

NEWS

Half a million people using food banks in UK as food poverty grows

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Around half a million people are facing poor health as a result of food poverty and are seeking help from food banks around the United Kingdom, a report claims.

The report from charities Oxfam and Church Action Poverty, published on 30 May, claims that the numbers of people thought to be in need of food aid to help them eat—in the form of food parcels and food banks—have been underestimated.

In the report *Walking the Breadline*,¹ the charities say that there has been a sharp rise in numbers of people turning to food banks in the past year. The report says that likely causes for this include changes to the benefit system, unemployment, increasing levels of underemployment, low and falling income, and rising food and fuel prices.

In April 2013, the Trussell Trust, a charity that is the biggest provider of food banks in the UK, said that more than 350 000 people turned to their food banks for help in the past year²—almost triple the number who received food aid in the previous year.

The new report, however, warns that the true number of people needing this help could be more than half a million, because the problem is not being monitored properly.

It says that poor families will experience the long term effects of food poverty because people forced to live on an inadequate diet have a significantly increased risk of developing serious health conditions such as cancer, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.

The charities called for an urgent parliamentary inquiry into the association between benefit delay, error or sanctions, welfare reform changes, and the growth of food poverty.

Niall Cooper, Church Action on Poverty national coordinator and report lead author, said: “The safety net that was there to protect people is being eroded to such an extent that we are seeing a rise in hunger. Food banks are not designed to, and should not, replace the ‘normal’ safety net provided by the state in the form of welfare support.”

- 1 Oxfam. *Walking the breadline: the scandal of food poverty in 21st century Britain*. 2013. <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/walking-the-breadline-the-scandal-of-food-poverty-in-21st-century-britain-292978>.
- 2 Trussell Trust. *Biggest ever increase in UK foodbank use*. 2013. www.trusselltrust.org/resources/documents/Press/BIGGEST-EVER-INCREASE-IN-UK-FOODBANK-USE.pdf.

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