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Foodbanks, Austerity and Critical Social Work

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Introduction

The increasing prominence of food banks in the UK over the past decade has brought with it the international debate about what role they should play in easing food poverty, particularly in countries with well-developed social welfare systems (Poppendieck 1999). This chapter considers the emergence and continued growth of food banks from a critical social work perspective (Fook, 2012). Following a brief exploration of UK foodbanks in the context of recent welfare reforms, there will be an initial focus on whether food banks could or should be considered counter-practice. The chapter will then conclude by proposing the wider adoption of a poverty aware paradigm of practice (Krumer-Nevo 2016). This practice framework facilitates a challenge to the structural and ideological inequality that generates food poverty whilst also easing the consequences of its existence.

Setting the Scene

Foodbanks and food poverty have become such commonly used terms over the past decade in the UK that they no longer require definition when reported by the mainstream media (Wells & Caraher 2014). The recognised definition of food poverty is taken from the broader definition of food insecurity, considered to be 'the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quantity or sufficient quality of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so' (Dowler 2003: 151). International authors and researchers predominantly refer to food insecurity, rather than food poverty, which is the choice of phrase adopted in the UK, therefore these phrases will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter (Butler, 2015).

It is noted that communities and specifically religious organisations have provided food-based help to those in need throughout history, and indeed this practice is recognised in England as far back as the 1601 Poor Law. There is, however, no denying the re-emergence of this form of support is noticeable by its exponential growth. The location of charitable provision in the UK today primarily within religious organisations is also notable. This chapter will focus on the work of The Trussell Trust, however both The Salvation Army and The Red Cross also contribute significantly to the emergency food sector in the UK. In their present iteration, food banks and redistribution organisations in the USA and Canada have become an entrenched resource, established in the early 1980's following the economic recession (Poppendieck 1999). In the UK however, they emerged en masse much later, with The Trussell Trust registering its first food bank in Salisbury in 2004. By 2009 there were 30 Trussell foodbanks, and the organisation now recognise 428 franchises in 2017. There are reports of foodbank use in several western European countries, with Germany estimating 1000 food banks, and substantial provisions emerging in France. (Loopstra & Lalor 2017). Foodbanks are just one way that emergency food is provided to those in need; lunch clubs,

soup kitchens and food redistribution organisations are also part of a broader network of provisions supporting those in food poverty. Despite the diverse and imaginative ways that these organisations have responded to the increased need for food provision, The Trussell Trust foodbank franchise has emerged as the focus of most media, political and academic debate (Loopstra & Lalor 2017).

The Trussell Trust has established a unique model which enables a national platform; the organisation was registered in Salisbury in 2004 following four years of operating from the founder's garden shed (www.trusselltrust.org/about/our-story/) and it now functions as a franchise. For a one off £1,500 fee, groups can register as a Trussell foodbank and are provided with branded promotional material and links with networks such as supermarket collection dates and largescale food producers. Foodbanks are stocked by donations from the public, supermarket collection points, school campaigns and wholesalers who donate surplus goods. They are managed by trustees who coordinate volunteers to staff drop-in sessions, collections, and storage of donated food.

Trussell registered foodbanks are provided with an operational manual which the trustees and volunteers must follow. The manual explains the processes that foodbanks must follow, including referrals, vouchers, data collection and food parcel content (Garthwaite 2016). Once registered as a franchise, Trussell foodbanks, staffed by volunteers, create contacts with local support organisations, that can then become referring agencies, holding the vouchers that their service users need to access food parcels. Organisations distributing vouchers can include the local authority, GPs, schools and health visitors, alongside other charities.

The Trussell Trust is marketed as an emergency food provider and therefore they collect information about food parcel recipients to restrict the number of parcels an individual can receive within a set time period. Food parcels are made up by weight, and their content is dependent on variables including the number of people in the household and type of cooking equipment available in the home. The food in a food parcel is provided with a menu and is expected to contain three days' worth of nutritionally balanced meals. Trussell foodbanks do not routinely collect or provide fresh food, and their content is usually made up of tinned or dried goods, with 'kettle packs' available for individuals with limited access to a cooker or microwave. (Garthwaite 2016). Routinely this means that as a foodbank user there is very little choice in the parcel's content.

Data provided by the Trussell Trust identifies more than 400 active foodbank franchises currently in operation in the UK, however this number indicates the number of *franchises* not the number of *centres* or outlets, that provisions are distributed from. In her 2016 publication, Garthwaite identifies that franchises can have up to 16 distribution centres working from one registered foodbank (37) and Loopstra & Lalor (2017) estimate there to be 1,350 Trussell distribution centres. Given the increased interest in Trussell, and their unique platform to collect data about foodbank users, it is imperative that any figures relating to usage be considered an under-estimation of the issue. The growth in this one organisation is reflective of growth across the sector and many independent and charitable groups also provide both small and largescale food aid.

Building Evidence

In June 2017 University of Oxford published an analysis of the use of foodbanks (Loopstra & Lalor 2017) in partnership with The Trussell Trust, Kings College London and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The most significant conclusion was that it finally acknowledged a significant correlation between welfare reform and foodbank use, a relationship that the Conservative led government had systematically refused to acknowledge prior to its publication despite mounting evidence (The Trussell Trust 2016, Livingstone 2015). The report not only confirmed this link but also provided more detailed information about the backgrounds and circumstances of those using foodbanks.

Key findings from the report indicate that single male households are most likely to use foodbanks, but that single mothers with children are the largest group of foodbank users. Half of households using foodbanks included someone with a disability and are less likely to be in work, although a third of households did include someone that was employed. Income shocks such as benefits sanctions were common (a third of respondents within the last three months) and nearly half of households had unsteady incomes (for example due to employment on a zero-hour contract or seasonal work), with a third awaiting a benefits payment. Significantly 78% of the respondents were defined as 'severely' food insecure, meaning that they had missed one or more meals in the last twelve months (some reported going several days without eating) and were more likely to be in other types of destitution alongside food poverty (for example fuel poverty or rent arrears) (Loopstra & Lalor, 2017).

The conclusions that emerged from this research is that those who are most likely to use foodbanks; single parents, people with disabilities, on benefits or in very low paid or insecure employment, are also those most likely to be affected by welfare reforms. It is this

disproportionate negative impact that the UK government had previously sought to deny (Livingstone 2015, Downing et al 2014; 9).

Welfare Reform

The Welfare Reform Act (2012) was introduced by the UK coalition government and brought with it several changes to the welfare system. The introduction of a spare room subsidy (popularly known as 'bedroom tax) meant a weekly fee for those renting homes from the local authority that were 'underpopulated', this signified the end of the 'home for life' premise on which council housing had previously been provided. The Act contained details of benefits sanctions, to be applied to individuals who are claiming jobseekers allowance (JSA) and whom had failed to apply for jobs, not attended a job interview or declined an offer of work. Sanctions could mean that claimants' benefits were either reduced or stopped for a period of up to 12 weeks. Furthermore, a new benefit, 'Universal Credit' was to be introduced, meaning all individuals claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA) must be reassessed under new criteria to decide on their eligibility.

The reality of these changes has meant substantial delays in claimants receiving benefits, individuals with serious and sometimes terminal illnesses being assessed as capable of work and in some devastating cases, individuals committing suicide because of anxiety induced welfare reform (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-stoke-staffordshire-40099987) (see Paduano, 2017). A petition in The Mirror newspaper in December 2013, started by the now food author and anti-austerity campaigner Jack Monroe prompted a parliamentary debate and an All Party Parliamentary Inquiry was published in December 2014 (Monroe, 2013). Before

the report was widely available, an open letter was published in The Lancet, signed by 170 experts in the field, urging Government to action the recommendations (Ashton, Middleton & Lang, 2014). Consequent publications and press releases by The Trussell Trust, including their mid and end of year statistics, indicate that food poverty is not reducing, and the number of food parcels given out to the public has consistently increased year on year to date.

Critical Social Work and Political Responses to Food Poverty

With this understanding, there is immense potential to explore food banks through a critical social work lens, drawing attention first, to analysing the role of Government in perpetuating the maintenance of individualised explanations for poverty.

The rise of neo-liberal political discourse is dependent on the repositioning of humans as independent individuals, responsible for their own actions and fortunes (Parton, 2014). This understanding necessitates an individualised response to both providing support, and for allocating blame, along with individual feelings of shame and failure (Gupta 2015). As food is seen increasingly as fundamental to our identity formation (Purdam et al, 2016, Emond et al 2014), in a neo-liberal society, the inability to acquire adequate food for ourselves and our families is necessarily interpreted as an individual failing, affecting identity, and generating feelings of shame and embarrassment (Purdam et al, 2016). This explanation is supported by the overwhelming evidence that people will only access food banks for support as an absolute last resort (Garthwaite, 2016; Loopstra & Lalor, 2017).

This discourse of individualised understanding is generated and perpetuated by political activity in the UK. The introduction of the 'big society' agenda first proposed in David Cameron's 2010 Conservative manifesto and promoted during the coalition government epitomises this Prime Minister's ideological position on the role of the state. This 'participatory', community led initiative, evoking an asset-based response to local social problems initially appears to fit well with the emergence of food banks. Although this agenda seems to contradict the individualised neo-liberal perspective, it does position responsibility for responding to social problems such as food poverty, in the hands of the communities, rather than government. This is a position that has resulted in entrenched charitable emergency food provision in Canada and the USA (McIntyre et al, 2016).

The initial response of the Conservative-majority coalition Government to the emergence of organised food banks, particularly the franchise model utilised by The Trussell Trust was positive, with the Prime Minister openly praising their work in Parliament and linking them to the 'Big Society' initiative (Wells & Caraher, 2014). This explanation repositions both blame and responsibility for food poverty with communities themselves. The role of the 'big society' in locating blame with communities diverts attention, preventing the realisation that systemic structural and ideological inequalities are at the centre of explanations for poverty. The prevailing neo-liberal discourse of individual responsibility obstructs opportunities for communities to work together to challenge the powerful (Gupta, 2015).

As foodbanks became more established, Government's response, particularly to The Trussell Trust provides further evidence for a CSW interpretation. In their analysis of print media coverage of food poverty, Wells & Caraher (2016) identify the emergence of a 'frame

contest' between Trussell and government, with Trussell using their referral statistics to push government to accept responsibility for the growth in foodbank use and key politicians moving to deny any link between welfare reform and foodbank use. Notably Ian Duncan Smith (the then Work and Pensions Secretary), Esther McVey and Edwina Curry all attempted to publicly denounce government's role, and locate blame firmly with the individual foodbank users, framing them as 'lazy', 'workshy' and referring to poor budgeting and cooking skills as reasons for the rise in referrals (Garthwaite, 2016). The Trussell Trust model echoes some of these explanations by denying users a choice of foods, on the basis that they will not be able to exercise choice responsibly. Other explanations proffered by government included the rationale that food poverty was not rising, but that the presence of foodbanks themselves was encouraging dependence and enabling users to spend their money on 'cigarettes, booze and mobile phones'. This response demonstrates the ferocity with which those in positions of power work to protect the neo-liberal agenda (Livingstone 2015).

The long-awaited recommendations from the All-Party Inquiry (2014) appeared to counter neo-liberal rhetoric, with Bishop Tim Thornton appealing for communities to us 'as a society, to reach out to all' in the introduction to the report. The Bishop claims that communities have lost the 'glue' due to the 'commodification' of people (p5) and urges society to stop blaming individuals, both those in poverty and in government for the issues at hand. The report makes 77 recommendations that plan to tackle food poverty, alongside other forms of destitution with three main strategies. Primarily to reduce demand on emergency food providers in order to focus on the most vulnerable. Secondly, to encourage a 'food bank plus' model where additional support can be offered (this is a strategy some Trussell franchises have implemented). Finally, to increase the redistribution of surplus food from wholesalers and supermarkets.

As previously identified, the recommendations were endorsed by an open letter to the Prime Minister, published in The Lancet (2014). Ten of the recommendations relating directly to food poverty explicitly identified a continued role for voluntary emergency food providers, with some suggestions of expanding this role to include additional support. Despite the recommendations being thorough and extensive in challenging government to reconsider many aspects of the welfare reform agenda, the idea of voluntary providers of emergency food aid becoming an entrenched response to food poverty is one that is explicitly warned against (Poppendieck 1999; McIntyre et al 2016; Garthwaite 2016). Not only does the establishment of such a response create inconsistency in provision, but it also perpetuates the positioning of responsibility for food poverty with individuals and communities rather than with government and structural oppressors (Livingstone, 2015).

Recognising that organisations such as Trussell are now considered at least part of the solution for tackling food poverty (Lambie-Mumford 2013), we now analyse their work from a critical social work perspective.

Can Food Banks be Counter-Practice?

Considering Healy's (2000) definition of critical social work, I believe counter-practice can be considered any form of practice that refutes individualised explanations for and responses to oppression whilst endorsing activism and challenging the structural reasons for inequality. It is practice that actively attempts to create counter-narratives to existing discourses of

power and oppression. In contemporary UK society, food banks are in a unique position in relation to these ideas, however, they should not automatically be accepted as counter-practice. Here we will analyse aspects of current emergency food provision in the UK in relation to a CSW position. As most data about food banks and food poverty in the UK stems from The Trussell Trust, this will be reflected in the discussion.

The Politics of Gatekeeping

If we observe the franchise model of The Trussell Trust, which utilises a voucher-based referral system, we see that this system requires a referring organisation to validate that an individual needs, or indeed is deserving of assistance. The Trussell website describes 'professionals' as identifying those in need (www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do) establishing the elevated position of their knowledge. Individuals who arrive at a foodbank without a validated voucher are to be refused a food package and are asked to seek out a voucher and return to be issued a parcel (Garthwaite, 2016); here we can see hierarchies in operation. The reality of this means that individuals with no material resources may have to walk several miles to have their need 'validated'.

As an emergency food provision, The Trussell Trust limit the number of vouchers, and hence food parcels to one household can be issued to three over a 'crisis' period. The rationale here is that established support services should have been engaged to resolve the crisis within this timeframe. Many researchers have identified that this is often not the case, and that people often return after their three-parcel limit. The 'three-package' rule, although rationalised, serves to perpetuate feelings of embarrassment and shame felt by those seeking emergency

food provision (Gupta 2015, Purdam et al 2015). The combination of unmet needs for support due to the impact welfare reforms, and individualised feelings of shame, nurtured by neo-liberal policy and social practices means that food bank users are increasingly isolated. This isolation in turn further reduces the possibility of the communal action required to challenge entrenched power structures.

Referring to the Trussell model as 'the franchising of the disenfranchised', Livingstone (2015) identifies that this structure is not openly questioned and is accepted as the 'only' model of foodbank. This is echoed by Wells and Caraher (2014) who note the absence of such discussion in the print media. The uncritical acceptance of any system that privileges 'professional' opinion over other types of knowledge cannot be considered a CSW approach, and by its nature can be seen as reinforcing systems of discrimination and oppression.

Foodbank Plus?

One of the key recommendations from the 2014 All-Party Inquiry into food poverty was the establishment of a 'foodbank plus' model. This recommendation was based on evidence that foodbank volunteers identified several users were in need of additional support services due to experiencing deprivations including fuel poverty, debt, ill health and employment/educational needs. It was proposed that existing foodbanks, notably The Trussell Trust, would be ideally situated to signpost and potentially provide these support services, with ideas that included positioning DWP officers at foodbanks, along with running cooking classes and debt management workshops.

The idea of a 'one-stop-shop' is familiar in social work, indeed local authorities often adopt such a format for providing 'low level' multi-professional support to their communities from a single platform (Askim et al 2011). It is not the 'one-stop-shop' format that a CSW approach contests here, nor the necessity of providing additional support, but the suitability of charitable organisations to deliver it.

To work in partnership with government organisations such as the DWP (Department of Work and Pensions), who are responsible for the administration of welfare reform, the primary reason that emergency food parcels is a requirement (Loopstra & Lalor 2017) significantly compromises the foodbank's ability to challenge these oppressive policies and the structures that promote them. The Trussell Trust consistently campaign government to acknowledge their role in alleviating food poverty through reporting their bi-annual statistics and frequent press releases (www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/press-and-media/press-releases/) however by partnering with the DWP and other established authorities they appear to endorse their existence.

Reports that users of foodbanks praise and encourage the availability of additional support via the foodbank could be understood as countering this CSW position. The Trussell Trust has always signposted its users to other local organisations for extra support and prides itself on the inclusive and warm atmosphere of their distribution centres. This atmosphere is credited to the foodbank volunteers, many of whom have previously been on the receiving end of the service (Garthwaite 2016). Ian Duncan Smith initially proposed the presence of DWP officials inside foodbanks during his time as minister for Work & Pensions, before The

Trussell Trust challenged the welfare reforms. Critics like McKenzie (2015) and Cummins (2018) would see these moves as an attempt by the state to colonise this initiative with the aim of extending its regulatory functions.

Alongside DWP representatives, recommendations from the committee for a 'foodbank plus' service included cooking and parenting classes, debt management support, and health advice. These are all valid and necessary support systems that could benefit individuals in all socio-economic positions. It is the targeted nature of these provisions that reinforces the perception of people living in poverty because they lack skills, knowledge and/or motivation to achieve change. This position is unsupported and research suggests that those with limited resources demonstrate high levels of budgeting skills and are all too aware of their health and dietary needs, indeed they are unable to meet these needs primarily because of a lack of funds (Dowler 2003: Garthwaite 2015).

Recent reports have seen the emergence of foodbank style organisations providing baby items; in Aberdeenshire and Bristol the establishment of baby banks, which claims to have provided support for 650 families in their first two years (www.babybanknetwork.com). The concern about the appearance of these well-meaning services is that in adapting to meet the diverse and growing areas of material need, the issue becomes depoliticised (Livingstone 2015). While these provisions exist, the urgency for government to address them is essentially, reduced. Additionally, the more established and entrenched reliance on these voluntary systems becomes, the more they are perceived as an essential part of the solution.

Further Monitoring?

The Trussell Trust collect demographic information about their foodbank users including age, household members and reason that the food parcel is required. This information is collated nationally and released bi-annually in press releases. Increasingly, Trussell have also participated in additional research (Loopstra & Lalor 2017, Garthwaite, Collins & Bambra 2015, Garthwaite 2016). This growing body of evidence enables a basic understanding of food poverty, establishing some consensus in terms of causes and consequences of living with insecure food supply. Despite this understanding, government consistently denied the existence of robust evidence linking welfare reform to increased foodbank use (Livingstone 2015) whilst also failing to support any research that would be considered 'robust' until the 2017 profiling report (Loopstra & Lalor 2017).

In April 2015, Trussell released figures stating that foodbank use had topped one million within a 12-month period for the first time, in a press release which has since been removed from their site. This figure was widely reported in both television and print media as one million *people* had used foodbanks in the stated period, which was incorrect. What Trussell meant was that they had given out packages to feed one million people, however because their system allows up to three parcels per household, with some exceptional cases being granted more than this, the number of *actual individuals* provided with food by Trussell was actually lower. The Trussell numbers do not, of course, include the many households provided with food aid via other food banks and redistribution organisations, or those that need support but did not feel able to access an emergency food provider. This argument about figures, played out in the national media, distracted from discussion of the root causes of foodbank use.

In the weeks following this misinterpretation, reporting on foodbanks increased in the print media, but focussed specifically on this issue, predominantly positioning blame for the misunderstanding with Trussell (Hope; 2015, Smith; 2015). Wells & Caraher (2016), in their analysis of foodbank coverage in the print media, identify the focus on statistics and 'frame contests' as at the detriment to the voices of users. Recognising that user voices are often absent from discussions about their experience of foodbank use. When user voices are presented, these are usually in the form of case studies, to promote the good work of the organisation and the volunteers.

The silencing of these voices, and the knowledge that they possess, in favour of tactical statistics promotion is of fundamental concern to CSW. Can foodbanks be considered counter-practice if they engage with the promotion of statistical information above presenting the lived experiences of the users they support, further, would critical social work accept the tokenistic representation of these users to promote an organisation?

Critical Social Work in Practice

Food Banks and Human Rights

In comparison to the quantitative data generated by The Trussell Trust and government organisations, there a growing support for a human-rights based approach to food poverty (Lambie-Mumford 2013, Dowler & O'Connor 2012). This perspective acknowledges the

need for food poverty to be situated within a social justice framework. Dowler & Connor (2012) explicate the connection between the universal right to health and the right to food by utilising evidence of poor diet (both quantity and quality) leading to poorer health (Chiu, Brooks & An 2016), alongside poorer academic achievement and employment opportunities (Garthwaite, Collins & Bambra 2015, Lambie-Mumford 2013). They identify that the polarisation of food prices has the potential to increase the disadvantage felt by those on low incomes, whilst the neo-liberal rhetoric of personal choice encourages us to believe poor diet is the result of poor understanding of nutritional needs. Specifically, Dowler & O'Connor identify evidence within the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in both the United Nations Comment 12 (CESCR 1999) and 14 (CESCR 2000) of the internationally recognised relationship between health and food, and the right to an adequate standard of both.

From a CSW position, a rights-based approach to food poverty would present the right to food as an expectation for all citizens. This universal application, in comparison to the targeted support proposed by the All-Party Committee and pioneered by Trussell, has the potential to reduce the stigma and embarrassment felt by food bank users (Purdam et al, 2016). Poppendieck (1999) has drawn on this approach to critique the entrenched establishment of emergency food provisions in the USA and Canada, believing charitable responses to food poverty to be unacceptable as a '*high-income* country response to food insecurity' (McIntyre et al 2016: 845) and reasserting the responsibility of the state to provide adequate food for its citizens.

The Poverty-Aware Paradigm (PAP)

Israeli academic Krumer-Nevo (2016) recently proposed a new paradigm for working with

people living in poverty. Stemming from work with families in Israel (Weiss-Gal, Levin &

Krumer-Nevo 2012), the paradigm was created in opposition to conservative social work

practices that fail to challenge the structural oppression and disadvantage felt by those living

in poverty. The paradigm recognises the conservative nature of social work in neo-liberal

societies and endeavours to realign practice with the values and ethics essential to working

with individuals, families, and communities. This approach resonates with the return to

community-orientated social work practice (COSW) advocated by Mantle & Backwith

(2010) and in action, can be seen as a form of counter-practice.

By considering three key components, the PAP has four aims;

1. Bridging the gap between theory and practice

2. Answering the questions 'how', 'why' and 'what' of practice

3. Recognising the political nature and impact of power relationships on individuals,
   families and communities.

4. Enabling identification of different forms of practice, advocating an action orientation
   to professional intervention

(Krumer Nevo 2016: 1795)

The above aims are achieved by utilising a three-tiered framework that leads practitioners to

consider their practice in relation to epistemological, ontological and axiological questions.

Krumer-Nevo explores how in answering these questions when working with those living in

poverty, social work practitioners can confront the oppression and disadvantage perpetuated by neo-liberal structures and conservative practices, whilst also providing purposeful, individualised support to those in need. Although designed for working with those living in poverty generally, this paradigm can be applied to specific contexts, such as food poverty in the UK, by reflecting on the three questions it poses.

Ontological: Here the PAP recognises that current explanations for poverty focus solely on either structural explanations or individual deficits. Although in the UK there has been a distinct policy shift towards strengths-based approaches (see The Care Act guidance 2014), Krumer-Nevo understands this as still focussing on the individual as the object of attention. The PAP urges practitioners to recognise that the lack of capital felt by those in poverty extends beyond the material to include symbolic capital and the effect of micro-aggressions in interaction with professionals.

 In relation to food poverty, one way of limiting the impact of micro-aggressions and individualising forms of support is to encourage the growth of universal support systems. For example, the foodbank plus model suggests the provision of cooking and debt management workshops in distribution centres, thus reflecting a targeted approach and locating the focus on the individual attendees, presumed unable to cook or manage their finances. By relocating these workshops as a universal provision, the relationship between poverty and debt/cooking support requirements is removed, hence reducing opportunity for stigma and incidents of micro-aggression (see Horton & Gregory 2010 for a more detailed discussion).

In 2015 Brighton & Hove council created an inclusive food strategy that focusses on all aspects of food provision including growing food, wholesale food waste, redistribution, and meal preparation. The services are provided for all residents with additional requirements catered for as needed, with the aims of improving the whole area's relationship with food, alongside reducing food poverty. (www.bhfood.org.uk/food-strategy). Utilising this model also addresses the power dynamics involved in foodbank workers choosing parcel contents and users being denied access to the store areas of foodbanks under the Trussell model.

Epistemological: The current focus of knowledge in relation to food poverty is based on gathering statistical information about both foodbanks and foodbank users (The Trussell Trust 2016, Loopstra & Lalor 2017). Recommendations from recent reports consistently reiterate the need for more 'evidence' and government refutes the existence of 'robust' evidence of the relationship between cause and effect (All Party Inquiry 2014).

The PAP would reject the validity of statistical data and encourages the recognition of such practices as politically motivated, endorsing instead, a critical constructionist understanding of the nature of knowledge. This approach privileges the use of relationship-based practices and the need to appreciate the lived experience of those living with food poverty.

In her ethnographic study of foodbanks, Garthwaite (2016) displays elements of this approach by sharing the experiences of foodbank users in empathetic and accessible case examples, woven into her analysis. More detailed explorations of the attitudes of both users and volunteers demonstrates that these insights are of value to the understanding of food poverty. (See also Lambie-Mumford 2013 for a consideration of the health of foodbank users

from this perspective). This is compared to the print media's strategic use of case examples to indicate their political alliance.

Axiological: 'Orthodox' social work practice is critiqued by the PAP for a dependence on the distinction between good and bad, stemming from historic notions of the deserving and the undeserving. This approach sees social workers as separated from those they work with by either their own lack of deficits or by their position as gate-keeper to the provision of services (Krumer-Nevo 2016). The PAP refutes this division, referring to the preposition 'we', thus unifying the worker and worked-for. In using 'we' the method does not deny the existence of power differentials, but instead recognises that this power should be used in solidarity with those living in poverty. Solidarity, developed using relationship based practice, is understood as enabling more open and transparent discussion of the issues for individuals living with food poverty, including where workers challenge the actions or behaviour of those they work with. The PAP recognises poverty as a fundamental human rights issue, which is appropriate to food poverty given the accumulating academic discourse encouraging food poverty to be understood through this lens.

Foodbanks are heavily dependent on volunteers to manage their distribution centres and food collections, many of whom have also been foodbank users. From the PAP perspective, this dual role can be seen to encourage the development of a 'we' dynamic between workers and users. Despite this, the existence of voucher schemes and the requirement for professionals to 'verify' individuals' need for food aid function to perpetuate power differentials.

Furthermore, reports from The Royal College of Nursing in March 2017, that record numbers of their registrants were seeking hardship payments and had accessed foodbanks affirms that austerity measures are affecting those in 'deserving' positions in society (Royal College of Nursing 4/3/2017). The denial of these figures by the Prime Minister Theresa May can be seen as an attempt by the powerful to prevent solidarity developing between those perceived as 'undeserving' and those who although they have little economic capital, have access to social and symbolic capital through their employment.

Conclusion

By considering the PAP approach to food poverty and foodbanks, there are several aspects of existing emergency food provision that already utilise this approach, although not explicitly linking their work to this framework. In order to champion these methods, several steps are required;

- Emphasis on the promotion of food poverty as a human rights issue is essential in order to achieve change in both the structural disadvantage and individual deficit models currently adopted.
- Hearing the voices of those with lived experiences of food poverty should be privileged above the requirements for data collection and objective quantitative analysis of both foodbanks and those that use them. This can be achieved by adopting counter-storying methods such as those used by McKensie-Mohr & Lafrance (2017)

- A focus on relationship-based practice and solidarity with those living in food poverty, with workers using their power to work for and alongside those requiring food aid.

Critical social work and the poverty aware paradigm reference 'social work' as a profession. Although there is debate within the CSW field about the merits of the professionalisation of social work, it is still apparent that the majority of workers practicing in food poverty are not qualified social workers. The emergency food provision both in the UK and internationally is managed predominantly by volunteers, who although increasingly organised and networked (See Freedom 90 in Canada for an example of a volunteer's network and union) have not had opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills that social work requires. This creates a tension in applying CSW theory and particularly the PAP, however the increasingly conservative culture of 'orthodox social work' (Parton 2014, Gupta 2015) needs to be met with increasingly diverse responses. These responses necessitate the involvement of workers from non-professional backgrounds, which is fitting, as CSW and the PAP advocate the recognition of value in all experience and knowledge.

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