the Official statistics Act (2001:99) states that

*“the official statistics shall be available for public information, investigative activities and research. They shall be objective and made available to the public.” (Eklund 2007)*

These are also those provided to the European Union as the official statistics of the country. (Eurostat n.d) This places a weighted link to the government and therefore may indicate what fields they deem worthy of research.

On examining the data available around food poverty in Sweden, there is a notable absence of measurement. Under the health data there exists information on the body mass index and obesity measurements but none on food insecurity or its effects. This may indicate a focus of government concern on obesity rather than food poverty. In the surveys of the finances of families with children there was no mention of food insecurity or related queries as part of these. (SCBd n.d) The single piece of data that was found that could be seen as related was in a living conditions survey of children: *Children’s health by indicator* with the years 2008-2014 being the only years available. This contained a question asking the children if they ever skipped breakfast. The level that responded yes in 2014 was 26%. (SCBb n.d) Another query asked if they skipped lunch, during the same period 13% indicated they did. (Ibid)

A number of issues present themselves as problematic with the data gathered. There doesn't seem to be a survey presented to adults asking about whether they have any difficulties in getting access to food. By not asking, there is a gap in the knowledge which the state has to assess the living conditions which are what the surveys purport to monitor. (Pew research centre 2021) In addition the questions asked to children are limited to whether they skip breakfast or lunch, with no further questions exploring their reasons for doing so. This leaves the information bereft of a way of interpreting the meaning behind it. This information has furthermore not been updated in the last seven years.

### **Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)**

The FAO comprises of 194 member countries and works in over 130 countries throughout the world. (FAO 2021) Sweden is one such member country and has been since 1950. (FAO Legal Services for development 2021) In their collection of data they have a specific section on Food security, which is broken down into two subheadings- Indicators from Household surveys (gender, area, socioeconomics) and Suite of Food Security Indicators. (FAOSTAT 2021) Under Indicators from Household surveys, Sweden is not one of the countries where this data is available. In fact only 16 countries make up the information gathered for this. (Ibid)

However, under the Suite of Food Security Indicators, a number of aspects of relevant data is specified, including prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity in the total population. (FAOSTAT 2021) It has dates ranging from 2000-2020. (Ibid)

Unfortunately on examining the statistics for prevalence of this in Sweden, the only data available is between 2014-2019. (FAOSTAT 2021) They state that the percentage of the population in this category increased during this period from 4.5% to 5.8%. However these figures are noted to be FAO estimates. In the number of moderately or severely food insecure people, again during the same time period, the figure amounts to 400,000 people in 2014. These numbers do not appear to equate with one another, as 4.5% of the population of Sweden in 2014 (SCB 2019) would be 438,630 meaning an *underestimate* of over 38,000 people. In 2019, the level is reported to be 600,000 people. Based on the population of Sweden in 2019 (SCB 2019), 5.8% of this population would be 598, 996, which is much closer to the figure provided.

The way food insecurity is measured by the FAO is according to the Food insecurity experience scale (FIES), which has eight questions that are self-reported. (FAO Voices of the Hungry 2021) The food security surveys undertaken began in 2014 and contracted the services of the Gallup Poll, covering 77 countries, including Sweden. (Ville, Po, Sen, Bui & Quinonez 2019) The FAO retains the propriety rights of the FIES surveys and so are not included in the Gallup Poll data. (Gallup Poll personal communication 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021) In polling a country with a high level of

telephone usage such as Sweden, the national demographics of the country are taken and then approximately 1000 people are surveyed. (Gallup: How does the Gallup Poll Work 2021) This is then scaled up and given as a representative sample of food insecurity in the country, and used by the FAO. (Ibid) Therefore the agencies quantify the level of food insecurity in a country of over 10 million people (Worldometer 2021) based on the self reported answers given over the phone to an unknown person, of 1000 of its inhabitants. This amounts to just 0.01% of the population (Worldometer 2021).

This survey fails to account for the fact that food insecurity may not be uniform across the demographic of Sweden. It may be more focussed in certain groups and occur at much higher rates within them (Karlsson 2019; Hebinck et al. 2018; Garratt 2020) and so questioning a random sample may give a non-representative presentation of those affected. Additionally it could be argued that the surveys do not take consideration of the feelings which the questions may exert upon the person being interviewed, who may feel shame or anxiety in answering truthfully. (Pryor & Porter 2004) The verbalisation of their situation may be more difficult for those who are actually in the midst of a crisis involving food poverty as they may wish to offer more socially acceptable responses, which may then skew the results to those who answer that this is not a problem for them. (Chesney & Penny 2013) While the anonymity may offer some mitigation against this (Pryor & Porter 2004), when a participant is in the presence of an interviewer even over the phone, the social expectations and desire to present as a successful person can dominate. (Chesney & Penny 2013) This can mean that people can paint a picture that reflects their wishes rather than their lived reality.

### **The Gallup World Poll**

The Gallup Poll is an organisation that conducts surveys in 160 countries throughout the world on a variety of issues. (Gallup 2021) Their surveys consist of a questionnaire of between 80-100 questions in a 30-minute survey. (Ibid) They are mostly self-funded but do take sponsorships for additional questions occasionally from NGOs and other international agencies. (Gallup personal communication 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021) In Sweden due to their telephone coverage, these are conducted over the telephone in a mixture of landline and mobile phone contacts. (Gallup 2021)

Of these questions, only one is asked regarding food insecurity related questions. This is as follows:

*Have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed? (Gallup 2021, p20)*

While it can be seen as positive that a long time scale is given, this ignores the potential difficulty people may have in recalling their experiences. (Polanyi 1966) In

addition, it ignores that idea that people may perceive this question differently, in that we know many people borrow money from others or take loans to manage their poverty. (Dowler 1998; Powell et al. 2020; Caraher & Furey 2018) So they may see this as having had money, but it is not their own. There is also an emphasis on the food that was *needed*, which implies essential for survival. A person living on handouts of food may have the food they need for survival but this does not mean they have the correct nutritional intake or the variety of foods required for good health. (Martin & Lippert 2012) Therefore the question is extremely limited in the information it can provide. Given that it is but one question among a hundred during a 30 minute phone call, the participant is likely to have little time to give this question time or thought as to its meaning or their own experiences in a way that is sufficient to allow them to express themselves fully. (Polanyi 1966)

The poll attempts to make the sample representative of the country using population statistics to gain data according to gender, age, education and socioeconomic status. (Gallup 2021) However, we do not know how likely those experiencing the highest degrees of poverty are to respond to such surveys, or whether they participate in them at all. Similarly to the FAO surveys, it also gives no account of whether the respondents may misrepresent the truth due to socially embedded perceptions of shame. (Garthwaite, Collins & Bamba 2015)

### **European Union statistics**

European statistical system operates as a partnership between the European statistics bureau (Eurostat) and the statistic bureaus in each individual country. In the case of Sweden that is Statistics Sweden. (Eurostat n.d) The data gathered covers a multitude of factors, but those relevant for the issues of food security are those of the European statistics on income and living conditions (EUSILC) and the European Community Household Panel (ECHP).

The statistics measured by the EU appear to focus on issues that surround food insecurity rather than measuring it directly. They undertake surveys on income and living conditions, but none of these address food access or availability. (Eurostat databases n.d) There is a survey on the number of people eating fruit and vegetables per day, with only 9% of Swedes recorded as eating five or more per day. Over half (54.5%) had between 1 and four portions, suggesting the rest ate no fruit or vegetables. This amounts to over 35% of Sweden's population as surveyed that do not eat any fruit or vegetables in a day. (Eurostat Daily consumption of fruit and vegetables n.d) This gives a potential indication of poor nutritional intake among a large portion of the population.

The sample size given by the EUSILC are much higher than those of the Gallup Poll or FAO data, indicating that 7500 individuals over the age of 16 would require to be interviewed as part of a cross sectional study. (Eurostat 2011) The sample selection

includes those who are over 16 and living in individual households. Communal or shared housing are excluded from the survey population. (Eurostat Survey metadata n.d) This would therefore fail to survey those in homeless shelters, elderly shared accommodation, student housing, women's refuges etc. This survey places an emphasis on interviewing those who have a home to live in and therefore it has omitted those most likely to experience poverty and inequalities that it attempts to measure. While also again, completely ignoring the issue of food poverty.

Under the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) the questions regarding food are reduced to a single question of whether the household can afford to eat meat, chicken or fish every second day if they wanted. This is under a section regarding the financial situation of the household. (EU commission Eurostat 2003)

These surveys took place between 1994 on a yearly basis until 2001 but now appear to have been included or replaced in the EUSILC surveys as outlined above.

(Eurostat: Your guide to European statistics n.d) However, it is noteworthy that *no* question of an individual's ability to access any sort of food is included in the up to date surveys. (Eurostat databases n.d.)

A company called Eurofound who financed by the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament, carries out quality of life surveys every four years. (Eurofound 2021) The sample size for these surveys is 1000 participants, who are interviewed face to face in the language of the country being surveyed, described as taking around 40 minutes and taking place in the person's home. (Eurofound EQLS methodology 2016) They cover a number of different areas, but in relation to food poverty and insecurity, four questions are pertinent to analyse.

The survey asks the question:

*From whom would you get support if you urgently needed to raise some money to face an emergency?* (Eurofound quality of life survey 2016, Q40e)

In response to those asked in Sweden, 84% of employed and 74% of unemployed stated a member of their family, with a non-family relationship such as a neighbour coming in at 7% and 6% respectively. A service provider, institution or organisation was only selected as a source of support by 6% of those employed. Among the unemployed this was a higher 11%. A telling statistic is that of the employed only 2% stated they had no one they could turn to for this help, whereas unemployed people the figure was 9%. (Eurofound quality of life survey 2016)

The same question as was used in the ECHP survey is also used here of asking

*Can your household afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day (if you wanted it)?* (Eurofound quality of life survey 2016, Q 9d)

Of those employed only 2% stated they couldn't afford it, while 4% of unemployed people stated they couldn't. (Eurofound quality of life survey 2016)

Another question asks *if the respondents had gone without fruit or vegetables in order to save money*, with employment status not changing the result of 2% saying yes. A higher figure of 9% was given for *those who chose cheaper cuts of meat or bought less than they wanted to in order to save money*. (Ibid) This demonstrates some level of discussion around the use of strategies around managing food expenses and acknowledging that purchasing something is not equivalent to wanting or needing something.

The surveys took place in the individual's home, leaving the writer to question the absence of those who don't have a registered address such as homeless and undocumented people. The language of the surveys conducted is Swedish, which omits those who only speak other languages well enough to participate in such a survey, such as migrants. It also includes only those who are willing to answer questions face to face with an interviewer asking questions among other things about their ability or inability to provide food for themselves and their families. Given the potential stigma around this issue, the writer would suggest this once again makes the results questionable based on the sample size, the mode of interaction and the willingness of participants to respond.

### **Save the children Sweden**

Save the children is a charity in Sweden, which attempts as part of its work to measure child poverty. This includes the child's access to food among other essentials for their wellbeing. A child meets the level of poverty according to their standard if their family has received economic support during the last twelve months, or have an income of such a low level that it does not meet basic needs. (Räddabarnen 2018)

Their website defines a specific problem in measuring these issues are that there exists in Sweden no official definition of what poverty actually is. Save the children therefore utilise their own measure through the framework of the Convention on the rights of the child, as they are then able to measure if these rates increase or decrease independent of population changes. (Räddabarnen 2018)

To analyse the effects of specific changes to the financial wellbeing of families they do utilise a standard definition of the EU which states it to be an income below 60% of the median income in the country. (Räddabarnen 2018) In their 2018 report, which is the latest one available, Save the Children estimated that 186,000 children were living in poverty in Sweden as per their definition that year. (Räddabarnen: Barnfattigdom I Sverige 2018)

A benefit of this type of measurement is that it focuses on the people who are in need rather than a generalised survey of the population. However, it does have the downside of focussing only on those with children, which is understandable given the charity's focus and also does not examine in more detail the food insecurity the families experience.

## **UNICEF**

UNICEF discusses a number of difficulties in measuring levels of food insecurity, including the need for additional sources of information. (UNICEF 2020) They highlight the unreliability of self-reported levels given the social pressures of shame and stigma linked to food poverty. (Pereira, 2016) What the charity chooses to do to provide a more accurate picture is compile global databases, using a combination of estimates by agencies as well as household surveys. (Maryah, F., Bernal, J. & Frongillo, E. 2015) They point to other data from the United Nations and other sources being used to contribute to this information also. (UNICEF The state of the world's children: notes on the tables 2019)

The information regarding food related poverty is however still limited when Sweden is examined. There are demographics of the levels of thinness of school children, detailed to be 1% as of 2019 and the levels of overweight children being at a rate of 24% in the same year. (UNICEF 2019) Unicef themselves advise caution about the comparability of the data across nations due to inconsistent methods of collection and analysis. (UNICEF The state of the world's children: notes on the tables 2019)

## **Food and Poverty Matrix**

Of the attempts to measure the levels of food poverty in Sweden, perhaps the most specific is that of the Food and poverty Matrix. (Karlsson 2019) This is based on data obtained during 2015-2018 from a variety of City Missions in Sweden who distribute food. The data collection focused on four key groups that the researchers deemed to be the most vulnerable or in need of food provision services. (Ibid) These groups include undocumented migrants, vulnerable EU migrants, people with long-term support and people not able to access benefits. (Karlsson 2019) They recorded that over this time period over 200,000 meals or food contributions were given to individuals, half of these to people already receiving long-term support from social protection agencies in Sweden. (Karlsson 2019) The collection of data was concurrently gathered alongside qualitative discussions with those running the organisations to confirm and crosscheck accuracy. (Karlsson 2019)

A positive aspect of this form of measurement is that it focuses on the most vulnerable by targeting the measurement on those who access the Swedish city missions for food. These may comprise of groups who may not wish to participate in other types of surveys due to the social stigma attached to not being able to obtain

food. (Tarasuk, St Germain & Loopstra 2019) It also removes the need for the individual to self-report, given their presence itself is enough for the worker to capture this information. However, the measurement is also limited by this in that we know that not everyone who experiences food poverty reaches the point of going to a city mission, as people will use many other strategies and borrowing in order to avoid this. (Dowler 1998; Power et al. 2020) Therefore this group goes unrecorded and invisible. The categories selected for the poverty matrix are also not covering all groups who attend the missions and so do not make use of the opportunity of recording the total figures of those accessing the service. Finally, the city missions are not the sole providers of food to those in need in Sweden, with many different organisations and churches providing aid in this way and so are unaccounted for in the data.

## **Conclusions**

There are a number of agencies as outlined above, including governments, charities and researchers conducting surveys and studies of issues related to food insecurity throughout Europe. They all appear to attempt different methods, suggesting no agreed upon way of carrying this out. However, what can be deduced from the above information is that a high degree of weight is placed on surveys, which in effect sample extremely small percentages of the population of Sweden. The demographic surveyed is with the exception of the poverty matrix, not focussed on those who are most vulnerable and most likely to experience food poverty. This has the effect of thinning the data making it falsely positive in presentation or with the poverty matrix too narrow, leaving out groups of the population who may be vulnerable to food poverty. There is no population wide census that measures food poverty, nor is there a uniform method with which all agencies, countries and NGOs utilise in order to be able to compare their information. Each singularly appear to attempt to ensure rigour and a set of standards for their data, but there are omissions in each which will neglect some of the most vulnerable in the population, such as undocumented immigrants; homeless people and those who through shame or stigma do not wish to participate. This results in a view of food poverty that gives the interviewers what the participants are willing to reveal.

In gathering the data provided by all these various actors, we can summarise their findings as follows. There appears to be nutritional deficiencies in large numbers of the population (Eurostat databases n.d), and obesity is a growing issue among children. (UNICEF 2019) Children are not immune to poverty, with 186,000 deemed to be living in it as of 2018. (Räddabarnen 2018) Whether related or not, surveys of children by the Swedish government would appear to indicate the likelihood that a quarter of all children are missing breakfast or another meal during the day. (SCB n.d) Unemployment appears to have a direct impact on the ability of people to provide food for themselves that are of adequate nutritional standard. (Eurofound quality of life survey 2016) The data the FAO provide indicates growing food poverty in

Sweden (FAOSTAT 2021) and families are depending on each other to make it through difficult circumstances. (Eurofound quality of life survey 2016) Among these measures, each with their individual strengths and weaknesses, there is a general picture being presented of the existence of food poverty as a very real social problem in Sweden today.

## Part 3: Thematic analysis

### The participants

The personal details of the participants are anonymised to ensure confidentiality and are given pseudonyms to aid the discussion. All 11 participants provided support to those experiencing food poverty in some way, whether through direct work with those in need or as indirect advocates. Their level of authority and responsibility varied and included volunteers, social workers, educators and others. What was exemplified was the multifaceted nature of the roles the participants had, spanning a large area of Sweden in both small towns and large cities.

### Defining food poverty / insecurity

Similar to the researchers noted in the literature review, there was a surprising diversity of views about what food poverty actually was among the participants. While some common phrases presented themselves such as “food on the table”, the framing of the issue had several branches. A lack of food through inability to access it for whatever reason was a common feature of all participants’ descriptions. However, one participant Mattias emphasised the nutritional value as being relevant and differentiated food poverty from the levels experienced during famines. He considered that

*“I think its something else from starvation obviously, so I think the breaking point or whatever you say, between starvation or famine side of it is the nutrition part, it should be, yeah you cant afford what is classed as nutritious food” (Mattias, charity worker)*

Another participant offered a counter to this point and viewed that there was a misconception in Sweden that *“no one is starving, that everyone has food but that’s not really true”*. (Sophie, social worker)

Lack of choice and a sense of dependence were other aspects of defining the term that were used, specifically the need to ask others for help or not being able to have the ability to choose foods for yourself. Other interesting interpretations included the social context of eating raised by both Mark and Lisa, where she suggested

*“Food poverty you can say you don’t have the company to eat, so you don’t eat because its boring to eat sitting alone, but when it comes down to it, when we have taken all these aspects away there is one thing left, that you are hungry and you cant put food on the table for yourself, for your kids”*. (Lisa, charity worker)

This was a general sentiment expressed by all those interviewed, that at its essence food poverty is not being in possession of enough food.

Analysis:

The very act of defining food insecurity and its variety of results, illustrates that it is lacking the rigidity of a universal definition. (Webb et al. 2006; Torre et al. 2017; Hebinck et al. 2017) This then implies a social construction around the individuals and groups who use the term. This relates to social recognition as a concept, as our status and roles in these groups are defined in large part by our interactions and relationships with others. (Honneth 2001) Thus, the way the group defines us and our circumstances, weighs heavily on how we will be treated by society. (Garthwaite et al. 2015; Pfeiffer et al. 2015)

What is interesting to acknowledge is that each of the respondents described it as an individual problem, when someone lacks food, lacks access, lacks something in terms of food. No one suggested it exists when a state does not provide for its people, or when structural poverty means that certain groups cannot access food. From a social recognition standpoint, this does what Honneth is critiqued of doing, individualises the problem. (Fraser 2003) It also suggests that the workers involved and the people experiencing food poverty are likely to fall victim to absorbing the beliefs that the state as master is infallible. (Honneth 2001) By not having a standard definition it also renders the victims invisible, lacking any social recognition, which as Honneth describes is a form of humiliation. (Ibid)

Sophie discusses the misconception that everyone in Sweden has enough to eat, meaning that if you don't there is likely to be a questioning of why and a doubt in the self trust of the individual. (Govier 1993; Ortiz-Ospina & Roser 2016) Food access itself appears grounded in the concept of trust as it requires our belief in the predictability of future access to it. (Galli et al. 2018; Mook et al. 2020; Borch & Kjaernes 2020) The view that food poverty doesn't exist in Sweden appears to be a misplaced trust as defined by Luhmann (2014) where people have faith that the nature of the world is as they believe it to be. This would appear to reinforce Luhmanns position of trust being a perspective viewed through the life experience and beliefs of the individual. (Christoffersen 2018) The faith in the Swedish system appears to be high (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser 2016), and to lack trust Luhmann (2014) argues could lead to chaos. However, to blindly believe falsehoods would appear to reduce the ability of individuals to depend on their reality and lead to self-doubt. (Govier 1993)

To exist in a system that believes you don't exist, as described by Sophie could create what Goffman (2016) examines as stigmatization. This could create feelings of not being a whole person, lesser or undeserving. (Goffman 1963; Silvasti 2014; Garthwaite et al. 2015) The creation of dependence on others as discussed by the participants could also highlight this in the perception of those without the stigma,

reinforcing its power. (Ibid) This appears to highlight the role that perception in what Sweden is and what it provides its citizens could be a key element in the creation of stigma against those in food poverty. (Silvasti 2015; Garthwaite 2016)

### **What their organisation does to help**

The support offered to individuals and groups varied according to which organisation or service they belonged. Social workers tended to focus on the financial aid they could give according to prescribed limits and conditions.

Sven described having to analyse bank statements and question individuals about how they had spent their money. He states that in order to access financial help a number of checks need to be made,

*“did the person really try everything...the job department are they cited in there? Do they do what they demand for them? And if we see that they have tried everything and really cant change their situation then we say ok you have the right to get some social help from us” (Sven, social worker)*

Another social worker Sophie pointed out that if they were working with a family in food poverty they could provide them money for that day, and they could get help from social services for a few days. However these types of social protections are not designed to be on-going or long lasting meaning those that are in food poverty for extended periods would need to strategize about how to meet their needs.

Those providing food aid did this in a number of different ways, from provision of hot food, bags of tinned and long life goods to the development of reduced rate supermarkets using waste food discarded by traditional supermarkets. In places where hot food was provided, it was explained that

*“3 out of 4 times we try to have heated food because its cold outside, they are seldom eating heated food” (John charity worker)*

Another worker from a different charity discussed that they make social dinners for groups where they make additional portions so that people could take the extra home:

*“...also in that organisation we had once a week like food utdelning, where they hand out food...so families would go there because we weren't able to give people money”. (Zoe, charity worker)*

Bread was noted by four of the workers to be a commonly donated and dispensed foodstuff given to those in need. The limited nutritional value of this was mentioned by workers, with Alan highlighting what the contents mean for those receiving it,

*“, you can offer a diet where bread is the staple and you never have anything that’s not based on bread... You can live for a long time on that but its not a good emm source of nourishment, not when it’s the only one.” (Alan, volunteer)*

A more diverse range of foods were offered through social supermarkets which two of the workers, Alice and Mattias, highlighted as being “empowering” as the people could choose what foods to buy, at very reduced prices. These usually required application for a special card, which required an element of bureaucracy in having their income reviewed to see if they meet the lowest threshold.

While most of the food aid agencies provided food for free, some had introduced nominal fees for a meal or for membership, one stating this was also to “empower” while another described it as an attempt to ensure the food went to those most in need due to excess demand.

Mark discussed this system of redistributing food as a relatively new phenomenon, and that the growing research in this field as a result may be helpful:

*“that’s a pretty new thing in Sweden anyway, while this food poverty and the need for food has been going on for a longer period of time...this is a growing research interest I think because it also involves the food companies...and that’s a game changer for it” (Mark, teacher)*

The development of food chains such as these, Mark describes as developing around the time of the 2008 economic crisis where links were made between private organisations and charities.

Other services provided by those dealing with food insecurity included housing; detoxification clinics; employment support and donations of clothing; practical advice and emotional support. Zoe described attending a social work office with a vulnerable woman and claiming to the officials that they lived at her home so that she could receive support. Additionally they

*“ ...practiced what she should say that I just need the money for food, not for anything else, I don’t pay rent, I don’t cut my hair, I don’t need to wash my body with anything. I just need food. That’s it.” (Zoe, charity worker)*

This typifies the lengths charity workers describe as going to in order to support those in need of food. It also illustrates a wall or barrier between those in charitable organisations and statutory agencies, given the stringent limits placed on social services in to who and what they can give. This lack of congruence in tackling the issue is discussed further under problems and barriers.

What is clear however is that food aid can often mean much more than giving someone a plate of food when they're hungry. It has social, emotional and practical dimensions that encompass more than their immediate physical need for food.

Analysis:

Social recognition as described by Axel Honneth (2001) is a sign of respect and an acknowledgment of humanity. The creation of services designed to support people in need can be seen as an indication of these people being seen, of not being rendered invisible. (Honneth 2001) He discusses also how social protection measures are indeed a form of social recognition as it does not hide the issue or the people but offers help. (Honneth 2004) However, this appears to be varied across services. Within social services, Sophie describes that they can only provide financial support for a few days and that it is not intended as a long-term support. This emphasises that those socially recognised by the state are those who have met some temporary misfortune from which they can readily escape. (Fourage & Layte 2005) These short terms supports are argued by Tarasuk et al. (2019) to leave the structural causes of poverty intact and unchallenged. For those who are in long-term poverty, they are required to obtain social recognition and therefore support through bureaucratic measures designed to maintain a differentiation between those worthy and those not. (Honneth 2001) This highlights what Sen (1999) describes as a lack of freedom existing within Sweden.

Regarding charitable agencies, Zoe presents as placing herself alongside the woman experiencing food poverty as an ally, supporting her to try to get her needs met. This presents as a wonderful example of social recognition, where she consciously acts to oppose acts of degradation and discrimination. (Honneth 2001) However, the failure of them to achieve their goal in gaining financial support illustrates that the negative social recognition of the person experiencing food poverty appears to supersede any positive social recognition that the supporting worker can access. (Ibid)

To seek help for food poverty from social welfare agencies can be seen as having a trust in the system as being willing to help you. This trust extends to the worker and assumes they will treat you fairly according to established laws and rules. (Luhmann 2014) It further emphasises a self-trust and belief that you are deserving of that help. (Sztompka 1999) However, this involves a dependence of the person in need approaching services, which is not experienced by the worker. This places a power imbalance in that trust relationship, leaving it open to abuse. Luhmann (2014) discussed trust as part of a survival mechanism and with food poverty, this can be seen as categorically correct as investing trust in these services places faith in the individuals survival on others.

However, the bureaucracy faced as part of the social welfare process presents as invasive and highly stigmatising, with individuals asked to provide significant details

of their income and adherence to expected standards. (Silvasti 2015; Mook et al. 2020) This is in spite of research indicating that individuals will use a number of strategies and alternatives to manage their food poverty before approaching these services. (David & Geiger 2017; Caraher & Furey 2018; Snell et al. 2018) By being questioned on details of their spending, they are essentially being made to justify their worthiness and fulfilment of the criteria of being a whole human. (Goffman 1963) Should someone fail in meeting these, they are left with a lower estimation in the perceptions of others and themselves and the degradation of stigmatization. (Ibid) The states decision to do this could be reflective of the impact of economic recessions and a tendency towards neo liberal policies among European countries at this time. (Lambie-Mumford 2012; Garthwaite et al. 2105; Snell et al. 2018) Policies have appeared to become more punitive in nature, the restrictions having the consequence of stigma creation. (Goffman 1963; Pfeiffer et al. 2015; O'Connell et al. 2019)

## **The people experiencing food poverty**

### *Who*

Those experiencing food poverty are described in great detail by the participants. When asked who was coming to the workers for help, the following groups of people were given: homeless people; unemployed; refugees; people with addictions; undocumented; elderly; single parents; families with children; young people; students; new migrants to Sweden; Romas; people with mental illnesses; unaccompanied minors; people with cognitive disabilities; women fleeing domestic violence and people in poverty.

Given their different roles and the focus of each organisation being different, it is perhaps unsurprising that they did not all mention the entirety of this list, but selected those with which they worked with most. That all these groups were described as needing support is indicative that food poverty covers a range of people throughout the lifespan who all share some degree of marginalisation.

Alan reiterated this fact, concentrating his discussion around the Roma community, describing a change in Swedish society occurring in the last ten years, as Romanian migrants became a presence on Swedish streets. He advised that they were living in extremely poor conditions, begging and sleeping in cars during the winter and did not have access to cooking facilities. Of the Roma he states

*“This is not a very large group but they are super visible and their poverty is among the worst you can find in Sweden because of combined structures of oppression that they encounter.” (Alan, volunteer)*

Freya described that for her it seems that food poverty is everywhere affecting a number of groups. She states

*“we have this stigmatized vision of who the homeless person is, its so much more diffuse than we think...the problem of food poverty...not only for homeless but for everyone, families, unaccompanied minors because that’s also something we see here.” (Freya, charity worker)*

She goes on to describe groups affected including those with mental health problems, unemployed and people who have experienced relationship breakdowns.

Lisa describes a change in who she sees coming for food:

*“Five years ago people who were in need of a free meal...they were people that you could see when you met them that they were living in bad conditions, they were homeless, they had addictions, they had a mental illness. It was the people that you could see on the outside...Today they look like you and me.” (Lisa, Charity Worker)*

Lisa described in her discussion that they now see mothers, pensioners, students – citizens of Sweden with full entitlements to supports, but running out of money and not being able to feed themselves and their children.

John, agreed that he had seen a change in the type of people in the ten years he had worked at the soup kitchen,

*“when I started ten years ago it was more homeless people sleeping on the streets, so it was ragged people very undernourished people and so on. We still get them but since we’ve got more people coming, its not more undernourished people like that, its more like...people who just cant get the money to last for months for food”. (John, Volunteer)*

*Why*

The reasons given for people seeking help were as varied as the people themselves. Income related issues were described by most workers as the reason people sought support. Discussion was given about the inability to make it until the end of the month and this occurred regardless of age. Strategizing finances was a reason implicated, in terms of diverting social funds given to them to pay their rent leaving themselves with little left for food. For those with addictions Alice advised that she knew people who had

*“been buying drugs on credit and...they have to take the support money to pay for the drugs they already have used” (Alice, Social support worker)*

This cycle of borrowing and debt fuelling food poverty is not one that is limited to those with addictions, as was outlined in the literature review. Food appears to be a resource that is not, or cannot be prioritised over what people view as more urgent needs. In the example above, this could be viewed as the need for drugs due to addiction or for personal safety, as not paying may lead to physical harm.

For individuals who are undocumented, the lack of legal status is the reason given by workers for their seeking of food aid. Their inability to access work, both legally and otherwise mean that they have few options available to them. Their vulnerability due to poor language skills and being outwith “the system” is noted by a number of participants, as is complicated and questionable legislation which means the people who could offer them aid for food, are the agency that wishes to deport them. Lisa highlighted that this group are also seen as a cause of or only victim of food poverty. She states

*“you know its easy to think that it is people who are living illegally in Sweden, ...the numbers there are so small they don't disturb the bigger picture ... (that this is) Swedish people, Swedish citizens”. (Lisa, charity worker)*

John and Alice gave an additional reason of loneliness as a reason for people seeking out these organisations, following loss of family members or social isolation. This emphasises that food aid goes beyond the provision of a meal.

### *Feelings*

The feelings of those who had sought out help were more uniform in nature, being those of shame, surprise, gratitude and relief. Alice described the feelings of shame elderly people feel due to historical stigma placed on social supports. She described individuals who have memories from their childhood of people coming to their school to provide free shoes for the poorer children and being made to stand in front of the class to receive them. This she states left them with feelings of humiliation,

*“that's been so hurting, they've been hurt by this, its easier for them to come to (us) and say can you please buy me food for this week rather than to go to the city, because they don't want to do this again. “ (Alice, social support worker)*

Two of the social workers, Jack and Sven described groups of people who experienced shame, but others that appeared not to,

*“some people feel very ashamed ...and people who have been living on the system or with social help like a long time they are not ashamed anymore, they see it like a ride” (Sven, social worker)*

Jack discussed the difficulty of trying to assist people through a bureaucratic system of support when the individual may not be in a place to comprehend it. This appeared to lead to frustration on both sides.

On asking social worker Sophie how those who seek her support appear to feel she answered

*“ that’s a bit sad, because many of the families that I meet, they don’t ask for help. ...partly because they are stigmatised, that they don’t dare to ask, they don’t know that they can ask”. (Sophie, social worker)*

A feeling of happiness, gratitude and relief was interestingly not described by those working within social services, but was mentioned a number of times by charity workers. As part of his work in a social supermarket, Mattias surprisingly commented that

*“we get a lot of nice gifts and stuff from the customers, they cook food for us from the stuff they have bought here and they come and give it to us so we can have it for lunch and stuff so that’s nice...they’re very generous”. (Mattias, charity worker)*

The fact that people who are using the service due to their own food poverty would then contribute back to workers by cooking meals and giving gifts, is a visceral illustration of the feelings experienced by those using it. Happiness is not something that may normally be considered as a likely feeling of those using food aid services, but one charity worker Freya described that the feeling goes beyond relief:

*“its usually a really really nice atmosphere, they’re really, happy to meet someone who, it sounds maybe strange, but someone that doesn’t have as many problems as them. They want to feel normal... “(Freya, charity worker)*

This once again reinforces the social dimension of food and how it can be used as a tool for social engagement. Freya also discussed that there was a sense of shame people had in coming to ask for help initially which she attributes to both the idea of the need being for the most essential of things, and the further dimension of this being in Sweden. Of this she says

*“the status quo is quite high so you think there shouldn’t be economic problems, and also...people who have problems with, that face food poverty, they try to dress as good as they can to try to not show maybe their problems, so that can be difficult ...if they go forward and say I also need” (Freya, charity worker)*

This relayed the sad outcome of stigma, being that those in need conceal it and therefore inadvertently result in the problem being further hidden. It also presents the added hurdle of the individual presenting as one thing, of coping, while in fact not.

This as Freya describes causes these individuals problems when they ask for help, as they may be doubted in their sincerity.

Analysis:

There is described a wide variety of groups in society experiencing food poverty composed primarily of marginalised groups and those impacted by poverty, concurring with the assertions of previous research on Europe in general. (Fourage & Layte 2012; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Garratt 2020; Power et al. 2020) The social recognition of these groups can be seen in the identification of them by workers, offers of support and development of relationships with them based on respect. (Honneth 2001) The change in composition of the group is a manifestation of social recognition as the workers described those attending now as looking like you and me. (Ibid) The IFRC (2013) had similarly warned in 2013 of groups among the middle classes of Europe appearing to fall into food poverty. This places them on a varying status level, one that presents as unusual and outwith the norm. The attempt by society to maintain the status quo, Honneth (2012) describes as a powerful force so for those boundaries to be broken indicates the severity of the situation affecting all groups. The research into the reasons behind the changes does not appear uniform, and while state level economics are offered as partly responsible, the impact of this varies across nations. (Mumford 2012; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Silvasti 2015; Loopstra et al. 2016; Mook et al. 2020) It also highlights however that there is a difficulty in knowing whether social safety nets are adequate. (Loopstra et al. 2016)

The response by recipients of food by the social supermarket –bringing gifts and meals in return as thanks – could be viewed as an indication of their sense of social recognition and validation as people. (Honneth 2004) They have been given a form of positive recognition, whereby their low income actually entitles them to access a service. With this however comes the previously discussed danger of the creation of a class system that uses “leftover food for leftover people”. (Dowler in Caraher & Furey 2018, p34) Their response to this appears significantly different to those receiving financial aid through social welfare agencies. This may be due to an expectation or trust that the welfare state is a fixed resource, and therefore perhaps additional gratitude is demonstrated for charitable assistance. (Richards et al. 2016; Borch & Kjaernes 2016; Ortiz-Ospina & Roser 2016)

The change in the group attending food charities could also indicate a move in the trust of individuals towards these agencies, or a move away from others. (Luhmann 2014; Simon 2013) If those who may have generally approached social welfare services have lost trust that they can predictably be expected to offer support, this may reduce their likelihood to seek them out. (Luhmann 2014) This could be a replication of what researchers observed in Finland, whereby there had previously been a belief in the welfare system as a “catch all” system but now this had changed due to a variation in how need was managed by the state. (Silvasti 2015; Richards et al. 2016)

The use of strategies diverting and stretching funds and resources to try to make ends meet however suggests a degree of trust by individuals in the wider financial system is retained, as well as the belief that the social protections will fulfil at least part of their needs allowing them to do this. (Sztompka 1999)

However, Sophie described that many don't ask her for help and the process of asking appears imbued with shame caused by the stigma attached to this. (Garthwaite 2016; Goffman 2016) Goffman's (2016) description of a stigma as originating from a physical attribute marked on the body of the owner is highlighted sadly by Freya who describes people in poverty attempting to hide their circumstances by dressing well. From a depiction thousands of years old, modern day Sweden has stigmas that are creating the need to physically mask these in order to gain social acceptability. (Caraher & Furey 2018) A surprising note was her description of people being happy to speak to those who did not share their problems. This would appear to reinforce the variation in perception of stigma and the impact it has, based on the interaction and response from other people. (Goffman 1963)

### **Levels of need and the impact of Covid-19**

When discussing the levels of need there again appeared to be a divergence in opinion from those working in statutory social services and those who work in voluntary organisations. For those in social services, when asked if they had been aware of any change in the levels of people coming to seek support, all three gave an indication that it had remained fairly constant during this time.

"It's been fairly steady" (Jack, social worker), "I haven't noticed that much difference in poverty, or food poverty" (Sophie, social worker), "it's been quite stable" (Jack, social worker). They did however all discuss an anomaly they had noted with colleagues that they had expected a significant rise in the people seeking support as a result of Covid-19, that had not transpired. All had the view that this may still present itself once existing social protections expire.

For those working in charitable organisations, the response was very different. John described that

*"This last year it has been increasing, before that we thought it was decreasing but that was a little bit of a lie because it was more like more places started doing this... we serve 500 per day during two days, this Christmas we served 1700 in two days" (John, charity worker)*

He was of the view that by increasing the number of organisations who provide food aid, it has become more accessible to those who may find it difficult to travel to a central food centre. However, what this does seem to indicate is that the need was there, and simply being unmet or managed in other ways.

Alice described her view that there appeared to be less elderly people presenting asking for help regarding food. She highlighted that this seemed to be the result of a policy allowing elderly people to apply for a housing allowance (bostadstillägg), which has meant they now have enough money to use for food. This indicates the significance of how policy can have a direct impact on mitigating food poverty for vulnerable groups of people. While this group may have reduced in numbers, she advised that there had been an increase in the number of addicts requiring assistance.

Others too reflected their perception of increasing numbers in using their services. Mattias described that

*“I can only say that we have increased our customer numbers steadily in the last years...just by looking at the line outside when we open every day at noon, I think we are quite important to a lot of people actually, sometimes we have a hundred people standing in line waiting.” (Mattias, social supermarket worker)*

He added that there is not enough food to meet the demand and that he believes they only come in contact with a small percentage of those who would qualify to use the social supermarket.

This description of long lines of people waiting for food aid is one echoed by Zoe. She stated her view that local authority decisions not to provide undocumented individuals food money has led to a worsening of food poverty. This has had the direct consequence of her charity developing a food programme to support those in need. This again can be seen as policy decisions directly impacting on food poverty levels.

The contrasting perceptions of those in the charitable sector to those of the statutory social workers would appear to indicate that people might be actively choosing to make contact with charities as an alternative to social services at this time.

### *Covid-19*

An explanation of the perceived increases in those attending food aid agencies, alongside stable rates attending social welfare agencies could be the very thing the social workers viewed as giving risk to a spike in attendance - Covid-19. John advised that those seeking food support were equally aware of the risks from Covid-19 and therefore

*“they don’t want to sit in a waiting area with fifty others because it’s the social welfare area, even they are conscious of this Covid situation and they respect it.” (John, soup kitchen worker)*

Hence, people seek out alternatives in attempting to manage their food needs.

The charitable services all described having to make adjustments or changes to what they do as a result of the pandemic. These included limiting the numbers who could be on the premises at once, using outside space or changing the physical layout of the facility to make it compliant with regulations in the case of the social supermarket. While these may seem standard for all companies during the current time, it appears to have several consequences for those using the service.

The use of outside spaces means that those who are homeless do not gain the opportunity of a warm safe environment in which to eat a meal, with John likening this to a “*factory*”. (John, soup kitchen worker) The social aspect of meeting and connecting with people that has been discussed earlier as a feature of the food aid provision has to a great extent been lost, as people are not permitted to gather in large groups or make use of the additional meeting areas.

Freya’s charity had an innovative method of addressing the limitations on space by utilising a mobile food service where the food can be taken to different areas of the city. This presented challenges of building up knowledge that they will be distributing food in certain times and places. The social supermarket also developed an alternative system to try to ensure fairness alongside safety, providing alternate times to different members. In this way the numbers at any one time were reduced. While these are valiant attempts to manage the Covid-19 risk, it cannot help but place additional barriers on people who already are facing hardship.

Lisa’s charity saw a change in the users of the service as a direct result of the pandemic. She described an increase in the number of students needing to ask for food support

*“young ones that they had just moved to a place of their own... they lost their jobs in April...what shall I do, so they lined up with us, can you help me with food, I’m hungry“.* (Lisa, Charity Worker)

She also described taxi drivers whose businesses were directly affected due to loss of custom, struggling to gain support through social welfare due to the fact that they owned their vehicle. Both the group of young people and the taxi drivers are citizens and may be supposed to have entitlement to social protection. However these are limited and conditional on certain factors, such as length of work history. Mark echoed this problem by advising that

*“the pandemic took away the temporary work opportunities”.* (Mark, teacher)

Another effect of Covid-19 appears to be funding issues, which was discussed by Alice and Freya. This was due to difficulty in accessing those who would

traditionally donate in person, and the additional ethical dilemma of asking for food donations from companies that may already be struggling.

Analysis:

The social workers and charity workers perceive the change in the levels of people attending the various services differently. This may however be an indication of a variation in the social recognition of who is in need. (Honneth 2012) This disparity is replicated in the literature where there is no consistent description of the individual likely to experience food poverty. (Fourage & Layte 2012; Garthwaite et al. 2015; Power et al. 2020; Garratt 2020) The significance of the individual relationship in the development of social recognition may mean that the relationships charities and social welfare workers have with those in need are not analogous, in spite of both aiming to promote the needs of those they serve. (Silvasti 2014)

There appears to again have been a high level of acknowledgement of the needs of those in food poverty by the charities in terms of the impact of Covid-19. They have adapted their services in a number of ways, and reflected on the losses these people would experience. This indicates a high level of social recognition of them as individuals worthy of having their needs fulfilled. (Honneth 2004) The change in circumstances for older people, appearing to reduce their food poverty through active policy decisions appears to be a state level social recognition of older people. The increasing population of older people in Sweden may offer an incentive to offer social recognition to those whose political franchise grows alongside it. (Statista 2021)

If people are actively choosing to access food aid agencies as an alternative to social welfare agencies, this may indicate a reduction in trust that social services will help. (Simon 2013; Luhmann 2014) It also demonstrates a growth in the trust that the charitable services are available to help them. Lisa described the students lining up saying they were hungry and asking for help, indicating a belief in that need being fulfilled by the charity and a sense of self trust in their own worthiness. (Luhmann 2014; Govier 1993) The limitation of social protection mechanisms to protect vulnerable groups appears as either a breakdown in that relationship between social services and those in poverty, or a misinterpretation of what that trust relationship was to begin with. (Luhmann 2014)

The move towards charitable agencies instead of social welfare agencies could also be the result of there being less bureaucratic measures and therefore the attached stigma. (Sztompka 1999; Goffman 2016) It may subsequently be that an increase in the numbers of those in food poverty and presenting at food charities creates a universalization of the problem, reducing the stigma for those using these. (Ibid) This may allow them to share knowledge of these services and could serve to lessen the impact of what the stigma represents. (Goffman 2016)

## Problems or barriers

From the discussions of the participants, there emerged a number of difficulties faced by the organisations in addressing food poverty. While it was evident that a high level of effort went into the work, there presented as a lack of central organisation when workers described the processes. John for example stated that there was variation in what food was provided at each location, as there was no central kitchen. This meant that the ability to provide hot meals was limited by what each venue was able to buy cheaply for the money. The result of this was that sometimes only salad was available. This idea of fragmentation would seem to be supported by the number of different food aid agencies operating within Sweden, with no coordination between them.

Several participants mentioned bureaucratic processes, although only Jack specifically used this word to describe it. While describing the Swedish welfare system as being generous, Jack describes specific conditions that need to be met including attending meetings, providing detailed information about bank accounts and taxes. He reflects that

*“...some people have a harder time than others meeting those demands and that might be inherent to their main problem, lets say if you have addiction problems, then following a bureaucracy perhaps isn't the easiest thing” (Jack, social worker)*

Others describe various criteria, eligibility and income levels that people need to meet in order to access services even in the charitable sector. The earnings limit placed on use of the social supermarket for example is set to lower than 9972 Swedish kronor after taxes per month. This leaves a layer of people who may be just above this bracket who could struggle equally or more due to variations in social networks and financial supports. But they are not able to access reduced price waste food.

After describing in detail how he must explain to those coming for help that they are required to budget better and manage their money more, social worker Sven was asked if social welfare was enough money to last for a month. He answered

*“no its not, really, its really little but its like all the systems like that. The social aid from the state is (sigh) what do you say, its really little, they the lawmakers or the state who are the politicians who decide about this.” (Sven, social worker)*

This would appear to be the system setting people up to fail, and then blaming them for it and is reminiscent of Thomas More's depiction of the creation of criminals in Utopia, whereby society first creates them and then punishes them. (More 1997) The social workers working within these settings presented as genuinely compassionate and wishing to help others, but the systems in place severely curtailed what they were

allowed to do. Sven described a time delay of money appearing in people's accounts, and his inability to give them a voucher or cash to go to the shop and buy food.

The bureaucracy also appeared to extend to legislation and policy that directly made things more difficult for charitable organisations to support people in need. Mattias discusses that

*“some companies who I've approached about donating to us have been kind of scared about backlash taxation from donating the food instead of just throwing it... we follow the exact same laws as everybody else and we don't really have the same resources as everyone else and were kind of suffering from that” (Mattias, social supermarket worker)*

So it would from this seem that not only are individuals being set up to fail, with supports that appear inadequate for their needs, organisations which attempt to support the vulnerable are being impeded in their efforts by unfair equivalence with standard supermarkets.

The failure of the government to take responsibility for the issue of food poverty and the transference of blame to the individual is discussed by a number of the participants. Zoe describes the response of social welfare agencies,

*“Social services...they reject people and they reject them because of they say well this is not ...an acute situation and they say since you got rejected from the migration board, you are not in an emergency, you should have foreseen this...you should have planned better” (Zoe, charity worker)*

Here social worker Sophie agrees that this is the way the service is conducted, advising

*“ a month is really really long so although you have enough money at the beginning of the month, you don't have enough in the end and the system says oh you should have planned for this, you're a grown up person...you should have solved it then I think, the system is really harsh” (Sophie, social worker)*

Not only does this present as a barrier to people presenting for support, but also places total responsibility on the individual for factors that may be societal or structural and outwith their control. By reinforcing this message repeatedly, it would appear to not only reinforce stigma of social protection but could also cause those receiving that message to internalise it and believe it themselves.

The politicians and legislators in Sweden are given rebuke by workers for appearing to deny the existence of the problem. Lisa stated

*“No one is talking about Poverty! ...not the social democrats, not the left party, no one talks about it. When they talk about poverty, it’s in the third world, in Africa, then we can talk about poverty, but not here.” (Lisa, charity worker)*

The focus of the government has a direct impact on the workers ability to operate, specifically for example in directing attention on accessing employment. For example Zoe advises

*“you can get money for helping people find jobs but its more difficult to find money to actually do all these other things so we need to kind of fake it...” (Zoe, charity worker)*

She also described how funds from larger Non-governmental organisations that were given support by the Swedish government, are given in part to smaller organisations that can distribute money directly to those in need. This was due to the bureaucracy in providing financial receipts and statements, binding in a sense what the larger charities were able to do for the individual. The ability of the workers to develop strategies to manage the funds to support people mirrors somewhat those people themselves use in managing food poverty.

Mark discussed a confusion within society of the extent to which the welfare state was designed to support people, with those not able to contribute towards the society not a part of the original concept. He spoke about the impossibility of everyone being protected under the umbrella of a welfare state, and the consequences of what that says about the vulnerable. He argues

*“that’s not possible...for example illegal immigrants, vulnerable EU citizens, people who don’t want to work, or those who use drugs or whatever...the core idea is that they are not part of this community”. (Mark, teacher)*

This could be seen as a somewhat brutal perspective, however highlights a fundamental barrier in understanding. There exists a belief of either a universal welfare state, which may be unattainable or a static maladaptive welfare state, which cannot accommodate change and grow. This difference can be perceived in the variation of views between social workers and charity workers and leads to clashes in a field that are at least on paper, fighting on the same side.

Analysis:

Social recognition or a failure to be so can be demonstrated in the barriers facing workers as well as those in need. The Swedish state appears to acknowledge only certain charities as worthy of financial support, failing to recognise the needs of undocumented migrants through payments to these agencies. Undocumented migrants face a wider issue of recognition in a number of ways, as they are not counted in the

population figures rendering them essentially invisible. (Silvasti 2014; Borch & Kjaernes 2016; Hebinck et al. 2018) This is as Honneth (2012) describes a form of humiliation and places them at the level of slave to the state master. (Honneth 2001)

The Swedish government seems to have limited acknowledgement of food poverty as a social problem as demonstrated in legislation issues impeding charitable work. This lack of social recognition appears to justify to an extent claims by Garrett (2010) that social recognition theory is perhaps too limited on the individual needs rather than state level. It is positive that charities are supporting those in need, however if the Swedish government does not give social recognition that it is a problem, this could then feed into the systems it manages, social services and welfare services. In contrast it could be as Garthwaite (2016) argues is the case in the UK, whereby the discourse actually perpetuates negative perceptions of those in need. Those that can apply to social welfare agencies for financial support are subject to a critical appraisal of their worthiness at being socially recognised. (Honneth 2001) To be acknowledged as the “deserving poor” you must fulfil and adhere to the measures imposed by the state, otherwise you are no longer given social recognition and placed in the shameful position of being effectively “undeserving”. (Castles 2010)

The major problem with this is that the trust placed in those systems by those in need (Luhmann 2014; Ortiz-Ospina & Roser 2016) appears to be misplaced. People are being given challenges they cannot meet, money that cannot last and then being placed in the position of being blamed or stigmatized for this. This appears to be a fundamental breach of the trust placed in the welfare state, in the Swedish government and the institutions of social services by society. (Luhmann 2014) To set people up to fail, and then stigmatize them is to promote stigmatization itself. (Goffman 2016)

### **Feelings and perceptions of workers**

In concluding the interviews, the workers were asked about their own feelings on the issue of food poverty occurring in Sweden, and whether it surprised them. Interestingly none of the participants expressed surprise in its existence in Sweden. Mattias advised that there had always been areas of deprivation that he was aware of growing up. John similarly described that

*“ it has always been a problem, but not a visual problem like it has been in the last five ten years ”. (John, soup kitchen worker)*

Feelings of anger were expressed by Alan and Lisa, sadness by Freya and Zoe. For Alan, he described that

*“I’m angry about it, I’m not surprised actually because Sweden has a very complicated relationship to roma especially, to migration as well and the last thirty*

*years also to poverty as a phenomena which has been individualised more and more.*“ (Alan, volunteer)

This individualisation of poverty, placing the focus or blame on the person rather than structural failures is a change he sees in what social democracy looks like, where Sweden no longer aspires to fix the problem.

Freya similarly stated a feeling of frustration that while not surprised that food poverty exists, she was dismayed that

*“in Sweden, that is kind of a rich country, they just cant find or don’t want to find solutions.”* (Freya, charity worker)

Lisa also expressed anger, coupled with a feeling of wanting to give up,

*“you know this feeling, what the hell should I do? Because the what the hell shall I do because in this country we don’t talk about poverty, it’s a no no no subject!*  
(Lisa, charity worker)

A feeling of sadness for Zoe was regarding her clients and also towards social workers within social services that she feels disappointed in,

*“ I get so sad because we have read the same theories, we have had the same exams, we read about this really this social difficulties that people have and still we can make these kind of decisions ...it feels really sad. “* (Zoe, charity worker)

Alan and Jack expressed their view that Sweden should have greater aspirations and ambition to do better. Social worker Sophie advises that in her view, people in Sweden have a simple choice to make,

*“Do you choose to believe that people cant or if they wont have food, is it because some people are more privileged than others or that they are lazy, and...make that choice and realise that people aren’t poor or they aren’t hungry because they are lazy”* (Sophie, social worker)

There were also views expressed by three of the participants that there is a lack of awareness or discussion within Swedish society in general of food poverty as a social problem. Jack advises

*“ I would imagine if you ask the average swede if they think food poverty is an issue in this country I think most would say no, but I would think it’s a bigger problem than we think “.* (Jack, social worker)

The variety of opinions and feelings expressed by those at the front line of working with people who are in food poverty illustrate that this is an emotive subject affecting not only those in need of food, but the workers that seek to support them.

Analysis:

The individual participants all presented as having a sense of social recognition and validation of the needs of people in food poverty as outlined in their expressions of feeling regarding their plight. (Honneth 2004) To them these people exist, are valid human beings with worthy needs. (Honneth 2001) However, the frustration that Lisa and Freya express and anger from Alan appear to centre around the lack of social recognition in general that people in food poverty experience in Sweden. They reflect their emotional response to the invisibility of the group and lack of acknowledgement by the Swedish state. To do this Honneth (2001) argues the Swedish state degrades and humiliates individuals in a position of vulnerability. Jack argues this is on a societal level, with the general population being unaware of the existence of food poverty as a social problem in Sweden. The general population may be in this case choosing to believe the arguments of the oppressor over that of the slave, the state over the victim. (Honneth 2001) Within the research also, there are examples of the victims being blamed for their own circumstances due to lack of education or making poor choices. (Trichopoulou et al. 2012) Dowler (1998) and Power et al. (2020) heavily contest this claim however. This raises the question of why the Swedish state would not wish to make visible this group, given that it appears to traverse the population. It may be that to do this destroys the reputation or myth of the Swedish welfare state that carries a high value in the social recognition of Sweden internationally. (Honneth 2012; Silvasti 2015)

For the workers, particularly Zoe, Lisa, Alan and Freya, their trust in the protectiveness of the Swedish state appears shaken. (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser 2016) For Luhmann (2014) this loss is not one that can be taken for granted by the state, as our belief in the people and groups around us are essential for society to function. By not appearing to offer social recognition to the vulnerable, the state risks this loss of trust growing and creating the destruction of the Swedish myth that they wish to protect. (Luhmann 2014; Richards et al. 2016; Borch & Kjarenes 2016)

The workers offer implicit solutions to the problem of stigma and shame that may come with food poverty, due to discussions that Swedish people don't know what is going on. (Goffman 2016) To lack understanding of the circumstances of people experiencing this heightens the sense of otherness and individualisation of the problem. (Goffman 2016) This suggests greater education of the community and awareness promotion could again universalise the experience and attempt to overcome stigma in asking for help. (Link & Phelan 2001) Interestingly Sophie argues this involves a choice by those in the general population of how to perceive those in need, which version of truth they choose to believe. This concurs with

Goffman (2016) who emphasises that perception can vary and affect how stigma is viewed; perhaps meaning the individual has a degree of power in preventing the stigmatization of others.

## **Conclusions**

The workers are a cross section of those attempting to address food poverty. They do this in a number of ways, from statutory interventions directed by the state, to charitable organisations setting up services independent of one another. All present as focussing on more than simply fulfilling the physical requirement for food, but attempt to engage in the social and emotional aspects of people's poverty.

The people experiencing food poverty span the lifecycle and include groups across the population of Sweden. The lengths people go to in order to avoid using the services at all means the true figures are unrecorded and an invisible layer of need exists. This being those that are too ashamed to ask for help, and those falling just above the threshold for either social protections or access to social supermarkets. These groups may have varying social support networks meaning that those just above the threshold may at times be more at risk of food poverty than those below. This could leave them vulnerable to exploitation.

The levels of people experiencing food poverty would appear to be rising in Sweden according to the accounts of charity workers. This disparity with the social service workers accounts would suggest active choices being made by individuals for whatever reason to seek out food aid agencies. This could be as an alternative to social services due to stigma or lack of knowledge of what they can offer, however it may also be an increase in availability of alternatives. What is evident is that Covid-19 has had a detrimental effect on the ability of charities to support the most vulnerable, with valiant attempts being made to adjust services and improvise solutions to continue the support as much as possible.

A final point that is striking in the discussions is that policy changes appear to effect meaningful change, and that the state requires having a greater sense of ambition in tackling this problem. However, with the stigmatization of the victims appearing to be promoted by the structures surrounding them, there is little sense that this is a likely goal at present.

## Chapter 8 Discussion

### *Part 1*

Part 1 outlined that the research focused on Sweden is extremely limited. This could be seen as indicative of a lack of prominence given to the subject by researchers, but only so far as Sweden is concerned. The topic in general is growing in significance across Europe, and it may be simply that other factors have led to Sweden not being prioritised as the centre of analysis. This could be in part an assumption regarding the social protections of the state, with Sweden having a reputation as having a strong welfare system. (Burns 2020; Sandvick et al. 2020) If so it would not be logical in this sense to focus research there. It could also be that there is a delay in the effect of global economic crises that are slower to impact on the visibility of food poverty in Sweden. This would seem to be supported by the research around the impact of social protections following global crises. (Loopstra et al. 2016) However, this effect may be time limited. Finally, that food poverty appears to be a hidden phenomenon in Sweden means that it may have not entered the wider public discourse as a social problem. This would consequently be reflected in the academic forums also.

### *Part 2*

The second section examined the methods in which food poverty is measured, which was highlighted to be varied and inconsistent. The sample sizes are low relative to the population they are assessing, and the questions asked take no account of the emotional sensitivity of not being able to feed yourself. This leads to questionable results, or at least uncertainty as to their reliability. By focussing on the general population, surveys and studies lack focus on the vulnerabilities of specific groups that appear to be more at risk of food poverty. In contrast, other studies that focus on measuring just those who use food banks or soup kitchens miss the layer of the population who do not attend these services but are still experiencing a lack of food.

The writers solution would be an alternative measurement, based on the risk factors of food poverty established in the qualitative chapter of this text which are also reinforced by the SCB which emphasise these are groups at risk of financial difficulties in general. (SCB 2020) This measures the latent variable of food poverty through the data on variables we can measure. (Lautre & Fernandez 2004) These groups are single mothers and their children (s+c), pensioners on low rate pensions (pg), those with addictions (a), people with disabilities (d), homeless people (h), undocumented migrants (u) and foreign-born individuals (fb). (SCB 2020) These could be calculated through data available on those receiving disability allowance, those in opioid treatment programmes, pensioners on low rate pension statistics etc., all of which is available data.

The sum total of those could be seen as the figure of the population that is **POTENTIALLY AT RISK** of financial difficulties, and consequently food poverty in the following formula,

$$(s + c) + pg + a + d + h + u + fb = R$$

R being the number of people self acknowledged by the state as those potentially at financial risk and therefore consequently at heightened risk of food poverty. (Ibid) A benefit of using this is that R divided by population could be used in order to provide a uniform comparison across countries using the same factors. Other benefits of this would be that this could be included in annual statistics of the country as other numerical measurements are updated. This would give us a measurable level of comparison to see if the levels of those at potential risk are going up or down. This would also eliminate the issue of reliance on self-reporting or ethics about asking people about food poverty given that these are based on the statistics available. (Pryor & Porter 2004; Chesney & Penny 2013) This measurement accepts the fact that food insecurity is not equal across the population and that certain groups are more vulnerable. It also emphasises the gender inequalities inherent in poverty. (Martin & Lippert 2012)

Limitations of this measurement include that the level of undocumented immigrants is an estimated figure, as this group are not recorded in population statistics. Opioid treatment centre statistics don't account for those *not* in treatment and therefore doesn't account for all those with drug addictions in Sweden. Similarly, simply being foreign-born does *not* necessarily make you vulnerable or in poverty, and is only being used as an additional risk factor of financial insecurity. The number of people receiving disability allowance again doesn't include those with a mental illness or cognitive difficulty that have gone unrecognised and therefore are not measured or included in this number. Receiving this allowance also does not necessarily mean that you have financial difficulties and is only being used as a risk factor. Data on the homeless population is difficult to measure, and for Sweden the last data gathered was in 2017. (SCB 2020) Regarding single mothers and their children, just being a single mother does *not* automatically mean you will be in poverty or financial difficulties but it is an additional risk factor and therefore is included. So the measure must take care not to add stigma to these groups or reinforce discrimination by their inclusion in a measure of risk. However, this is weighed against the need to acknowledge that there does appear to exist an increased likelihood of vulnerability that cannot ethically be ignored.

A sum measurement of these groups in Sweden was undertaken by the writer, leading to a total number including children of 1,315,115 people. (See appendix 5) This is approximately 13% of Sweden having a high degree of vulnerability to food poverty. Further measurement that could benefit our understanding is a more detailed survey on these groups specifically to measure their levels and experiences of food poverty.

After removing the children from inclusion and sampling the remainder, quantitative surveys may offer a more representative picture of the reality of food poverty than currently exists. This is beyond the scope of this thesis but an area where further research would be beneficial.

### *Part 3*

Part 3 illustrated the views and perspectives of those working with this issue at present in Sweden. A variety of different charities are operating within the country, operating independently but in parallel with the social welfare agencies. They attempt to offer supports that are not solely the physical supply of food but social and practical help to those in need. Food itself appears from the literature and interviews to provide more than physical sustenance for survival, but is a conduit around which human connection is made. Covid-19 appears to have had a direct impact on these agencies, particularly on the level of social connection that can be made in these circumstances. This may have the consequence of greater feelings of isolation among those already marginalised.

What became evident both in the literature and the interviews was the connection between lack of food and poverty generally. While not surprising in itself, it does indicate that the causes of food poverty are likely to follow similar structural lines of inequality and barriers for those discriminated against. An interesting revelation from the workers was the apparent change in demographic of those seeking food aid, with it no longer being an issue consigned to the homeless. The people as one worker described look like you and me. This could be an indication that the measures people take to avoid attending food aid agencies are no longer enough. This is a significant concern given that the people using the services cross such a wide span of the population, meaning that at every stage of the life cycle food poverty may be something that you may experience.

The feelings associated with needing support around food are emphasised as being embroiled with shame. The systems that aim to support the vulnerable through social welfare appear structured whether intentionally or not to reinforce this feeling. Strict protocols and procedures, with scrutiny over bank statements and questioning of spending choices places responsibility on the individual for their own poverty. It may be that some no longer feel shame as was suggested, as they have adapted to using the services and using it for what they can get. However, this is not a failure in them, but a systemic failure that individuals require to use social welfare funds as an economic resource for survival. The bureaucracy that is involved in asking for money cannot help but be seen as a deterrent, given the difficulties it would pose for those with any learning impairment or lack of access to the needed social passports such as person number or Bank ID. It could be argued of course that this is needed in order to ensure money is distributed to those who really need it, and taxes used in a fair and equitable way. However, when the very design of the system blocks the most vulnerable, this

argument falls down. It also exposes a weakness of the welfare systems safety net for the most vulnerable. (Silvasti 2015) Social workers acknowledge the money given to live on is a small amount, too little even. Yet people are judged and condemned for their inability to live on it.

What was startling in the results were examples where policy and legislation could be effective in making changes. The allowance for pensioners supporting them in paying rent appears to have had a direct and visible effect on the numbers of people presenting for help at one agency. Another example is the tax legislation on waste food that punishes companies for donating food rather than throwing it away. This appears highly unethical and not in line with most other countries in Europe who do not have this in place. (European Economic and Social Committee 2014)

To retain it under an illusion the need does not exist in Sweden for waste food to be used by those in need is to legislate denial. Furthermore, measures were put in place during Covid-19 to support people by reducing the length of time you are required to have been employed before you are able to claim benefits. (Sveriges a-kassor n.d.) The social workers interviewed appeared to believe this may have been effective in staving off a surge in people at risk of poverty. The question then raises itself as to why this needs to be changed back if this is the case? Removing it would be purposely allowing the system to be more punitive.

In terms of the levels of food poverty in Sweden, there is conflicting information. The data we have available from the FAO indicates an increase in levels of food insecurity to varying degrees, but an upward trend. (FAO 2021) The social workers interviewed could not see a visible change, although they did anticipate a future one resulting from the impact of Covid-19. The charitable agencies were more in line with the statistics that they believed through first hand experience that the numbers attending their services were increasing. They were able to note changes in groups and identify where the increases were occurring. It could be argued that they may have a socially political motive for their claims, wishing to pursue the interests of the vulnerable. However, what they say appears to be evidenced not just in the statistics in Sweden, but in the general trends occurring in Europe. Therefore it is likely their assertions are valid.

#### *Suggestions actions/interventions in social work*

So what can be done? Aside from the aforementioned increased need for research in the area, and a more in depth measurement of the problem, a number of other solutions were generated from the discussions. Policy and legislation should be targeted to relieve the financial difficulties on those who are in the most vulnerable categories in Sweden. In this way, the writer believes that food poverty is something that has potential to be reduced. The legislation that restricts and punishes companies for donating food can be changed, to allow this waste food to be distributed and used.

This would appear not only a practical and ethical issue about food poverty, but also one that is in line with sustainability models regarding climate change.

For all those working with people experiencing food poverty, there appears to be a need for coordination at the state level in order to enhance knowledge sharing and create political capital. By undertaking educational activities such as shared conferences, training and strategy meetings there is potential to make the voices of those in need have a more powerful lobbyist. The social capital gained of sharing experiences of how things are done, could lead to the development of larger scale operations such as national food banks. There is some contention about the notion of food banks as allowing the state to absolve themselves of some degree of responsibility. (Caraher & Furey 2018) However, they could also be a source of data if used in conjunction with the government about what the level of need is and where to target efforts.

The concluding point of this exploratory study of food poverty in Sweden is that food poverty in its many forms would appear to exist in a very real, tangible way to a large number of people living in Sweden. To ignore it, to ignore them and pretend that they do not exist in Sweden is to maintain a falsehood. That Sweden is somehow immune to global recessions, to neo liberalism, to discriminatory practices and to poverty. And as Swedish history demonstrates, it is from the very history of famine and poverty that the ideals of the welfare system have developed, to protect those who are vulnerable and make a more equitable society. (Bergh 2014) Ignore the vulnerable, and the welfare system becomes nothing more than a myth.

#### *Suggestions for further research*

This thesis cannot hope to cover the breadth of detail that food poverty and insecurity encapsulates. What it does do however is indicate where further research could be focussed. This includes an attempt to undertake an adequately representative measure of the number of people experiencing food poverty in Sweden, by focussing on the vulnerable groups and utilising techniques less likely to provoke a shame response. This would assist in understanding what the lived experiences are and how much of a problem actually exists, allowing targeted solutions. The stigma attached to food poverty, how this is created and the impact on individuals and groups is also an area of exploration, given that if this could be challenged, more may be able to access help.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1.**

#### **Authors focus of topic through the years selected**

**1998** Language (1), Statistics (1), Poverty (1)

**2002** Statistics (1), Poverty (1), Supply (1)

**2003** Poverty (1), Welfare State (1), Language (1), Who experiences it (1)

**2005** Poverty (1), Welfare (1), Who experiences it (1)

**2006** Language (1), Food waste (2), Statistics (1), Research (1), Language (2), Stigma (1), Welfare state (1)

**2009** Mental/Physical Health (1), Poverty (2), Welfare State (1), Stigma (1)

**2010** Poverty (1), Statistics (1)

**2011** Welfare State (1), Increases (1), Food waste (1), Poverty (1), Human Right to food (1)

**2012** Welfare State (3), Language (2), Who experiences it (2), Poverty (2), Human right to food (1)

**2013** Increases (2), Welfare state (1), Stigma (2), Research (1), Human right to food (1), Poverty (1)

**2014** Legislation (2), Language (2), Increases (1), Stigma (1), Poverty (1), Who experiences it (1), Welfare state (1), Human right to food (1), Food waste (1)

**2015** Food waste (1), Poverty (2), Increases (5), Language (3), Welfare State (5), Stigma (3), Statistics (2), Research (2), Who experiences it (1), Physical/Mental health (1), Food waste (1)

**2016** Human right to food (2), Welfare State (3), Poverty (6), Food waste (3), Research (4), Language (4), Statistics (5), Increases (6), Stigma (2), Types of food provision (1), Who experiences it (3)

**2017** Increases (4), Food waste (3), Welfare state (1), Research (1), Language (2), Poverty (1), Legislation (1), Statistics (2), Stigma (1)

**2018** Increases (7), Welfare state (5), Research (4), Stigma (4), Food waste (3), Legislation (2), Human right to food (1), Physical/Mental health (1), Poverty (3), Types of food provision (1), Language (3), Statistics (4), Who experiences it (1)

**2019** Increases (3), Stigma (1), Poverty (3), Statistics (2), Who experiences it (2), Food waste (1), Language (2), Welfare state (2), Research (1), Types of food provision (1)

**2020** Increases (4), Language (5), Physical/Mental health (3), Research (1), Statistics (4), Who experiences it (3), Poverty (3), Welfare state (4), Stigma (3), Legislation (1), Human right to food (1), Types of food provision (1), Food waste (1)

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## Appendix 2:

### Information and consent letter

#### INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SOCIALT ARBETE



#### **A study of food poverty in Sweden**

This research project centres around the issue of food poverty in Sweden over the last several years. Through discussions with individuals who are working or have worked with people experiencing food insecurity, it aims to better understand what the situation is at this point in time in Sweden. The interviews will focus on the lived experiences of the workers and examples of different scenarios where people experience food poverty. The personal interviews will be conducted with both social workers and charity workers who specifically have experience of this first hand so that they can reflect on who experiences food poverty and why. This is in order to gain a more detailed picture of the needs of those using the services. This research is part of a Masters thesis on the International Masters programme Social work and human rights at the Department of Social Work at the University of Gothenburg.

The personal interviews themselves will take approximately 60 minutes and will be carried out using Zoom due to restrictions of Covid-19. They will be recorded so that the interview can be written out in full and then analysed for themes. The personal information given will be anonymised including name, location etc. so that the participants can feel more free to express their views.

It is hoped that the research will contribute meaningfully to the understanding of those experiencing food poverty, in order to create a base for forming long lasting solutions.

#### **Informed consent**

The following is a presentation of how we will use the data collected in the interview.

The research project is a part of our education in the International Masters program in Social Work at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. In order to insure that our project meets the ethical requirements for good research we promise to adhere to the following principles:

- Interviewees in the project will be given information about the purpose of the project. [1111]  
[SEP:SEP]

- Interviewees have the right to decide whether he or she will participate in the project, even after the interview has been concluded. [SEP] [SEP]
- The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no unauthorized person can view or access it. [SEP] The interview will be recorded as this makes it easier for us to document what is said during the interview and also helps us in the continuing work with the project. In our analyze some data may be changed so that no interviewee will be recognized. After finishing the project the data will be destroyed. The data we collect will only be used in this project. [SEP] You have the right to decline answering any questions, or terminate the interview without giving an explanation. [SEP] You are welcome to contact myself or my supervisor if you have any questions (e-mail addresses below). [SEP] [SEP]

Upon completion of the study, participants will receive a copy of the research as a thankyou for taking part.

Student name & e-mail: Stephanie Rost, [Stephanierost83@gmail.com](mailto:Stephanierost83@gmail.com)

Interviewee: [SEP]

Place: via Zoom [SEP]

Date:

Supervisor name & e-mail: Jörgen Lundälv, Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor in Social Work, Department of Social Work [Jorgen.lundalv@socwork.gu.se](mailto:Jorgen.lundalv@socwork.gu.se)

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## Appendix 3:

### Interview Schedule/Guide



#### Categories

- Personal information of the in interviewee,
- Views and experiences
- Reflections on Covid-19

#### Items

- Area of work
- Name
- Location
- Service user group
- Understanding of the topic of food insecurity
- Experiences of the topic of food insecurity
- Examples
- Description of those using food provision services i.e. age, gender, ethnicity
- Role of the organization in addressing the issue

#### Stems

- Can you tell me your name and job title?
- Can you tell me a bit about what your job entails?
- Where in Sweden do you work?
- What service users do you work with?
- What do you think food insecurity or food poverty is?
- Can you tell me about your experiences of food insecurity, food poverty or hunger in Sweden?
- Can you give any example of a time when a service user was experiencing this?
- Can you describe who is using the food provision services?
- What are the methods used to address this by your organisation?
- Have you noticed any change in the levels of food insecurity that you see?
- What are the changes?
- How has Covid-19 affected peoples need to seek assistance to get food?
- Has Covid-19 changed the way your service operates with regard to food?
- Do you think food insecurity is increasing or decreasing?
- What experiences make you have this view?

## **Appendix 4:**

### **Codebook**

#### **Personal details**

Role or job title (orange)

Location of where they work (dark red)

Time that they have done this (light purple)

#### **Workers definition of food poverty**

What they think food poverty is/ causes (red)

#### **What they or their organisation does to help those in food poverty**

What the work involves (green)

Food/support provided (yellow)

Funding (light brown)

How people find them (lime green)

#### **The people experiencing food poverty**

Who is using the service (bright purple)

Feelings of the people using the services (light blue)

Why people using the service or why they are vulnerable or in need/types of food poverty (blue)

Economic Strategies/ other needs (very light green)

#### **Levels of need and the impact of Covid-19**

How many people/ Levels/changes ( maroon/peach)

Impact of covid (dark blue)

**Problems or barriers in the system**

Organisation/structural changes or barriers (turquoise)

Government/municipality involvement (grey)

Problem with the research (pink)

Welfare state (bright turquoise)

Waste/ dumpster diving (neon green)

**Feelings and perceptions of the workers and Sweden**

Feelings of the workers / Personal motivation (dark grey/ purple)

Perceptions in Sweden (very light brown)

21 codes in 7 categories

## **Appendix 5:**

### **Calculation of vulnerability**

**Number of children aged 0-21 living with a single mother in 2019 = 381,774**  
(SCB 2021)

**Number of lone parent mothers with children aged 0-24 in 2019 = 208 037** (SCB 2021)

**Homeless people = 33,000 in 2017** (most recent data available)  
(SCB 2020)

**People receiving disability allowance 2018 = 66,274**  
(Försäkringkassan 2019)

**Total foreign born men and women ( without children) in 2019 = 329583** (SCB 2021)

**Number of opioid substitution treatment clients as of 2017 = 3679**  
(Folkhäso myndigheten 2017)

**Number of undocumented immigrants working illegally 2017 = Up to 50,000**  
(estimate only) ( Ahlander & Yosufzai 2017)

**Number of immigrants who choose to disappear each year in Sweden as of 2017 = Up to 10,000** (estimate only) (Ahlander & Yosufzai 2017)

**Pensioners on the lowest general pension in 2018 = Total number of pensioners on a general pension=232,768** (Pensionsmyndigheten n.d)

**Total sum = 1,315,115 people**

