

Strong link between increased benefit sanctions and higher foodbank use

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

There is a 'strong, dynamic' relationship between people having their benefits stopped and an increase in referral to foodbanks, new research has found.

Researchers from the University of Oxford analysed foodbank data from

across 259 [local authorities](#) between 2012 and 2015 and found that as the rate of sanctioning increased within local authorities, the rate of foodbank use also increased. Even after accounting for differences between local authorities, the researchers' modelling showed that for every 10 additional sanctions applied in each quarter of the year, on average five more adults would be referred to foodbanks in the area. As sanctioning decreased, foodbank use also decreased, which the report suggests is evidence of a strong link between sanctioning and people not having enough money to meet basic needs. The researchers used foodbank data from the Trussell Trust, the only source of routinely collected surveillance for the past decade.

Dr Rachel Loopstra from Oxford University's Department of Sociology, the paper's lead author, said: 'These findings show clear evidence of sanctions being linked to economic hardship and hunger, as we see a close relationship between sanctioning rates and rates of foodbank usage across local authorities in the UK.'

The findings are from the first phase of a 16-month study into how trends in foodbank usage over the last four years relate to changes in the economy and welfare system. Looking across local authorities and over time using aggregated quarterly data, researchers examined whether changes in sanctioning rates within local authorities related to changes in foodbank usage. The researchers built a longitudinal dataset of local authorities containing quarterly adult foodbank usage, data on foodbank operations, and government data on the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, the number of sanctions applied to Jobseeker's Allowance claimants, unemployment and employment rates, and population size. These models control for differences in characteristics between local authorities and time trends, ruling out other potential explanations for the relationship observed.

The report says foodbanks in The Trussell Trust network experienced a

spike in numbers after 2013, when over one million sanctions were applied. Changes to the sanction regime and Jobseeker's Allowance at this time included increasing benefit conditionality for claimants, sanctions imposed immediately for failure to meet these conditions, and longer sanctioning penalties. Foodbanks distributed three times as much over the period – from just under 350,000 three-day emergency food supplies in 2012/13 to around 913,000 in 2013/14. Even after accounting for new foodbanks opening, this spike was evident across the network, says the research.

More information: 'The impact of benefit sanctioning on food insecurity: a dynamic cross-area study of food bank usage in the UK', *Sociology Working Papers*

Provided by University of Oxford

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