

Four percent of people in England cannot afford to feed themselves

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University of Southampton research presented at the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Annual International Conference has exposed the stark geography of food poverty in England – providing an opportunity to better target local interventions.

Researchers from Southampton, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, University College London and East Surrey Hospital have produced the first objective estimate of the percentage of people in England who cannot afford to feed themselves.

The study modelled food poverty in England, finding that an estimated 4.1 percent of the population are at risk of food poverty. It identified Liverpool, Kingston upon Hull and Middlesbrough as the cities with the greatest number of neighbourhoods at high risk of food poverty. Parts of Leeds, Manchester, and Wokingham in Berkshire are among the areas ranked with the lowest risk of food poverty.

Lead researcher and geographer at the University of Southampton, Dr Dianna Smith comments: "Food poverty is increasing in the UK, but we do not have any systematic way to measure it. Using public data, we have been able to reliably estimate the percentage of people in England who cannot afford to feed themselves and model the geographic distribution of food poverty.

"This global model is adaptable to local pressures and should be useful for planning interventions in local authorities."

Dr Smith continues: "Population risk varies greatly at a local level especially within cities in the North of England, with Birmingham having areas of both the highest and lowest of expected risk."

The study found that the geography of the populations at highest risk of food poverty – families on low incomes with children and pensioners living alone – varies dramatically in England, with estimated population risk highest mostly in urban areas outside of London.

"Pensioners living alone and families on a low income with children are particularly vulnerable to food poverty. In [low income families](#) struggling to feed themselves, free school meals is a crucial lifeline and 'holiday hunger' is a real concern at present. It's crucial that we are able to identify where support is most needed," says Dr Smith.

"UK food poverty remains a contentious issue, despite mounting calls for action and the ever increasing diversity of community responses to the problem. The tools we have developed will allow for more effective local responses targeting high-risk groups in each area. We hope that they will help inform local interventions to address food poverty, such as community supermarkets or meals for local residents."

Provided by University of Southampton

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