

# FACTFILE: GCE NUTRITION & FOOD SCIENCE

## FOOD POVERTY



### Food Poverty

#### Learning outcomes

- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of food poverty as a global issue.
- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of food poverty as a local and national issue.



#### Course content

According to Safe Food, food poverty is defined as the inability to access a nutritionally adequate diet.

The World Food Programme (WFP) claims that there is enough food to feed the entire global population of 7 billion people. And yet one person in eight on the planet goes hungry.

#### Food poverty as a global issue

Millions of people go hungry across the world. High costs and low affordability also mean billions cannot eat healthily or nutritiously. Projections now show that the world is not on track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2, Zero Hunger by 2030. The United Nations estimate that around 660 million people may still face hunger in 2030, in part due to the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on global food security.

Hunger and malnutrition are the biggest risks to health worldwide. Malnutrition in children causes stunting – when the body fails to fully develop physically and mentally - and increases a child's risk of death and lifelong illness.

Countries with the most undernourished people include Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.



Many factors contribute to the state of food poverty. The reasons are complex and varied, and often interconnected. They often focus on cultural and financial issues. Some reasons to consider include:

- **Poverty trap**

People living in poverty cannot afford nutritious foods, often condemning them to a life of poverty and hunger. In some countries farmers often cannot afford seeds, so they cannot plant crops that would provide food for their families. Some have no land, or water or education. In short, the poor are hungry and their hunger traps them in poverty.

- **Lack of investment in agriculture**

Too many countries lack key agricultural infrastructure, such as roads, warehouses and irrigation. The results are high transport costs, a lack of storage facilities and unreliable water supplies. All conspire to limit agricultural yields and access to food.

- **Climate and weather**

Natural disasters such as floods, tropical storms and long periods of drought are on the increase, with calamitous consequences for the hungry and poor who depend on the land as their main food source. Drought is one of the most common causes of food shortages in the world. In many countries climate change is exacerbating already adverse natural conditions. Increasingly, the world's fertile land is under threat from erosion, salination and desertification.

- **War and displacement**

Across the globe conflict consistently affects farming and food production. Fighting also forces millions of people to flee their homes, leading to hunger emergencies. In war, fields are often mined and water wells contaminated forcing farmers to abandon their land.

- **Unstable markets**

In recent years the price of food has been very unstable. Roller coaster food prices make it difficult for the poorest people to access nutritious food consistently. Price spikes may temporarily put food out of reach. When prices rise people shift to cheaper, less-nutritious foods, heightening the risks of micronutrient deficiencies and other forms of malnutrition.

- **Food wastage**

One third of all food produced is never consumed. Food wastage represents a missed opportunity to improve global food security in a world where

one in eight is hungry. Producing this food also uses up precious natural resources. Each year the food that is produced, but not eaten, guzzles up a volume of water equivalent to the annual flow of Russia's Volga River. Producing this food also adds to 3.3 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, with consequences for the climate and ultimately for food production.



## Food poverty as a local and national issue

Everyone in the UK and NI should have access to healthy affordable food. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Many families and individuals live in poverty and do not have a minimally acceptable diet. In NI wages lag behind the rest of the UK and costs for necessities, such as fuel and childcare are substantially higher in NI than other regions of the UK. Poverty and hunger have a devastating impact on the physical and mental health of families and once again, it is those who are most disadvantaged who suffer the most. The causes of food poverty are complex and multiple and include the following factors;

### Financial factors

#### Income

Despite their best efforts many people cannot earn enough to live on. There are a number of reasons for this including high unemployment, static incomes, insecure contracts, low minimum wage and changes to benefits. Some may earn a reasonable wage but not enough to meet rising living costs such as food, energy and childcare. In the UK insufficient social housing means many are renting privately which is expensive.

#### Price of locally available healthy food

Prices charged for healthy food are higher in small convenience shops compared with large supermarkets. People on low incomes, the elderly,

and other vulnerable groups are more likely to be reliant on small local shops where choice and affordability is limited. Local shops may not stock healthy options, such as fruit and vegetables, due to a shorter shelf life, lower profit, a perceived lack of interest or a shortage of storage options.

## Social factors

### Skills

Many individuals lack the knowledge or skills needed to buy and cook foods from scratch. There is also a lot of misinformation about nutrition and healthy foods in the media meaning many do not know how to achieve a healthy diet.

### Impact of marketing of unhealthy foods

Marketing of unhealthy foods often undermines healthy eating messages. It can influence what some families consider to be a 'normal diet'.

## Physical factors

### Transport

Local independent stores are closing in the UK and NI, often in communities that lack alternatives. Not having a local shop within walking distance is a real issue for those who do not have access to adequate public or private transport. Not being able to get to food shops is a defining factor in their ability to buy healthy affordable food.

### Cooking facilities

A lack of access to cooking facilities will impact on food choice and meals eaten.

## Consequences of food poverty in the UK and NI

Food poverty reduces the ability to meet dietary guidelines and healthy eating advice. Cheap diets

are often low in fruits, vegetables, wholegrains and low fat dairy; deficient in iron, folate and vitamin D and high in sugars, salt and fat.

Food poverty in the UK is associated with overconsumption of calories as price disparities lead many facing food poverty to base their diet on cheaper energy dense foods.

Poor diet is linked to diet-related disorders such as dental caries, anaemia, osteoporosis, Type 2 diabetes, CVD, some cancers and obesity.

Food poverty status is strongly predictive of chronic illness such as arthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and kidney disease.

There are also economic costs. Diet-related ill health is responsible for about 10 per cent of deaths in the UK and is estimated to cost the NHS some £6 billion every year. This is more than double the cost of tobacco use.

Stress and emotional wellbeing is associated with worry about food.

Food poverty is especially detrimental to the health, development and wellbeing of children in the short and long term. They are likely to be sick more often and recover from illness more slowly. Lack of adequate healthy food can impair a child's ability to concentrate and perform well in school and is linked to higher levels of behavioural and emotional problems. Inadequate dietary intake during pregnancy and early childhood can increase the risk of birth defects, anaemia, low birth weight and developmental risk.



## Revision Questions

- 1 Discuss food poverty as a global issue.
- 2 Explain the impact of food poverty on the physical and mental development of children.
- 3 According to the Trussell Trust 1 in 5 people in the UK live in poverty. Suggest possible reasons for this statistic.

