*Are* we all in this together?

 Austerity in the UK and discrimination in the Right to Food.

MA in Understanding and Securing Human Rights

University of London

School of Advanced Study

Institute of Commonwealth Studies

16th September 2013

Lauren Vose

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Abstract

Since their election in 2010 the current UK government has pursued an economic programme of austerity including significant welfare reforms. Internationally, austerity programmes have raised concerns with human rights experts. This thesis outlines the evidence indicating the disproportionate impact austerity in the UK has on women, especially those on low incomes. It builds on this evidence by focusing on austerity's effect on the right to food and presenting new primary research which demonstrates a link between austerity and increased food poverty. Underpinning this empirical evidence is feminist and human rights-centred economic theory which is used to argue that austerity, and thus its impact, is shaped by neoliberal ideals which value markets at the expense of human rights.

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Introduction

The Conservative Party flagship policy at the 2010 election was framed around the concept of the 'Big Society', a concept that has continued to lead their policy strategy post-election. The Conservative Party state:

 We are helping people to come together to improve their own lives. **The Big Society is about putting more power in people's hands -** a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities (The Conservative Party, 2013).

The party leader and now Prime Minister, David Cameron, stated in 2010 that his vision for the 'Big Society' was of a society where people "don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face"(Watt, 2010). The 'Big Society' policies would make people "feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities", he said (Watt, 2010). Cameron's statements assume that the responsibility of the government for its citizens 'problems' can be absolved, that government policies affect everyone similarly, and that power is equally within the reach of every member of society. This thesis contends Cameron's statements are not supported by the prevailing evidence, and indeed that these assumptions mark a deviation from the UK's human rights obligations.

 The language and philosophy of the 'Big Society' policy feeds into the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne's economic policies. The manifesto includes the slogan "*We are all in this together*" (The Conservative Party, 2010, 7) which Osborne has repeatedly used in his speeches.[[1]](#footnote-1) In his first speech as Chancellor, Osborne used the phrase to assure the public that "the burden of deficit reduction is being fairly shared" (Goodman, 2012). One manifestation of the 'burden' he refers to are the 'austerity measures', a series of policies designed to reduce government expenditure and, thus, the budget deficit. The slogan has been fiercely debated and dismissed by some commentators such as Curtis (2012) and McTague (2013), whilst the authenticity of deficit reduction as the reason for the particular austerity measures adopted has also been fiercely contested.[[2]](#footnote-2)

 But *are* we all in this together? And if we are not where are the dividing lines? If there is no real 'we' who is the 'us' and who is the 'them'. Counting Women In, a coalition of five campaigning organisations, published a report entitled 'Sex and Power 2013: Who runs Britain?' (2013) which reveals that, across the board, positions of power are largely held by men. The report details the percentage of women in the most powerful positions across a range of occupational areas. In every area represented, women hold less than 40% of positions (Counting Women In, 2013, 7). For example, only 22.5% of MPs, 21.7% of peers and 17.4% of the Cabinet are women (Counting Women In, 2013, 13). Moreover the number of women in the Cabinet has decreased by 4.3% since 2000. There are currently only 4 female members. Women number just 12.3% of council leaders, 13.3% of elected mayors, and 15.6% of high court judges (Counting Women In, 2013, 13). The report notes that "the presence of women changes what is debated in the public realm as well as what government actually does" (Counting Women In, 2013, 14). Such inequality of power and the absence of women in the government is likely to result in decision making which is formed from men's experience and which fails to adequately reflect the experiences and needs of women. However, the report states that the effect of power inequality has even deeper, more widespread ramifications:

The lack of women in the Cabinet means that women are not generally perceived as powerful; this perception filters throughout society, reinforces gendered assumptions and stereotypes of what a leader looks like, and impacts directly on women's power and agency (Counting Women In, 2013, 15).

Not only does unequal power affect the decisions that are made but it also, by default, reinforces and further embeds women's inequality into society rendering their ability to challenge this inequality even more difficult.

 This thesis will challenge the Government's concept of 'we' and argue that as the austerity measures disproportionately impact on women and people on low incomes they experience cumulative discrimination with severe negative impacts on their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights as contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966).[[3]](#footnote-3)

 The ICESCR, to which the UK is party, sets out a number of legally binding obligations, for which the government can be held accountable. ICESCR Article 2(2) outlines forms of discrimination that must be eradicated if all persons are to enjoy equal access to their rights.

The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to guarantee that the rights enunciated in the present Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (UNGA, 1966).

The categories outlined are 'prohibited grounds' on the basis of which discrimination cannot be exercised. ICESCR Article 3 is also relevant.

The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant (UNGA, 1966)

Discrimination on the basis of sex is, therefore, illegal under ICESCR Article 2(2), as well as Article 3, and additionally under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979) to which the UK is also a party. The wealth of international human rights law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex underlines that non-discrimination is foundational to human rights discourse. The central importance of non-discrimination in human rights discourse further reflects the prominent assumption that discrimination seriously undermines people's ability to access their human rights. Discrimination based on income is also in violation of ICESCR Article 2(2) as it is part of the 'property' dimension of the article according to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in General Comment No. 20 on Non-Discrimination in Economic, Social and Cultural rights (2009). In General Comment 20. (2009) CESCR affirm that multiple or cumulative discrimination occurs "when individuals face discrimination on more than one of the prohibited grounds". CESCR (2009) add that such discrimination "impacts heavily on individuals" and "should be addressed in law, policy and programmes". The existence of inequality in societies means that government policies affect different people in different ways. Governments are therefore obliged to consider such inequality in their policy designs in order to prevent their having a discriminatory effect. General Comment No. 20 (CESCR, 2009) also asserts that discrimination can be direct or indirect:

Indirect discrimination occurs when a law, policy, programme or procedure does not appear to be discriminatory, but has a discriminatory effect when implemented, thus leaving the existing inequality in place, or even exacerbating it.

The UK's austerity measures are not necessarily discriminatory in their intention but their 'effect when implemented' is discriminatory. The discriminatory effect of the austerity measures on women - especially those on low incomes - has been well established through numerous reports by NGOs and other organisations. In order to contribute usefully to the existing discourse this thesis will not analyse the austerity measures solely in terms of discrimination against women or people on low incomes. Instead, understanding the discriminatory effect of austerity on women and people with low incomes, it will examine their experience of "the right to food" as a facet of the "right to an adequate standard of living" as enshrined in ICESCR. Article 11(1) of ICESCR asserts:

The State Parties to the present covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

The right to food is central to the human rights framework, indeed its absence inhibits the right to life, one of the first rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNGA, 1948). Its importance is further demonstrated by General Comment 12 on the Right to Food (CESCR, 1999) and the existence of a Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food (OHCHR, 2000). Drawing on a theoretical grounding in redistributive theory, feminist economic theory and literature on poverty, economics and human rights the thesis will scrutinise welfare policies designed by the current government under austerity from a human rights perspective. The thesis will contribute to the existing discourse by presenting new primary research and evaluating its findings alongside existing data in order to explicate the manner in which the UK's human rights obligations may be affected by their economic policies of austerity.

 The austerity measures include cuts to; the funding of quangos, government departments, and local council's budgets. They also include changes to the welfare system, and public sector pay freezes. HM Treasury conceived of the austerity measures in its 2010 Spending Review, and then deferred responsibility for their implementation and monitoring to different government departments. The policies that come under the authority of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are some of the most radical and highly publicised reforms. The thesis focuses particularly on the Benefit Cap and the Housing Benefit Size Criteria Changes[[4]](#footnote-4) and also analyses the potential impact of the Child Benefit Freeze, which is not administered by the DWP. The former two policies came into effect as late as April 2013, highlighting the prescience and timeliness of this work.

 In August 2013 a DWP spokesperson was reported as stating:

The benefits system supports millions of people who are on low incomes or unemployed and there is no evidence that welfare reforms are linked to increased use of food banks (Duggan, 2013).

It is the intention of this thesis to refute the DWP's claim and illustrate a direct link between austerity driven welfare changes and increased difficulties in accessing the right to food for women with low incomes.

Context

**Austerity in the UK**

The austerity measures in the UK were designed and implemented within the context of the 'Global Financial Crisis' of 2007-2008 and the ensuing Global Recession. In 2008 the UK's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by 7.2% and has flat lined at this level since (Inman, 2013). In October 2010 the Coalition Government published their 'Spending Review'; George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer and head of HM Treasury was in charge of the review. The Executive Summary states:

The Spending Review sets out how the Coalition Government will carry out Britain’s unavoidable deficit reduction plan. This is an urgent priority to secure economic stability at a time of continuing uncertainty in the global economy and put Britain’s public services and welfare system on a sustainable long term footing (HM Treasury, 2010a, 5).

The national deficit stood at 10.2% of GDP in 2010 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2013a). Many economists did not view this as an alarmingly high deficit[[5]](#footnote-5) the government stressed that the 'reduction plan' was critical to the survival of the economy. Despite the language of inevitability used, the Summary goes on to admit that the review "makes choices" *choosing* to "reduce welfare" as a deficit reduction strategy (HM Treasury, 2010a; 5). So even accepting that deficit reduction was unavoidable the government made particular choices about where the money needed would come from.

 A timeline of all the austerity measures published by the Financial Times (Pickard, Cadman and Nevitt, 2011) shows that they tend to be concentrated around April of 2011, 2012 and 2013. A total of 37 discrete changes are identified on the timeline of which 26 are categorised as 'benefit' related changes (Pickard, Cadman and Nevitt, 2011).

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| April 2011 | October 2011 | April 2012 | January 2013 | April 2013 |
| public sector pay freeze benefit deductions increasedchild benefit freeze childcare support element of tax credits cutmaternity grant restrictedincome threshold for family element of child tax credit cut | cap on housing benefit at 30th percentilereduction of eligibility to Income Support (IS) for lone parents  | public sector pensions 3% risemobility allowance cut50+ tax credit cut eligibility for child tax credit reducedeligibility for housing benefit cut | cap on child benefit eligibility | cap on total benefitscouncil tax benefit abolishedsocial housing entitlement restricted (bedroom tax)inflation calculation change to CPI from RPI |

Figure 1. (Pickard, Cadman and Nevitt, 2011)

The welfare reforms most relevant for this thesis have been included in Figure 1. but the measures analysed closely in this thesis are restricted to the Benefit Cap, the Bedroom Tax and the Child Benefit Freeze. The Benefit Cap entails a total cap on benefits of £350 per week for a single person and £500 a week for couples or lone parents - certain benefits are exempt from the cap (DWP, 2013b). The Benefit Cap does not account for family size. The Bedroom Tax consists of a change in Housing Benefit rules for social housing tenants whereby Housing Benefit amounts are calculated in line with the household size (DWP, 2013c). Each person or couple in the household is permitted one bedroom and no spare bedrooms are allowed. There are different rules for foster carers, armed forces personnel and persons with disabilities (DWP, 2013c). Where the Bedroom Tax is applied Housing Benefit is reduced by 14% where there is one spare room and 25% where there are two spare rooms (DWP, 2013c). Tenants unable to pay the extra rent no longer covered by their Housing Benefit are expected to move to a smaller house. The rate of Child Benefit was frozen from April 2011 for three years until April 2014 (Fawcett Society, 2012, 25).

**Human Rights and Austerity**

In May 2012 the Chairperson of CESCR, Ariranga Pillay sent a letter to all States party to the ICESCR in response to the increasing prevalence of austerity measures to remind States of their human rights obligations. The letter set out four standards that austerity programmes should comply with to ensure they do not breach the ICESCR. The letter states; "first, the policy must be a temporary measure covering only the period of crisis" (Pillay, 2012, 1). The 2010 Spending Review sets out a plan covering four years but many of the welfare policies it contains are not temporary. There is no time limit attached to changes to Tax Credits, the Benefit Cap, the Bedroom Tax, Council Tax Benefit cuts and many others. Secondly, the letter continues, "the policy must be necessary and proportionate" so that there is no alternative which would not be "detrimental to economic, social and cultural rights" (Pillay, 2012, 1). There are other alternatives to the particular spending cuts that the government chose to instigate. A more progressive taxation system and tackling tax avoidance are just two alternatives.[[6]](#footnote-6) The third standard is that of non-discrimination, a commitment to reducing inequality, and "ensuring the rights of disadvantaged and marginalized individuals...are not disproportionately affected" (Pillay, 2012, 1). The final standard requires a policy to "identify the minimum core content of rights or a social protection floor...and ensure the protection of this core content at all times" (Pillay, 2012, 2). In order to comply with the latter two points the government would need to complete in depth impact assessments which acknowledge human rights. The government would then be able to mitigate the impact on certain disadvantaged groups whilst ensuring a 'core content' of rights was maintained.

 A highly critical view on austerity programmes is put forward by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It states that austerity has resulted in "reduced government expenditures on human rights, development and social welfare when and where they were most needed" (OHCHR, 2013). OHCHR (2013) assert that “austerity measures that affect spending on social welfare programmes and public services disproportionately impact the disadvantaged". This has been shown to be the case in the UK through numerous reports outlining a disproportionate impact on groups including women, disabled people, children, and the unemployed.

**Government Equalities Impact Assessments**

The HM Treasury published an “Overview of the Impact of the Spending Review 2010 on Equalities” after the publication of the Spending Review in October 2010.[[7]](#footnote-7) The treasury devoted just 600 words of the impact overview to gender. The impact overview acknowledges that where single parent households with children are concerned changes “will affect women more than men as they make up the majority of lone parent households” (HM Treasury, 2010b, 8).

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has also produced a series of equality impact assessments for measures which come under its remit including Universal Credit (2011b), Disability Living Allowance changes, Housing Benefit size criteria changes(2012b)[[8]](#footnote-8), the Benefit Cap (2012a), and the removal of Income Support to lone parents with a child aged five or over (2011a). These reforms presented in the 2010 Spending Review were made law through the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Each impact assessment has a section devoted to gender.

The equality impact assessment entitled 'Housing Benefit: Size Criteria for People Renting in the Social Sector'[[9]](#footnote-9) (DWP, 2012b) notes that there are "1.1 million more single female Housing Benefit claimants than single male" claimants and so any changes "would be expected to have a bigger impact on female claimants" (DWP, 2012b, 10). The document provides quantitative data on those affected and shows that 340,000 single females will be affected compared to 160,000 single males and 160,000 couples (DWP, 2012b, 10). The data shows that 51% of all those affected by the size criteria will be single women whilst 24% will be single men (DWP, 2012b, 10). The DWP state, however, that because 51% of all social housing sector Housing Benefit claimants are female and 26% are men the size criteria rule does not "have a significantly different impact on claimants of either gender" (DWP, 2012b 10). No gender specific mitigation measures are outlined as there is "no differential impact by gender" (DWP, 2012b, 10) despite the much greater number of women affected.

The DWP also published an impact assessment of the Benefit Cap in which they state that "60% of people likely to have their benefit entitlement reduced by the cap will be single females but only around 10% will be single men" (DWP, 2012a, 8). The DWP (2012a, 8) also state that 50% of those affected will be single parents which, given that 92% of single parents are women (ONS, 2011), indicates that women will be disproportionately impacted by the Benefit Cap. The government's research indicates that women will be disproportionately negatively impacted by these austerity measures, and yet no mitigation strategies are proposed.

**The impact of austerity on women: NGO responses**

 Since the publication of the Spending Review 2010 NGOs have produced detailed reports containing compelling evidence of its impact, both actual and potential, on women. The Women's Budget Group (WBG) carried out an impact assessment of the 2010 Spending Review and found that "the record cuts to the public sector services and welfare budget announced in the Spending Review impact disproportionately on women's incomes, jobs and the public services they use" (2010, 1). The WBG also note that "the Coalition's approach to fairness fails to acknowledge that men and women start from unequal positions" (2010, 1). In addition they state that HM Treasury's 'Overview of the Impact of Spending Review 2010 on Equalities' "is inadequate in many ways" (WBG, 2010, 3) not least because it fails to address the "gender impact of changes in taxes and benefits" (WBG, 2010, 4).

 The Fawcett Society's report 'The Impact of Austerity on Women' (2012) echoes the concerns raised by the WBG. The Fawcett Society (2012, 3) highlight that in law the government must consider the impact of their policies on women and men. They note that the government has failed to "collect sufficient data and analysis of the impact of either the raft of individual measures...or on the cumulative impact of these measures on women's equality" and that "women are bearing the brunt of the cuts" (The Fawcett Society, 2012, 3). They highlight a "triple jeopardy" (2012, 5) where women suffer most from cuts to public sector jobs and wages, cuts to services and benefits and are then required to 'fill the gaps' in state services (2012, 5). The Fawcett Society (2012, 4) asserts that austerity will have a significant cumulative impact on women:

It will result in a society in which women's voice and choices are diminished, where women's access to employment, justice and safety are undermined and where women become more, rather than less, dependent on the state and their families for support.

Austerity not only affects women materially but has the potential to undermine women's equality in the long-term through their increased vulnerability to unemployment, impoverishment and consequently diminished agency in society. Both reports provide strong evidence demonstrating the ways in which austerity has impacted negatively on women's experiences to a greater extent than those of men. Their reports also provide testimony to the failure of the government to acknowledge and mitigate this difference of experience.

 This year the UK's compliance with CEDAW will be reviewed at the 55th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CtEDAW). The shadow report submitted to CtEDAW by the UK CEDAW Working Group and published by the Women's Resource Centre (WRC) provides an insight into the ways austerity is affecting the government's obligations under CEDAW. Although CEDAW is not addressed by the research question the report is a useful resource in understanding the impact of austerity on the UK's obligations to non-discrimination under the ICESCR. The WRC present serious concerns

[Given the] cumulative failure to address the inequalities that exist between women and men and to mitigate the austerity measures that threaten to further widen inequality...there is a genuine threat of regression in gender equality, both in terms of income, and of jobs, and of the ability to reconcile employment with caring responsibilities (WRC, 2013, 33).

The WRC (2012, 33) also note that whilst on average the general population will lose 6.8% of their income by 2014/5 as a result of austerity single female pensioners will lose 11.7% and lone mothers 18.5% of their incomes clearly demonstrating that women are markedly more affected by austerity. Like the WBG (2010) and the Fawcett Society (2012) the WRC highlight the government's failure to produce a gender equality impact assessment at all for many of its plans under austerity and, where it has, they note inadequate detail and a lack of disaggregated data (WRC 2013, 33-35). The WRC state that despite the government's promise that decisions "will be made fairly and the most vulnerable will be protected" (WRC, 2013, 24) their report shows that "this commitment has not been seen in their actions to date" (WRC, 2013, 24).

 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) an A rated national Human Rights Institution in the UK also submitted a shadow report for the UK's review by the CtEDAW (2012). EHRC highlight a number of areas where austerity measures impact on women's equality. These include; women's un/underemployment, the gender pay gap, provision and affordability of childcare, and welfare benefits which they argue will inhibit women's independence (EHRC, 2012, 2). In addition, the EHRC (2012, 33) raise concerns over the government's lack of gender analysis and data collection on the impact of austerity on women's equality.

A report by Warwick University and Coventry Women's Voices (CWV) examined the impact of austerity on women in Coventry. Their research revealed that "taken together the benefit and tax changes in the 2010 budget will cost women in Coventry £29,631, 532" whilst "the cost to men will be less than half of this" (Warwick University and CWV, 2011, 4). This finding is particularly significant because in general women in Coventry are poorer than men (Warwick University and CWV, 2011, 3) and so austerity could tip "women into poverty [thereby] raising significant human rights concerns" (Warwick University and CWV, 2011, 4).

 A report published by Coventry Women's Voices (CWV), Coventry Ethnic Minority Action Partnership(CEMAP), Foleshill Women’s Training (FWT) and the Centre for Human Rights in Practice at the University of Warwick (CHRIP) focused on black and minority ethnic (BAME) women's experience of austerity. The research concludes that austerity will disproportionately impact BAME women (CWV, CEMAP, FWT and CHRIP, 2013, 3).

 Correspondingly a report focused on the North-East of England (NEWomen's Network and WRC, 2013) found that as there is already high levels of deprivation and inequality between men and women austerity will impact on women's lives significantly. The report explains that the "impacts of the national austerity measures, together with long-term, ingrained inequality in the region mean that the prospects for women in the North East are now bleak and urgently need addressing" (NEWomen's Network and WRC, 2013, 6).

 In line with the findings of the Coventry case study (Warwick University and CWV, 2011), the TUC (2010) highlight a report which shows that women will pay more, in cash terms, for austerity than men:

An analysis of the June 2010 budget by the House of Commons Library found that women will pay for roughly 72 per cent of the net cost of the changes in taxes, benefits and tax credits set out in the budget (TUC, 2010, 3).

The TUC's (2010) analysis calls attention to the disproportionate impact not only on women but also those with low incomes (TUC, 2010, 1). The impact on income is something that Oxfam looked at in detail in their report 'The Perfect Storm: Economic stagnation, the rising cost of living, public spending cuts, and the impact on UK poverty' (2012). Oxfam also report that there is a significant divide in terms of income in who is paying for austerity:

Poorer people rely most on public services, and spending cuts are estimated to hit the poorest tenth of the UK population 13 times harder than the richest tenth- with planned reductions to public services being equivalent to more than a fifth of their income taken away (Oxfam, 2012, 4).

As poorer people are more reliant on public services and welfare, reductions in these will disproportionately affect them. Oxfam note that it is the "particular approach" that the government has taken to austerity that "is hurting people living in poverty the most" (Oxfam, 2012, 6). This raises the question of government 'choices' which the Treasury referred to in the 2010 Spending Review as previously discussed (HM Treasury, 2010a; 5). Oxfam infer that the government have made specific choices which target people already in poverty. Oxfam's evidence along with the other NGO reports outlined here work to discredit the government's assertion that "deficit reduction is being fairly shared" (Goodman 2012) and demonstrate that in fact, women, and those on low incomes are being treated unfairly.

 The potential human rights impact of austerity was a key theme at a roundtable organised byJust-fair, BiHR, University of Essex and EHRC entitled 'Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the UK: Combating Social Injustice in an Age of Austerity' (2011). Their report notes the relevancy of the human rights framework as a mechanism for holding the government to account for the "cumulative human cost" of austerity (Just-fair, BiHR, University of Essex and EHRC, 2011, 13). The report states that there is a need to look at "the impact of austerity and public service cuts on ESCR and the real risk that the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) violates the UK's obligations under the ICESCR" (Just-fair, BiHR, University of Essex and EHRC, 2011, 4).

 From the evidence and analysis by organisations outlined here it can be concluded that women, especially those on low incomes have been disproportionately affected by the austerity measures. In their Impact Assessments the government admitted that women would be more affected than men by the Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax. The context of this thesis was laid out thus to explain that it aims to build on this evidence, not re-iterate it, by bringing austerity's effect on women with low incomes together with the right to food under Article 11(1) of ICESCR.

**Food poverty in the UK**

The most comprehensive data on food poverty in the UK comes from The Trussell Trust the largest network of Foodbanks. The Trussell Trust report a 170% increase in the number of people using their Foodbanks from April 2012-13 compared with the previous year (The Trussell Trust, 2013a). The Trust currently has 345 Foodbanks across the UK with 3 new ones opening each week (The Trussell Trust, 2013b). If Foodbanks not run by The Trussell Trust are accounted for reports estimate that 500,000 people in total used Foodbanks in 2012/13 (Morris and Cooper, 2013). Morris and Cooper (2013) note that the cost of food has risen by 35% whilst the cost of gas and electric has risen by 65% over the last 5 years whilst incomes have not risen in line with these costs resulting in greater pressure on household budgets. The Trussell Trust use a voucher system whereby a distributor[[10]](#footnote-10) who comes into contact with someone suffering a 'crisis' can get a voucher worth 3 days of food, they can only do this 3 times consecutively to avoid dependency (The Trussell Trust, 2013b). The Trust record the reason why a voucher is being used and found that the most significant reasons are benefit delays (30%), a low income (19%) and thirdly benefit changes (15%) (The Trussell Trust, 2013a). These statistics indicate that those who rely on the welfare system are at an increased risk of food poverty and that changes to their payments have directly resulted in the need to use a Foodbank. These indications support this paper's hypothesis that welfare changes and low incomes have affected people's right to food. However they do not provide an insight into the cause of the welfare changes or the potentially gendered nature of such experiences. The thesis aims to address the lack of gender sensitive insights into austerity's affect on the right to food.

Feminism, Human Rights and Neoliberal economics: A Difficult Relationship

**Neoliberalism**

There is a prevailing culture of neoliberal economics in the UK which currently dominates the debate whilst its principles govern the decision making of the government (Monbiot, 2013). David Harvey in *A History of Neoliberalism* argues that neoliberalism has been the dominant theory both in economic policies and discourse across the world since the 1970s (2005, 2). Harvey contends that neoliberalism is defined by the belief "that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade." He continues that the role of the state is to create the 'institutional framework', including structures to defend the market[[11]](#footnote-11) and create markets in every area of society,[[12]](#footnote-12) but once these markets have been created the state should not interfere in them (Harvey, 2005, 2). Harvey (2005, 3) declares:

Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive eﬀects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.

But there are alternatives. Feminist economic theory and a human rights-based theory of economics are valuable alternatives to this neoliberal hegemony. In the context of austerity in the UK these theories elucidate the ways in which austerity is part of a wider structure of patriarchal neoliberalism. This thesis argues that the effect of austerity is so marked on women on low incomes because it is based on a neoliberal framework which does not value them. Such disregard results in economic, social and cultural rights deprivations.

**Feminism**

Marianne Ferber and Julie Nelson published *Feminist Economics Today: Beyond Economic Man* in 2003 as a follow-up text to their 1993 seminal work *Beyond Economic Man: Feminist Theory and Economics* in whichthey oppose the dominant economic theory that neoliberal capitalism with its devotion to the markets represents the best economic model for everyone in society. Instead they assert that such a model divides society along gendered lines impacting negatively on women. A feminist standpoint is helpful in understanding why policies of austerity affect women, especially those on low incomes, acutely and gives interesting insights into why such policies would be introduced in a neoliberal economy. The book was significant as it revealed the sexist construction at work in mainstream economics:

[In] contemporary mainstream economics, culturally ‘masculine’ topics, such as men and market behaviour, and culturally ‘masculine’ characteristics, such as autonomy, abstraction, and logic, have come to define the field. Meanwhile, topics such as women and family behaviour as well as characteristics of connection, concreteness, and emotion are all considered ‘feminine’ (Ferber and Nelson, 2003, 1).

Ferber and Nelson argued that what has become talked about as ‘economics’ is typically the section of the economy which is characterised as ‘masculine'. Economics discourse has done this to ensure that what is 'masculine' remains dominant and holds power. Ferber and Nelson provided an alternative system where the 'masculine' is just one area of economics.

In a sexist culture they [‘feminine’ characteristics] are denigrated, sometimes even by women themselves, and largely excluded from mainstream thinking...we challenged the view that the ‘masculine’ topics are inherently more worthy...we challenged the definitions of economics based...[on] markets and suggested instead a definition centred on the provisioning of human life (2003, 1).

Ferber and Nelson argue that mainstream economics promotes the ‘masculine’ regardless of the impact on society. Ferber and Nelson’s writing is relevant to human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights it challenges the mainstream economic assumption that the markets and their capital are the foundation of society. They pose an alternative set of priorities based on ensuring an equal standard of living for everyone.

 Paula England (2003) in her chapter “Separative and Soluble Selves: Dichotomous Thinking in Economics” constructs her argument around a concept of the ‘separative/soluble’ self to argue that it is used in economics in a gendered way to ensure women’s subordination to men both in the workplace and at home. England notes that “economists have had one notion of the self for market behaviours [where] individuals are atomised and self-interested, with preferences that no one can change”but simultaneously inseparable from 'the family' at home and completely dependent on it (England, 2003, 33). As a result a dichotomy is created between an “extreme separative” and “extreme soluble” view of the self (England, 2003, 33). England refutes the plausibility of such a dichotomous self, one which is, within the family, "emotionally connective" yet in the market is "selfish, unable to empathize with those outside of the family" (England, 2003, 48).

England argues that mainstream economic theory concentrates on the 'separatist' self and “ignores the inexorable interdependency of human life and the importance for human wellbeing of connection” (England, 2003, 34). The dichotomous self is necessary in neoliberal economics so that the 'separatist' self can be elevated and the 'soluble' self repressed. This elevation and repression mean that the market can pursue its self-interested goals and disregard everything external to it.

The dichotomous self is significant for feminists because it leads to a division in experience between male and female people. The 'separatist' self is 'masculine' and the 'soluble' self is 'feminine'. England recounts one area of feminist theory which argues that women have been excluded from roles in political office, the military, and religious leadership because they require the ‘separate self’ (2003, 35). Such exclusion is meaningful as these positions have “the largest rewards of honour, power, and money” (England, 2003, 35). By maintaining the notion that particular roles require a ‘separatist’ self and that this self is inherently ‘male’ it has been possible to exclude women from them. Women's exclusion from these roles in the UK, though not absolute, is still significant as evidenced by *Sex and Power* *2013* (Counting Women In, 2013). The extent to which these men are reliant on and connected to women has been repressed.

England (2003, 36) notes one branch of feminism which believes in women's right to enter 'men's' roles. These feminists are, thus, advocating the autonomous self and arguing women should inhabit it. The problem with this is that the articulation of the dichotomous self will not be altered by women entering the 'separatist' roles (England, 2003, 36). Women are simply entering the ‘masculine’ world which does not value any of the qualities associated with the 'soluble' self and the 'feminine'. Autonomy and self-striving is part of the structure of 'masculine' roles which will not be altered by the gender of the individuals who work within it. England (2003, 36) argues that allowing women to do 'masculine' roles will not result in a more equal society which recognises the needs and contributions of both the 'separative' and the 'soluble' self. Equality between 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics remains elusive.

England then highlights another branch of feminist thought which emphasises the way in which women’s traditional roles have been undervalued.

The sexism here is in failing to see how traditionally female activities or dispositions contribute to the economy, society, or polity. Examples include failing to see how much child rearing, household work, and volunteer work contribute to the ‘wealth of nations’ (England, 2003, 36).

The contribution unpaid care work makes to the economy is not recognised by neoliberal capitalism and its dichotomous self. England argues that this branch of thought can be seen as “valorising connection as an ideal” and rejecting self-interested market-driven 'separateness' (England, 2003, 36).

 England's thesis goes further than either of the branches of feminism she employs and argues that the 'dichotomy' is a false conception. England argues that there is no split self, that both the market and the family require “both altruistic and narrowly self-interested motives” (England, 2003, 35). England (2003, 53) asserts that the dichotomous self "glorifies and exaggerates men’s autonomy outside the family" which "perpetuates women’s subordination to men in markets and the family". The extreme 'masculine' versus 'feminine' conception results in men holding the money and power and women caring for the family with no autonomy. England attests that feminism needs to reject the conception of the dichotomous self. It is only then that women and men will be equally valued and able to share money, power *and* family-based care work.

 In an analogous point England (2003, 40) notes that utility comparisons, that is comparing people's needs in a society, are not made within a neoliberal economic regime and describes the effect of this using an example:

This assumption leads one to question the merit of assistance to the large proportion of female-headed families who live in poverty. More generally, it denies us a theoretical basis for saying existing arrangements benefit some groups more than others or, specifically, men more than women (England, 2003, 42).

Comparisons imply a level of altruism towards others which is not possible given the requisite autonomy of the market. Not only does neoliberal economics exclude those not engaged in the market it also denies any basis for considering them by stating that such consideration is against the very basis of the market's philosophy so consequently no judgements of inequality can be made.

 Viewed from a feminist perspective the austerity measures are having a disproportionate impact on women because they are underpinned by an economic system which does not value the 'feminine'. A feminist approach would say that the government is serving the interests of a neoliberal economic model that does not want to 'pay' for people and processes extraneous to the market. The neoliberal model takes no account of what these people or processes may provide for society in other, non capital centred ways. The government does not want to have a welfare role in society because it believes the market should fulfil this role. To this ends the government is removing money from areas of society least associated with the market. Due to the patriarchal nature of a neoliberal economy the areas where money is being withdrawn are also those closely associated with the 'soluble' self with its 'feminine' characteristics, and where the dominant gender is female.

**Human Rights**

 In *Economic Policy and Human Rights: Holding Governments to Account* (2011) Radhika Balakrishnan and Diane Elson formulate a framework of how to examine whether a government’s economic policies are in line with their obligations to 'respect, protect and fulfil' economic and social rights. They note the dominance of neoliberal economies and a commitment to the markets as the best providers for society (Balakrishnan and Elson, 2011, 2) Balakrishnan and Elson explain how economics and human rights relate to each other:

Human rights have significant economic implications, since promoting, protecting and fulfilling them require resources and involve costs. In turn, economic policies have significant impacts on human rights; they shape the extent to which the economic and social rights of different groups of people are realized (2011, 3).

The authors make clear that it is not only laws that play an important role in human rights but also economics. The economic system a State follows can have significant impacts on the human rights its citizens enjoy.

Both progressive economists and human rights advocates challenge a vision of economic development that claims that remaining internationally competitive must be the key objective, despite growing inequality and increasing risk (Balakrishnan and Elson, 2011, 3).

In successful neoliberal capitalist economies a proportion of the population have greater realisation of human rights whilst others suffer significant human rights deprivations. This thesis argues that those who are less likely to have access to their rights are those who are less actively involved in the market and because of this are discriminated against by an economy which highly values the market. Balakrishnan and Elsonnote that human rights offers a space "in which to contest the hegemony of neoliberal economic policies” (Balakrishnan and Elson, 2011, 3). Like feminist economic theory, human rights can be used to challenge neoliberal economics and its belief that the market, left alone, will provide the best standard of living for all in society.

 Balakrishnan and Elson (2011, 12) argue that neoliberal policies to maximise economic growth "cannot be substituted for the goal of realising human rights" even when such growth may in turn 'provide' for the population. They use the analogy of a pie to describe the neoclassical economist's assumptions thus; increase the size of the pie, then it can be sliced and everyone will get a bigger slice (Balakrishnan and Elson, 2011, 12). However those who control the pie and gain most from its enlargement resist its distribution so many people will be no better off with a larger pie (Balakrishnan and Elson, 2011, 12). They were better off with a proportionally bigger slice of the smaller pie. Balakrishnan and Elson (2011, 12) note that "the way in which the pie is produced constrains the way in which it can be sliced". In order to achieve a greater quality of life for everyone you cannot simply produce more as not everyone is rewarded by this growth, the conditions of distribution would need to be centred on equality.

 Balakrishnan and Elson (2011, 12) contend that whilst States have obligations to their creditors, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, these obligations should not trump their human rights obligations, though they may affect their economic policies. Once the economic policies, and their human rights impacts, have been brought to light it becomes "important to change the ways in which economists evaluate policies, so that human rights take priority and economic growth, and economic efficiency, is pursued only in ways that are consistent with human rights" (Balakrishnan and Elson, 2011, 25). In the context of austerity in the UK the government must not pursue deficit reduction at the expense of human rights.

 Balakrishnan and Elson are not arguing on the "justiciability of economic and social rights" but they are "aiming to establish the extent to which there is a prima facie case that some policies may not be in compliance with human rights norms and standards" (Balakrishnan and Elson, 2011, 16). Similarly, this thesis does not set out to 'prove' policies as illegal under human rights law but to analyse, in detail, the ways in which economic policies of austerity may not be in line with international human rights standards.

**Poverty and Human Rights**

 Social protection systems including welfare payments are important for the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights in particular the 'right to an adequate standard of living' and the 'right to social security' (ICESCR). The UK government's commitment to a neoliberal economic agenda must not cause them to renege on their human rights obligations to provide social protections to people in need. Magdalena Sepúlveda and Carly Nyst (2012) aimed to develop a framework for understanding social protection systems in light of human rights obligations in *The Human Rights Approach to Social Protection*. They state that there are “clear and indisputable causal links between the violations of human rights, and the economic, social, cultural and political deprivations which characterise poverty” though poverty may not necessarily constitute a rights violation in itself (Sepúlveda and Nyst, 2012, 17). Poverty leaves people at a much greater risk of suffering from human rights violations given the interdependence of human rights and the vulnerability of people in poverty. Sepúlveda and Nyst assert:

States must ensure, at the very least, minimum essential levels of non-contributory social protection - not as a policy option, but rather as a legal obligation under international human rights law (2012, 13).

Although human rights do not dictate the exact policies governments implement (Sepúlveda and Nyst, 2012, 19) they must ensure that they are in line with human rights law. This obligation includes providing a 'minimum essential level' which can be used to "secure an adequate standard of living through basic subsistence, essential primary health care, basic shelter and housing, and basic forms of education...for all members of society” (Sepúlveda and Nyst, 2012, 18). In neoliberalism it is the markets which provide a standard of living for people but human rights dictates that where this fails to be the case the government must take up the responsibility.

Methodology

Primary research was conducted in order to test the hypothesis that as a result of austerity women with low incomes' right to food is being disproportionately negatively affected. The fieldwork took place over 3 days in August 2013. It involved semi-structured interviews with clients of two Trussell Trust Foodbanks in the London Borough of Bromley; Orpington and Bromley Foodbank.[[13]](#footnote-13) Foodbanks were used in the research as using a Foodbank is one indicator of food poverty and their use has dramatically increased since 2010 (The Trussell Trust, 2013a). However, the latest figures of Foodbank usage do not cover the time since April 2013 when significant welfare reforms were introduced and so the research aimed to discover if they had had any effect on food poverty. By visiting Foodbanks it would be possible to investigate whether the Foodbank's clients had been subject to welfare reforms, and if they had, whether it was these reforms that had lead to their food poverty.

 The Trussell Trust facilitated the research by locating suitable Foodbanks and liaising with the Foodbank managers. Bromley was a relevant Borough to study as it is one of only four London Boroughs where the Benefit Cap Pilot Scheme was implemented in April 2013.[[14]](#footnote-14) The research did not evaluate the The Trussell Trust Foodbank model or their alleviation of food poverty rather Foodbanks were used solely as sites for meeting people in food poverty.

 Foodbank clients were approached and asked if they would like to take part in the research. Full informed consent was used and each participant signed a consent form. In total 15 interviews were conducted. Interviews were not transcribed verbatim in their entirety due to client’s time constraints but verbatim quotes were taken and content transcription used at other times. In order to protect the anonymity of the Foodbank clients no personal details were recorded nor was any record of which Foodbank they had attended.

 No formal interviews with Foodbank volunteers took place therefore any discussions with them were not recorded.

Research Analysis: Austerity and Discrimination in the Right to Food

**Poverty**

 There are a variety of ways to calculate what counts as an acceptable standard of living. In the UK poverty is most commonly defined in relative terms, as an income at or below 60% of the median income (IFS, 2012). The median income of a couple with two children is currently £26,500 per year (ONS, 2013b) in the UK therefore a couple with two children would be in poverty if they had an income of £15,900 per year (£331 per week) or less. Using data from the IFS (2012) report "Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK : 2012", Chris Cross and Simon Rogers (2012) produced an online tool which works out the relative wealth of households depending on size and income.[[15]](#footnote-15) The tool calculates that a single adult living alone lives in poverty when their income is £9000 per year (£188 per week) or less whilst for a single parent with two children under 14 the poverty threshold is £14500 per year (£302 per week) (Cross and Rogers, 2012).

 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) annually releases a report detailing a 'Minimum Income Standard' (MIS) for the UK. The MIS reflects the necessary income level "in order to reach a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in the UK today, based on what the public think" (JRF, 2013, 8) and is defined by the JRF thus:

A minimum standard of living in Britain today includes, but is more than just, food, clothes and shelter. It is about having what you need in order to have the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society (JRF, 2013, 8)

The MIS is "about more than survival" but "covers needs not wants; necessities not luxuries" (JRF, 2013, 8). In the 2013 report the MIS for a single adult was set at £272.86 per week, for other family types the figures are based on the Minimum Income Calculator[[16]](#footnote-16) and dependent on the age of children (JRF, 2013). For example; a couple with two children of primary school age need £564.72 net income per week according to the MIS.

 The ICESCR allows for 'progressive realisation' of ESC rights but the CESCR noted in General Comment 3 on the Nature of States Parties Obligations (1990) "that a minimum core obligation to ensure the satisfaction of, at the very least, minimum essential levels of each of the rights is incumbent upon every State party". These 'minimum essential core obligations' as described in the ICESCR are based on the specific State concerned[[17]](#footnote-17) and are, therefore, different depending on the wealth of the State. As the UK is ranked the 6th richest country in the world in terms of GDP (World Bank, 2013) the poverty line or even the slightly higher MIS is a reasonable measure of the 'minimum essential levels' required by ICESCR.[[18]](#footnote-18) Therefore living in poverty, or even below the MIS is likely to affect people's enjoyment of Article 11(1) 'the right to an adequate standard of living including adequate food, clothing and housing' (UNGA, 1966).

 Research was carried out in two Foodbanks for the thesis in order to interview people in food poverty.[[19]](#footnote-19) It is important to note that the research is not an absolute measure of food poverty; Foodbanks are just one way of measuring food poverty; there may be many other people in food poverty who do not attend Foodbanks. The research can only account for what was recorded at the time and does not propose to give a comprehensive assessment of food poverty in Bromley. During the research period 31 people visited the Foodbanks studied, 74% of these were women and 26% men. A relatively small sample was taken consisting of 15 Foodbank clients, 11 women and 4 men. Although this thesis concentrates on the experiences of women, the research also sought to take male Foodbank users into account for purposes of comparison. However, due to the fewer number of men using the Foodbank it was not possible to interview an equal number of men and women, this in itself indicates that more women are affected by food poverty or that women were more likely to take the responsibility for acquiring food. Single parent households made up almost half of the research sample.[[20]](#footnote-20) Of the 7 single parents surveyed, 6 were female and only 1 was male. The high proportion of single parents is in line with existing data which shows that single parents are more likely to live in poverty,[[21]](#footnote-21) 92% of whom are women (ONS, 2011).

 Interviewees were asked to choose a current income per week from 11 ranges provided in order to determine whether they would be classified as living in poverty. The income group most commonly selected was £50-£100 per week with 2 interviewees reporting that their current income was as low as less than £50 per week. Interviewees were asked to state whether this income had changed at all over the past 3 years. 12 interviewees reported that their income had decreased over the last 3 years, 2 interviewees reported it had not changed and 1 did not know. The research found that all of the interviewee's income indicated they were living in relative poverty even considering their household type and size.[[22]](#footnote-22) These findings are not surprising given that people accessing a Foodbank would be expected to have a low income but they are important here as they indicate that having a low income means you are highly vulnerable to food poverty. Moreover it shows that even if people are using a Foodbank as a result of money mismanagement they are unlikely to have had a sufficient income to live on in the first place. None of the interviewees had an income which was in line with the MIS (JRF, 2013), indicating that none would be able to attain a 'minimum standard of living' as identified by the JRF research (2013) from their stated income.

 The *Context* section of this thesis established that as a result of discrimination women are more likely than men to live in poverty. The research findings were in line with this evidence as most of the Foodbank clients were women and most of them were single parents. In addition the research found that 12 out of 15 interviewees' income had gone down over the past 3 years. What the research now aims to show is that the reduction interviewees experienced resulted in their food poverty and that the reduction was due to austerity-driven welfare reforms.

**Food**

In General Comment 12 on the right to food CESCR state:

Whenever an individual or group is unable, for reasons beyond their control, to enjoy the right to adequate food by the means at their disposal, States have the obligation to *fulfil (provide)* that right directly. (CESCR, 1999, 5)

CESCR states that "adequacy" is "determined by prevailing social, economic, cultural, climatic, ecological and other conditions" and that the right to food entails both "physical" and "economic access" (1999, 3). The 'prevailing culture' of food consumption in the UK is very diverse but it is usual to eat three times a day. Meals often include fresh meat, fish and vegetables alongside a carbohydrate and access to this range of food is culturally expected. In other words a diet not containing a balance of these items would not be in line with the prevailing food culture in the UK. CESCR also state that the core content of the right to food "implies the availability of food in a quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals" (1999, 3). Even though the UK has experienced a recession it still has a very strong economic position and provides, for some, a very high standard of living.[[23]](#footnote-23)

 In February 2013 the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter delivered a lecture at Doughty Street Chambers, London, in which he detailed three ways food poverty manifests itself in the context of rich countries. He stated firstly that, "people cut down on meals thereby reducing the expenses raised by food" (De Schutter, 2013). Secondly people cut down on certain foods and "eat poorer diets" (De Schutter, 2013) and thirdly if they are still unable to manage people go to a Foodbank (De Schutter, 2013). This thesis' research found that interviewee's right to food was affected via all three of the strands Olivier De Schutter describes. Almost all interviewees had missed meals, almost all had cut down on certain fresh food, and all were using a Foodbank.

 In the research interviewees were asked the same questions in relation to the time since and the time before their income changed (if participants had reported income change previously in their interview). The 3 interviewees for whom there had been either no change to their income or they were not sure were asked to think of their answers in relation to the time since 2010 and before 2010. The 'before and after' approach was used to try to ascertain whether the change in income had resulted in their food poverty as opposed to something which pre-dated it. This method was employed to avoid directly asking interviewees whether their food poverty was due to austerity which may have biased the research.

Figure 2.

The chart (Figure 2.) above shows the discrepancy between interviewees' experience of food poverty in the time before and after their income changed. When asked; 'since the change has there ever been a day when there was no food in your house and you could not afford to buy any' 10 interviewees answered 'yes' while only 3 stated this was true of the time before their income changed. One interviewee reported:

*"That happens quite regularly, it has happened 5 or 6 times recently"*

When asked 'since the changes to your income have you ever missed meals because you could not afford food?' 12 interviewees said 'yes' while just 3 reported they had ever done this before their income changed. One interviewee commented:

*"I always miss breakfast and at least one other meal a week"*

Whilst one single mother said:

*"I'll just have a cup of coffee, if I can have a coffee I can manage, as long as I can feed the kids properly"*

12 interviewees reported that since the change to their income they had 'gone hungry'[[24]](#footnote-24) - apart from the meals they missed - due to the cost of food. Just 4 interviewees reported they had ever gone hungry before their income changed. Although all interviewees were obviously using a Foodbank just 4 reported they had done so before their income changed. No interviewees had used a Foodbank before 2010. Many interviewees reported that their access to food was particularly difficult immediately before they came to the Foodbank that day. For instance, 12 interviewees reported they had missed meals in the last week while 5 reported they had missed 'more than 7' meals in the last week. The statements made by interviewees testify to the severity of their food poverty:

*"I've missed 1 or 2 meals everyday in the last week, it's been really bad"*

*"I've only eaten twice in the last week"*

One single mother reported:

*"I never have breakfast and I've only had 1 lunch this week so the kids can have more"*

Whilst another working mother's comments on her food consumption were particularly striking:

*"I don't usually eat until tea time. I have a meal with the children then, so that we can all sit down, but I don't usually eat before that. If there are sandwiches and things leftover from meetings at work I'll have those, but usually nothing."*

These statements highlight the particular impact of food poverty on families with children. 9 out of 15 interviewees were women with children, 5 of whom reported sacrificing meals so their children could eat sufficiently. The research findings are in line with research by Netmums (2012) which showed that 1 in 5 mothers missed meals in order to feed their families. 11 interviewees also reported they had, apart from the missed meals, 'gone hungry' in the last week with 5 reporting they had done this 'more than 7' times. Similarly, in the last month 11 interviewees had missed meals and 11 had 'gone hungry'. The research clearly shows that interviewees faced difficulties in access adequate food. Although physically available,[[25]](#footnote-25) food was not accessible to most interviewees in a 'quantity sufficient for their needs'[[26]](#footnote-26) due to economic constraints.

 CESCR state that it is not solely access to food that is crucial to enjoyment of the right to food but that the "core content of the right" also demands "the accessibility of such food in ways that are sustainable and that do not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights" (1999, 3). They go on to note that “sustainability” incorporates the notion of "long-term availability and accessibility" (1999, 3). The research found that 6 interviewees had used a Foodbank 5 times in the last 3 years, repeated use of a Foodbank shows that interviewees found it difficult to access a sustainable food source.[[27]](#footnote-27)

 De Schutter (2013) characterised the difference between the type of provision offered by a Foodbank (a non-governmental source) and government programmes in terms of the right to food thus:

The significant difference between these different ways of getting food is that people have the right to claim certain benefits from the government who in turn have a duty to fulfil what legislation provides for...We should not forget that Foodbanks are testimony to the failure of public authorities to deliver on the right to food.

The government have a legal duty to ensure people can access food under ICESCR Article 11(1), the existence of Foodbanks does not absolve them of this duty. According to De Schutter (2013), as Foodbanks are "dependent on goodwill" they should not "become a substitute for more robust social protection programmes in affluent societies" as it is the government who are responsible for fulfilling the right to food. In addition, De Schutter (2013) stated that there may be many people unable to access Foodbanks due to "geographical limitations" and "shame" which inhibits their enjoyment of the right to food in the absence of a sufficient government system. The shame or embarrassment people may feel at accepting a charitable 'handout' was detectable from the research presented here. One interviewee who was a working mother said:

*"It doesn't get any easier coming in here, the people here are so nice, but it really doesn't get any easier, you feel ashamed."*

Such shame should not be a part of trying to obtain the right to food and undermines the concept of food as a right.

 CESCR in General Comment 12 (1999) note that , although the composition of diets may need to change at certain times, State parties should ensure "that changes in availability and access to food supply as a minimum do not negatively affect dietary composition and intake" (CESCR, 1999, 3). CESCR's statement links to De Schutter's second manifestation of food poverty, poorer diets. He asserts that people "will be considered food poor if they cannot afford, every 2 days, to eat fish, meat, or poultry" (De Schutter, 2013). People's access to certain food types since their income changed was studied in this thesis' research. It found that 14 out of 15 interviewees cut fresh fish from their meals, 11 had to cut out fresh meat and 5 had to cut out cheese due to the high cost of these items. In addition 4 interviewees reported they were forced to cut out fresh fruit and vegetables from their diet due to cost, whilst 6 more had to limit them. The research found that 14 out of 15 interviewees 'bought more processed food than they would otherwise' due to the greater affordability of such food over fresh produce. These findings raise serious concerns in terms of the right to food. Almost all of the interviewees had a 'poor diet' in De Schutter's (2013) conception and had to restrict 'their dietary composition and intake' which CESCR (1999) asserted was not in line with the right to food.

 De Schutter (2013) argues that people have more control over their expenditure on food at a household level than they do over other costs. He explains that whilst people do not "easily renounce on food expenses" their reducibility may mean that people spend significantly less on food, and eat poorer diets, to pay the rent or energy bills (De Schutter, 2013). CESCR also raise the issue of balancing the cost of food with other living costs.

Economic accessibility implies that personal or household financial costs associated with the acquisition of food for an adequate diet should be at a level such that the attainment and satisfaction of other basic needs are not threatened or compromised (CESCR, 1999, 4).

The indivisibility of rights means that accessing the right to food should not undermine other rights, namely the other strands of the right to an adequate standard of living; adequate housing and clothing. In 'General Comment 4 on the right to adequate housing' (1991) CESCR note that an "adequate house must contain certain services necessary for must contain certain facilities essential for health, security, comfort and nutrition" including "sustainable access" to "energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation and washing facilities" (CESCR, 1991, 3). 14 interviewees reported that since their income has changed they have been forced to choose between paying for bills and buying food:

*"I pay for bills first and then see what's left for food"*

*"I prioritise my bills even when I have no food, its just grief if you don't pay"*

*"Now I prioritise my heating bills over food, they went up in January when it was really cold from £120 to £200, I tried to do without the heating but I have arthritis so the cold made it worse. I had to put my heating on but couldn't pay the bills"*

As almost all interviewees have had to choose between essential bills and buying food it is likely they have not had 'sustainable' access to the 'energy required for cooking, heating and lighting' at some point *or* if they have, then their access to food has suffered. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) report in "Living standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2012" that the inability to heat your house is the strongest indicator of material deprivation (IFS, 2012, 104). 11 interviewees reported that the change to their income had negatively affected their ability to keep their house warm in winter, a situation they tried to alleviate by skipping meals and reducing food expenditure. The right to food cannot be fulfilled if the right to adequate housing suffers as a result; access to one cannot impinge on another if either is to be fulfilled.

 It is possible to conclude from the research analysis so far that the interviewees all had a low income such that they lived 'in poverty' and that as a result of this poverty they were unable to afford sufficient food.[[28]](#footnote-28) In other words their right to food was inhibited by their situation of poverty. It can also be said that the interviewees all lived below the MIS and thereby could not attain an 'adequate standard of living' as defined by the JRF (2013). The research analysis also showed that a change in the interviewees' income, within the last 3 years, was the critical factor in their inability to access food. Figure 2. visualises the radical change in interviewee's experience of access to food before and after their change in income. The crucial question which remains unanswered is whether austerity had any bearing on the change in income which led to interviewees' food poverty.

**Austerity**

 So far the research analysis has shown that 12 interviewees' difficulty in accessing adequate food was a result of a change in their income which has occurred within the last three years. Crucially for this thesis 6 interviewees stated 'yes, completely' when asked if the change was related to their welfare payments, 2 men and for women. 2 interviewees answered 'yes, partly' whilst 4 answered 'no' and 3 did not know or had experienced no change. Loss of employment, pay cuts and relationship breakdowns were also factors which caused income changes. All 6 interviewees (4 women and 2 men) whose income change was solely related to welfare payments reported that the change was 'highly significant', meaning it had a notable impact on their lives. The 6 interviewees reported that the change had occurred in April 2013 which correlates with the implementation of the most dramatic austerity driven changes to the welfare system.

 The WBG (2010) produced a series of charts which looks at the effect of the 2010 Spending Review on 6 different household types. When the losses are looked at solely in cash terms, single parents and couples with children lose about the same amount (although single parents still lose slightly more) (WBG, 2010, 6). However, when the losses are shown as a percentage of existing income single parents lose much more significantly (WBG, 2010, 7). According to the charts, single parents will lose 18.5% of their income whereas couples with children will lose 7.5% (WBG, 2010, 7). Female single pensioners suffer the 2nd largest loss with 11% of their existing income lost but this is still significantly less than single parents. The four other family types analysed lose less than 10% of their existing income (WBG, 2010, 7). These charts show that single parent households who already had the lowest incomes have paid proportionately more than other households for austerity.

 A report released by the Children's Commissioner (2013) supports the data of the WBG and this paper's claims, as it asserts that those on lower incomes will be affected most by the austerity-driven changes to benefits.

Looking at impact of tax and benefit reforms by income decile the reforms are shown to be strongly regressive with low-income families with children losing more as a percentage of net income than high income families (Children's Commissioner, 2013, 10).

This data strengthens this paper's claim that people who are already on low incomes are more affected by austerity as single parents are more likely to live in poverty (Gingerbread, 2010).

**The Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax**

 In April 2013 the government introduced several austerity measures; a total cap on benefits, benefit eligibility reduction to reflect family size (Bedroom Tax), they abolished Council Tax Benefit, and linked the indexation of benefits to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than the Retail Price Index (RPI) (Pickard, Cadman and Nevitt, 2011). The first three of these measures have an immediate effect which varies at the household level while the change in indexation has a much more gradual effect which will not be detectable at the household level after only a few months, thus its effect is not dealt with using case studies but will be discussed later.

 The research found that 4 interviewees' incomes had been reduced by the Benefit Cap. One was a woman in a couple with 5 children. Whilst the other was in a couple and had 7 children, she was also affected by the abolition of Council Tax Benefit. One single man affected by the Benefit Cap was also subject to the Bedroom Tax. The last interviewee affected by the Benefit Cap was a single man with a disability. In addition a single mother with 2 children was affect by the Bedroom Tax. The other interviewee affected directly by an austerity measure was a single woman with a disability who was affected by the abolition of Council Tax Benefit. The mother of 5 described:

*"We got our benefits capped in April; we lost £90 a week which was specifically my food budget. It made a huge difference, after the Benefit Cap I was in dire straits, 1 jar of baby food is all I had in the cupboard."*

The Benefit Cap directly affected the family's ability to afford food as the money budgeted for it was taken away. The interviewee reported that the Benefit Cap meant the family had to go into debt with their rent so that they could buy food. The interviewee also reported that she and her partner had missed meals since the Benefit Cap in order for their children to eat sufficiently on a much reduced budget.

 The interviewee with 7 children reported that her income went down in April 2013 by 25% due to the Benefit Cap and the loss of Council Tax Benefit. She reported that she was required, for the first time, to pay a £165 bill for Council Tax. In addition her Child Tax Credit was reduced to £128 per month and she lost milk tokens worth £49.60 per month. At the time of interviewing her family were still waiting to hear whether they will be subject to the Bedroom Tax. The interviewee had come to the Foodbank 5 times since April and stated that the Benefit Cap "*made a lot of difference, it really hit hard*". The interviewee's income change was completely related to welfare payments and had caused her to miss 2 meals in the last week. In addition she reported 'going hungry' "*a lot of times, more than 7",* in the last week as she would "*rather give it to the kids."* Both of these interviewees affected by the Benefit Cap had large families who received higher benefits in line with the number of children they had. The Benefit Cap undermines the basis of welfare as a system based on need and instead applies a blanket upper figure to welfare amounts regardless of family size. Such a measure will inevitably affect larger families more severely and could lead to increases in child poverty.

 A single man affected by the Benefit Cap and the Bedroom Tax stated that before the measures were introduced life was difficult due to the rise in living costs out of line with welfare levels. But the Bedroom Tax had pushed him into severe poverty which negatively affected his access to food.

*"It was the Bedroom Tax that did for me; I got into loads of debt with rent and am still feeling the effects. That's the reason I am here* [at the Foodbank]*"*

The interviewee reported that his income reduced by more than 25% after the Bedroom Tax and Benefit Cap and so he got into debt before he was able to move into a 1 bedroom flat. He had lived in a 3 bedroom house but had 'surplus' rooms since his sons had moved out. The interviewee said he was *"lucky"* as he was able to stay in the same area where he had family and social ties. Despite no longer having to pay the Bedroom Tax the debt he incurred and his continued low income affected his ability to afford food.

 The other interviewee affected by the Benefit Cap was a single man with a disability. Although not an issue examined in this thesis the particular impact of austerity on people with disabilities warrants attention.[[29]](#footnote-29) The Benefit Cap reduced his income by 20-30% as he lost £40 a week from Income Support. In addition, he was waiting to hear if his disability had to be reassessed in the changeover from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) which he understood, could incur further income losses. The interviewee reported that the £40 reduction made a big difference as it was "*the gas and electric amount*" and therefore he had since had to choose between paying for these bills - as well as other bills and costs incurred in hospital - and paying for food. Since the Benefit Cap the interviewee has used a Foodbank 3 times. He missed breakfast everyday and *"at least 1 other meal a week".* When asked if he had ever 'gone hungry' since the Benefit Cap he replied:

*"Nearly every day I eat less than I would like to in order to save it for the next day".*

It is clear, therefore, that the Benefit Cap negatively affected the interviewee's access to food as it reduced his income such that he found it difficult to afford.

 Another interviewee who is a single mother with 2 children under 2 was informed she had 1 bedroom too many under the Bedroom Tax policy in April 2013. At the same time the interviewee missed a benefit-related appointment and her Income Support was stopped completely. The interviewee reported that she was suddenly without enough money to pay any bills or buy food so she was forced to use the Foodbank. The interviewee appealed the Bedroom Tax decision successfully and has recently arranged for her Income Support to be reinstated but is still waiting to receive any payments. Whilst the interviewee's reduction in income was not solely due to austerity this case highlights the potential impact of suddenly reducing the income of someone who is dependent on welfare payments.

Child Benefit Freeze

 As 11 of the research participants were parents the research it is instructive to look at an austerity measure with an extensive reach and a long-term effect to understand how it may impact on the right to food of people living in poverty. The government imposed a freeze on the rate of Child Benefit from April 2011 to April 2014 as part of their austerity programme (Fawcett Society, 2012, 25). The Fawcett Society (2012, 25) report that, when inflation and the rising cost of living are accounted for the freeze represents a cut in the value of Child Benefit of over 10% by 2014. They stress that this not only means that the value of Child Benefit decreases within those years but it does so permanently as the cost of living continues to rise which "reduces the income of nearly all mothers" (The Fawcett Society, 2012, 25). The Fawcett Society (2012, 25) also highlight that this austerity measure is likely to impact disproportionately on families with low incomes as Child Benefit forms a larger proportion of their income. The research showed that all 15 interviewees were in receipt of income-based benefit and/or tax credits whilst 11 were also in receipt of Child Benefit which is not income assessed.[[30]](#footnote-30) So even though the interviewees were in receipt of income-assessed benefits they were still living in relative poverty.[[31]](#footnote-31) 5 of the Child Benefit recipients had more than 2 children and so the freeze is likely to have affected them significantly, contributing to their low income and, thus, their food poverty.[[32]](#footnote-32)

 One interviewee, a single mother who worked part time and also received Child Benefit for her 4 children stated that she felt her income had not changed over the past 3 years but the value of it had decreased. Her statement is supported by the statistics which show that food prices have risen 30.5% in the last 5 years whilst the minimum wage level has increased by just 12.1% in the same period (Oxfam, 2012, 3). A freeze in Child Benefit over the last 2 years, then, will cause the value of recipient's income to decrease. The interviewee also stated that her welfare payments do not reflect the fact that as her children grow older the costs associated with them increase, like eating more food and the increased expense of clothing. Another interviewee, a single mother, corroborated the view that benefit levels are set too low. She stated that 5 years ago it was much better but now "*benefits seemed to have remained the same and felt very minimal*". The government have exacerbated the impact of the stark rise in food prices by freezing Child Benefit at a time when people who depend on it most were likely to be already struggling to afford food. The 170% rise in the number of people using Foodbanks from 2011/12 to 2012/13 is testament to the government's failure to adequately address food poverty (The Trussell Trust, 2013a). From April 2012 to April 2013 36.6% or 126, 899 Foodbank users were children (The Trussell Trust, 2013a). These figures show that many parents are unable to feed their children adequately, a situation which, if not completely caused by, can only be exacerbated by, the freeze to Child Benefit. Such findings strongly indicate that current benefit levels are inadequate as a social protection system if its recipients still live in poverty. Sepúlveda and Nyst (2012, 15) assert that from a human rights perspective "benefit levels must be adequate to improve the standard of living of the beneficiaries." Freezing the rate of Child Benefit undermines this requirement and together with the rising cost of living and reductions in other benefits could cause retrogression rather than an improvement in recipient's standard of living. If people are still living in poverty such that they cannot access adequate food despite their receipt of government benefits then questions are raised as to the compatibility of the particular social protection system the government has chosen with the right to food.

**Research Conclusion**

The primary research conducted for this thesis found that all interviewees lived in poverty and this poverty negatively affected their enjoyment of the right to food. The research also documented that more women than men were affected by food poverty. For 12 out of 15 interviewees a decrease in their income in the last three years was the main factor which caused their food poverty. Crucially, in 6 cases this decrease in income was directly caused by austerity measures namely the Benefit Cap, the Bedroom Tax and the abolition of Council Tax Benefit. However what is striking is the severe impact the Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax had on the right to food of those interviewees who were subject to them. The loss of income resulted in severe food shortages such that people missed meals, cut down on the amount they ate, ate poorer quality diets, and had to seek Foodbank assistance.

 Although the research for this thesis did not show that women were more likely to be affected by the Benefit Cap or the Bedroom Tax, evidence such as that by the WBG (2010), the Fawcett Society (2012) and the Children's Commissioner (2013) does indicate that women are disproportionately affected by austerity overall. What the research does find is that austerity measures had a severe impact on interviewee's right to food. It can be deduced therefore that *overall* more women will suffer deprivations in the right to food as a result of austerity. The research attests to the need for further, more comprehensive research to be done with a much larger, more representative sample in order to accurately determine the impact of austerity on women's ability to access the right to food.

Conclusions:

We're not all in this together

This paper set out to test the theory that the effect of austerity in the UK is discriminatory against women on low incomes in relation to their right to food. The thesis began by outlining the Government's austerity measures with a focus on welfare reform. It detailed both the government's assessment of the impact of welfare reforms and the extensive body of research by NGOs which illustrates the disproportionate impact austerity has on women and people with low incomes. It also sought to indicate the concerns that austerity has raised with human rights academics and experts. In addition, the thesis situated these issues within the theoretical framework of an anti-neoliberal feminist perspective. Significantly, this paper has argued that the UK's austerity programme is affecting women on low incomes the most because it is driven by a neoliberal economic philosophy which is dedicated to the market and does not value people who do not fit in with its practices. Indeed, this paper has asserted that austerity is a product of a neoliberal economic agenda which does not account for the human rights of women and does not value their needs. As such women on low incomes have been particularly affected by austerity measures. The thesis accepted the existing research as demonstrable of the discriminatory effect of welfare reform on women and people with low incomes and sought not to reproduce this evidence. The thesis sought to build on this research on it by focusing on the right to food as enshrined in ICESCR Article 11(1) and investigating the effect of austerity on the right to food of women with low incomes. Research was carried out at Foodbanks in the London Borough of Bromley in the form of semi-structured interviews and the discussion section of the thesis was based on these findings. This primary research found that interviewees subject to the Bedroom Tax and the Benefit Cap were unable to access their right to food as a result and were forced to eat less, eat poorer diets and use a Foodbank. Interviewees reported the serious difficulties in being able to afford food alongside other basic living costs. In addition it found that even in the absence of these measures welfare payments to interviewees did not ensure that food was economically accessible to them. The research found that 11 out of 15 interviewees were parents of dependent children indicating that the Child Benefit Freeze may have contributed to these interviewees' inability to afford adequate food.

 A key finding of the research was that in 6 cases the interviewee's food poverty was a direct result of austerity. A reduction in their income from the Benefit Cap, the Bedroom Tax or the abolition of Council Tax Benefit meant they were unable to afford sufficient food. Of those interviewed, austerity had directly affected the right to food of 4 women and 2 men. The research was inconclusive as to whether women's right to food has been disproportionately affected by austerity compared to men's as the research sample was too limited. Although the number of women whose right to food was affected by austerity is larger, it was not significant as more women than men were spoken to in the research. Therefore the higher number of women affected by austerity is not disproportionate to the number who were researched.

 However, the prevailing evidence - as previously referred to and outlined in the *Context* section - that women, especially those on low incomes, are disproportionately negatively affected by austerity measures and the strong indications - from the primary research presented here - that austerity measures are directly affecting people's right to food, indicates that women's right to food could be disproportionately affected. Further research with a more comprehensive sample is warranted. The government must, as a matter of priority, conduct thorough research to ensure its austerity-driven welfare reforms are not negatively affecting people's right to food. The government must investigate the steep annual increases in Foodbank usage since 2010 and ensure their obligations to fulfil citizen's right to food under ICESCR Article 11(1) are fully realised. Furthermore, in light of the research presented here, the government must examine whether their welfare reforms, namely the Benefit Cap and the Bedroom Tax are negatively affecting people's right to food and mitigate their impact accordingly. The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, Raquel Rolnik, visited the UK during this thesis' writing period. She noted that the package of welfare reforms had impacted on "a number of human rights, but especially the right to adequate housing" (OHCHR, 2013). The Special Rapporteur recommended the Bedroom Tax be "suspended immediately" in light of "the serious impacts on very vulnerable people [that] have already been felt" (OHCHR, 2013). The preliminary findings of the Special Rapporteur attest to this thesis' claim that austerity measures raise serious human rights concerns. Finally, it is most pressing, considering the wealth of evidence detailing the disproportionate effect of austerity on women, to ascertain whether their right to food is also being disproportionately impaired. Evidence indicates that the potential for discrimination against women on low incomes, in the right to food, is significant, this issue must be comprehensively researched by the UK government to ensure its economic policies are in line with its human rights obligations under the ICESCR.

Appendices

Research Interview Structure

How many people live in your household?

 How many of these members are dependent children?

What is your current total income per week?

<£50

£50-£100

£100-£150

£150-£200

£200-£250

£250-£300

£300-£350

£350-£400

£400-£450

£450-£500

>£500

Do you receive any benefits?

Housing Benefit

Child Benefit

Income Support

JSA

ESA

Other, please specify

Do you receive any tax credits?

Has your income level changed over the past 3 years?

It has gone down by 10%

It has gone down by 25%

It has gone down by >25%

It has not changed

It has gone up by 10%

It has gone up by 25%

It has gone up by >25%

Further comments:

When did it change most significantly? (1 yr ago, 2yrs ago, 1 month ago, when a particular event occurred)

Do you expect it to change further over the next 3 years?

I expect it to go down by 10%

I expect it to go down by 25%

I expect it to go down by >25%

I do not expect it to change

I expect it to go up by 10%

I expect it to go up by 25%

I expect it to go up by >25%

I am unsure whether it will change

Further comments:

Are any of the changes in your income related to changes in your benefits?

Yes completely

Yes partly

Unsure

No it’s mostly due to other factors

No it’s completely due to other factors

Further comments:

How much of the change you have experienced would you say is due to benefit changes?

100%

75%

50%

25%

10%

Have your benefits changed due to any of the following measures?

Benefit cap

Bedroom tax



Income Support eligibility reduction

Of the changes in your income from benefits how significant would you say the change is?

Highly significant

Significant

Neither significant nor insignificant

Insignificant

I am not sure

Further comments:

Are there any other factors which have resulted in changes to your income?

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WILL ASK ABOUT FOOD

Have the changes in your income **from benefits** affected your ability to afford food?

Yes, definitely

Yes, somewhat

Not really

Not at all

I am unsure

Further comments:

Did you use a foodbank/did you feel you needed one/did you get other help from family friends etc with buying food before your income changed?

Yes, definitely

Yes, sometimes

Not really

Not at all

I am unsure



Did you use a food bank/did you feel you needed one/did you get other help from family friends etc with buying food before 2010?

How many times have you visited a food bank?

1

2

3

Do you still find it difficult to afford enough food even with the food bank service?

All the time

Often

Sometimes

Never

Since the change to your income from benefits has there ever been a day where there was no food in the house and you could not afford to buy any?

Yes

No

If yes: How many days? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7+

Before the change to your income from benefits was there ever a day where there was no food in the house and you could not afford to buy any?

Yes

No

If yes: How many days? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7+

Since the change to your income from benefits have you had to choose between paying for bills and buying food?

Yes

No

If yes: How many times? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7+

Which bills?

Before the change to your income from benefits did you ever have to choose between paying for bills and buying food?

Yes

No

If yes: How many times? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7+

Which bills?

Since the changes to your income from benefits have you missed meals because you cannot afford enough food?

Yes

No

If yes: How many meals? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7+

Since the changes to your income from benefits have you gone hungry because you cannot afford enough food?

Yes

No

If yes: How many times? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7+

Before the changes to your income from benefits did you ever miss meals because you could not afford enough food?

Yes

No

If yes: How many meals? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7+

Before the changes to your income from benefits did you ever go hungry because you could not afford enough food?

Yes

No

If yes: How many times? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7+

In the last week have you missed meals because you cannot afford enough food?

Yes

No

If yes: How many meals? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7+

In the last week have you gone hungry because you cannot afford enough food?

Yes

No

If yes: How many times? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7+

In the last month have you missed meals because you cannot afford enough food?

Yes

No

If yes: How many meals? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 14+

In the last month have you gone hungry because you cannot afford enough food?

Yes

No

If yes: How many times? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 14+

Do you do any of the following due to the cost of food?

Cut out fresh meat

Cut out fresh fish

Cut out cheese

Cut out fresh fruit

Cut out fresh vegetables

Limit fresh fruit

Limit fresh vegetables

Buy more processed food than you would otherwise

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WILL ASK ABOUT HOUSING

Do you currently own, rent privately or live in accommodation provided by the council/a social housing association?

Has the change in your income **related to benefits** affected your housing situation?

Has the change in your income **related to benefits** affected your ability to keep your home warm in winter and cool in summer?

Yes, definitely

Yes, somewhat

Not really

Not at all

I am unsure

Has the change in your income **related to benefits** affected your ability to keep your home in good repair?

Yes, definitely

Yes, somewhat

Not really

Not at all

I am unsure

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WILL ASK ABOUT CLOTHING AND OTHER ITEMS

Has the change in your income **related to benefits** affected your ability to buy necessary items such as; [if yes, in what way?]

**Clothing**

Yes, definitely

Yes, somewhat

Not really

Not at all

I am unsure

**Shoes**

Yes, definitely

Yes, somewhat

Not really

Not at all

I am unsure

**Cleaning materials**

Yes, definitely

Yes, somewhat

Not really

Not at all

I am unsure

**Birthday/Christmas presents for family members/close friends**

Yes, definitely

Yes, somewhat

Not really

Not at all

I am unsure

**Leisure equipment (a bike, trainers)**

Yes, definitely

Yes, somewhat

Not really

Not at all

I am unsure

**Have friends/family round for a meal**

Yes, definitely

Yes, somewhat

Not really

Not at all

I am unsure

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**Interviews**

Magdalena Sepúlveda. Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights. Palais des Nations, United Nations Office at Geneva. Tuesday 4th June 2013.

1. For example his speech at 2012 Tory party conference (ITN, 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Toynbee (2010) and Will Hutton's statements that "austerity is a discretionary act", with no basis in "necessity" (Hutton, 2013) for just 2 examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This hypothesis draws on evidence of discrimination against women and people on low incomes presented by The Fawcett Society (2012), the Women's Budget Group (2010), the TUC (2010) and many other reports. In order to avoid repeating the findings of such research this thesis develops their findings in relations to the right to food. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Though not its official name this policy is commonly referred to as the 'Bedroom Tax' and will henceforth be referred to as such given the prevalence of this name. Where government literature is being directly referenced the official name will be used. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Will Hutton's evidence (Hutton*,* 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Groups such as UKUncut (2013) have focused on the existence of alternatives to cuts in public spending. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Domestic anti-discrimination law requires that they do so whilst international human rights law such as CEDAW Article 2 demands that governments address discrimination against women in law which implies a duty to insure any policies they implement are non-discriminatory. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This is popularly referred to as 'the bedroom tax' and will be henceforth referred to as such given the proliferation of this name. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Hereafter referred to as the bedroom tax due to the prevalence of the term over the policies official name. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. These include, but are not limited to doctors, social workers, or job centre advisers. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Such as laws, police, military (Harvey, 2005, 2) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Such as healthcare, land, water, education where they might not ordinarily exist (Harvey, 2005, 2) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Please see Appendices for the forms used to record the interviews [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The other 3 are Croydon, Enfield and Haringey. The benefit cap was then implemented in a 'phased' system beginning in July 2013 with the aim of being implemented in every local authority by September 2013 (DWP, 2013a) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The online tool was published in *The Guardian* and is a datablog under the series 'Breadline Britain' see bibliography for full blog citation. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This is an online tool for working out MIS for a particular family size and age range. It only includes the most common family types and so is not suitable in some instances. It was designed and is managed by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) and is funded by the JRF. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This is a principle of the 'progressive realisation' system of ESC rights and was stated as a correct interpretation of the obligations under ICESCR by Magdalena Sepúlveda (2013) in my interview with her. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The MIS was used as a measure of an 'adequate standard of living' in a report published by the Children's Commissioner (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Please note where 'the research' is referred to the primary research conducted for this thesis is being referred to. Secondary sources will always be referenced. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 7 out of 15 people interviewed were single parents. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Gingerbread (2010) report that children in single parent families are twice as likely to live in poverty as those living with a couple. They are likely to have lower incomes than couples even when working and make up 43% of social housing tenants. 75% of single parents claim housing benefit. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *The Guardian's* online tool was used to work this out where necessary. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. As previously noted it is ranked the 6th largest in GDP terms (World Bank, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This term was described as 'eaten less than you needed to' [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Shops in the UK are stocked with food. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Paraphrasing from previous reference (CESCR, 1993, 3) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Foodbanks are not sustainable sources of food they provide an emergency three day parcel which can only be sought three times in a row. This is an intention of the Trussell Trust system to prevent dependency and ensure a long-term solution is sought. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The 60% of median income definition of poverty is that one being used. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. There is existing research; see DisabilityRightsUK (2012) and Mansell (2010) as just 2 examples in-depth research on the effect of the Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax on people with disabilities are warranted if not being done. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Although there is a 'high income child benefit charge' if you have an income of £50,000 or above but, still, child benefits rates are fixed and not dependent on income. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Less than 60% of the median income. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. No one referred to the freeze specifically as it does not appear as a 'change' to the beneficiary, its effect accumulates over time. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)