



Experience of food pantries for people living with digestive health conditions ~ Donna Tomlin



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Lived experience rationale:

While using food banks for many years, I observed a shortage of foods for people with dietary restrictions (like gluten, lactose and sugar free). There has been an increase in the number of people who need to follow dietary requirements and people using foodbanks /pantries have experienced problems receiving the foods they need to follow their dietary restrictions. This needs to be investigated further so that food pantries can support and help people maintain their health.

Methods

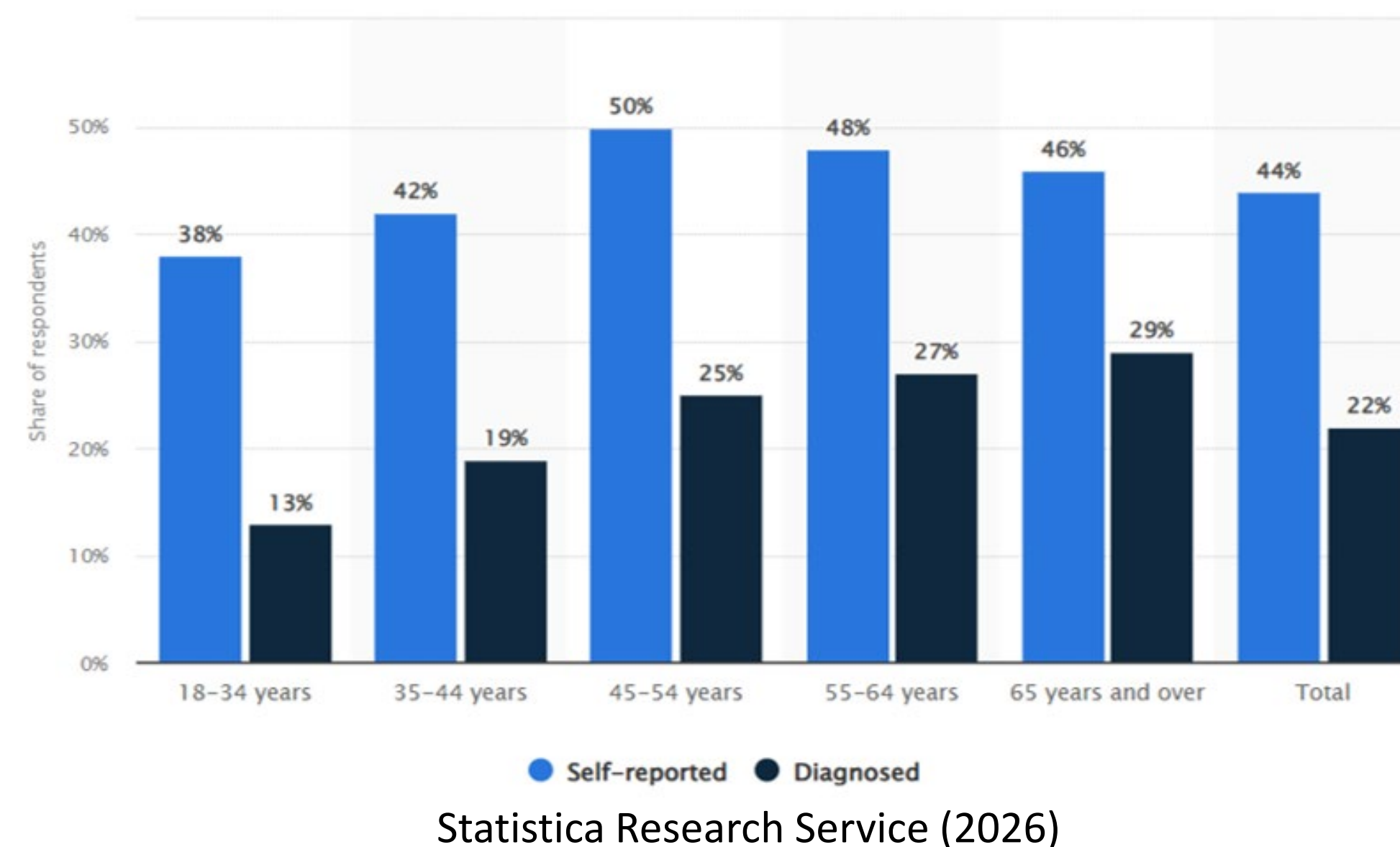
- Desk-based research about food support in the local area & digestive health conditions
- Online & paper questionnaires
- 5 responses through advertising at and visiting food pantries



Thank you to: Southampton City Mission, Oasis Church, St Denys Food Bank, Bitterne Station Pantry, University of Southampton; Ascension Marketplace

How can food pantries better meet the needs of people living with specific health conditions such as Diabetes, Coeliac disease, IBS, and Crohn's Disease?

Share of adults diagnosed with gastrointestinal conditions in the United Kingdom, by age



Conclusion

- There is the need for more research into this important topic
- Food pantry users with digestive health problems want to eat healthier foods but they are often too expensive.
- They do not think that there are enough appropriate foods, like gluten and lactose-free, available in food pantries.

References

NHS UK, IBS Awareness And Support <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs/diet-lifestyle-and-medicines/>
Diabetes UK <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/>
Food Bank Angels <https://www.foodbankangels.com/>
Statistica (2026) <https://www.statista.com/statistics/420260/gastrointestinal-conditions-by-gender-and-age-in-the-united-kingdom/>

Findings:

Key food items needed: alternative milks, gluten-free food, dairy-free, fermented foods, vegetables

Health issues stated when participants can not access foods for their dietary requirements:

- Bloating, skin issues, cramps
- Poor concentration, poor sleep, fatigue, poor eyesight, gain or loss of weight
- Poor mental health, stress and depression, mood swings

Possible Next Steps:

- Foodbank/pantry Health Awareness Donations campaign: encouraging specific food donations from supermarkets & public
- A list of commonly-requested foods for those with dietary restrictions to be developed and used for donations and buying foodbank/pantry stock.
- Staff and volunteer training & system for allocating food items (e.g. gluten-free, dairy free) to people who have digestive health conditions
- Community support e.g. cooking groups, recipes, chat groups.
- Better food aid info: using postcode regions stated to be helpful.