

Researcher ethnographic observation notes – excerpt 1:

Pantries have a delivery once a week and people arrive early to ensure that they get what they need. In one of the pantries I visited, around 11:00am, there was a basket with just a couple of handfuls of Cherry tomatoes left, it was obviously full earlier on. A few people do come in throughout the day to use the pantry, the lack of tomatoes would make me feel that I could only take a small amount, in order to leave some for other people. This is an issue of scarcity, which could have an effect on people's dignity.

An overwhelming majority of people wanted a larger quantity and variety of Fresh Fruit and Veg, although they were very creative with what they received. Only a couple of participants said there was plenty of Fruit and Veg. Maybe people who are conscious about eating more veg and less meat perceive the pantry as lacking in fruit and veg, whilst someone who is a heavy meat eater, may perceives that the pantry has an abundance of fruit and veg. More people cared about their diet and health than I thought they would have.

They also understand, that although there are limitations on some supplies, the volunteers can only do their best with what they get.

The colour coding system ensures that food is distributed fairly and it works. However, in my opinion it is inherently linked to scarcity. Shoppers are directed to what, and how many, items they can have from each section, this lack of control, links to a person's dignity.

There is a severe lack of toiletries across the pantries, as they don't receive many donations. Each shopper is only allowed one toiletry item per visit, therefore shoppers are forced to choose between sanitary products or soap, which is problematic. Some products are more effective for an individual's needs than others. But there is very little choice on offer.

The data I collected were from pantries in a predominantly white area, one of the pantries was in a very diverse area, yet, out of 120 members only 15 of them were of a non white ethnicity. I only managed to interview one person from a non white background. Although there were some people of ethnic minority, they either didn't speak enough English to participate in the interview, or they didn't use the pantry at all. One person said they would fill the interview questions online, using my QR code.

Are these people aware that the food pantry exists? Is language a barrier? How much do they need the pantry?

This pantry also said they don't advertise themselves because they don't have any spaces, and there is a waiting list. Therefore there is a lack of awareness.

I recommend that changes need to be made at supply level, regarding fruit and veg, and a toiletry donation box should be set up within the supermarkets, as hygiene is important to dignity. Also more disabled parking.

The interviews went well, and was conducted in a space away from other people, but as food pantries are noisy and bustling places, maybe the participants would have felt different in another space away from the pantry, where it was more relaxed. If I was to do this again I would visit more pantries in a diverse area, in order to find out how people feel, and if they're not attending then why?