

Institution: University of Warwick
Unit of Assessment: Sociology
Title of case study: Household food security in the global North
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Building on a background in nutritional science, Professor Dowler's research on social and policy aspects of food, nutrition and household food security has created impact at local, national and international levels. Her membership of key national expert advisory panels and councils, both official and voluntary, has allowed the research to inform policy-making as well as print and broadcast media debates on many issues, notably the consequences of low wages and benefit cuts on the diet of low-income households; the role played by food banks in relieving food poverty and the benefits of local food networks in securing community-level food resilience.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Dowler came to Warwick in January 2000 with an established expertise in both nutritional and social sciences. This expertise developed further through interlinked research projects, funded by local, national and international agencies (2000-13). The research focuses on household food security in terms of two inter-related agendas: (a) difficulties encountered by poor households faced by falling real incomes, reduced state benefits and rising food prices; (b) the interconnections between food production and consumption within specific localities.</p> <p>Addressing Food Poverty. From 2000-03, Dowler worked in the team that successfully tendered for the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Low Income Diets Methods Study, preparing for the FSA Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey (2003-6), for which she acted as adviser. This research led to two further projects (2008 – 10) for the Department of Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) that analyse (a) factors threatening UK household access to healthy and sustainable food in a context of rising prices and falling real incomes; (b) how consumers in low income households understand and address the rising cost of food. Research findings reveal critical consumer concern over food budget management and nuanced understanding of price increases. Despite unfamiliarity with 'food security' concepts, respondents recognise the need for affordable, universally accessible, healthy food and reject 'consumer choice' as a mechanism to achieve sustainable food security, while expressing strong views concerning the responsibility of government. Research outcomes. This research has led to a current DEFRA-funded Rapid Evidence Assessment to evaluate 'food aid' provision as a means to address household food problems in times of austerity, specifically the charitable sector's role through food banks [and associated food provision], at national and international levels. Diets of poor households continue to command public attention; consultative work for the FSA [and the Northern Ireland Office] on UK household food poverty is forthcoming.</p> <p>Local Food Networks. Early work on four small-scale local studies (Dowler: PI) analysed nutritional needs and access to healthy food in deprived areas (2000-4). Collaboration on a ESRC/AHRC- funded project, 'Producers, Consumers and Food: Exploring Reconnection' (2003-6) analyses 6 food schemes (5 in the UK, 1 in Italy) that encourage direct contact between food producers and consumers, to examine the multiple ways in which these 'reconnect': biologically, socially and morally. Research findings show how local networks foster local economies, integrity, environmental citizenship, health and well-being. Consumers act as economic and social agents with sophisticated understandings of the complexities of food production and consumption, challenging assumptions about their necessary separation, low household income notwithstanding. Research outcomes. The ESRC/AHRC project has led to a subsequent project (2008-09), funded by the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) that develops participative research 'toolkits' to enable communities to map 'local food webs': to identify economic and social benefits of locally produced and retailed food: also to demonstrate how, through engagement with the local food economy, community-level food resilience could be created. Research results include <i>Mapping Local Food Webs Toolkit</i>, a physical (later online) research package for local adaptation and use. (For further results, see</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

section 4 below)

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

DOWLER, E. and Caraher, M. (2003) Local Food Projects - the New Philanthropy? *Political Quarterly*, 74, no1, pp. 57-65 [peer-reviewed] DOI: 10.1111/1467-923X.00512

DOWLER, E., (2008) 'Food and Health Inequalities: the challenge for sustaining just consumption' *Local Environment* 13, 8, pp. 759-772 [peer-reviewed] DOI: 10.1080/13549830802478736

DOWLER, E. (2008) 'Policy initiatives to address low income households' nutritional needs in the UK'. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 67, 3, pp. 289-300. [peer-reviewed] DOI:10.1017/S0029665108008586

DOWLER, E., Kneafsey, M., Lambie, H., Inman, A. and Collier, R. (2011) 'Thinking about "food security": engaging with UK consumers' special issue *Critical Public Health*, 21, pp. 403-416. [peer-reviewed] DOI:10.1080/09581596.2011.620945

MacMillan, T. and DOWLER, E. (2012) 'Secure and sustainable? Examining the rhetoric and potential realities of UK food security' *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 25, 2, pp. 181-204. [peer-reviewed] DOI: 10.1007/s10806-011-9304-8

Kneafsey, M., DOWLER, E., Lambie, H., Inman, A. and Collier, R. (2012) 'Consumers and food security: Uncertain or empowered?' *Journal of Rural Studies*, 28, pp. 1-12. [peer-reviewed] DOI: 10.1016/j.jrurstud.2012.05.005

Research Funding**(1) Addressing Food Poverty**

- Low Income Diet Methods Study (2000-03); National Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey (2003-6): FSA (Dowler: Co-I in consortium bid led by Kings College London): £4+ million.
- Drivers of Change in UK Food Security and Potential for Complexity Science (2008-9) DEFRA [Collier (PI: Warwick); Dowler (Co-I: Warwick); Kneafsey (Co-I: Coventry)] £50,000
- Consumer insight into food prices and food security (2009-10) DEFRA Collier (PI: Warwick); Dowler (Co-I: Warwick); Kneafsey (Co-I: Coventry); Mead (Co-I Warwick)] £190,000

(2) Local Food Networks

- Producers, Consumers and Food: Exploring Reconnection (2003-6): ESRC – AHRC [Kneafsey (PI: Coventry); Dowler (Co-I: Warwick); Holloway (Co-I: Hull); Cox (Co-I: Birkbeck)]: £207,000
- Development and Testing of Participatory Food Map Webbing (2008-9): CPRE [Kneafsey and Dowler joint PI] £60,000.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research has contributed extensively to public debate on household food poverty and its socio-political ramifications at local, national and international levels. It has informed policy and media comment. It has created new means for reinforcing and publicising local food networks, aligning production and consumption for public benefit. The main impacts are outlined below. Space does not permit further detail – such as Dowler's engagement with faith groups (notably the Iona Community) and their role in sustaining a reasonable diet and good nutrition in poor households.

Policy Impacts. Using her established position on the Food Ethics Council (FEC - where she has been an elected trustee / board member for 8 years) and the former UK Public Health Association, Dowler promoted discussion of the research at the highest levels. As a representative of both agencies, Dowler was invited to give evidence to the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit's consultation on food (2007). This consultation generated the report *Food Matters: Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century* (2008) - 'an overarching statement of government food policy' (The Strategy Unit 2008, (i)). The report recommended the creation of DEFRA's Council of Food Policy Advisers, a 16-person expert panel. Dowler was selected as one of four academic members (2008-10). The Council engaged with multiple users – such as the National Heart Forum, where Dowler represented the Council in November 2009 – as part of its remit to provide advice to the Minister over the development of a national food policy, an objective achieved in 2010 (see Macmillan and Dowler, 2012). Following the election that year, the Coalition government dissolved the Council, but Dowler was appointed to the newly created DECC/ DEFRA Social Science Expert Panel where

Impact case study (REF3b)

she remains centrally networked in policy-making circles.

The research has made a contribution to policy-making at national and international levels. For example, the research has been cited in policy documents, such as The Scottish Government, *Food Affordability, Access and Security* (2009) and *The Scottish Health Survey: Main Report*, (Sept 2010). Dowler co-authored a commissioned report for NHS Scotland “Understanding food culture in Scotland and its comparison in an international context” (November 2010). In December 2011, she contributed to an expert panel’s oral evidence to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee. She was sole academic speaker at an Industry and Parliament Trust event on the future of household food security at the House of Commons in October 2012: research citations pepper the published notes. Invited participation in a WHO/EU policy discussion on obesity (Riga, 2008), consultancy work for UNHCR on human rights and nutrition and invited participation as one of three international experts at an Institute of Medicine workshop in Washington DC (2011) reviewing relationships between food insecurity and obesity - all this illustrates how international public engagement has been stimulated by this research.

Media Impacts Following the 2008 financial crisis, rising food prices created increasing media interest in how poorer households could cope, an interest further stimulated by recent cuts in UK welfare benefits. As her research centred essentially on policy and the diet of poorer households, Dowler’s advice and comment has been persistently sought. She is a regular contributor to Radio 4’s *The Food Programme*, a key media outlet for academics, practitioners and policy makers in the field, and has made many media contributions, including appearances on regional television in the West Midlands and Scotland. Dowler acted as professional adviser for ITV1’s series *The Hunger Shame* and appeared in BBC 1 *The Great British Budget Menu* – both centred on dietary issues facing poor households. Patrick Butler, social policy editor at *The Guardian* (among other journalists), uses Dowler as his primary source on food policy and poverty. Invited comments in the print media on food and poverty, household food insecurity and food banks have included a commissioned editorial in *Food Ethics Council* (FEC quarterly journal) that led to an invited letter in *The Observer* (1 January, 2012) in response to an earlier article on food banks. This was subsequently cited in a *Guardian* article on the growing reliance on food banks, prompting public debate (21 August 2012).

Public Engagement Impact National impact also emerged from local research on household food sustainability. Work supported by Council for Protection of Rural England (CPRE) produced a research toolkit to enable local people to develop their own ‘mapped’ interconnections between local food producers, retailers and consumers (see Dowler and Kneafsey, *Mapping Local Food Webs Concepts and Methods. Interim Report Part 1, SURGE*,). Local volunteers in 16 locations accepted the challenge: using surveys, interviews and outreach they analysed interactive networks between local production, food outlets and consumption within a 2.5 mile radius of town centres, revealing economic, social and environmental benefits of local food systems. Published reports on 6 pilot and 10 subsequent locations, with a summary (*From Field to Fork: The Value of England’s Local Food Webs* - citing Dowler and co-researchers), were launched at the House of Commons (June, 2012) and announced in a news release (11 June 2012) “New national report finds local food is recipe for economic success”.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Council for Protection of Rural England (CPRE)

<http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/farming-and-food/local-foods/item/2897-from-field-to-fork>
<http://www.cpre.org.uk/media-centre/news-release-archive/item/2892-new-national-report-finds-local-food-is-recipe-for-economic-success>

Council of Food Policy Advisors (DEFRA)

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/policy/council/>

Food Ethics Council www.foodethicscouncil.org [Dowler was a panel member of the Food & Fairness Inquiry - <http://www.foodethicscouncil.org/node/466>]

Media

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/aug/21/councils-invest-food-banks-welfare-cuts>

The Guardian 21 August 2012 “Breadline Britain: councils fund food banks to plug holes in welfare state” 522 Comments, 473 Facebook shares, 526 Tweets, 22+ on Google

References can be sought from:

- 1) Project Director for the Campaign to Protect Rural England
- 2) Former Chair of the Food Policy Advisory Council
- 3) Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- 4) Former Chair, Food Ethics Council
- 5) Social Policy Editor, *The Guardian*