TRANSFORM
Transform Research Consultancy Ltd

Food Insecurity in Devon

Final Report

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Executive Summary

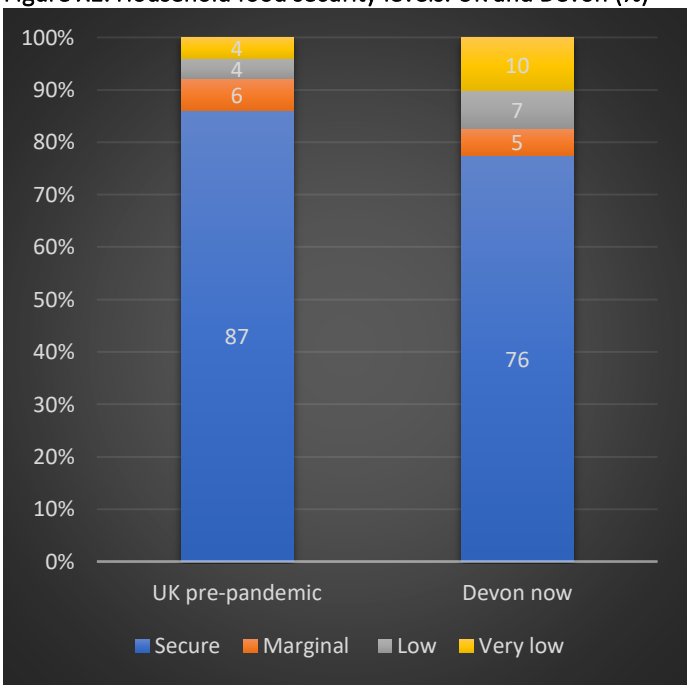
Until now, little has been known about how food insecurity is experienced in Devon. While it has been possible to estimate the likely risk of households in specific areas being food insecure (based on deprivation and income levels, claimant counts, etc.), it has not been known which types of households have suffered from food insecurity, where, and to what extent.

This study has addressed this by interviewing a representative sample of 1,160 households from across Devon about their food security and their experiences since March 2020.

Headline findings

The results show that levels of household food insecurity are at high levels across the county. Overall, one in ten Devon households (10%) are experiencing substantial disruptions to their eating patterns, with household members eating less and going hungry. These households have reduced food intake because they do not have sufficient money to pay for enough food.

Figure X1. Household food security levels: UK and Devon (%)



Prior to the pandemic, most UK households were food secure, with high food security (87%) or marginal food security (6%). Only a minority were food insecure, with low food security (4%) or very low food security (4%).

Figure X1 shows that there are significantly higher proportions of households in the low and very low food security categories currently in Devon. This clearly demonstrates the impact of the pandemic, and how it has impacted on many household's finances and their ability to buy sufficient and appropriate food for a balanced diet.

Furthermore, the economic impact of the pandemic has not been felt equally by all Devon households. This is reflected in the very significant variations in the levels of food security found between different household types. The presence of children, household income level and receipt of benefits were key indicators of food security. The figure below shows the types of households that were most likely to be food insecure and that for each type the proportions in Devon were currently markedly higher than those found nationally pre-pandemic:

Figure X2. Devon and UK household food insecurity: income, benefits and children (% insecure)

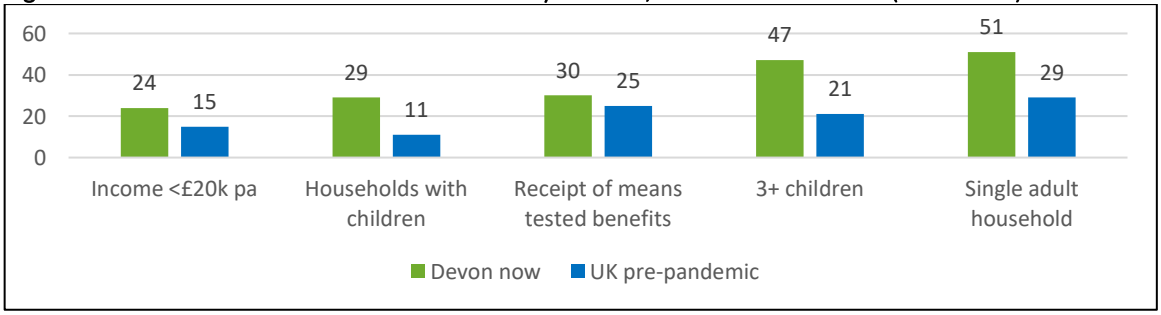
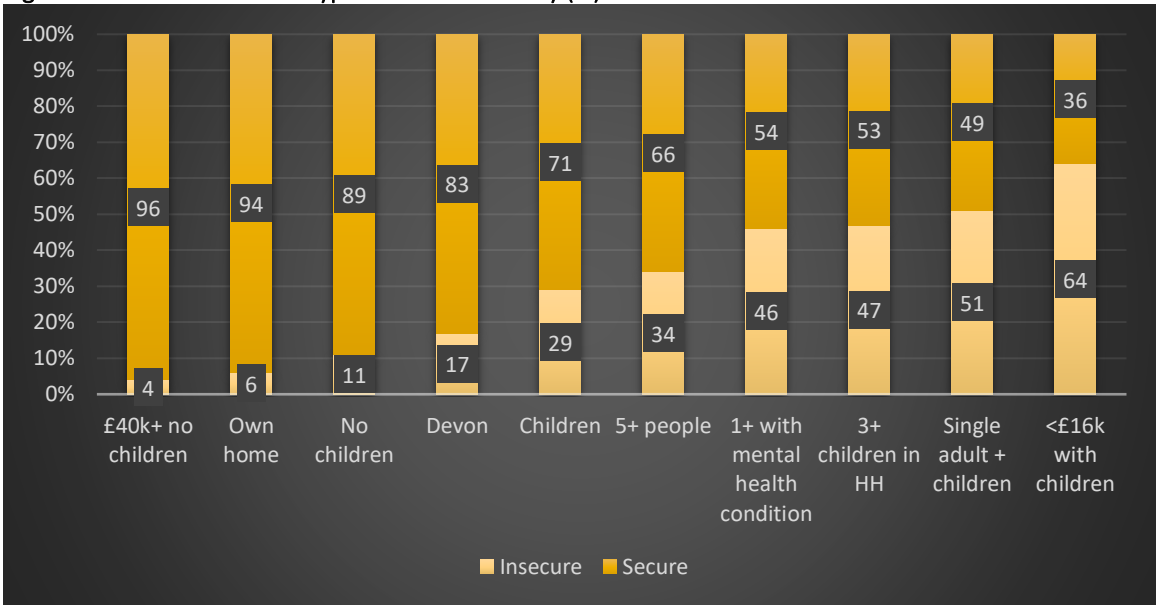


Figure X3 below contrasts some of the types of Devon households with the highest levels of food insecurity with those with lowest levels. It shows that as well as households with children, those with someone with a mental health condition were much more likely to be experiencing food insecurity. Evidence was also found that households with ethnic minority members were more likely to be food insecure. However, the small sample size means that this finding requires further research.

Figure X3. Devon household types and food security (%)



Impact of food security-related events

Devon households that had ***not*** experienced any events since March 2020 were much less likely to be food insecure (6%) than those experiencing at least one (24%). Households that had experienced any of the following events were more likely to be food insecure:

- **Covid** (Testing positive for coronavirus and/or suffering coronavirus symptoms)
- **Employment** (Losing a job, being placed on furlough, reduction in working hours)
- **Income/benefits** (Reduced income and/or suffered a delay in benefits payments)

Overarching picture: the unequal economic impacts of pandemic

The pandemic has had a very significant negative impact on the food security status of many households across Devon. If the overall reported UK wide proportion of 8% of households experiencing food insecurity pre-pandemic in March 2020 was applicable in Devon at that time, then the proportion that are *now* experiencing food insecurity has more than doubled. While this increase is deeply troubling, it is exacerbated by the fact that the impacts have been concentrated on certain types of households. These can be broadly categorised into:

- Households that are among the most deprived and vulnerable, in terms of having low incomes, being in receipt of benefits, having 1+ household members with a mental health condition, living in social/council accommodation and/or being a single adult household: and
- Households that had been dependent upon income from sectors that have been badly hit by lockdown such as accommodation & tourism, retail, construction and arts, resulting in lost jobs and/or lower income, living in private rented accommodation with higher outgoings.

Both of these groups have been more likely to suffer from a negative event during the course of the pandemic. What they also have in common is that they are both generally younger than the Devon population on average – with children present – and therefore have more mouths to feed.

1. Introduction and background

This report presents the findings of research commissioned by Devon County Council (DCC) to investigate the extent and experience of food poverty and insecurity in Devon. The research was designed to deepen understanding of poverty and deprivation experienced in Devon and also to act as a baseline for the Devon Community Foundation, who are running a programme to support food banks and develop food networks locally across the county.

Transform Research, an independent research consultancy, was commissioned to conduct the study between February and May 2021.

1.1 Background

The issues of food insecurity and child hunger have been of rising concern in society for some considerable time. The worldwide Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting economic turmoil that has resulted have exacerbated the issues. There has consequently been a much greater degree of public awareness of the problems after campaigns by well-known figures such as Marcus Rashford.

It was acknowledged by the government that there was insufficient data on food insecurity and child hunger in the UK to fully measure and assess the situation at the local level. Consequently in 2019, a set of relevant questions was incorporated into the Family Resources Survey by ONS. However, the findings covering the pandemic period will not be published until March 2022.

As a result of this gap, and the increase in concern about the problem, the Social Market Foundation commissioned the *Measuring and Mitigating Child Hunger in the UK*[1] study in the autumn of 2020. This was based on the findings from a national survey combined with risk indicators to produce a ranking of local authority districts. It found three out of the top ten local authorities with the highest share of children with very low food security were districts in Devon: Mid Devon (23.1%), Teignbridge (21.8%) and North Devon (21.4%).

These findings presented a dilemma for Devon County Council as whilst it is possible to calculate the potential risk of food insecurity to residents in a local area, using existing indicators (claimant counts, proportion of jobs in insecure sectors, wage levels, etc), very little was known about how food insecurity was actually being experienced in Devon – who was food insecure, where, and to what extent?

Furthermore, the methodology used by the SMF meant that there were questions about the ability of their approach to paint an accurate picture at the district level, given the small sample size, and absence of any account taken of local mitigating measures. Therefore, in order to fully inform local interventions, support measures and the associated policy development, it was felt necessary to conduct research focussed on Devon alone. This would provide both large enough samples for district level analysis and also take account of any local mitigating measures.

[1] https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/measuring-child-hunger/

1.2 Study aims

This study aimed to provide a better understanding of how and the extent to which food insecurity is experienced in Devon. It was designed to give a granular picture of residents' experiences of food insecurity at the district level. The study has three specific objectives:

- To identify potential food insecurity hotspots across the county and to provide robust estimates of households experiencing food poverty and insecurity and accessing food from Food Banks across Devon.
- To provide an assessment of change over time and an understanding of the impact of the pandemic on increasing levels of food poverty and insecurity.
- To provide a baseline against which to measure the impact of work being undertaken to improve access to food support. This work includes the commissioned project on emergency food using the Winter Grant, led by Devon Community Foundation.

1.3 Study methodology and survey accuracy

To meet these aims, the study involved the design, conduct, analysis and reporting of a stratified random sample survey of 1,160 households across Devon. The methodology contained six main elements, which are summarised below and detailed in Appendix I:

- Desk research
- Questionnaire design and piloting
- Sample design
- Survey fieldwork
- Analysis
- Reporting, data and presentation

The sample of 1,160 provides results that are representative of all Devon households[2]. For a finding of 50%, we can be 95% confident that the "true" figure lies within +/- 3% for Devon. To produce reliable findings for all of Devon's local authorities, the smaller districts were oversampled. The data presented in this report is weighted to 1,165 to compensate for this.

1.4 This report

This report presents the findings of the study in the following chapters:

- Chapter 2 describes what is meant by food insecurity and the measures that are used to assess household food security status:
- Chapter 3 details the profiles of Devon households relative to the levels of food insecurity that were associated with their characteristics:
- Chapter 4 explores the key events that different households have been through since the start of the pandemic and how these events have impacted on their food security:
- Chapter 5 examines in more depth the households that were either found to be in very low food security status and/or who had accessed emergency food support:
- Chapter 6 sets out some concluding comments on the overall study findings and makes suggestions for informing policy development.

As well as the methodological details in Appendix I, a copy of the questionnaire used in the consultations with household residents is presented in Appendix II. A full breakdown of responses to the individual food security questions is provided in Appendix III, while Appendix IV details the bibliography and references used.

[2] The study covers residential households in Devon. This means that it does ***not*** include the residents of institutions such as care homes, halls of residence, military barracks, prisons, etc.

2. Measuring household food security status

To inform the detailed findings that follow, this chapter examines what is meant by "food insecurity" and the method by which it has been measured in this research.

2.1 What is food insecurity?

The Evidence and Network on UK Household Food Insecurity (ENUF) defines it as:

> *"a lack of the financial resources needed to ensure reliable access to food to meet dietary, nutritional, and social needs. It can be acute, transitory, or chronic, and ranges in severity from worry about not being able to secure enough food to going whole days without eating[3]".*

ENUF goes on to describe that people and households across the world experience food insecurity in the same ways, including *"running out of food, feeling anxiety about food supplies, relying on low-cost foods, changing diet patterns, skipping meals, and going without food."* Consequently, these "core" experiences are used in the measurement and monitoring of food insecurity in households and among individuals.

However, ENUF point out that food insecurity can be evident in other ways. For example, households might access charitable sources of food, such as food banks, because they have no money available. For other households, they might miss out on or reduce social activities involving food, such as not having friends over for a meal. These types of events though occur at different rates for different people and at varying levels of severity of food insecurity.

ENUF also highlight that some research suggests children, adolescents, and older people might experience food insecurity in different ways, and that different members of the same household can also experience it different ways.

2.2 Measuring food insecurity

Food insecurity has been measured in different ways by diverse organisations over time. This study draws on the most recognised and reputable main techniques: The Food Insecurity Experience Scale devised by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations[4] (FAO) and the Food Security Status system used by Office for National Statistics (ONS).[5]

Both the FAO and the ONS studies use a standard set of ten core questions to assess individual or household food security. These ten questions are provided in full in Appendix II and are summarised below. In each case, the household was asked whether during the last 30 days:

- *They were worried their food would run out before they got money to buy more.*
- *The food they had bought just didn't last, and they didn't have money to get more.*
- *They couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.*
- *They had cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.*
- *At least one person had cut size of meals or skip meals for 3 or more days.*
- *At least one person ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money.*
- *At least one person was hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food.*
- *At least one person had lost weight because there wasn't enough money for food.*
- *At least one person did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food.*
- *At least one person was not eating for a whole day for 3 or more days.*

3 https://enuf.org.uk/what-household-food-insecurity

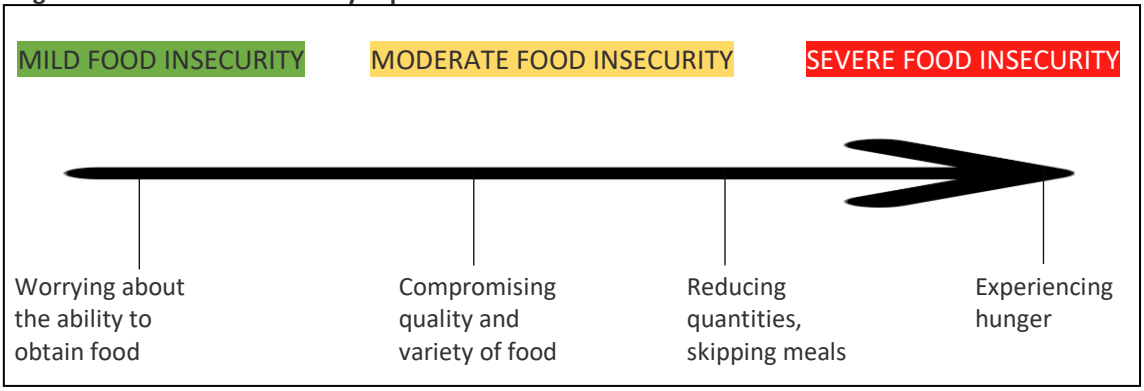
4 http://www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry/fies/en/

5 https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2019-to-2020/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2019-to-2020#household-food-security-1

The Food Insecurity Experience Scale

The FAO devised the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) regarding people's access to adequate food. The scale uses the same core questions about household's experiences and classifies them into categories in the manner shown in the figure below:

Figure 3.1: FAO Food Insecurity Experience Scale



Household Food Security Status

Since 2019 ONS have used the same ten experience questions on the Family Resource Survey (FRS) to generate a ten-point household score, from which the household is placed into one of four categories of household food security status:

- **High food security** (score = 0): Household has no problem, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food
- **Marginal food security** (1 or 2): Household had problems at times, or anxiety about, accessing food, but quality, variety and quantity were not substantially reduced
- **Low food security** (3 to 5): Household reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of diets, but quantity and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted
- **Very low food security** (6 to 10): At times during the last 30 days, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced

Households that are in the high and marginal categories (scoring 0 – 2) are "food secure", while those in low or very low (scoring 3 – 10) are "insecure".

The following chapters describe the food status of Devon households in terms of their position relative to each of the four categories above, as this allows direct comparisons with the findings from the FRS and UK national and regional figures. Reference is also made to the two-point shorthand descriptions of households as being either "secure" and "insecure", where this is appropriate and helpful.

The status categories above are, of course, a summary score representing all the answers given by each household to the ten individual food experience questions outlined previously. Appendix III contains the percentage responses given by Devon households in aggregate to each of these individual questions, as well as highlighting statistically significant replies that were given by different types of household.

The findings for the food status of Devon households that are presented are based on the total sample of 1,160 interviews that were conducted between March and April 2020. As noted above, findings from the 1,160 interviews were weighted to compensate for the oversampling of smaller local authority districts in the county. The weights produce a representative sample for Devon as a whole, that totals to a base of 1,165.

3. Devon households and food security

This chapter examines the relationship between households with different profiles and their food security status over the last 30 days. It covers all 1,160 Devon households surveyed during March and April 2021 in terms of their:

- Size, composition and presence of children
- Income and benefit receipt
- Tenure
- Activity status and industrial sector
- Physical and mental health conditions
- Ethnicity
- Accessing emergency food support
- Local Authority

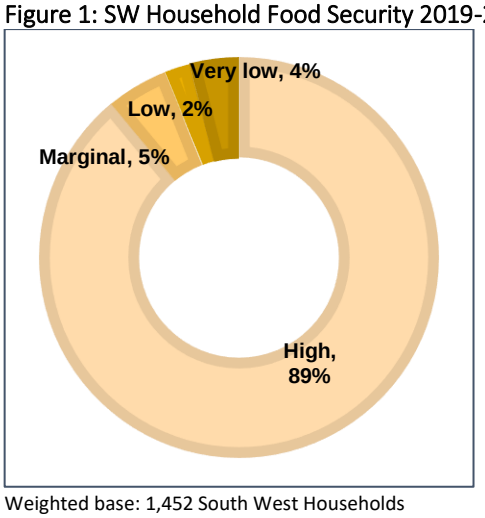
The chapter concludes with a summary of the types of households that were found to be most likely to be "food insecure", i.e. they were low or very low in food security status.

Results from the Government's Family Resources Study (FRS) are used during the chapter to provide national and regional context to the Devon findings. The FRS findings cover the period BEFORE the pandemic started, from April 2019 to March 2020.

The FRS reports that most households in the UK during that time were food secure, with high food security (87%) or marginal food security (6%). Only a minority were found to be food insecure, with low food security (4%) or very low food security (4%). Similarly high levels of security were reported for households in the South West region with 94% being secure.

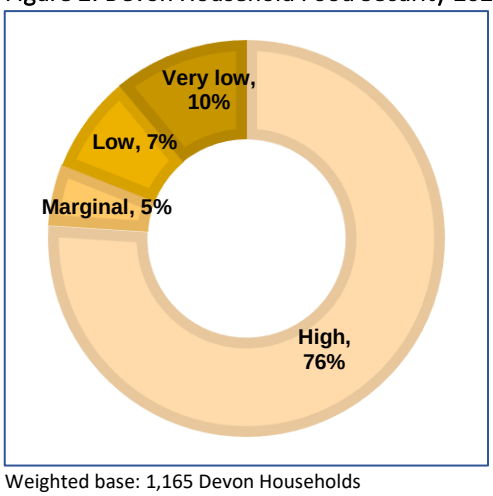
Figure 1 shows the detail for the region *before the pandemic*, compared with Devon *currently* in figure 2[6]. The difference between the figures clearly demonstrates the impact of the pandemic, with around one in six Devon households (17%) overall currently experiencing food insecurity, compared with over one in sixteen South West households (6%) before it started.

Figure 1: SW Household Food Security 2019-20



Weighted base: 1,452 South West Households

Figure 2: Devon Household Food Security 2021



Weighted base: 1,165 Devon Households

Most concerningly, the findings show that one in ten Devon households are currently experiencing very low food security with household members eating less and going hungry because of a lack of money and/or resources.

[6] Unfortunately, because of the sample size the FRS does not report at sub-regional level to allow a direct Devon comparison.

3.1 Household size, composition and presence of children

The Family Resources Survey identified a close correlation between levels of food security and the numbers and types of people within households in the pre-pandemic year 2019-2020. This section assesses whether these correlations were also evident in households across Devon in terms of their:

- Size (the number of adults and children in the household):
- Presence of children (any member aged 18 or under): and
- Composition (the number of children and adults).

3.1.1 Household size

Table 3.1 below shows that Devon households with 5 or more people were markedly more likely to be experiencing food insecurity (35%) than those households with fewer than 5 people (15%). This pattern mirrored that found on the Family Resources Survey, which also reported higher levels of insecurity among larger households. However, the proportion of insecure households was markedly higher in Devon for each household size grouping.

Table 3.1 Household size and food security

Food Security	Devon	1 person	2 – 4 people	5+ people
Secure	78%	79%	80%	56%
Marginal	6%	5%	6%	9%
Low security	7%	5%	7%	14%
Very low security	10%	11%	8%	21%
Weighted base	1165	179	853	133

The average household size (total number of residents) found among households at each of the four levels of food security (with figures for adults first and children/young people shown second in brackets) are listed below. This pattern also mirrored the findings of the FRS, with households having more children present being more likely to be insecure, although again the rates of insecurity found in Devon were higher:

- Secure 2.6 (2.1 adults and 0.5 children/young people on average)
- Marginal 3.2 (2.5 adults and 0.7 children/young people on average)
- Low 3.4 (2.2 adults and 1.2 children/young people on average)
- Very low 3.4 (2.2 adults and 1.2 children/young people on average)

3.1.2 Households with children

Reflecting the findings for size above, households in Devon with children were markedly more likely to be experiencing food insecurity (29%) than those without children (11%), as shown in table 3.2. Half of lone adult households with children reported that they were experiencing insecurity (51%), making them among the most likely of all groups to need food support[7]. The FRS also reported higher levels of insecurity among households with children and particularly those with single adults albeit at a pre-pandemic level of 21%.

Table 3.2 Households with children and food security

Food Security	Devon	Households without children	Households with children	Lone adult with children
Secure	78%	85%	63%	47%
Marginal	6%	5%	8%	2%
Low security	7%	4%	13%	19%
Very low security	10%	7%	16%	32%
Weighted base	1165	785	380	43

[7] This figure has a base of 43 so should be treated with some caution. However, it corresponds to that reported by the FRS.

It is very important to emphasise that the finding that nearly a third of Devon households *with children* are currently experiencing food insecurity (29%) is higher than that found nationally by the SMF in October 2020 (23%)[8]. It is, of course, far higher than the FRS UK pre-pandemic (11%) or the Food Foundation[9] after the first lockdown in spring 2020 (14%).

Furthermore, when asked about the age of their children, a degree of correspondence was found between those Devon households with ***more younger*** children (aged 0 – 5 years) and the likelihood of the household being food insecure:

- Secure Average of 0.3 children aged 0-5
- Marginal Average of 0.5 children aged 0-5
- Low Average of 0.6 children aged 0-5
- Very low Average of 0.7 children aged 0-5

In comparison, there was no correlation evident between food security and households with older children (aged 6 – 11 years) or those with young people aged 12 – 17. These findings demonstrate that many Devon households with children are experiencing food insecurity and those with more younger children are more likely to be insecure.

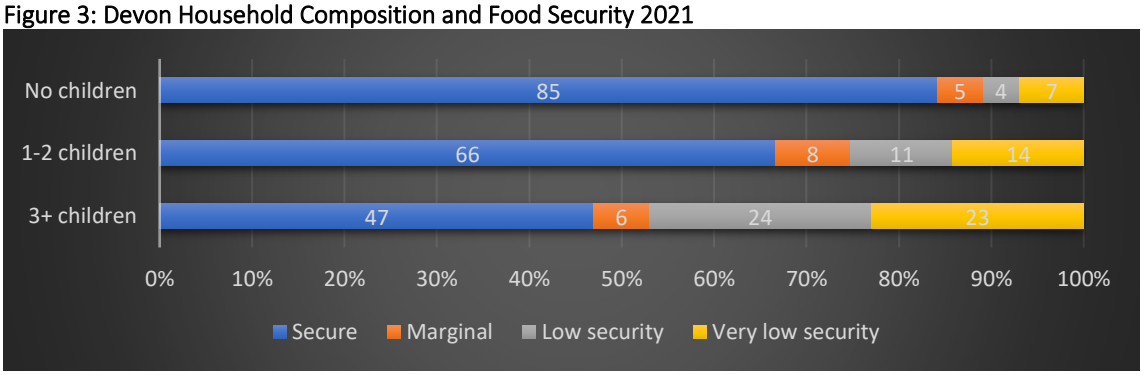
3.1.3 Household composition

As would be expected given the findings reported above on size and children, those Devon households with *more* children were found to be *more* likely to be experiencing food insecurity: nearly half (47%) with 3+ children compared with a quarter (25%) of those with 1 or 2 children and just one in nine (11%) of those without children. Table 3.3 contains the details and figure 3 below illustrates the trend.

Table 3.3 Household composition and food security

Food Security	Devon	Adults only	1-2 children	3+ children
Secure	78%	85%	66%	47%
Marginal	6%	5%	8%	6%
Low security	7%	4%	11%	24%
Very low security	10%	7%	14%	23%
Weighted base	1165	785	310	70

Figure 3: Devon Household Composition and Food Security 2021



This finding was another area in which the Devon results were slightly different to the FRS for the pre-pandemic period of 2019-2020. The FRS had found that: "*Households with two adults and one or two children had similar to the national rates of household food security".* However, the Devon findings were that all households with children in the county (regardless of the number of children) were more likely to be food insecure than the Devon average.

[8] https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/measuring-child-hunger/

[9] https://foodfoundation.org.uk/vulnerable_groups/food-foundation-polling-fifth-survey/

3.2 Household income and receipt of means tested benefits

This section discusses the levels and types of food insecurity that were found in Devon households in terms of their levels of income and the receipt of benefits. It covers:

- Household income:
- Households with and without children and their income: and
- Household receipt of any means tested benefits.

3.2.1 Household income

The households were asked about the total income received by all adults in the household over the last month, after all taxes and deductions were removed. It is important to note that a third of the households (32%) said they had experienced *reduced* income since March 2020.

Table 3.2.1 below shows the direct correlation between higher household income and greater food security. Over a third of Devon households with annual income under £16,190 were experiencing food insecurity (35%), as were over a fifth of those with income between £16,1919 and £19,999 (22%). These compared with just 8% of those households with income of £40,000+ and 13% of those with income between £20,000 and £39,999.

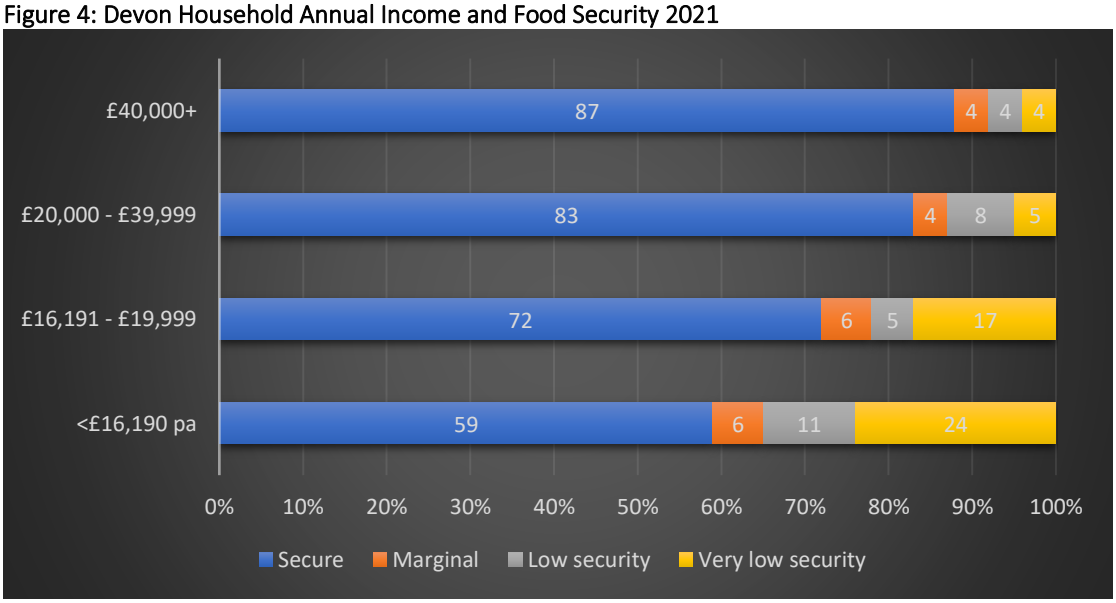
Not surprisingly, the FRS also reported a direct correlation between income and food security, albeit with the overall proportions of food insecure households at lower levels pre-pandemic. The FRS found that UK wide 16% of households with income less than £20,000 were food insecure at that time, compared with 3% of those with income of £40,000+.

Table 3.2.1 Household annual income and food security

Food Security	Devon	<£16,190 pa	£16,191 - £19,999	£20,000-£39,999	£40,000+
Secure	78%	59%	72%	83%	87%
Marginal	6%	6%	6%	4%	4%
Low security	7%	11%	5%	8%	4%
Very low security	10%	24%	17%	5%	4%
Weighted base	1165	227	162	372	211

This direct correlation between higher household income and increasing food security found in Devon households is illustrated in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Devon Household Annual Income and Food Security 2021



3.2.2 Households with and without children and their income

Table 3.2.2 brings together the findings from the previous section on households with children and those about household income. It shows that nearly two thirds of Devon households with children and income of less than £16,190 are experiencing food insecurity (64%). Over two fifths of household that have children and an income of between £16,191 and £19,999 were also experiencing insecurity (44%).

While the base numbers for these two groups are comparatively low (63 and 56 households respectively) the findings fit the pattern shown in the previous tables and reported nationally by the Family Resources Survey.

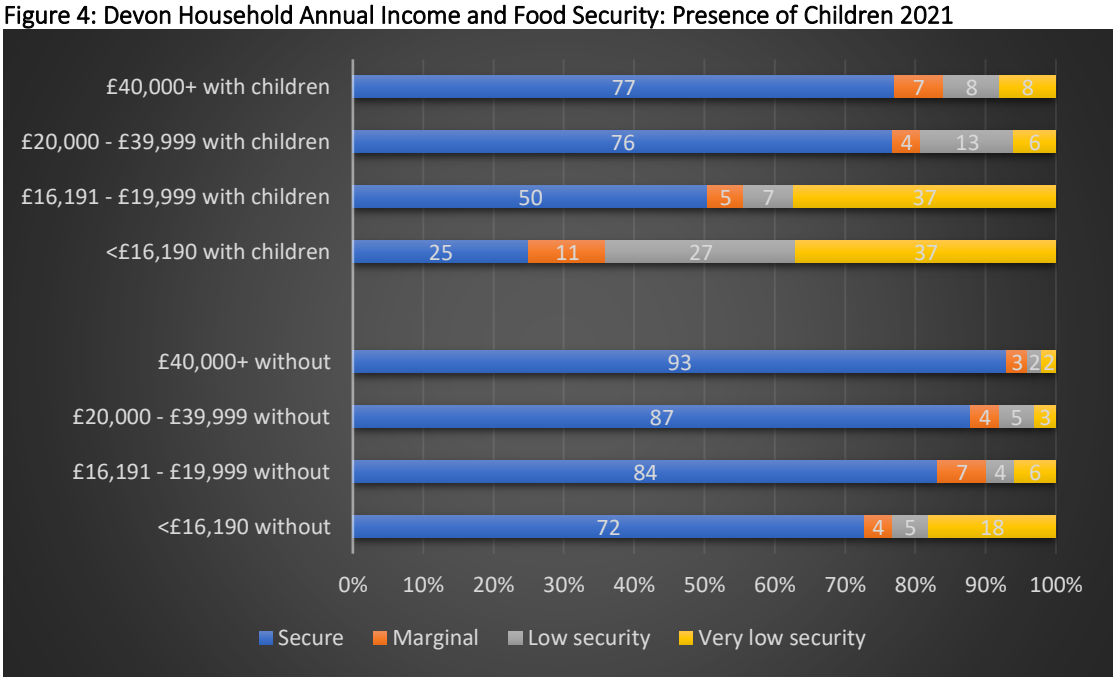
Table 3.2.2 Household annual income (with and without children) and food security

Food Security	Devon	<£16,190		£16,191 - £19,999		£20,000-£39,999		£40,000+	
		(with)	(without)	(with)	(without)	(with)	(without)	(with)	(without)
Food secure	78%	25%	72%	50%	84%	76%	87%	77%	93%
Marginal	6%	11%	4%	5%	7%	4%	4%	7%	3%
Low security	7%	27%	5%	7%	4%	13%	5%	8%	2%
Very low security	10%	37%	18%	37%	6%	6%	3%	8%[10]	2%
Weighted base	1165	63	164	56	106	139	233	74	137

The relationship between increased food insecurity and the presence of children was evident even in households with the highest levels of income: 4% of households with income of £40,000+ *without* children were food insecure compared with 16% of those with income of £40,000+ *with* children. These huge differences in levels of food insecurity between households with and without children are illustrated in figure 4 below.

The figure shows that, while the presence of children impacts on food security in households at all income levels, it is most acutely apparent in low-income households, particularly those with annual income below £20,000. As noted, over half of Devon households with children and income of under £20,000 are currently experiencing food insecurity.

Figure 4: Devon Household Annual Income and Food Security: Presence of Children 2021



[10] These households were more likely to have had an employment event, such as being furloughed, changes to hours, etc.

3.2.3 Households in receipt of means tested benefits

As was to be expected, given the findings for household income, a correlation was also found between household receipt of at least one means tested benefit and the likelihood of food insecurity. Table 3.2.3 shows that approaching a third of households in receipt of at least one means tested benefit (30%) are experiencing food insecurity, compared with just 8% of the households not receiving any means tested benefits.

Table 3.2.3 Household in receipt of means tested benefit(s) and food security

Food Security	Devon	Receiving at least one means tested benefit	Not receiving any means tested benefit
Secure	78%	63%	87%
Marginal	6%	7%	5%
Low security	7%	11%	4%
Very low security	10%	19%	4%
Weighted base	1165	455	709

This difference again corresponded with that reported by the FRS which found, pre-pandemic, that 25% of households on income related benefits were experiencing food insecurity, compared with 4% of those not receiving any income related benefits. However, there are two things to note about this finding:

- Firstly, that the Devon figure of 30% is only slightly above that reported by the FRS pre-pandemic (25%), compared with the much larger differences reported earlier between other household types such as those with children (Devon = 29% and FRS = 11%); and
- Secondly the Devon figure of 30% of households on means tested benefits being food insecure is nothing like as high as the level of insecurity among those households with low incomes and children (around half of those with income less than £20,000 pa).

While these findings need further investigation, they indicate there may be Devon households with children who are eligible for benefits, but who are not claiming them and/or that for some groups of Devon households that are in receipt of benefits the amount they receive is still not sufficient to keep them food secure.

3.3 Household tenure

Table 3.3.1 below shows that Devon households who were renting their accommodation, either from a social/council (34%) or private (33%) landlord were more likely to be food insecure than those who owned their home outright (6%) or owned it with a mortgage (10%).

Table 3.3.1 Household tenure and food security

Food Security	Devon	Own outright	Own with mortgage	Rent social/council	Rent privately
Secure	78%	91%	83%	61%	57%
Marginal	6%	3%	7%	5%	11%
Low security	7%	3%	5%	11%	15%
Very low security	10%	3%	5%	23%	18%
Weighted base	1165	423	313	173	187

For households that either owned their accommodation outright or rented from social/council landlords, this pattern replicated that found on the FRS, albeit with slight increases in the overall levels of insecurity. However, in 2019/20 the FRS found that households renting privately were much more likely to be food secure (88%) than insecure (12%). If this national figure were indicative for Devon at that time, then it indicates a significant increase of +20% in food insecurity during the pandemic among this group of households.

3.4 Household activity status and industry sector

This section explores the relationship between the activity status of the adults in the Devon households covered by the survey and the food security levels in their households. For those households in which the adults were employed (full or part-time) or self-employed, the section also examines the industrial sector in which they worked.

It is worth noting that details were collected on the activity status of *up to four separate adults* in each household. The data presented in the following sections show the findings for the activities of the main respondents only, relative to the food security status of their household.

When assessing the data in the table it should be remembered that the average Devon household contains just over *two adults* – and the data relates only to the activity of the main respondent. The details of the activities of the remaining adults and the industrial sectors of those working can be found in Appendix IV.

3.4.1 Activity status of main household respondent

Much of the published research in this area has identified the strong link between different types of activity and the level of food security. This is obviously because of the relationship between activity and income levels[11].

As reported above, households suffering food insecurity have invariably been those in which the activities of the adult members were associated with low incomes, such as being unemployed, long term sick, or in poorly paid or part-time occupations. Some reports had indicated that the pandemic had added a further set of households to those in low security: those who were in work, but who had been furloughed[12].

Table 3.4.1 below presents the findings for Devon households in terms of the status of the person who answered the questions on behalf of each household. The table shows some very wide differences in the levels of household food security. Nearly all the households in which the main respondent was retired were food secure (98%).

In contrast, between a quarter and a third of some households were food insecure: where the main respondent was either long term sick (35%), a student[13] (34%), other (30%), unemployed (28%), currently furloughed from their work (28%) or part-time employed (26%). Of course, these differences in security correspond to both the different levels of income in the different households and also the likely levels of expenditure in terms of mouths to feed. Indeed, those households with the fewest members (the retired – of whom 80% had only one or two household members) were the most food secure.

Table 3.4.1 Current activity status of main household respondent

Food Security	Devon	Full Time Emp	Part Time Emp	Self Emp (FT & PT)	Furlough (from any job)	Retired	Unemp -loyed	Long term sick	Student	Other
Food secure	78%	79%	70%	83%	65%	97%	55%	63%	46%	60%
Marginal	6%	6%	5%	3%	7%	1%	17%	2%	20%	10%
Low security	7%	6%	13%	7%	15%	1%	10%	9%	14%	11%
Very low security	10%	10%	13%	7%	13%	*%	18%	26%	20%	19%
Weighted base	1165	332	135	133	69	278	64	54	42	58

[11] https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Affordability-of-the-Eatwell-Guide_Final_Web-Version.pdf

[12] https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/measuring-child-hunger/

[13] This figure has a base of 42 so should be treated with some caution. Again, it corresponds to that reported by the FRS.

It is worth briefly looking at each of the main activity categories:

- Full-time employees and the self-employed
  Households in which the main respondent was in one of these groups were no more or less likely to be food insecure than the Devon population as whole.
- Part-time employees and those on furlough
  Reflecting the lower wages and often higher levels of transience in these positions, households with the main respondent in these groups were more likely to be food insecure.
- Retired
  Households with the main respondent in this group were nearly all in the secure food category as a result of their smaller size, stable pension incomes and comparative lack of outgoings.
- Long term sick and those unemployed
  For many of these households the lack of earned income and dependence on benefits meant they were the most likely to be food insecure.

3.4.2 Industry sector of main respondents who were working

Details were collected on the industrial sector in which main respondents who had a job or were self-employed were currently working. The SMF report[14] highlighted four sectors that had been particularly badly hit by the pandemic – hospitality & leisure, retail, manufacturing and construction – with large increases in the proportions of very low child food security in households where the parents' occupation was in one of the four. The report noted that:

> *"Sectors with lower pay and often less consistent and secure contracts, such as hospitality and retail, had higher levels of food insecurity, with around a quarter of parents recalling difficulty feeding their children prior to the pandemic…. these were the sectors in which the highest proportion of respondents said that their incomes had fallen since the pandemic."*

The findings for the Devon households closely mirrored those found nationally by SMF, with respondents working in the same four sectors, together with arts, entertainment & recreation and administrative and support services being the most likely to have experienced a reduction in income, being furloughed or having reduced working hours since March 2020.

Table 3.4.2 below contains the detail for these six sectors, compared with all Devon sectors combined. This illustrates that, while the impact of the pandemic was felt across all sectors in the county, the level of impact was far greater in some than others.

Table 3.4.2 Industrial sector and experience since pandemic started in March 2020

Experience	Reduced income	Being furloughed	Reduced hours	Weight base
Arts, entertainment & leisure	85%	64%	49%	37[15]
Accommodation & food services	57%	62%	45%	97
Administrative & support services	51%	46%	45%	56
Wholesale & retail	49%	49%	36%	152
Construction	45%	41%	40%	129
Manufacturing	36%	56%	24%	78
All Devon sectors	32%	29%	23%	1165

[14] https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/measuring-child-hunger/

[15] NB Caution is needed with this finding because of the low base of 37 for this sector.

3.5 Household physical and mental health conditions

This section discusses the levels and types of food insecurity that were found in different households across Devon, in terms of whether any household members had:

- Physical and mental health conditions lasting or expected to last 12 months or more: and
- Whether the conditions reduced people's ability to carry out day to day activities.

3.5.1 Physical and mental health conditions

The respondents were asked whether they, or anyone else in the household had any physical or mental health condition lasting or that was expected to last more than 12 months. Households with at least one person with a health condition (27%) were more likely to be experiencing food insecurity than those households without anyone with a condition (8%).

Table 3.5.1 Households with and without members with a health condition

Food Security	Devon	At least one member of HH with health condition	No members of HH with health condition
Secure	78%	67%	87%
Marginal	6%	6%	5%
Low security	7%	10%	4%
Very low security	10%	17%	4%
Weighted base	1165	504	640

There were very marked differences between the likelihood of the household experiencing food insecurity, in terms of whether the health condition was physical or mental. Nearly half of household with at least one person with a ***mental*** health condition (46%) were experiencing food insecurity, compared with 13% of those households with at least one person experiencing a ***physical*** health condition. Table 3.5.2 contains the details.

Table 3.5.2 Households with different types of health conditions

Food Security	Devon	At least one member of HH with physical health condition	At least one member of HH with mental health condition	At least one member of HH with both mental & physical condition
Secure	78%	82%	48%	54%
Marginal	6%	5%	6%	8%
Low security	7%	5%	16%	12%
Very low security	10%	8%	30%	26%
Weighted base	1165	265	126	113

3.5.2 Household members with reduced ability to carry out day to day activities

The households containing at least one person with a health condition were asked whether the health condition limited the persons' abilities to carry out day to day activities. Those households with a member whose health condition reduced their abilities either a lot (37%) or a little (30%) were more likely to be experiencing food insecurity than those households with members whose health condition did not reduce their abilities (10%).

Table 3.5.3 Households with and without members with reduced abilities

Food Security	Devon	No reduction in abilities	Abilities reduced a little	Abilities reduced a lot
Secure	78%	86%	62%	57%
Marginal	6%	4%	7%	6%
Low security	7%	3%	13%	12%
Very low security	10%	7%	17%	25%
Weighted base	1165	148	161	195

These findings again mirrored those found by the FRS, in terms of households with people having a limiting condition being more likely to be experiencing food insecurity. The FRS reported that, pre-pandemic, 12% of UK households containing one or more disabled[16] adults in the household were food insecure, compared with 5% of those households with no disabled adult members.

3.6 Household ethnicity

The FRS had a sample size of 19,041 enabling it to conduct analysis of households in terms of the ethnicity of their "head of household" (HoH). This analysis showed some significant variations in the level of food insecurity between households related to HoH ethnicity. For the proportions of households that were food insecure, these variations were:

- White HoH = 7% insecure
- Indian HoH = 5% insecure
- Pakistani HoH = 10% insecure
- Other Asian HoH = 8% insecure
- Black/African/Caribbean Black British HoH = 19% insecure
- Other ethnic group HoH = 14% insecure

The Devon survey had a sample size of 1,160 and the 2011 Census had found that 95% of the county's population was white. This would indicate that all but c.50-60 of the sample of interviews would be completed with HoHs who were white. In fact, 99 of the 1,160 interviews were conducted with respondents who indicated that their ethnic group was something other than being white British. This had been anticipated as it was known that the number of people in Devon who were from different ethnic backgrounds had increased since 2011. When published, the 2021 Census results will provide a precise figure on the amount of increase.

While it was not possible to fully analyse the 99 households in terms of their different ethnic backgrounds, as shown above, because of the sample size limitations, it is possible to identify two broad trends in the data:

- Firstly, those Devon households in which the HoH was white were more likely to be food secure than any of the other groups.
- Secondly those Devon households in which the HoH was either Black/African/Caribbean /Black British or of mixed/multiple background were more likely to be food insecure. (N.B. The sample size for these findings are small, so they should be treated with caution).

Further research is needed to confirm and explore these points.

[16] The FRS defines disability as: *"A person is considered to have a disability if they regard themselves as having a long-standing illness, disability or impairment which causes substantial difficulty with day-to-day activities. Some people classified as disabled and having rights under the Equality Act 2010 are not captured by this definition, such as people with a long-standing illness or disability which is not currently affecting their day-to-day activities."*

3.7 Household Local Authority

The households interviewed were geographically grouped into their local authority district within Devon. Reflecting the different profiles of the constituent populations and hence the composition of the households in each of the eight districts, there were some very marked differences in the levels of food security found in each district. Table 3.7.1 contains the full details, while figure 5 highlights the levels of food insecurity found in each district.

The highest levels of household food insecurity were found in three districts, where around a quarter of households were insecure: Exeter (28%), North Devon (24%) and West Devon (21%). In contrast, in Mid Devon (9%), Torridge (10%), East Devon (12%) and Teignbridge (12%) around one in ten households were experiencing insecurity.

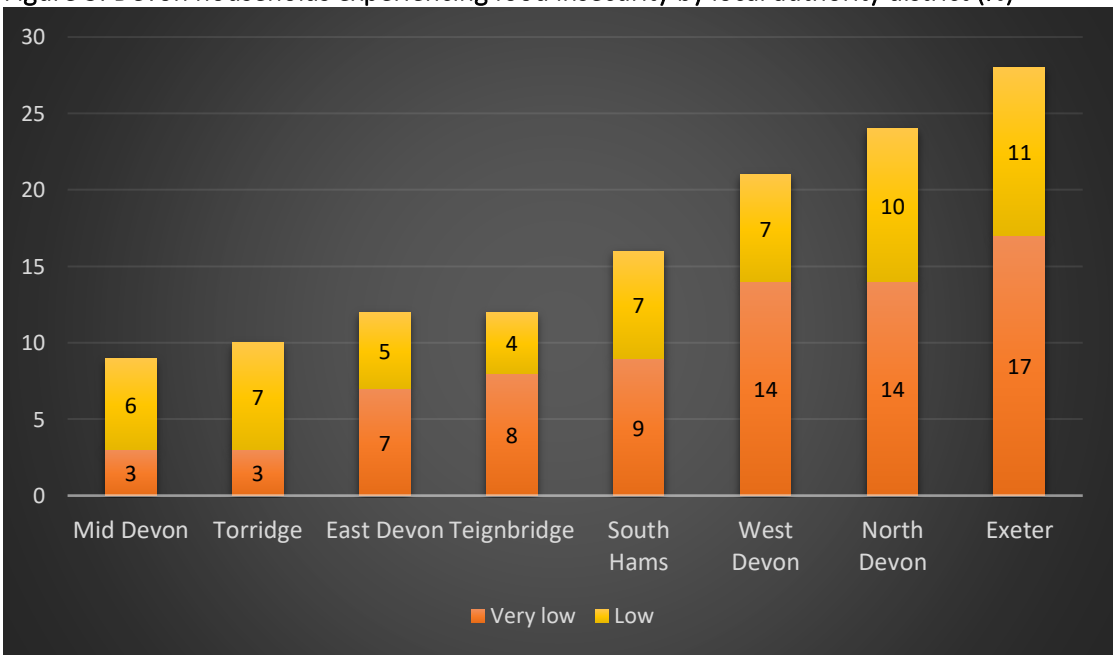
These differences were the result of a wide range of factors, including average household size and composition (esp. number of children), income, employment status, proportion of retired people, tenure, health conditions, especially mental health and benefits receipt as described earlier. (These are discussed further overleaf).

Table 3.7.1 Household local authority district

Food Security	**Devon**	East Devon	Exeter	Mid Devon	North Devon	South Hams	Teign-bridge	Torridge	West Devon
Secure	78%	83%	61%	86%	73%	80%	80%	87%	75%
Marginal	6%	5%	11%	5%	3%	4%	7%	2%	4%
Low security	7%	5%	11%	6%	10%	7%	4%	7%	7%
Very low security	10%	7%	17%	3%	14%	9%	8%	3%	14%
Weighted base	1165	196	175	121	129	122	181	121	120

It is striking that table 3.7.1 shows that in some districts – Mid Devon (91%), Torridge (89%), East Devon (88%) and Teignbridge (87%) – the levels of food security overall were broadly on a par with those that would have been anticipated *before* the pandemic. Figure 5 below highlights these differences, focusing on the proportion of households in each district that were experiencing food insecurity.

Figure 5. Devon households experiencing food insecurity by local authority district (%)



As mentioned, the variations in food security levels between the districts are the result of a range of differences in their household profiles. These differences are summarised in table 3.7.2 below for the key indicators of food insecurity such as household size and composition (esp. number of children), income, employment status, proportion of retired people, tenure, health conditions, especially mental health and benefits receipt as described earlier.

For the two districts with the highest insecurity ratings – Exeter (28%) and North Devon (24%) – it was not surprising that the table shows that they scored poorly (in terms of levels of food insecurity) on many on the indicators: having the highest average number of children per household, the highest proportion of households with income of less than £20,000 per annum, the lowest proportions of main respondents who were retired, together with being among the highest proportions of households who were renting (as opposed to owning outright) or with health conditions.

In contrast, for the two districts with the lowest insecurity ratings – Mid Devon (9%) and Torridge (10%) – the table shows that they scored comparatively "highly" across many of the indicators for high food security: smaller households, higher proportions of respondents who were full-time employees or retired, together with higher proportions of households who owned their accommodation outright and lower proportions with health conditions.

Table 3.7.2 Selected household characteristics by local authority district

Age band	**Devon**	East Devon	Exeter	Mid Devon	North Devon	South Hams	Teign-bridge	Torridge	West Devon
Average size (no. of residents)	2.8	2.7	3.1	2.6	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.9
Average no. of children	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.6
Income (%)									
- <£20,000 pa	34%	33%	40%	30%	39%	31%	30%	33%	29%
- £20 - £40,000 pa	32%	38%	24%	33%	38%	29%	31%	33%	30%
Main respondent activity (%)									
- FTE	28%	28%	33%	33%	19%	22%	32%	32%	25%
- PTE	12%	9%	13%	8%	15%	11%	15%	10%	13%
- Retired	24%	30%	14%	25%	19%	29%	19%	30%	28%
Tenure (%)									
- Social/council rent	15%	16%	18%	9%	16%	19%	14%	9%	16%
- Private rent	16%	9%	19%	20%	21%	8%	21%	16%	14%
- Own outright	36%	43%	28%	40%	33%	43%	28%	43%	34%
Health (%)									
- 1+ any condition	45%	41%	47%	43%	48%	44%	49%	39%	49%
- 1+ mental health	11%	11%	11%	7%	12%	13%	12%	6%	14%
Benefit receipt (%)	39%	39%	39%	36%	46%	36%	36%	36%	42%
Weighted base	1165	196	175	121	129	122	181	121	120

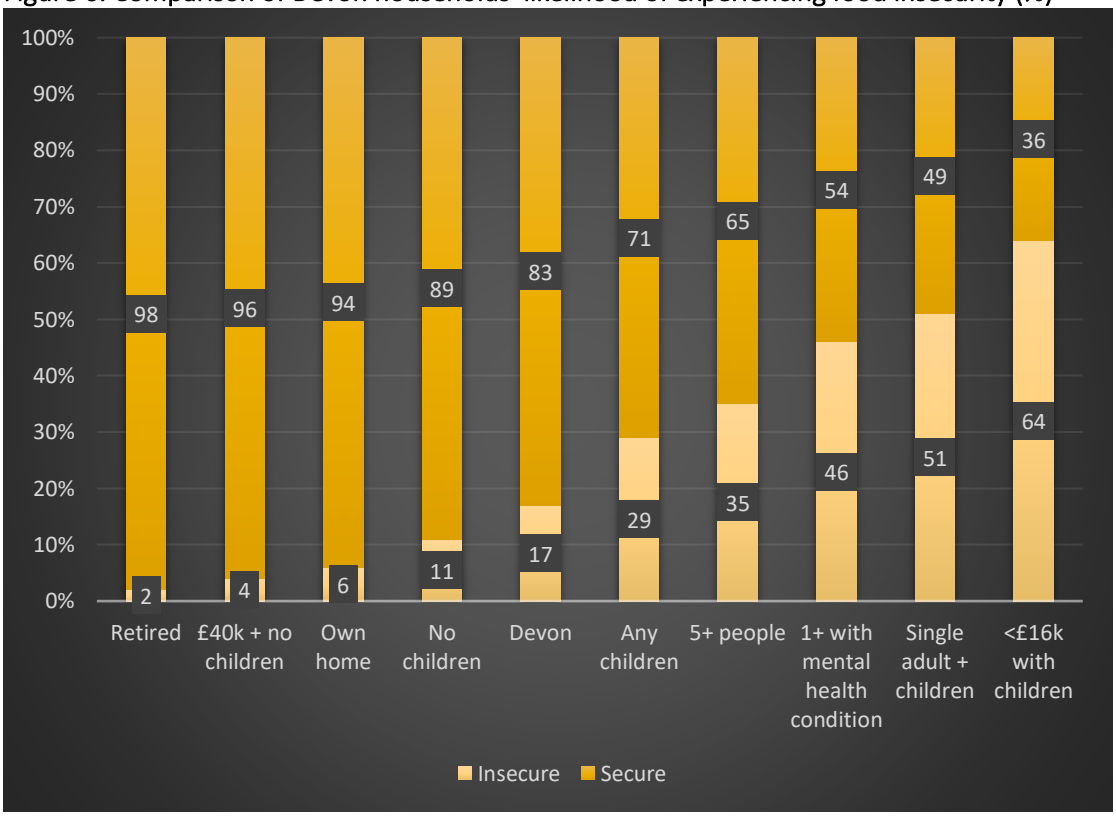
When assessing the finding in this section, it is important to remember that all eight of the districts in Devon contain households that are experiencing very low food security. The overall figures for the levels of food security found in each district are merely a reflection of the composition of the constituent households living there.

Based on the findings in the previous sections showing the types of households most likely to be experiencing food insecurity, further research is needed to pinpoint specific food insecurity hotspots within districts. This can be done by mapping these types of households at the MSOA and LSOA levels where available and also correlating them with DCC's vulnerability index.

3.8 Summary of Devon Households Facing Food Insecurity

In summary, 17% of the total sample of Devon households were classified as being "food insecure", either having a low food security or very low food security status. The preceding sections of this chapter have shown how the likelihood of being food insecure varies greatly between households with different profiles. Figure 6 below compares some of the characteristics of the Devon households that were found to be significantly more likely to be food insecure with those that were least likely:

Figure 6. Comparison of Devon households' likelihood of experiencing food insecurity (%)



In addition to the categories of household that are shown in the figure, there were several other profiles that were found to be significantly more likely to be food insecure than average:

- Income of between £16,190 - £19,999 and children (44%)
- 1+ household member with a health condition limiting ability to do day to day activities (37%)
- Renting their accommodation from the council/social (34%) or privately (33%)
- Households where the main respondent was either long term sick (35%), student (34%), other (30%), unemployed (28%) or currently furloughed from their work (28%).
- Households in receipt of means tested benefits (25%)

The study also found some evidence that households in which the HoH was either Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British or of mixed/multiple background were more likely to be food insecure. However, this needs verification by further research.

What is most important to highlight is that many of the households that were food insecure invariably had more than one of the characteristics listed above. For example, they might have annual income of less than £16,191, children present and more than 5 people living in the household, or they might be a single adult with children, income of less than £16,191 and a household member with a mental health condition. Many of the Devon households in the very low food security group faced multiple disadvantages.

4. Pandemic and food related events in household since March 2020

One of the key drivers for this study was to gain a better understanding of how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on household food security in Devon. While it was acknowledged that no baseline existed for the county about the levels of household food security *before* the pandemic, it was intended that the study would both identify the *current* levels[17] and explore the ways in which the pandemic had affected these levels in households across Devon.

Consequently, the interviews included a question asking whether a set of pandemic and food related events had happened to anyone in the household since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. This was done to try to ascertain whether there was a link between the occurrence (or not) of any of the events and the level of food security in the household. While it was acknowledged that the events asked about could not be exhaustive, it was felt that they covered most of the likely things that could have impacted on food security:

- Testing positive for coronavirus
- Suffering coronavirus symptoms
- Losing a job
- Being placed on furlough
- Increased working hours
- Reduced working hours
- Reduced income
- Suffered a delay in benefits payments
- Hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food
- Accessed emergency food support (i.e. visited a food bank or other food support)
- Received free school meals (if there are children in the household)

The SMF research[18] had used broadly the same list of events to assess those families *"who reported moving into very low child food security in 2020, having been more food secure in 2019*". It found that these families had "*been disproportionately affected by the economic fallout from the pandemic"*. Specifically, it found that three fifths of this group reported reduced income, over two fifths had faced reduced working hours and around a quarter had lost their job or suffered a delay in benefits payments. All of these proportions were significantly higher than those among families who had not moved in food insecurity.

4.1 Household experience of at least one pandemic and food related event

The pattern found by SMF nationally was replicated among the Devon households surveyed. Overall, two fifths (39%) of the Devon households reported that they had ***not*** suffered any of the events since March 2020, while the remaining three fifths (61%) had suffered at least one event. Those that had ***not*** suffered any events were significantly less likely to be experiencing food insecurity (6%) compared with households that had experienced at least one event (24%)

In line with the SMF analysis, the Devon households with low or very low food security were found to have been disproportionately affected by the economic impact of the pandemic, with around a half reporting reduced income, two fifths having reduced working hours and around a quarter losing a job or suffering a delay in benefits payments. Table 4.1 overleaf has the details and shows that households with low or very low food security had also suffered ***more*** events on average than households that were food secure or marginal.

[17] To act as a baseline for future comparative studies.

[18] https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/measuring-child-hunger/

Table 4.1 Household experience of 1+ event(s) since March 2020

Food Security	Devon	No events since March 2020	At least one event	Average number of events
Secure	78%	90%	70%	1.0
Marginal	6%	5%	6%	1.4
Low security	7%	3%	10%	1.9
Very low security	10%	3%	14%	2.3
Weighted base	1165	450	713	1165

It is, of course, extremely difficult to fully establish cause and effect for all the households in the insecure category – that is, were they more likely to experience an event because they were insecure or were they more likely to be insecure because they had experienced an event. It was evident, however, that the 61% households that had suffered at least one of the events were in several key respects very different from the 39% that had ***not*** suffered any of them.

Most importantly, and as was to be expected given that many of the events asked about were employment related events, the main respondent from the 61% of Devon households experiencing an event was significantly more likely to be in any form of employment or self-employment (73% compared with 32% of those with no events). Conversely, the main respondent in households ***not*** experiencing an event was significantly more likely to be retired (51% compared with just 6%).

The households who had experienced an event were also more likely to be larger, with more children, as well as being in the private rental sector or with mortgages. Interestingly they were broadly in the *same income bands* as the households not experiencing an event. From this we can infer that, given that the households experiencing an event have more people to feed, together with mortgages/rent to pay, they were more likely to become food insecure because their overall level of expenditure (relative to income) will need to be higher.

This is a powerful and important finding because it demonstrates how pandemic events have led to specific groups of households being more likely to become food insecure. Table 4.2 below summarises the key differences between the characteristics of those Devon households who have and those who have not experienced any events since March 2020.

Table 4.2 Household characteristics and experience of 1+ event(s) since March 2020

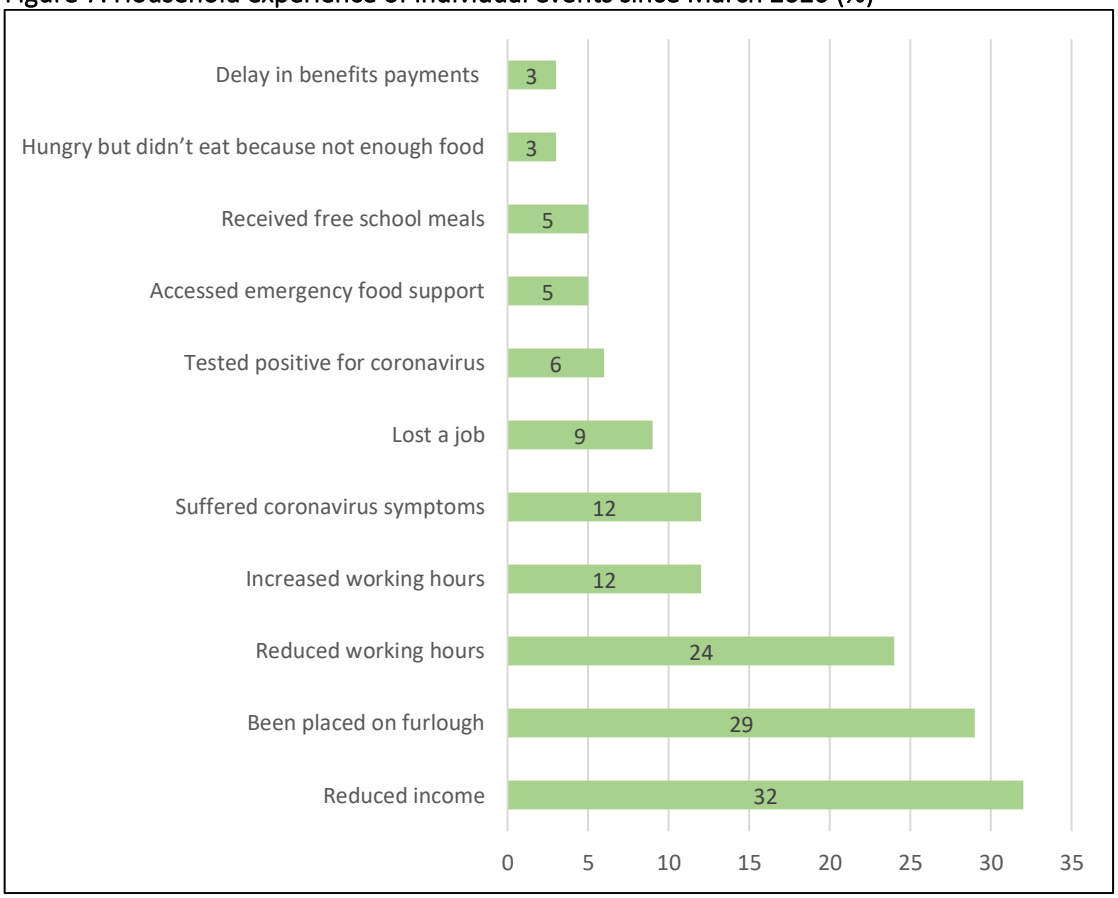
Household characteristic	Devon	No events in last year	At least one event
Main respondent activity			
- Employment or self-employment	58%	32%	73%
- Retired	24%	51%	6%
Average household size (adults and children)	2.6	2.2	3.2
Average no. of children	0.6	0.3	0.8
Tenure			
- Private renters	16%	11%	19%
- Own outright	26%	52%	26%
- Mortgage/loan	32%	18%	32%
Health conditions			
- 1+ with mental health	11%	6%	14%
- 1+ with physical and mental	10%	7%	12%
Currently in receipt of:			
- Universal credit	12%	7%	15%
- Tax credits	8%	4%	11%
- Family benefits	7%	2%	10%
Weighted base	1165	450	713

4.2 Household experience of individual events since March 2020

While 61% of Devon households had experienced at least one event since March 2020, the proportions reporting each individual event varied greatly. Figure 7 below contains the details and shows that between a quarter and a third of households reported one or more of their household members having some of the key employment and income related events, such as reduced income, being placed on furlough or reduced working hours.

Much smaller proportions said that someone in the household had a covid related event, such as suffering symptoms or testing positive[19] and similarly smaller proportions reported someone having lost a job, suffered delays in benefit payments or a food related event (such as accessing emergency food support or receiving free school meals).

Figure 7. Household experience of individual events since March 2020 (%)



Weighted base: 1,165

The proportions of households reporting each of the events shown in figure 7 are, of course, based on all Devon households. The analysis revealed that the proportions are markedly different when the households experiencing food insecurity are compared with those who are food secure. These are detailed in figure 8 and show that those experiencing food insecurity were *more likely to report experiencing each of the events* (except working longer hours).

[19] The figure for 6% of the Devon households having at least one member test positive for Covid can used to create an estimate for the total number of Covid cases in the whole Devon population living in private households for comparison with published figures. By multiplying by the average household size of 2.8 and then grossing up to the Devon population of 802,000 produces an estimate of c.17,100 Devon positive Covid cases. The total published figure for positive cases in Devon as of 28/4/21 was c.20,400, which includes cases in institutions such as hospitals, care homes, halls of residence, prisons, etc. Unfortunately, it is not known exactly how many of these cases there are. However, by making an allowance of 10-15% for them, it can be seen that 17,100 is very close to the published figure. (https://www.devon.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-in-devon/coronavirus-data/)

In relation to food security, the three most significant differences were found to be in terms of the likelihood of food insecure households having experienced economic events that:

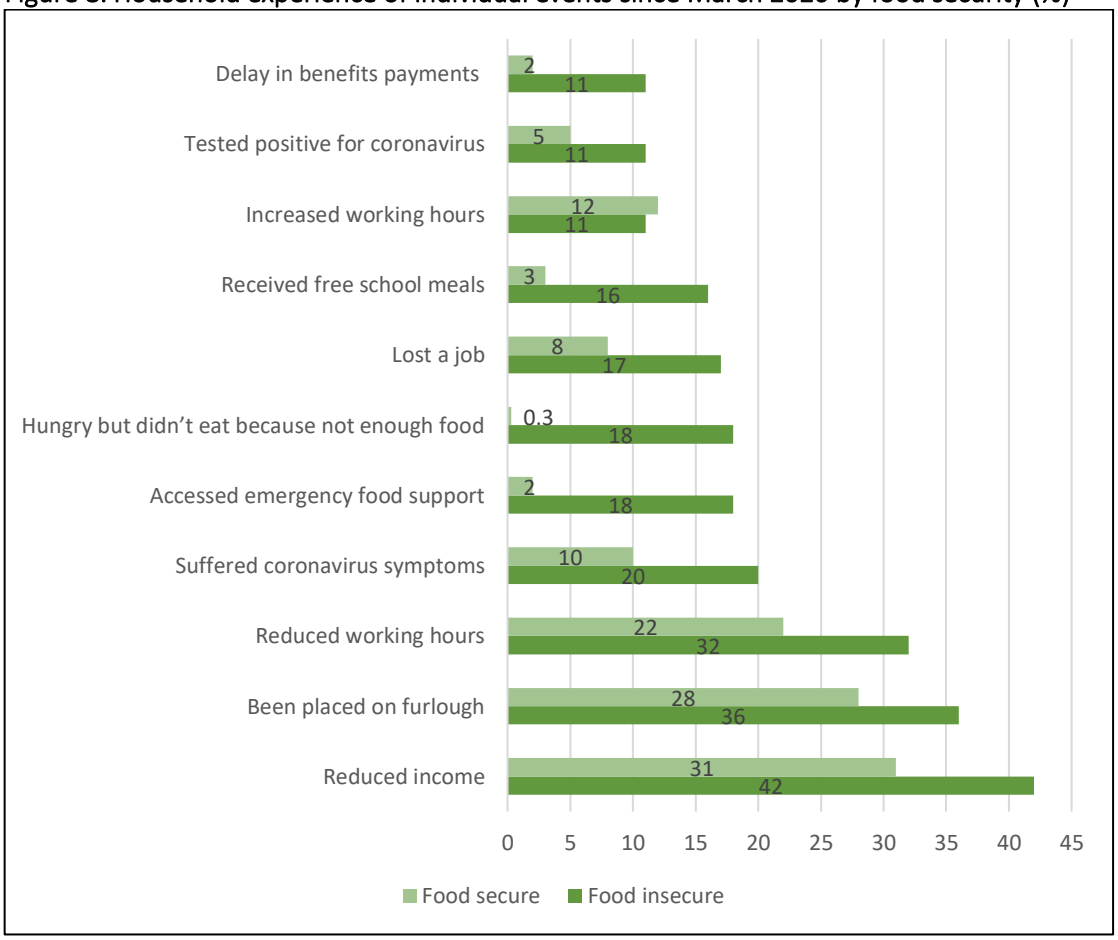
- Reduced income (42% compared with 31% of food secure households)
- Reduced working hours (32% compared with 22% of food secure households)
- Losing a job (17% compared with 8% of food secure households)

It was apparent that these three economic events all impact directly on the level of household food security identified. It was also evident how they had impacted on these food insecure households, with them being much more likely to have experienced a food related event:

- Accessing emergency food support (18% compared with 2% of food secure households)
- Being hungry but not having enough food (18% compared with 0.3%)
- Receiving free school meals (16% compared with 3%)

Figure 8 below contains the details for households who were food secure and food insecure.

Figure 8. Household experience of individual events since March 2020 by food security (%)



Weighted bases: Food secure (secure and marginal) households = 969 / Food insecure (low and very low) households = 196

It is also possible to examine these findings from a slightly different perspective. Figures 7 and 8 above are based on the proportions of food secure and insecure households that have experienced each type of event. Table 4.3 below shows for those households that have experienced each event, the proportions who are food secure or food insecure. This shows an intriguingly different pattern from the mostly economic relationships identified in figures 7 and 8 above.

The table shows that while the occurrence of 1+ event was associated with the household reporting higher levels of food insecurity (24% having 1+ event being food insecure compared with 6% of those having no events), each individual event was itself also associated with households with different levels of food insecurity.

As would be expected, the three food related events were most closely associated with households suffering food insecurity[20]. The next event that was most closely associated with households suffering food insecurity was suffering a delay in benefits payments[21], followed by testing positive for coronavirus and losing a job.

Table 4. 3 Association between individual event(s) in last year and current food security

Event	Food secure	Food Insecure	Weighted base
- No events	95%	6%	450
- 1+ event in last year	76%	24%	713
Hungry but not enough money for food	7%[22]	93%	38
Accessed emergency food support	33%	67%	52
Received free school meals	44%	56%	54
Delay in benefits payments	45%	55%	36
Tested positive for coronavirus	67%	33%	65
Lost a job	69%	31%	108
Suffered coronavirus symptoms	71%	29%	123
Reduced working hours	77%	23%	273
Reduced income	78%	22%	376
Been placed on furlough	79%	21%	338
Increased working hours	86%	14%	141
Devon	**83%**	**17%**	**1,165**

While on the surface this appears to present a somewhat different pattern to that shown in figures 7 and 8, it merely demonstrates that the impact of the events varied between different household types. Further analysis reveals that the underlying driver for the level of impact on food security is not surprisingly the levels of household income and expenditure.

This is evidenced firstly by the fact that the Devon households that have an income below £16,190 pa were significantly more likely to have suffered a reduction in their income, lost a job or had a delay in benefit payments since March 2020:

- Reduced income (35% compared with 22% of households with income > £40,000 pa)
- Losing a job (16% compared with 4% of households with income > £40,000 pa)
- Delay in benefit payments (8% compared with 2% of households with income > £40,000 pa)

Secondly, there is considerable evidence that families on a low income have spent more during the pandemic, because: "*having children at home more has meant higher spending on food, energy and ways to entertain or distract children when so many outdoor leisure activities have been curtailed. Remote schooling in particular has proven very expensive.*[23]"

Thirdly, these events meant that this group of low-income Devon households were, of course, significantly more likely to be food insecure (35%) compared with those households with higher levels of income of >£40,000 pa (8%), as shown in section 3.2.1.

[20] The figure for being "hungry but not having enough money" has a base of 38 so should be treated with caution.

[21] This figure has a base of 36 so should also be treated with caution, although it does correspond with other benefit-related findings in the study.

[22] N.B. Food security status is based on the last 30 days only, while the individual events cover the last year since March 2020.

[23] https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/pandemic-pressures/

4.3 Household experience of categorised events in last year

To provide an overview, the eleven different events were categorised into four broad types:

- **Covid** (Testing positive for coronavirus and/or suffering coronavirus symptoms)
- **Employment** (Losing a job, being placed on furlough, change in working hours)
- **Income/benefit**s (Reduced income and/or suffered a delay in benefits payments)
- **Food** (hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food, accessed emergency food support and/or received free school meals

Table 4.4 shows that, aside from households that had a food event, households that had a Covid event were more likely to be experiencing food insecurity (31%) than other households. A quarter of households that had an income reduction or benefits delay were experiencing food insecurity (24%).

Overall, those households that had experienced a food event were, not surprisingly, the ***most*** likely to be experiencing food insecurity (62%). It was more surprising though that more than a third of this group reported that they were actually food secure (38%) – these households were often those that reported having received free school meals, rather than accessing emergency food support or being hungry because they didn't have enough money.

Table 4.4 Household experience of categorised event(s) since March 2020

Food Security	Devon	Covid	Employment	Income/ benefits	Food
Secure	78%	62%	73%	69%	34%
Marginal	6%	7%	6%	7%	4%
Low security	7%	12%	8%	10%	17%
Very low security	10%	19%	12%	14%	45%
Weighted base	1165	150	576	388	106

4.4 Households with very low food security status and events since March 2020

Table 4.5 below shows how the Devon households that were in the very low or low security status were also far more likely to have suffered from pandemic related events since March 2020 than those in the secure groups. Nearly nine out of ten of those in the very low security group had suffered at least one event (89%), compared with just over half of those in the secure group (55%).

Table 4.5 Household food security status and experience of event(s) since March 2020

Events	Devon	Secure	Marginal	Low	Very low
No events	39%	45%	33%	14%	11%
At least one event	61%	55%	67%	86%	89%
Weighted base	1165	903	66	83	113

Because of their very vulnerable position, it is important to examine the group of households in the very low food security category separately. As was to be anticipated, the specific events that they were significantly more likely to have suffered since March 2020 were closely linked to reducing food security:

- Reduced income (45% compared with 28% of other food security categories)
- Losing a job (20% compared with7%)
- Delay in benefits payments (11% compared with 2%)

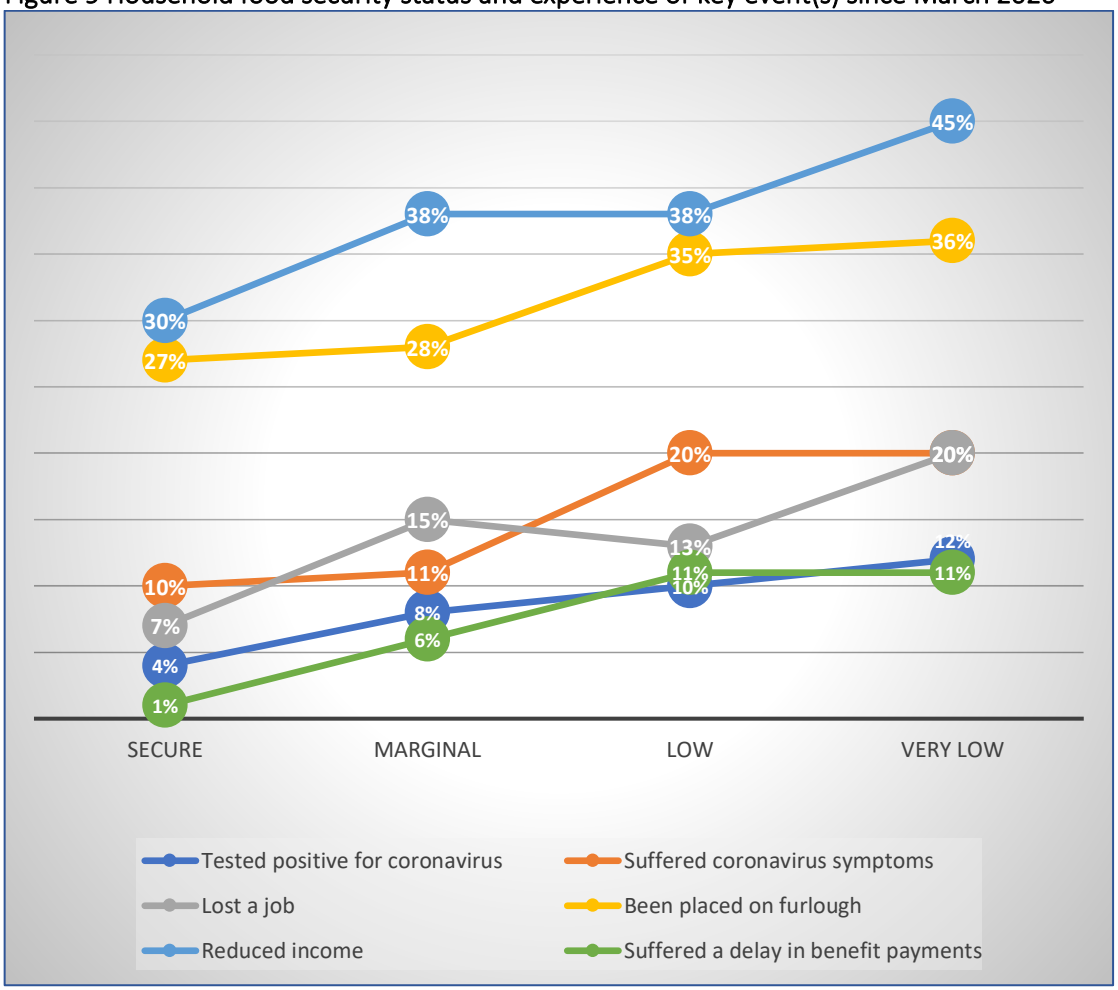
Table 4.6 and figure 9 overleaf contain the details, clearly showing the relationships between the likelihood of experiencing events and lower household food security.

Table 4.6 Household food security status and experience of key events since March 2020

Events	Devon	Secure	Marginal	Low	Very low
Tested positive for coronavirus	6%	4%	8%	10%	12%
Suffered coronavirus symptoms	12%	10%	11%	20%	20%
Lost a job	9%	7%	15%	13%	20%
Been placed on furlough	29%	27%	28%	35%	36%
Reduced Income	32%	30%	38%	38%	45%
Suffered a delay in benefit payments	3%	1%	6%	11%	11%
Weighted base	1165	903	66	83	113

Figure 9 below highlights the clear relationship between experiencing each of the key individual economic and covid related events and decreasing levels of household food security. The households that had very low food security were the most likely to have experienced each of the events since March 2020.

Figure 9 Household food security status and experience of key event(s) since March 2020

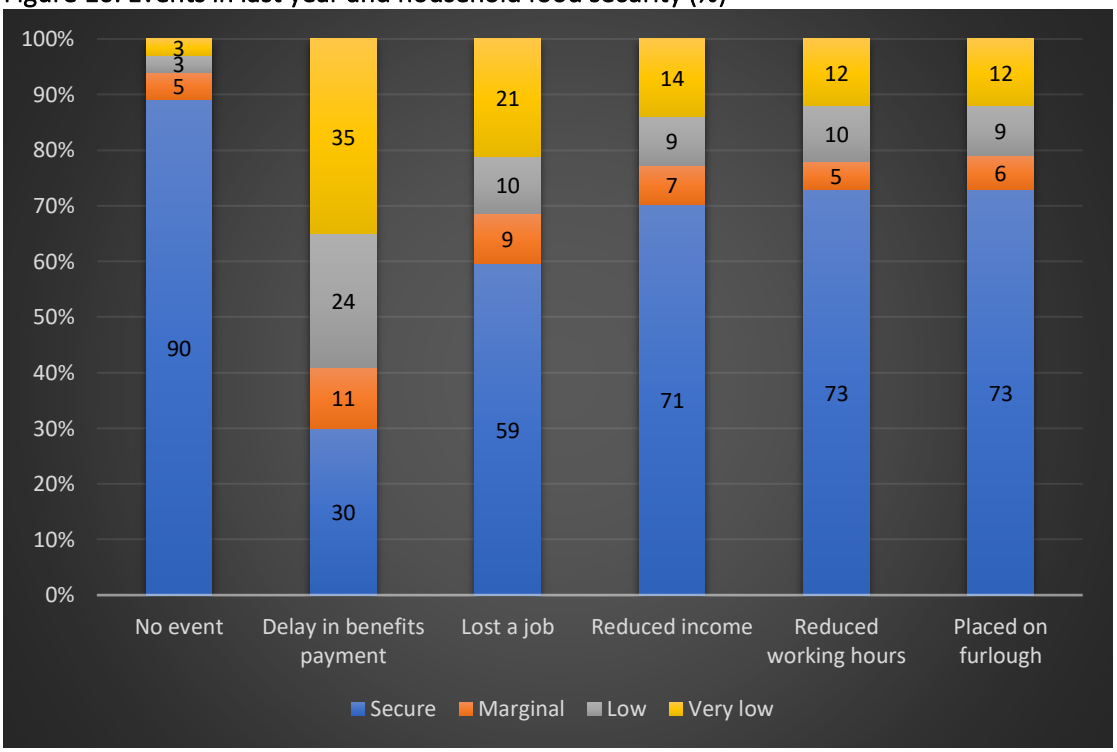


4.5 Summary of Devon Households Experience of Events Since March 2020

In summary, 61% of the total sample of Devon households had experienced an event since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. The preceding sections of this chapter have shown how both the types of events that were experienced and the likelihood of experiencing them varied greatly between households. Not surprisingly, events that directly impacted on household income were most closely associated with higher levels of food insecurity.

Figure 10 below shows the levels of food security in Devon households relative to the event that had been experienced. It is important to note that some households experienced multiple events, thereby further increasing the likelihood of being food insecure. Indeed, households found to have very low food security had experienced an average of 2.3 events compared with just 1.0 for food secure households.

Figure 10. Events in last year and household food security (%)



This "double whammy" clearly had a much greater impact on households with low income of below £16,190 pa. This group were significantly more likely to have suffered a reduction in their income, lost a job or had a delay in benefit payments since March 2020:

- Reduced income (35% compared with 22% of households with income > £40,000 pa)
- Lost a job (16% compared with 4% of households with income > £40,000 pa)
- Delay in benefit payments (8% compared with 2% of households with income > £40,000 pa)

As noted, low income households were also more likely to have spent more during the pandemic, due to the need to feed, entertain and keep their children warm. Consequently, more than a third of them (35%) had very low food security. As described in chapter 3, many of these households were extremely vulnerable and facing multiple disadvantages, including mental health conditions. They were disproportionately more likely to have had a household member who went hungry and did not eat because there was not enough money for food and to have accessed emergency food support.

5. Very low food security and accessing emergency food support

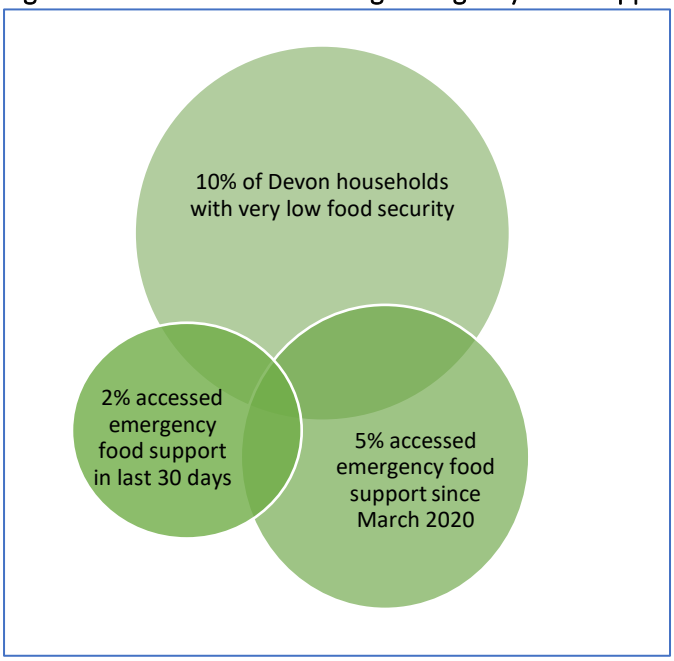
The specific types of households that have been particularly badly hit by the pandemic have been highlighted in numerous studies. The Food Foundation stated: "*households with children have consistently found it harder to put food on the table, particularly lone parents, large families, and low-income families*[24]*",* while the Resolution Foundation reported that[25]:

> *"The cost of feeding a family on a low income has risen during the pandemic. A reduction in promotions and difficulties obtaining particular items, and the need to avoid the risk of infection has forced some families to use more expensive food stores that are closer to home or will deliver."*

As such, this chapter focuses on the 113 Devon households that were classified as being in the most insecure category – those with "very low" food security[26] – as well as examining the 55 households that reported they had accessed emergency food support.

Figure 11 below highlights that, while there was unsurprisingly a degree of overlap between the households with very low food security and those accessing emergency support, the two groups did not entirely correspond. The proportion of households classified as having very low food security (10%) was markedly higher than either the proportion of households who had accessed emergency food support in the last 30 days (2%) or even since March 2020 (5%). Furthermore, not all of households who had accessed emergency food support were classified as having very low food security.

Figure 11. Households accessing emergency food support



There are, of course, a range of reasons why this might be the case and the following sections examine these reasons in terms of the different household profiles.

Firstly, the focus is on the profiles of the households with very low food security and compares those who ***have*** accessed emergency food support with those who ***have not*** accessed it – exploring the differences between them.

There is then an assessment of the types of households that have accessed emergency food support in the last 30 days or since the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

The chapter explores the "routes to emergency food support", charting the circumstances and events leading to these households needing to access emergency food support in terms of their characteristics. Lastly, it examines the profiles of very low food security households with children who have received free school meals compared with those who have not.

[24] https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FF_Impact-of-Covid_FINAL.pdf

[25] https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/pandemic-pressures/

[26] Much of the analysis in the preceding chapters has focused on those Devon households that were classified in the broad "food insecure" status so this represents a narrowing of the focus onto those that are most in need of support.

5.1 Households with very low food security status

A total of 113 Devon households (10%) were classified as being in the very low food security status. Specific types of households were significantly more likely to be in this group:

- Income of <£16,190 and children (36%)
- 1+ household member with a mental health condition (30%)
- Renting their accommodation from the council/social (23%) or privately (18%)
- Households where the main respondent was either long term sick (21%), unemployed (17%) or currently furloughed from their work (19%).
- Households in receipt of means tested benefits with children (27%)
- Households containing 5+ people (21%)

As described earlier, households with very low food security were also found to be significantly more likely to have experienced negative economic events since the start of the pandemic:

- Reduced income (45% compared with 32% of all Devon households)
- Been placed on furlough (36% compared with 29% of all households)
- Lost a job (20% compared with 9% of all households)
- Delays in benefit payments (11% compared with 3% of all households)

From these sets of characteristics and events, it is possible to identify that the impacts of the pandemic appear to have been concentrated on certain types of Devon households. These can be broadly categorised into two groups:

- Households that are among the most deprived and vulnerable, in terms of having low incomes, being in receipt of benefits, having 1+ household members with a mental health condition, living in social/council accommodation and/or being a single adult household: and
- Households that had been dependent upon income from the sectors that have been badly hit by lockdown such as accommodation & tourism, retail, construction and arts, resulting in lost jobs or lower income, who are living in private rented accommodation and consequently faced with comparatively higher outgoings.

Crucially, both these groups have been disproportionately more likely to suffer a negative income-related event since the start of the pandemic. What they also have in common is that they are both generally younger than the Devon population on average – with children present – and therefore have larger average household sizes and more mouths to feed.

This finding is supported by numerous other studies that have taken place recently. In January 2021, the Food Foundation[27] reported:

> *"Covid-19 has deepened the financial hardship faced by low-income households and has also created a newly vulnerable group who were financially stable pre-Covid. Households are balancing on a financial tightrope, increasing debt and using up savings to survive."*

Also in January 2021, ONS[28] reported that:

> *"The labour market shocks associated with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic have been felt more by young people and the lowest paid… People with a job or seeking work were more likely to have decreased income during the pandemic, and particularly the poorest 20%... Throughout the pandemic, employed parents were almost twice as likely to report a reduction in income than the general employed population."*

[27] https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FF_Impact-of-Covid_FINAL.pdf

[28] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/personalandeconomicwellbeingintheuk/january2021

Similarly in February 2021, the TUC[29] reported that debt levels had increased among:

- *"Furloughed workers and those recently made redundant. 35 per cent of furloughed workers and 46 per cent of those recently made redundant have experienced high levels of debt, compared to 19 per cent of those working as normal*
- *Those in receipt of benefits. 37 per cent of workers receiving benefits reported increase debt due to the pandemic, compared to 17 per cent of those not in receipt of benefits."*

The Fawcett Society[30] also reported in February 2021 that:

- *Parents on a lower income have seen a reduction in earnings due to loss of hours and job losses compared to parents on higher incomes.*
    - *31% of low-income families with children (below £20,000) were affected by loss of hours compared to 23% of those with household incomes above £40,000.*
    - *13% of parents on lower incomes lost jobs compared to 9% of those on higher incomes.*

In combination, these studies and the current research show a clear picture of the very negative impact of the pandemic on the food security of two broad groups of households in Devon. In essence, these are those households that were in a disadvantaged and precarious financial position prior to the pandemic and now find themselves in an even more difficult position, together with those households that pre-pandemic were just about managing, but following the economic fallout from the pandemic are now struggling as well.

5.2 Households accessing emergency food support since start of pandemic

It has been widely reported that the use of emergency food banks and support from the voluntary sector has increased significantly since the start of the pandemic[31]. The SMF report from December 2020 found that: *"Reported usage of food banks (among households with children) rose from 8% before the crisis to 11% since[32]",* while the Food Foundation stated: "*Existing (emergency food) support schemes have made a difference, but gaps have meant many people still struggle to eat adequately.[33]"*

Across all Devon households, a total of 5% said they had accessed emergency food support since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. The proportion among the households with children was found to be higher at 8% - the same figure as that reported by SMF nationally. However, the proportion was far higher among the most disadvantaged households:

- Households with income <£16,190 pa and children (19%)
- Single adult households (17%)
- Households with 1+ person with a physical and mental health condition (14%)
- Households receiving means test benefits with children (13%)
- Households where main respondent was unemployed (12%)

Of course, many individual households were in several of these categories – for example, they might have low income, be in receipt of means tested benefits, have children and someone with a health condition. In these instances, the likelihood of them accessing emergency food support will have been even higher.

[29] https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/impact-pandemic-household-finances
[30] https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/impact-pandemic-household-finances
[31] https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/mar/21/nine-in-10-councils-in-england-see-rise-in-people-using-food-banks
[32] https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/measuring-child-hunger/
[33] https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FF_Impact-of-Covid_FINAL.pdf

The households that have accessed emergency food support were disproportionately more likely to have experienced an economic event(s) since March 2020 that had directly impacted on their resources:

- Reduced income (58% compared with 32% of all Devon households)
- Placed on furlough (46% compared with 29%)
- Lost a job (32% compared with 9%)
- Suffered a delay in benefit payments (24% compared with 3%)

It is also important to highlight that all but 96% of the households who accessed emergency food support since March 2020 described their household members as being white - British. Given that 9% of the households covered by the survey contained at least one person whose background was described as being from an ethnic background that was not white British, this indicates that food insecure households with people of other ethnicities do not seem to be making as much use of the emergency food support available.

Clearly this finding for Devon households needs to be treated with caution because of the sample size. Nonetheless it is again evident that more research is required in this area to evaluate and further explore this issue, as stated earlier. It should be noted that the Food Foundation report stated: "*BAME communities have consistently encountered disproportionately higher levels of food insecurity compared with white ethnic groups.*[34]"

5.3 Households *not* accessing emergency food support since start of pandemic

As discussed, a total of 113 households (10% of the sample of 1,165 households) were found to be in the very low food security category. Within this group of 113:

- Just over a quarter (28%) said that someone in their household had been hungry but had not eaten because there was not enough money in the last 30 days: and
- A quarter (24%) said they had accessed emergency food support in the last 30 days (these two quarters were not exactly the same households).

However, this means that of the total of 113 households classified as being in very low food security, 88 had not accessed any emergency food support in the last 30 days. Given the potential vulnerability of this group, it is worth investigating them in more detail to try to understand why they have not accessed any support. In several respects they differed markedly from the sample of 1,165 Devon households. They were more likely to be:

- In receipt of benefits (70% compared with 39% of all households)
- Income of <£20,000 pa (67% compared with 33% of all households)
- Private renters or social/council renters (31% and 30% respectively compared with 16% and 15% of all Devon households)
- 1+ person with a mental health condition (30% compared with 11% of all households)
- 1+ person from an ethnic minority group (16% compared with 9% of all households)
- Long term sick or disabled (13% compared with 5% of all households)
- Average household size of 3.4 people compared with 2.8 in all households.

In other words, they were again overall disproportionately more likely to be on a very low income, in receipt of benefits, have larger households with children and at least one person in the household with a mental health condition. They also were more likely to have at least one person from an ethnic minority background.

[34] https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FF_Impact-of-Covid_FINAL.pdf

5.4 Very low food security status and receipt of free school meals

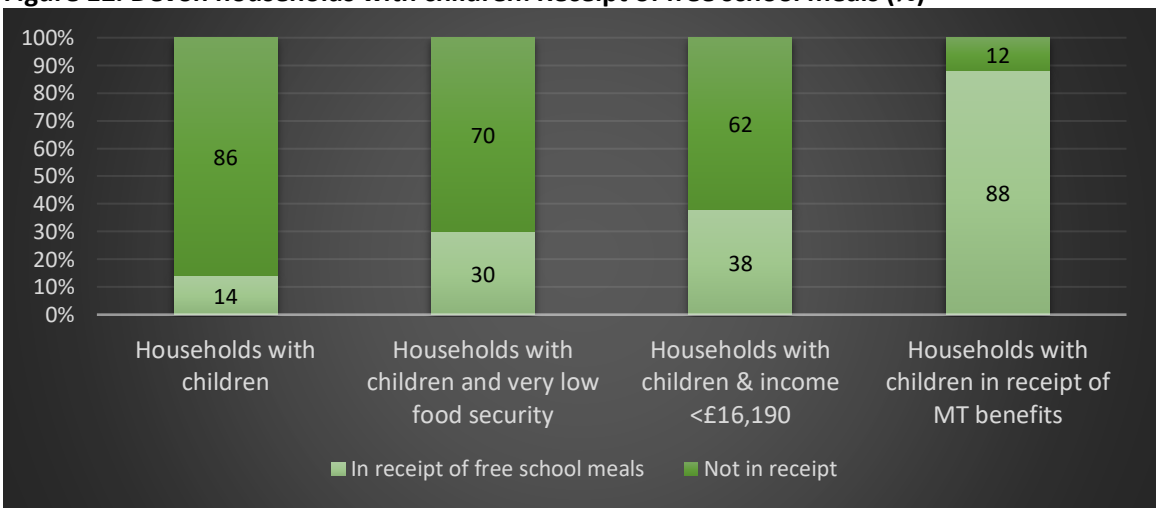
This section examines households experiencing very low food security and the number of them who have been in receipt of free school meals since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. Whilst not all households experiencing very low food security contain children, it would be anticipated that many of those with children would be in receipt of free school meals.

This is because of the clear overlap in the profiles of the two groups: with a disproportionate number of those experiencing very low food security having children present, an income of less than £16,190 per annum and being in receipt of means tested benefits. These characteristics closely match the eligibility criteria for the receipt of free school meals[35]:

> *All children in reception, year 1 and year 2 at state schools in England automatically get free school meals... From year 3, children whose parents are getting any of these are entitled to free school meals:*
> - *Universal Credit (with annual net earned income of no more than £7,400).*
> - *Income Support (IS), IBJSA or IRESA.*
> - *The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit.*
> - *Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.*
> - *Child Tax Credit (with an annual gross income that does not exceed £16,190).*
> - *Working Tax Credit run-on*

Of course, an overlap in characteristics and eligibility does not necessarily mean that all households in very low food security *will actually* have been receiving free school meals. Indeed, the analysis found that some household groups were much more likely than others to have been in receipt: nearly nine out of ten households with children in receipt of means tested benefits (88%)[36] had been receiving free school meals, while the corresponding figures were much lower among households with children that have income under £16,190 (38%) and also those who had very low food security status (30%).

Figure 12. Devon households with children: Receipt of free school meals (%)



Wgt bases: 350 HHs with children / 55 HHs with children & very low food security / 63 HHs with children & income < £16,190 / 201 HHs with children receiving benefits

These differences are somewhat surprising given the similarities between these household groups in other respects. To explore this further, the following sub-sections examine in more detail those households who *have* been in receipt of free school meals, and crucially those households in very low food security that *have not* been in receipt.

[35] https://www.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/school-information/school-meals

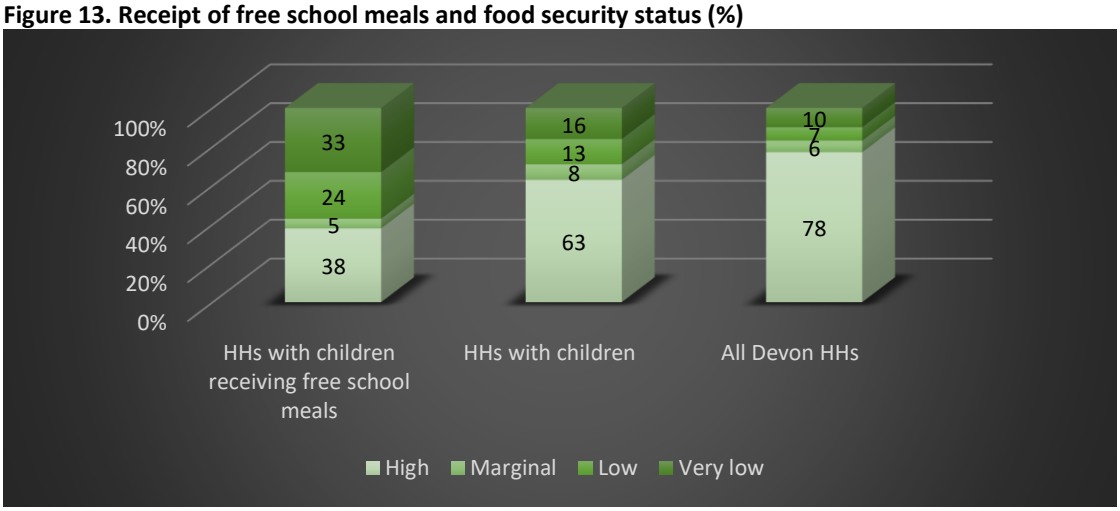
[36] 88% is almost identical to that reported by the government (*"our last estimate is that take-up is 89% of those who are entitled"*) in a House of Commons written answer in Oct 2020. https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-08/100943

5.4.1 Households in receipt of free school meals

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, 5% of all Devon households had at some point received free school meals. As shown in figure 13 this equates to 14% of Devon households *with children* having received free school meals since the start of the pandemic.

In terms of their food security status, this group of households were suffering much higher levels of insecurity than other households. Figure 13 shows that well over half (57%) were food insecure (either low or very low), compared with 17% of all Devon households and 29% of households with children. Indeed, a third of those receiving free school meals were suffering very low security (33%).

Figure 13. Receipt of free school meals and food security status (%)



Bases: 54 HHs with children in receipt of FSMs / 350 HHs with children / 1165 All Devon HHs

Assessing the characteristics of this group of households that had received free school meals since March 2020 in more detail, it is evident that they were very disadvantaged:

- **Income**
  39% of these households had income less than £16,190 (compared with 20% overall) and 20% had income of £16,191 - £19,999 (compared with 14% overall).
- **Benefits**
  92% of these households were currently in receipt of at least one MT benefit (compared with 39% overall) and 65% were currently in receipt of family benefits (compared with 7% overall).
- **Unemployment**
  In 14% of these households the main respondent was unemployed (compared with 5% overall) and in 11% the second adult was unemployed (compared with 4% overall).

It was also very significant that, since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, these households were much more likely to have suffered negative events impacting on their finances. They were more likely to have had a household member lose a job (22% compared to 9% overall) and/or suffered a delay in benefit payments (15% compared to 3% overall). In this light it was not surprising that they were also more much likely to have accessed emergency food support (30% compared to 5% overall).

Further characteristics of note about this group were that they were more likely to be renting their accommodation from the council/housing association (37% compared with 15% overall) or privately renting (24% compared with 16% overall). The main respondent was also more likely to be looking after the family home (17% compared with 3% overall) and second adults in the household to be long term sick/disabled (11% compared with 2% overall).

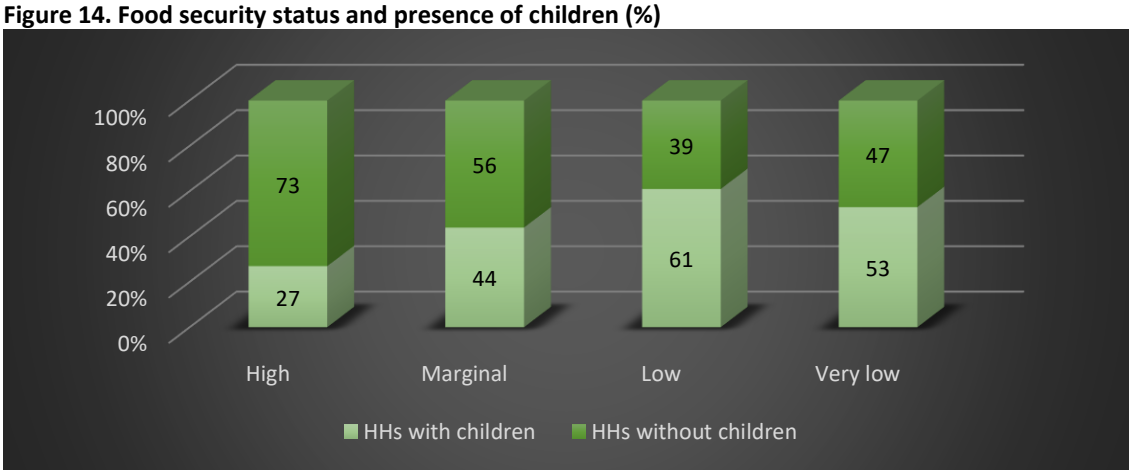
These characteristics demonstrated that the households with children who were receiving free school meals were facing extremely difficult and challenging circumstances.

5.4.2 Households experiencing very low food security and the receipt of free school meals

One in ten of all Devon households (10%) were experiencing very low food security. Among this group of households, 53% had children and 47% did not have children. This compared with the overall Devon household proportions of 37% having children and 63% not having children. Figure 14 shows the relationship between food security and presence of children.

While households containing children represent around a third of all households in Devon, they make up well over half of those experiencing either very low or low food security in the county. It is also worth reiterating that, as shown in figure 14 above, this means that 16% of Devon households *with children* are experiencing very low food security status.

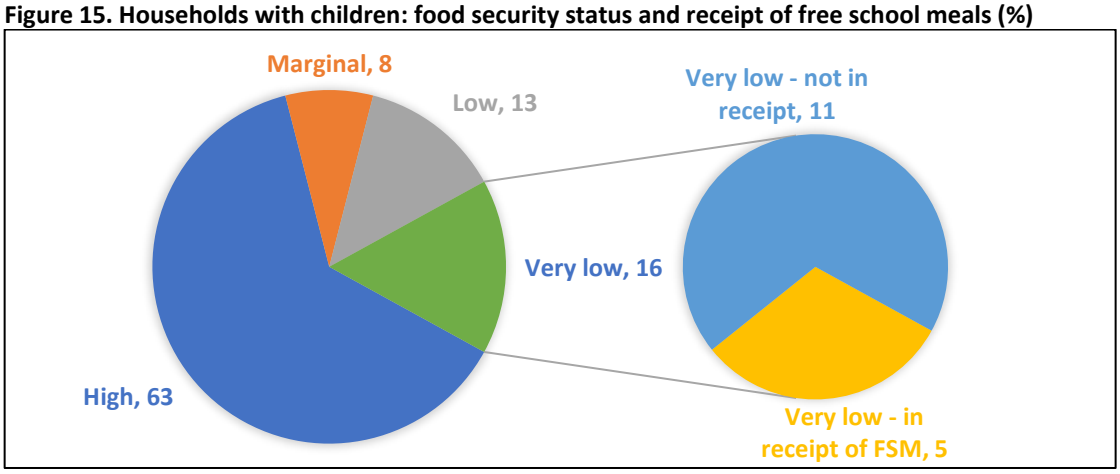
Figure 14. Food security status and presence of children (%)



Bases: 903 High / 66 Marginal / 83 Low / 113 Very low

The 16% of Devon households *with children* who have very low food security status equates to 55 households in our sample. Of this group of 55 households, 16 (30%) of them had received free school meals since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. This means, of course, that there were 39 (70%) households in the group who had not received free school meals. These are shown in figure 15 below. These findings show that 11% of all Devon households with children have very low food security ***and*** do not receive free school meals.

Figure 15. Households with children: food security status and receipt of free school meals (%)



Base: 350 HHs with children

Clearly this is a cause for concern: it shows that there are around twice as many households with children experiencing very low food security that are **not** receiving free school meals (11%) as there are actually receiving free meals (5%). The following sub-section examines these two sub-sets of households to assess if they have any different characteristics that can explain this situation.

5.4.3 Very low food security households in receipt and *not* in receipt of free school meals

In making the comparison between those households in receipt and not in receipt of free school meals, it is very important to firstly highlight that the sample sizes for the analysis are small. The findings must therefore be treated with great caution. As noted, the bases are 16 households for those in receipt of free school meals and 39 for those not in receipt.

Nonetheless, even allowing for these small bases, the analysis showed some striking findings. The first of these was the overall broad *similarity between the two sub-sets*, in terms of their structure, composition, demography, likelihood of physical and mental health conditions, accommodation, etc. The two sub-sets had almost identical average sizes, numbers of children, household members with mental and/or physical health conditions and only very slight differences in their types of tenure.

However, the second finding was that for the key indicators related to eligibility for free school meals – principally income and benefit receipt – there were some marked differences between the two sub-sets of households. These differences clearly account for some of disparities found between them in terms of the receipt of free school meals:

- **Income of very low food security households**
  The households not receiving the free school meals were more likely to have slightly higher income, especially in the £20,000+ category.
- **Benefit receipt in very low food security households**
  The households not receiving free school meals were less likely to be in receipt of either Universal Credit and/or family benefits.
- **Employment in very low food security households**
  The households not in receipt were more likely to have the main respondent in full-time employment and correspondingly less likely to be in part-time employment.
- **Unemployment in very low food security households**
  The households not in receipt were less likely to have the main respondent unemployed or long-term sick/disabled.

The details of the similarities and differences between the two sub-sets are shown in table 5.1[37]. The differences do explain why some of these households with very low food security status were not receiving free school meals – i.e. those whose income was above the limit of £16,190, those who were not receiving the appropriate benefits such as Universal Credit, etc.

However, the differences found do *not* explain all the differences. For example, 31% of households with children and very low food security status had an income of less than £16,190 and/or were receiving Universal Credit yet were not receiving free school meals. These households appear to be both eligible and in need of free school meals. Similarly, the 39% of these households who were in receipt of Tax credits and/or the 25% receiving Family benefits also appear to be eligible, but were also not receiving free school meals.

The DoE Research Report *Pupils not claiming Free School Meals*[38] (FSMs) casts more light on the matter, showing that pupils with these characteristics had *lower* likelihoods of claiming:

- Living in a less deprived area and/or attending schools with a lower school free school meal rate;
- From families with higher status occupations and/or with higher parental qualifications; and
- Of Chinese ethnic origin.

There was also some evidence to suggest that families entitled to FSMs while in some part-time work were less likely to claim FSMs than those on out-of-work benefits.

[37] For reference the table also contains the comparative figures for all Devon households based on the total sample of 1,165 households.

[38] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183380/DFE-RR235.pdf

Ethnicity

As well as the eligibility related benefit and income criteria, a further marked difference was found between the very low food security households receiving free school meals and those not in receipt in terms of the **ethnicity of their household members**.

Table 5.1 shows that 9% of Devon households had at least one member with an ethnic background other than white – British. Among Devon households experiencing very low food security and not receiving free school meals this figure was much higher at 26%. Although the base is small, this finding corresponds with the low take-up of free school meals that has been reported nationally for some ethnic minority groups, such as Chinese origin[39]. Section 5.2 also identified that: "*food insecure households with people of other ethnicities do not seem to be making as much use of the emergency food support available.*" Further research is required to confirm and explain these differences in Devon.

Table 5.1: Characteristics of households experiencing very low food security by receipt of free school meals

Household characteristics	Devon	Very low food security - receiving FSMs	Very low food security – not receiving
Average household size (adults and children)	2.6	4.1	4.1
Average no. of children	0.6	2.2	2.1
Tenure			
- Rent from council/housing association	15%	49%	39%
- Private renters	16%	27%	16%
- Own outright	36%	6%	14%
- Mortgage/loan	27%	17%	21%
- Other	6%	2%	10%
Health conditions			
- None	55%	22%	18%
- 1+ with mental health	11%	43%	38%
- 1+ with physical and mental	10%	29%	21%
Main respondent activity			
- Full-time employment	32%	11%	43%
- Part-time	14%	36%	20%
- Self-employed	12%	0%	9%
- Unemployed	5%	16%	8%
- Long term sick/disabled	5%	17%	8%
- Looking after family home	3%	16%	7%
- Retired	24%	0%	0%
- Student	4%	0%	4%
Annual income:			
- <£16,190	20%	55%	31%
- £16,191 - £19,999	14%	39%	35%
- £20,000 - £39,999	32%	6%	18%
- £40,000+	18%	0%	16%
Means tested benefits:			
- None	61%	0%	16%
- Currently in receipt of 1+ benefit	39%	100%	84%
Of which:			
- Universal credit	12%	71%	31%
- Tax credits	8%	40%	39%
- Family benefits	7%	52%	25%
Ethnicity			
- White - British	91%	100%	74%
- Other	9%	0%	26%
Base	1165	16	39

[39] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183380/DFE-RR235.pdf

5.4.4 Summary comments on the receipt of free school meals

The research identified that 16% of Devon households with children are experiencing very low food security. However, less than a third of this group of households have received free school meals since March 2020. This means that there is a substantial group of households with children in Devon who are experiencing very low food security and who are not in receipt of free school meals to help them through.

Furthermore, only one fifth of these households (19%) with children experiencing very low food security and not in receipt of free school meals have accessed emergency food support to help them. This compared with half of those households with children experiencing very low food security who were in receipt of free school meals (51%).

The group of households with children experiencing very low food security who are not receiving free school meals make up **11% of all Devon households with children.** They can be broadly categorised into two sub-sets:

- **Those households who appear to be eligible for free school meals** but are not in receipt either because they choose not to claim or because they are not aware they are eligible: and
- **Those households who are not eligible under the current criteria**, but their circumstances are such that they have very low food security status.

On this basis consideration should be given to means of further raising awareness of the free school meals scheme to try to increase take-up among the first sub-set of households. This will need to address perceived prejudices about the scheme as well as target households in which take-up is low, such as those with ethnic minority members. Additional research is also needed to fully examine the factors behind the take-up levels of free school meals and accessing emergency food support among Devon households with ethnic minority members.

Consideration should also be given to changing the eligibility criteria for free school meals to include the second sub-set of households with children who are experiencing very low food security. This is particularly the case for those households whose income is slightly above the threshold criteria of £16,190, those who may have experienced a negative event, such as decreased income or losing a job, and/or those who have accessed emergency food support since the start of the pandemic.

5.5 Summary of households with very low food security status

Households with very low food security
Overall, 10% of Devon households were classified as being in the very low food security status. Specific types of households were significantly more likely to be in this group:

- Children and income of <£16,190 and/or in receipt of means tested benefit(s)
- 1+ household member with a mental health condition
- Renting their accommodation from the council/social or privately
- Main respondent was either long term sick, unemployed or currently furloughed
- Households containing 5+ people

They were also significantly more likely to have experienced negative financial events since March 2020, such as reduced income, being furloughed, lost a job or delay benefit payments.

Routes into very low food security
There were two main "routes" for households that had led them into very low food security:

- Those who were already in a financially precarious position, either depending upon benefits and/or a low income, whose situation had been made worse by the economic impact of the pandemic: and
- Those that pre-pandemic had been dependent upon income from sectors that have been hit by lockdown with the result that they lost their jobs, been furloughed and/or had reduced income and have consequently struggled to meet their outgoings.

Households accessing emergency food support since start of pandemic
A total of 5% of Devon households had accessed emergency food support since March 2020. However, this figure was far higher among the most disadvantaged households:

- Households with income <£16,190 pa and children (19%)
- Single adult households (17%)
- Households with 1+ person with a physical and mental health condition (14%)
- Households receiving means test benefits with children (13%)
- Households where main respondent was unemployed (12%)

Many households were in several of these categories making the likelihood of them accessing emergency food support even higher. Households accessing emergency food support were disproportionately more likely to have experienced an economic event(s) since March 2020:

- Reduced income (58% compared with 32% of all Devon households)
- Placed on furlough (46% compared with 29%)
- Lost a job (32% compared with 9%)
- Suffered a delay in benefit payments (24% compared with 3%)

There was evidence from the research that households containing one or more person with an ethnic minority background were *more* likely to have very low food security, but *less* likely to have accessed emergency food support. However, the sample size for these findings is small and further research is required to confirm and explore them.

6. Concluding comments

Following the Covid-19 pandemic and increases in awareness of higher levels of food poverty and childhood hunger nationally in the UK, this study was commissioned to provide a better understanding of the extent to which food insecurity is experienced in Devon. It was designed to give a granular picture of household residents' experiences of food insecurity in the county. It had three specific objectives:

- To identify potential food insecurity hotspots across the county and to provide robust estimates of households experiencing food poverty and insecurity and accessing food from Food Banks across Devon.
- To provide an assessment of change over time and an understanding of the impact of the pandemic on increasing levels of food poverty and insecurity.
- To provide a baseline against which to measure the impact of work being undertaken to improve access to food support. This work includes the commissioned project on emergency food using the Winter Grant, led by Devon Community Foundation.

6.1 Key findings

The research has found that levels of household food insecurity are at disturbingly high levels across Devon. Overall, one in ten households in the county (10%) are experiencing substantial disruptions to their eating patterns, with household members eating less and going hungry. These households have had to reduce their food intake because they do not have sufficient money or resources to pay for enough food.

The levels of food insecurity that were found varied significantly between different types of households. Low-income, disadvantaged and vulnerable households with children were far more likely to be experiencing the highest levels of food insecurity in the county. The key characteristics of these households are summarised in the box opposite:

DEVON HOUSEHOLDS MOST LIKELY TO BE FOOD INSECURE

- Children present
- Low income
- Single adult
- 1+ member with mental health condition
- Renting from council/ social/ privately
- Main respondent either long term sick, on furlough or unemployed
- 5+ household members

It has been well documented that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted very significantly on food security across the UK. However, the level of very low food security identified in Devon currently (10%) is far higher than that reported nationally (4%) or across the South West region (3%) *prior to* the pandemic.

While it is not clear whether this increase has happened nationally as well, there is strong evidence that Devon may well have been hit harder by the pandemic than other areas. This is primarily based on the proportion of Devon households on low incomes compared to national averages, and/or with adults working in sectors disproportionately affected by the lockdown, such as tourism and retail. However, this needs further research to be fully verified.

What is evident is that the food security status of two main groups of households in the county has been most directly impacted by the pandemic:

- For many of the households in Devon currently experiencing very low food security this is due directly to the economic consequences of the pandemic. They have experienced reduced income, being furloughed, lost jobs and reduced working hours. This set of households were managing to get by *before* the pandemic – but they are now struggling.
- For other already vulnerable households across the county, reliant upon benefits and/or low income, the economic fallout from the pandemic has exacerbated their difficult circumstances pushing them further into food insecurity. This is the result of delays in benefit payments and reduced income combined with the increased costs of childcare from lockdown.

It is on these groups that Devon's future food support interventions should be targeted. There is also evidence that other groups might need to be added to these core groups – particularly households with a member with Black/African/Caribbean or other mixed ethnic backgrounds – but again further research is needed to verify this.

Further key findings from the research were that:

- Devon households with children are more likely to be suffering food insecurity
    - Very low food security is much more common among households with children, with those with low income/in receipt of benefits and/or with adults working in sectors badly hit by lockdown being most affected.
    - Reduced levels of household income, delays in benefit payments, lost jobs and being furloughed were more likely to have been experienced since the start of the pandemic by the Devon households facing higher levels of food insecurity.
    - Households with 1+ member with a mental health condition, a sole adult and/or where the main respondent was either long term sick, unemployed or currently furloughed were also more likely to be facing higher levels of food insecurity.

- Food support schemes have made a difference, but not all those experiencing very low food security have accessed them
    - The research found that 5% of Devon households had accessed emergency food support since the start of the pandemic.
    - It also identified that 14% of Devon households with children had received free school meals since the start of the pandemic.
    - However, given that 10% of all households and 16% of those with children faced very low food security, these figures indicate possible issues with awareness and take-up.

6.2 Areas for further research

As noted, there are several areas that need further research and analysis to fully explore their link with food security. Some of these will require both further quantitative analysis of the survey dataset and qualitative focus group discussions with members of households from each group, while for others it will only be possible to conduct focus groups, due to sample size:

- Ethnicity (examining individual ethnic backgrounds)
- Adult female only households (in addition to lone adult households)
- Households with 1+ members with mental health conditions
- Receipt of individual benefit types (uptake of universal credit and pandemic events)
- Impact of events relative to households on benefits and those not on benefits
- 2nd, 3rd and 4th adult household members activity and sector

Appendix I: Study methodology

The study involved the design, conduct, analysis and reporting of a stratified random sample survey of 1,160 households in Devon. The methodology contained six main elements:

- Desk research
  The desk-based research identified and examined other key relevant studies and surveys that have taken place, including national work and local work. This was to inform and direct the development of the questionnaire and produce additional evidence for the analysis stage.

- Questionnaire design and piloting
  The questionnaire was based on the Government's Family Resources Survey food insecurity questions to ensure comparability. These questions were supplemented by further questions tackling other issues emerging as a result of the pandemic, such as an assessment of change over time. The initial draft of the questionnaire was successfully piloted with 30 respondents.

- Stratified random sample design
  Devon has a population of over 800,000 people in total, and a simple random sample of 1,060 drawn in terms of probability proportional to size (PPS) would provide findings with a 95% confidence level and a 3% margin of error. However, the residents are divided unequally between the district authorities. Consequently, the sample was stratified by district, increasing the total achieved number of interviews from 1,060 to 1,160. This would allow robust analysis of each district as well as the whole county with a minimum of 120 interviews being achieved in each district.

- Survey fieldwork
  The survey fieldwork was conducted using a mixture of computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) and an online panel element. The total achieved sample of 1,160 completed interviews was divided between 760 CATI and 400 panel interviews. This mixed approach provided three main benefits:

  - Comprehensive coverage: enabling those households with ***and without*** internet access to be included in the research:
  - Broad comparability with the questionnaire and fieldwork approach used in the ONS Family Resource's Survey research: and
  - Cost effectiveness and speed: Panel and CATI surveys are known to produce much quicker outcomes at a reduced cost compared with other approaches.

- Analysis
  The analysis included a review of the quantitative data and qualitative information collected by the primary and secondary research activities. This identified the relevant evidence for each of the study's objectives. The main analysis was conducted on geographic: county (Devon) and district (eight local authorities) and household characteristics: age, presence of children, gender, income, receipt of benefits, etc).

- Outputs: Reporting, data and presentation
  The outputs of the study were this report, an aggregate dataset of completed survey results (fully anonymised) and a presentation of the findings to the Steering Group.

Appendix II: Survey questionnaire

Devon household survey food security questionnaire

INTRODUCTION: Good morning/afternoon, my name is … and I'm calling on behalf of Devon County Council's Public Health Team. They have commissioned this research to understand how the coronavirus pandemic has affected people's diets and ability to buy food for themselves. I would like to ask you some questions about how your household has been affected by the pandemic, and your current situation in terms of food, health and employment.

ADD AS NECESSARY:

- The study is being conducted to provide data on the impacts of the pandemic at a district and county level in Devon:
- The data will be reported in an aggregated form and no households or individuals will be identified in the results:
- It is very important that all the households selected for the research agree to participate so that we can obtain a representative picture of all Devon's population.

Please note that this call is recorded for quality and training purposes and the interview is undertaken under the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. If you need me to repeat any of the questions, please let me know. Are you happy for me to proceed?

A. Household characteristics

The first questions are about your household. Please answer for everyone living at this address.

ASK ALL

A1 How many people normally live at this address? (INTERVIEWER RECORD No. IN HOUSEHOLD)

- How many adults at the address (Number of: Females 18+ years and Males 18+ years)?
- And how many children <18 years (ASK: Number of 0-5 years, 6-11 years and 12-17 years)?

(NB A person is part of the household if the respondent considers they usually live there. Usually may be taken as being regularly, part of the time but not necessarily the majority of the time.)

ASK ALL

A2 In which of these ways do you occupy this accommodation?

- Own it outright
- Buying it with the help of a mortgage or loan
- Rent it privately
- Rent it from council/local authority/housing association
- Live here rent free (including in a relative's/friend's property)
- Other (Please describe)

ASK ALL

A3 Which of these categories best describes you (the person responding) at present?

- Employee working full-time (30 hours+/week)
- Employee working full-time (30 hours+/week) – currently on furlough
- Employee working part-time (less than 30 hours/week)
- Employee working part-time (less than 30 hours/week) – currently on furlough
- Self-employed working full-time (30 hours+/week)
- Self-employed working full-time (30 hours+/week) – currently on furlough
- Self-employed working part-time (less than 30 hours/week)
- Self-employed working part-time (less than 30 hours/week) – currently on furlough
- Unemployed
- Student (incl. pupil at school, those in training)
- Looking after family home
- Long-term sick or disabled
- Retired from paid work
- Not in paid work for some other reason

ASK IF EMPLOYEE OR SELF-EMPLOYED (WORKING OR ON FURLOUGH) AT A3
A4 Which of these best describes the industry you work(ed) in? ONE CODE ONLY

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- Mining and quarrying
- Manufacture
- Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning
- Water supply and waste management
- Construction
- Wholesale and retail trade, motor vehicle repair
- Transportation and storage
- Accommodation and food services
- Information and communication
- Finance and insurance
- Real estate
- Professional, scientific and technical
- Administrative and support services
- Public admin and defence
- Education
- Health and social work
- Arts, entertainment & recreation
- Other (Please describe)

ASK IF 1+ ADULTS AT A1 (UP TO THREE OTHER ADULTS AT THE SAME ADDRESS)
A5 Which of these categories best describes (the other adults in the household) at present?

- SAME CODES AS Q3

ASK IF EMPLOYEE OR SELF-EMPLOYED AT A5 (WORKING OR ON FURLOUGH)
A6 Which of these best describes the industry they work(ed) in? ONE CODE ONLY

- SAME CODES AS Q4

ASK ALL
A7 Can I check, since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, have any of the following happened to you (or anyone else in the household)? CODE ALL THAT APPLY

- Tested positive for coronavirus
- Suffered coronavirus symptoms
- Lost a job
- Been placed on furlough
- Increased working hours
- Reduced working hours
- Reduced income
- Suffered a delay in benefits payments
- Were hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food
- Accessed emergency food support (i.e. visited a food bank or other food support help)
- (Households with 1+ children only) Received free school meals
- None of these (Single code only)

ASK A8a AND A8b IF ACCESSED EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPORT AT A7
A8a Can I check, **in the last 30 days** have you or any member of your household accessed emergency food support? Yes/No

A8b And to check as well, were you or any member of your household accessing emergency food support **before** March 2020? Yes/No

B. Food insecurity

The next section is about the food eaten in your household in the **last 30 days**, that is since [date 30 days ago], and whether you were able to afford the food you needed in that time. Here are several statements that people have made about their food situation. For these statements, please say whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for your household in the last 30 days, that is since [date 30 days ago].

ASK ALL
B1 *[I/We] worried whether [my/our] food would run out before [I/we] got money to buy more.*
Was that often true, sometimes true, or never true for [you/your household] in the last 30 days?

- Often true
- Sometimes true
- Never true

ASK ALL
B2 *The food that [I/we] bought just didn't last, and [I/we] didn't have money to get more.*
Was that often, sometimes, or never true for [you/your household] in the last 30 days?

- Often true
- Sometimes true
- Never true

ASK ALL
B3 *[I/we] couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.*
Was that often, sometimes, or never true for [you/your household] in the last 30 days?

- Often true
- Sometimes true
- Never true

ASK B4a-B7 IF ANY OF B1-B3 ARE 'often' OR 'sometimes'
B4a *In the last 30 days, did (you/your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?*

- Yes, cut size
- Yes, skipped meals
- No (Single code)

IF YES AT B4a
B4b On how many days (or 3 or more, if not sure)?

ASK IF ANY OF B1-B3 ARE 'often' OR 'sometimes'
B5 *In the last 30 days, did (you/anyone in your household) ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?* Yes/No

ASK IF ANY OF B1-B3 ARE 'often' OR 'sometimes'
B6 *In the last 30 days, were (you/anyone in your household) ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?* Yes/No

ASK IF ANY OF B1-B3 ARE 'often' OR 'sometimes'
B7 *In the last 30 days, did (you/anyone in your household) lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food?* Yes/No

ASK B8a IF ANY OF B4-B7 ARE "yes"
B8a *In the last 30 days, did (you/anyone in your household) ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?* Yes/No

ASK IF YES AT B8a
B8b On how many days (or 3 or more, if not sure)?

C. Health, income, benefits and end

Lastly, to help us understand the full impact of the pandemic, we need to collect some background information about health, household finances and benefits.

ASK ALL

C1 Does you or anyone else in the household have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?

- Yes – physical condition
- Yes – mental condition
- Yes – both
- No
- Don't know

ASK IF ANY YES AT C1

C2 Does this condition or illness/do any of the conditions or illnesses reduce your/their ability to carry-out day-to-day activities?

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, a little
- Not at all

(ADD AS NECESSARY) Day to day activities include washing and dressing, household cleaning, cooking, shopping for essentials, using public or private transport, remembering to pay bills, lifting objects from the ground or lifting objects from a work surface in the kitchen.

ASK ALL

C3 Does anyone in this household currently receive any of these *means-tested* (related to your level of income) benefits and support?

- Universal credit
- Tax credits (working tax credit, child tax credit)
- Jobseekers allowance or low-income benefits (JSA, income support, loans)
- Family benefits (sure start maternity grant, free school meals)
- Housing benefit and heating (inc winter fuel payment, cold weather payment, council tax support)
- Other benefits (such as pension credits, funeral payment, etc)

ASK ALL

C4 In which of the following bands was your total household income last month? This is the amount of all income received by adults in the household after all taxes and deductions are removed.

- Less than £1,350 per month (less than £16,190/year)
- £1,351 - £1,666 per month (£16,191 - £19,999/year)
- £1,667 - £3,333 per month (£20,000 - £39,999/year)
- £3,334 - £4,999 per month (£40,000 - £59,999/year)
- £5,000 - £8,333 per month (£60,000 - £99,999/year)
- More than £8,334 (more than £100,000/year)
- Don't know

ASK ALL

C5 Which of the following best describes the ethnic groups or backgrounds of the people in this household? INTERVIEWER: PLEASE CODE ALL THAT APPLY

- White - English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- Any Other White background (please describe)
- Mixed - White and Black Caribbean / Black Asian / Asian
- Any other Mixed multiple ethnic background (please describe)
- Asian or Asian British - Indian / Pakistani / Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian/Asian British background (please describe)
- Black or Black British - African / Caribbean
- Any other Black / African / Caribbean background (please describe)
- Arab
- Any other (please describe)

ASK ALL
C6 Can I just check, would you like any information about the emergency food support that is available in Devon and/or eating balanced diets?

- Yes – emergency food support
- Yes – balanced diets
- Yes – both (ANY YES: Either email insights@devoncf.com or give us your contact details)
- No

ASK ALL
C7 At some point in the future there may be a follow-up or a new study related to this one. Would you be willing to be contacted again then?

- Yes
- No

ASK ALL
C8 Thank you for taking part. The information you have provided, together with that from all the other people who are taking part in the study in Devon, will be extremely helpful in building a better understanding of food and health issues in the county. That is the end of the interview. Thank you again for taking part.

Once again, my name is … and you have been interviewed on behalf of Devon County Council's Public Health team. If you have any questions or queries about the interview you can contact Devon County Council, my company which is Transform Research or the Market Research Society who will be able to reassure you about the bona fide nature of this call.

Appendix III: Item responses to individual food security questions

Table III.1 below contains the answers given by households to the ten individual food security questions. For the purposes of the main commentary in the report and to allow comparison with the FRS, the ten questions were used to produce the scores for allocating households into the four food status categories of: secure, marginal, low and very low security.

The table shows the replies given by the whole sample of 1,165 Devon households and compares these with those given by key vulnerable and/or disadvantaged households. The differences between the replies that were given is very stark in many instances. It is very important to highlight that most of the households in the "very low" food security group are actually in several of the vulnerable/disadvantaged categories, for example having income under £16,191 pa, children ***and*** more than 5 household members, or being a sole adult household with income under £16,191 pa ***and*** someone with a mental health condition.

Table III.1 Responses to individual food security questions

Household food security questions	**All Devon Households**	**Very low food security**	Income < £16,190 pa	Children in HH	1+ with mental health cond/n	5+ people n HH	Sole adult
HH worried about food running out before they got money to buy more	Often – 5% Sometimes – 13% Never – 82%	**45%** **52%** **3%**	12% 24% 64%	9% 22% 69%	16% 27% 57%	14% 19% 67%	13% 36% 51%
The food the HH bought just didn't last, and they didn't have money to get more.	Often – 4% Sometimes – 11% Never – 85%	**30%** **65%** **5%**	9% 23% 69%	8% 19% 73%	14% 31% 54%	10% 24% 66%	7% 36% 57%
HH couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.	Often – 6% Sometimes – 11% Never – 83%	**43%** **50%** **8%**	15% 18% 67%	9% 18% 73%	14% 24% 62%	12% 25% 64%	18% 23% 59%
In the last 30 days, HH had cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.	Cut size – 8% Skip meals – 9%	**51%** **63%**	17% 20%	13% 14%	19% 23%	15% 15%	28% 26%
At least one person cutting size of meals or skipping meals for 3 or more days in last 30 days.	7%	**47%**	15%	9%	21%	17%	12%
In the last 30 days, at least one person in HH ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money for food.	11%	**92%**	27%	19%	33%	23%	33%
In the last 30 days, at least one person in HH was hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food.	9%	**81%**	21%	16%	27%	19%	27%
In the last 30 days, at least one person in HH lost weight because there wasn't enough money for food.	7%	**61%**	19%	12%	21%	13%	24%
In the last 30 days, at least one person in HH did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food.	4%	**43%**	10%	8%	15%	10%	12%
At least one person in HH not eating for a whole day for 3 or more days in last 30 days.	2%	**24%**	5%	5%	10%	7%	2%
Weighted base	**1165**	**113**	**227**	**380**	**126**	**133**	**43**
No. of HHs in base with very low food security (% of base)			54 (24%)	61 (16%)	38 (30%)	28 (21%)	14 (32%)
No. of HHs in base with low food security (% of base)			25 (11%)	49 (13%)	19 (16%)	20 (14%)	8 (19%)
Total insecure (very low plus low)			79 (35%)	110 (29%)	57 (46%)	48 (35%)	22 (51%)

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Appendix V: Survey accuracy

The survey was conducted with a stratified random sample of 1,060 Devon households (plus the boost of 100 in three districts to allow reliable analysis in the smaller districts and thereby produce the total of 1,160 interviews) between March and April 2021.

From this sample size it is possible to calculate the accuracy of the results, based on a 95% confidence level. Table V.1 below shows a range of margins of error for different responses, at the 95% confidence level. For example, for an answer of 50%, the sample size provides survey accuracy of +/-3% at the 95% confidence level. That is, we can be 95% confident that the "true" figure lies between 47% and 53%.

Table V.1: Accuracy of survey findings (margins of error at 95% confidence level)

Sample of 1,060 Devon households	
Answer	Margin of error
5% or 95% response	+/– 1.3%
10% or 90% response	+/– 1.8%
20% or 80% response	+/– 2.4%
30% or 70% response	+/– 2.8%
40% or 60% response	+/– 2.9%
50% response	+/– 3.0%

It is worth noting that the margins of error decrease for responses at either end of the scale. For example, if the data shows that 90% of Devon households are found in food security status XXX, then the margin of error decreases to +/-1.8% and we can be 95% confident that the "true" figure actually lies between 88.2% and 91.8%.