

# Families and Food in Hard Times

## Outline:

- Families and food: two projects
- What is food?
- Food in families' budgets
- Young people's experiences
- Wider implications

Dr Rebecca O'Connell, Senior Research Officer  
Thomas Coram Research Unit  
UCL Institute of Education



**European Research Council**

Established by the European Commission

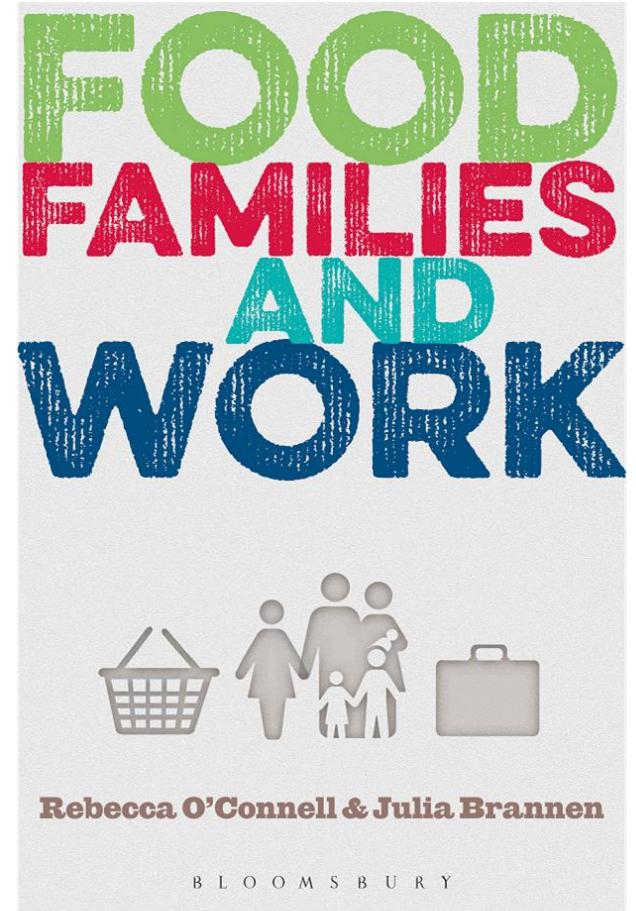
**Supporting top researchers  
from anywhere in the world**



[foodinhardtimes.org](http://foodinhardtimes.org)



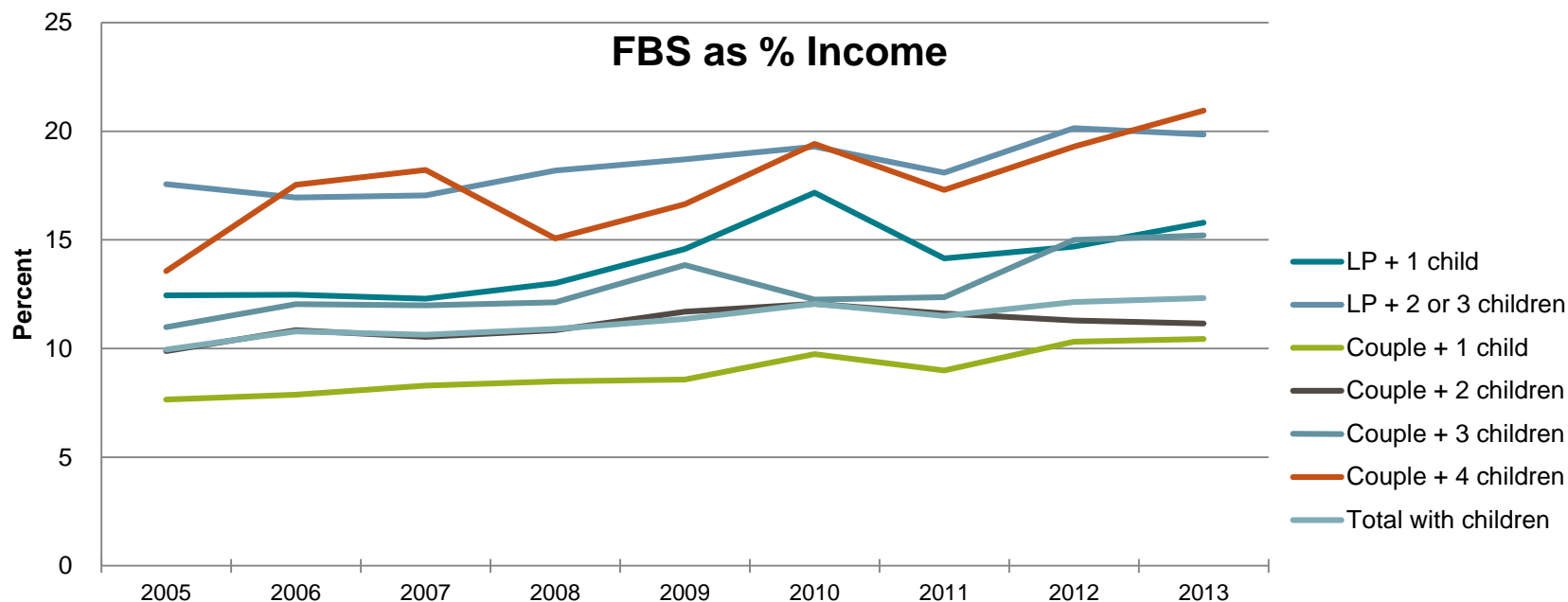
**European Research Council**  
Established by the European Commission  
**Supporting top researchers  
from anywhere in the world**



# Food: the 'intimate commodity' (Winson, 1993)



## The FBS as a proportion of income for families 2005 - 2013



Food has become less affordable whilst the cost of other essentials has also increased

*M: I've noticed whenever I have to pay something or do something I always have to cut into my food budget*

# Young people's experiences

## Food quantity and hunger

- I was so hungry and that, so ... all of a sudden yeah it was like ... it was like ... it was like I got hit on my belly.... like I got stabbed with a knife
- I skip meals to share with my mum [...] I personally skip a meal ... for example [...] I skip my meal to wait for her to come back and at least we can have the same amount of food [...] starve together through the whole day, so at least we will have had something to eat
- When I'm hungry I just can't concentrate, it's really, really hard for me to do that.

## Food quality

- We keep repeating the same food like over and over and over, just gets boring. Like just keep eating ... but we can't do anything about it, we have to just keep eating the same food.

# Young people's experiences

## Stigma and shame

- So when she was like 'You can't get that, you're free school meals' like I was really embarrassed cos people were waiting behind me, I was kind of like 'Oh my God'.

## Isolation/lack of participation

- 'I just watch them eating and I don't eat, I just watch them eat'
- Feels like I'm left out of the fun that happens and stuff. Like it just makes me feel empty
- M: I've told my kids straight 'You invite your friends round, tell them to bring their pocket money, I [can] barely feeds yous lot'

## PSE UK (poverty.ac.uk)

- Half a million children (4%) live in families who cannot afford to feed them properly, that is, provide at least one of the following: three meals a day, fresh fruit and vegetables every day, or meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent at least once a day
- The proportion who could not afford to have a friend's child round for tea or a snack once a fortnight had doubled between 1999 and 2012, from 4% to 8%, representing 1,000,000 children

## Wider implications

- Food is fundamental to health and social participation
- Hunger and food poverty have risen in austerity Britain
- Troubling implications not only for individuals but for society itself



Thank you

[rebecca.oconnell@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:rebecca.oconnell@ucl.ac.uk)

# Additional slides

# Food, poverty and inequality

- ‘Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities’ (Townsend, 1979: 31).