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# Food insecurity in South Australian single parents: an assessment of the livelihoods framework approach

Iain R Law<sup>a</sup>, Paul R Ward<sup>b1</sup>, John Coveney<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *School of Medicine, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia;* <sup>b</sup> *Discipline of Public Health, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia*

Single parent households experience periods of food insecurity more frequently than other Australian families. Despite elevated risk, many single parents achieve food security with limited means. This paper applies and evaluates the utility of the livelihoods framework approach as a tool for understanding food insecurity in this population and generating relevant policy recommendations. The approach is adapted here to provide insight into the skills, strategies, and resources individuals use to attain or strive for food security. The framework incorporates these individual capabilities into a model of the social, economic, and political structures and processes through which individuals navigate to attain food security. Semi structured interviews were conducted with single parents living in rural and urban South Australia. Transcripts were analysed in an effort to populate a food security livelihoods framework for single parents. The livelihoods framework is found to be capable of reproducing the types and levels of capabilities reported in previous findings. Furthermore, it provides novel insight into the relationships that form between classes of capabilities and between capabilities and the structures and processes in which they are utilised. These insights are considered in terms of relevance to policy.

Keywords: food insecurity; single parents; livelihoods framework; policy analysis; social determinants of health

## Introduction

In a document entitled Australia: The Healthiest Country by 2020, released in June 2009, the National Preventative Health Taskforce (NPHT) described obesity as one of three priority action areas for better health, beside tobacco and alcohol consumption. It emphasised that addressing social inequalities in differential access to healthy food is

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author. Email: [paul.ward@flinders.edu.au](mailto:paul.ward@flinders.edu.au)

fundamental to obesity prevention (National Preventative Health Taskforce 2009). In doing so, the NPHT identified food insecurity as an important concern for low-income Australians and many at-risk groups, and acknowledged the ensuing negative health consequences of inadequate access to healthy food. This paper investigates determinants of food insecurity experienced by one such at-risk group; low-income single parents in South Australia.

Effective policy needs to respond to a wide array of determinants. The Department for International Development in the UK formulated the livelihoods framework approach for guiding policy in developing countries (Department for International Development 1999). The approach is adapted here to provide insight into the skills, strategies, and resources individuals use to attain or strive for food security. The framework incorporates these individual capabilities into a model of the social, economic, and political structures and processes through which individuals navigate to attain food security. At time of writing, the livelihoods framework approach has not been applied to the problem of food insecurity in developed countries. In an effort to explore and evaluate the opportunities provided by this approach, we apply it to the lived experiences of single parents in South Australia.

Food security, within developed countries such as Australia, can be defined as, the “ability of individuals, households and communities to acquire appropriate and nutritious food on a regular and reliable basis, and using socially acceptable means” (Rychetnik *et al.* 2003, p.1). The 1995 National Nutrition Survey estimates food insecurity in Australia at 5.2% in the general population (Marks *et al.* 2001). Data collected in South Australia estimates the food insecurity rate to be approximately 7% (Foley *et al.* 2010). However, this increases among at-risk groups including:

unemployed (11.3%), rental households (15.8%) (Marks *et al.* 2001), those identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (23%) (Shannon 2002), and recently landed refugees (71%) (Gallegos *et al.* 2008). Single parents are also considered an at-risk group with reported levels of food insecurity as high as 23% (Burns 2004).

The health consequences of food insecurity are well documented. It might be expected that food insecurity would be associated with reduced food intake and below average body mass. However, in a developed country, food insecurity is associated with obesity (Alaimo *et al.*, 2001b, Townsend *et al.* 2001, Burns, 2004, Martin and Ferris 2007) and obesity related disease (Vozoris and Tarasuk 2003, Seligman *et al.* 2007). These elevated rates of obesity among the food insecure is thought to result principally from increased consumption of foods high in fat and or sugar that are typically cheaper, more available, heavily marketed and simpler to prepare than healthy alternatives (Burns 2004, Drewnowski and Specter 2004, Wong *et al.* 2011). Furthermore, the health consequences of food insecurity go beyond obesity and include nutrient inadequacy (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk 2008), poor? self reported health (Vozoris and Tarasuk 2003), and compromised child health (Alaimo *et al.* 2001a).

Diverse factors differentially expose certain members of the population to periods of food insecurity and the associated consequences. Some established determinants include: poverty (Polit *et al.* 2000), rising food prices in Australia (Harrison *et al.* 2007), higher food prices and greater density of unhealthy food options in socially disadvantaged areas (Donkin *et al.* 2000, Ellaway and Macintyre 2000), other financial obligations (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk 2007), employment status (McIntyre 2003), lower educational attainment (Turrell and Kavanagh 2006), and lack of access to private transport (Coveney and O'Dwyer 2009).

Single parents experience an elevated risk of food insecurity due to increased poverty rates compared to partnered families (Gucciardi *et al.* 2004, Page and Stevens 2004, Glanville and McIntyre 2006). There is also a tendency for single parents to sacrifice their own nutrition to improve the diet of their children (Dowler 1997, McIntyre *et al.* 2003a). The lived experience of low-income single parents is characterised by feeling deprived, frustrated by a lack of occupational choice, needing to manage the appearance of poverty, judged and degraded by other families, guilt in relation to their children, and isolated from social activities (McIntyre *et al.* 2003b). These findings are of increasing concern as the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that the number of single parents continues to climb (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007).

In this paper we apply the livelihoods framework approach as an analytical lens and organisational structure and is expected to generate policy relevant understanding of the strategies single parents use to maintain food security, the limits of those strategies, and the socioeconomic environment in which these strategies emerge. The utility of the framework is evaluated in terms of the consistency of its findings to previous literature and the novel insight it provides and compared with other candidate frameworks to provide critical insight into potential limitations.

## **Methods**

### ***Theoretical framework***

The livelihoods framework is adapted from the Department for International Development (1999) and Women and Economic Development Consortium (2001). It is an assets, as opposed to deficits, model (Sen 1999) that depicts the main factors that

impact an individual's capacity to maintain a sustainable livelihood (Figure 1).

Sustainable livelihood refers to the life situation that people strive towards that enables individuals to, “maintain and cultivate ourselves and our households, to take advantage of opportunities for growth over time, and to remain resistant to shocks and stresses from within and without” (Department for International Development 1999, p.12). The extent to which someone is able to achieve a sustainable livelihood is a function of the first three components of the framework: (i) vulnerability context, (ii) livelihood capabilities, and (iii) transforming structures and processes. These components do not interact in a linear fashion. Rather, they relate to one another dynamically with influence travelling in all directions. Through these components the framework captures both individual and structural determinants of achieving a sustainable livelihood.

The vulnerability context comprises the physical, social, political, and economic environments in which people live and shapes and constrains capacity to achieve sustainable livelihoods. The other components of the model respond to the vulnerability context. Capabilities represent fluid and exchangeable personal assets and attributes utilised to achieve livelihoods. The five capabilities are: (i) physical, (ii) human, (iii) financial, (iv) social, and (v) personal.

Physical capabilities include the natural resources, equipment, services, and infrastructure available to a person. In terms of food insecurity, this includes access to, and availability of, healthy food. Human capabilities reflect the health, skills, and knowledge that allow someone to earn money and apply other capabilities to their maximum effectiveness. Financial capabilities are the financial resources a person has available and generally come from two main sources: savings, or other liquid assets, and regular income. Social capabilities are the social and political networks to which

someone belongs that can be utilised to achieve a sustainable livelihood. Personal capabilities stem from values and self-perceptions. These drive motivation and enable personal transformation.

Finally, the transforming structures and processes reflect the institutions, organisations, policies, social structures, cultures, markets, and laws through which people utilise their capabilities to produce sustainable livelihoods. Although they do not directly affect capabilities, the livelihood outcomes they engender feedback and allow individuals to invest in the capabilities they need for a sustainable future.

### ***Data collection***

The research took a qualitative, inductive approach. This enabled interviewers to draw out the world-views of the participants and limited the influence of researchers' preconceptions of either the relative importance of food security or the factors that lead to participants being food insecure. Participants were not predetermined as 'food insecure', but rather interviewers provided space for them to talk freely about all issues to do with accessing, cooking and storing food.

A semi-structured interview was used, which allowed for explorations and discussions of relevant experiences and perceptions of history, biography and food, in addition to creating an atmosphere conducive to an open and uninhibited flow of conversation (Silverman 2001). In this way, the interview process and later data analysis recognised that 'food security' may not have been a useful concept to understand food-related behaviours within these particular groups.

In total, 73 interviews were undertaken, although this particular paper focuses on single parent families, which was a subset of 8 interviews (see Table 1). The project

was approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 4415). Informed consent was obtained before all interviews. A stratified sample (SES, household type, geographic location) was recruited by Harrison's, an accredited social research agency. This approach to sampling has been successfully used by the research team before, and is particularly useful for accessing 'hard to reach' groups, such as single parent families.

Interviews were undertaken with all willing participants within each household and explored the opportunities and barriers to accessing food outlets and healthy food choices. The interview covered areas such as regular food shopping destinations, reasons for food choice and value for money and perceptions on the influence of food advertising on purchasing habits.

Interviews generally lasted one hour, were undertaken at a venue convenient to the participant and were all audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Preliminary analysis, with recording of field notes, was carried out soon after each interview in order to inform the development of subsequent interviews. All transcripts were checked for accuracy by a member of the research team. Initial analysis of all 73 transcripts involved open coding, and then grouping conceptual labels under common themes which were modified to accommodate negative or deviant findings. Through the analytic process it became clearer which themes were common, not only across the study participants, but within sub-groups as well (e.g., single parents, older participants, rural/metro participants etc). It became clear that single parents had particular issues in relation to accessing food which were not common to other participants in the study and deserved independent consideration. These issues emerge from the lifestyle demands of supporting children alone including, extensive demands on time, resources spent on



childcare, restricted income, and the challenges of balancing work, necessities of daily living, and parenting.

### ***Analytical process***

In terms of analysis for this paper the objective was to populate a food insecurity livelihoods framework for low-income single parents. The livelihoods framework functioned as an analytic lens through which the data was viewed and organised. To accommodate this function the 'framework method' (Ritchie and Spencer 1994) of analysis was adopted to replace open coding. The framework method facilitates qualitative analysis that is directed *a priori* by a specific research objective, but remains responsive to emergent themes within the data or as identified by respondents themselves. In contrast to the initial analysis of all transcripts, components of the livelihoods framework constituted thematic nodes and provided thematic hierarchy. Each interview transcript was coded and indexed according to components of the livelihoods framework, including vulnerability context, each type of capability, and transforming structures and processes. Sections of text referring to a particular livelihoods framework component were copied to their appropriate node. This facilitated interpretation of each component across respondents. Portions of interviews found to be incompatible with the livelihoods framework were indexed and analysed according to their internal emergent themes.

### **Findings**

Analysis of the interview data enabled the construction of a food insecurity livelihoods framework for the single parent sample. However, two caveats must be considered. First, the intention was to understand the experience of the respondents. Therefore the

focus was on what impedes these parents from achieving their expectation of a healthy diet, rather than determining the disparity between their diets and a clinical definition of a healthy diet. Second, this was a secondary use of data in that, the interview was not specifically designed to elicit information pertinent to a livelihoods framework approach. As a result, some sections may be disproportionately populated. Also, the dataset only included eight single parent respondents, which diminishes the comprehensiveness of the findings. Although these data proved sufficient to populate a preliminary livelihoods framework useful for evaluating this approach, our findings relating to food insecurity for single parents are tentative and subject to confirmation through further investigation.

### ***Vulnerability context***

Respondents' discussion of issues pertinent to the vulnerability context was limited, likely due to the content of the interview questions. Issues discussed included: increasing price of food over time and of fruit and vegetables in particular; shrinking package sizes while maintaining prices; and diminishing food quality, especially of fruit and vegetables. The demands of single parenthood, including managing children while shopping, children's dietary restrictions and preferences, and meeting the needs of multiple children and their friends were also reported.

### ***Financial capabilities***

The financial capabilities of respondents varied from full-time employment to pensioners, those on permanent disability cover, and those on welfare. Respondents consistently reported income as the dominant, and usually the only factor that limits food purchases, indicating a relative deprivation of financial capabilities within this group:

The last two weeks I actually put myself on a budget, so I bought just the basics of what I needed. [R4]

Like I think I need to have more in the area of fruit. We don't eat nearly as much fruit, but I can't afford the bloody fruit. [R5]

Obviously, if I had unlimited spending power I would buy a lot more, but I buy enough to suit my family. [R6]

Notably, these restrictions were most acute for central food items such as fruits, vegetables, and meat. However, as strained as financial capabilities appear to be, the respondents maintain that they are able to provide for their families.

### ***Social capabilities***

Respondents commonly reported two types of social capabilities. First were exchange relationships, where friends or family brought food around. This was usually eggs (it is not unusual in South Australia for homes to keep one or more chickens for egg laying purposes), but fruit and vegetables, or a hamper, were also reported. A second relevant social capability is amicable relations with shop owners, or employees of supermarkets, which benefit respondents in terms of what food is made available and what they pay for it.

I go to Foodland [large supermarket chain] and get it from there because I know the lady that works there and she tells me which ones are the cheapest. [R3]

You know, if you wanted to buy a cow [from the butcher] you'd have to start talking to the butchers and find out what their intent is otherwise you're bidding against them and you can't bid against the butchers. [R5]

### ***Personal capabilities***

Data relevant to personal capabilities was limited. Respondents discussed pride in

thriftiness and the value they place on providing healthy and nutritious food for their families.

I bargain hunt. I'm a champion bargain hunter. [R2]

Well you've got to live within your means....but food is one thing I will not scrimp out on. If it means I can't go to the gym or, you know, I can't go out or anything I won't. [R8]

I won't go without food, no. I mean I can live on beans on toast or spaghetti on toast, but [my child] can't so you can't skimp on food. [R8]

### ***Physical capabilities***

Some physical capabilities were relatively consistent across respondents. Almost all used a car to transport groceries. Supermarkets were the dominant source of groceries and all respondents, even those in rural locations, lived less than 5 kilometres from a large supermarket. No respondent indicated they had trouble accessing food.

Other, more variable, physical capabilities that contribute to food security were gardens and storage space. Some respondents had home gardens and fruit trees, but these appeared to contribute minimally to diet. Storage and freezer space was generally good, and a crucial asset to many parents who depend upon saving money by buying in bulk and freezing meals to reduce cost and waste.

### ***Human capabilities***

Respondents exhibit extensive and various human capabilities that enable them to achieve food security. A major contributor was knowledge and skills that enable good purchasing decisions, including bargain hunting, evaluating 'specials' [offers], and knowing stores in the area:

They send out a catalogue every week and I cruise the shops. Well they can't fit everything in the catalogue that's on special. [R2]

I'll have a look 'okay, that's meant to be on special, I'll go down the aisle and see if there's anything similar to that' [R3]

I did have to look around because I did feel, because of the lack of department stores, that things were more expensive. Now I've got to know all the different stores I know which items I can get that are similar at a cheaper price. [R6]

Other contributing human capabilities included: competency at cooking and related strategies such as batch cooking and freezing:

...[It's] about having the knowledge and knowing what to buy and then once you've bought it knowing what to do with it. [R5]

I mean I'm a cooker so I will use something for a base and just add whatever I want to it so I don't mind going for the cheaper option. [R8]

Health knowledge about the importance of fruits and vegetables and eating a balanced diet was also reported. However, in other areas there was a relative deprivation of human capabilities. For example, health was an issue for many respondents. It impeded their ability to shop, lift large or bulk items, and restricted what they could eat.

### ***Time capabilities***

During the analysis it became apparent that some respondents were constrained by the amount of time they had in the day to accomplish everything, including food acquisition and preparation.

It's terrible when you work – I've been working full-time and doing all sorts of other things, that's why I go in my lunch hour. And you've got to get back on time. I've got one hour from when I leave work until I have to get back so, yes. [R7]

Oh sometimes I skip lunch just because I'm busy. [R6]

...like Wednesday nights for us is busy, she has school then she comes – goes to swimming and then to her grandma's for piano lessons so it's always good just to [have a meal] out of the freezer... [R1]

Time was most constraining for working parents and less so for those on pensions or disability.

### *Transforming structures and processes*

Respondents identified a variety of structures and processes, such as social services, the educational system, and cultural norms that influence food security. However, supermarkets—the dominant food source for this group—emerged as a crucial structure and process for transforming capabilities into livelihoods.

Respondent engagement with supermarkets is complex. Parents rely on promotions offered by supermarkets to stay within their food budgets, which fosters an impression of generosity in some respondents:

And I guess I buy according to specials... Sometimes I don't buy it because it's too expensive, so you go without, especially meat. I won't buy it usually full price so you've got to wait for the specials. That's very limiting. [R7]

Coles is trying to be better for people. At the moment they've got their watermelon out for 96 cents a kilo which is better than paying two dollars a kilo. [R1]

In situations where specials are unavailable or sold out, frustrations are sometimes directed towards other customers:

It's hard to do it sometimes because some people get here really, really early and all the specials have all gone and like why can't people just have variety and have the different one which is also on special but they don't like it because it's got such and such on it. I'm like 'come on'. [R3]

However, respondents also acknowledge the limits of promotions to meet their dietary needs:

R: But, meat does go on special frequently, but not much in the store does. They have a lot of specials on chocolates and drinks and things, soft drinks, but they don't have the specials on <inaudible>.

I: The stuff you really need which is...

R: So they don't have that kind of stuff. [R1]

Furthermore, respondents report the capacity for supermarkets to be deceitful. This is apparent in comments reported in the vulnerability context and human capabilities section regarding the shrinking of packages and their contents without a corresponding reduction in price and the need to double check the value of specials. Other supermarket tactics are also questioned by respondents:

When that GST[(Government Sales Tax) stuff was all getting talked about I noticed that from that day on every couple of weeks Woolworth was putting the prices up, not to worry about oh, you know, you're getting 10 percent - that's all it is, 10 percent - that's not true. Woolworths had already put the bloomin' price up 10 percent before the GST even got here so the foodstuffs went up 20 or 30 percent. [R5]

In summary, respondents described a complex and contradictory relationship with supermarkets, characterised by dependency, impressions of generosity, and recognition of deceit. The implications of this relationship are taken up later in the discussion.

## **Discussion**

We have used the livelihoods framework as both an analytical lens through which qualitative data can be analysed and an organisational structure to model the determinants of food insecurity for low-income single parents in South Australia. We now evaluate utility of this approach, first in terms of the kinds and levels of capabilities it detected compared with previous findings, and second, in terms of novel contribution. Specific contributions discussed include (i) the dynamic interaction of capabilities, and (ii) the interaction between capabilities and transforming structures and processes. Finally the limitations and applications of the livelihoods framework are discussed.

### ***Assessment of Capabilities***

Capabilities are an inventory of assets or attributes that parents use to achieve food security. Consistent with previous findings, respondents reported a relative deprivation of financial capabilities, mainly in terms of income (Tarasuk 2001, Vozoris and Tarasuk 2003, Glanville and McIntyre 2006, Tarasuk and Vogt 2009, Stevens 2010).

Also consistent with the literature, human capabilities such as cooking skill and storage techniques (McLaughlin *et al.* 2003, Stevens 2010), budget shopping, and meal planning (Dowler 1997, Stevens 2010) were found to contribute significantly to food security.

Reports of personal capabilities were limited in our study, which may be due to us analysing secondary data (i.e. the original study was not focussed on capabilities and therefore did not seek to elicit data on personal capabilities). However, capabilities that



were identified, including pride in thriftiness and value placed on healthy eating are consistent with the literature (Crotty *et al.* 1992, McIntyre *et al.* 2003b, Burns 2004).

Physical capabilities also corroborated previous findings. Consistent with Coveney and O'Dwyer (2009) supermarkets were the principal food source and other sources contributed variably to food security. All respondents reported adequate geographical access to supermarkets and depended on cars for transport.

In terms of social capabilities, there is evidence for people utilizing relationships with family and friends for free food (McIntyre *et al.* 2002). Beyond these exchange relationship, some respondents also discussed the benefits of a relationship with shop or supermarket employees. However, this appears only as a contributory and not a major determinant for achieving food security.

During analyses it became evident that having sufficient time to complete daily activities was a key issue for these parents. Considering the prevalence of observations, it seems reasonable to incorporate them into the framework. Indeed the importance of time poverty has been recognised in previous food insecurity research (Drewnowski and Eichelsdoerfer 2009).

### ***Dynamics of Capabilities***

The preceding discussion demonstrates that the capabilities detected by a livelihoods framework approach are consistent with previous findings. A major strength of this approach is the organization and integration of various determinants of food insecurity. In terms of capabilities themselves, the framework demonstrates that parents reported in this study have developed a wide range of human and social capabilities to substitute for variable deprivation of financial and time capabilities. This form of intra-capability exchange reflects what DFID identifies as substitution (Department for

International Development 1999). Bargain hunting reduces food costs. Cooking skill allows parents to buy cheaper unprepared food items. Knowing the layout of the store reduces shopping time. Extensive planning and scheduling allows for food shopping and preparation to be included in a busy day. Relationships with store owners and employees ensure good value for money. The organization provided by the livelihoods framework analysis suggests that although few of these families were currently experiencing food insecurity, the extent of capability substitution suggests their capacity to handle shifts in vulnerability context is compromised.

### ***Capabilities and Transforming Structures and Processes***

Another major strength of the framework emerges from the insight it provides into the interaction between individual capabilities and transforming structures and processes. Modelling this interaction reveals the purpose and action of capabilities and the factors that shape, enable, and constrain, their usefulness.

In this study supermarkets were identified as playing a major transformative role. Structurally, supermarkets are important because their extensive distribution provides geographical access to food. Supermarkets also generate the process, or 'rules of the game', through which respondents access food. This process engenders a complex relationship with supermarkets characterised by dependency, and perceptions of both generosity and deceit. The dependency on promotions appears to foster a willingness to characterise supermarkets as generous and benevolent that disempowers respondents from challenging supermarket processes and protects supermarket from critique. This is apparent, for example, in the frustrated comments directed towards other customers when specials are sold out. However, supermarkets were not immune to criticism by respondents and some deceitful practices were still reported.

The structure and process of supermarkets also characterise the capabilities described by respondents. For example, as described in the findings, cars are commonly used to transport large quantities of groceries, purchasing knowledge and skills catered to bargain hunting and price comparison, and in one case a relationship was developed with a supermarket employee.

This analysis confirms the importance of supermarkets for these families to maintain food security. As an assets rather than a deficits model the livelihoods framework approach directs policy makers towards interventions that empower individuals. In this case, policy might engage with supermarket processes to enhance the opportunities for individuals to utilise their existing capabilities. As a commercial enterprise, supermarkets are accountable only to their shareholders. However, revised public policy could focus on increasing accountability to communities through increased transparency of food pricing structures, profit margins, and promotional schemes. This could also include taxing unhealthy foods and subsidising healthy foods or regulatory policies such as price controls. Importantly, the model emphasises that attaining sustainable livelihoods feeds back on existing capabilities to strengthen individuals and their communities. These policy approaches are consistent with recommendation that food policy needs to focus upstream on the food supply chain (Caraher and Coveney 2004, Wardle and Baranovic 2009).

The policy relevant evidence produced by the livelihoods framework could have direct implications for national policy in Australia. The National Preventative Health Strategy (NPHS) has made recommendations consistent with the findings of this study. For example, action 2.2 recommends the government should “[c]ommission a review of economic policies and taxation systems, and develop methods for using taxation, grants,

pricing, incentives and/or subsidies....” (National Preventative Health Taskforce 2009, p.105). Unfortunately, in response to the NPHS, the government reported that it had already undertaken a review of the Australian taxation system and that no such policy changes were recommended (Commonwealth of Australia 2010). The NPHS did not make any recommendations for increased transparency and regulation of pricing structures and promotional strategies. The limited scope of the NPHS and the reluctance of the government to engage with structural determinants is unfortunate as policies that engage with transforming structures and processes have potential to improve the livelihood outcomes, which in turn empowers individuals to invest in capabilities needed to achieve their own food security (Department for International Development 1999).

### ***Limitations of the Livelihoods framework***

The livelihoods framework is an effective policy tool. However, it is not without limitation. A notable issue is the tendency of the framework to treat people as being driven primarily by necessity and ignoring the rich socio-cultural context that motivates certain behaviours. That is to say, the livelihoods framework does not take account of the ways in which people interact with each other and with the cultural environment in which they operate. In an effort to moderate such structuralist accounts of human behaviour, some researchers have turned to Bourdieu to integrate structure and individual agency (Lunnay *et al.* In Press; Sayer 2005; Gatrell *et al.* 2004). Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘capital’ and ‘habitus’ might provide similar insight if applied to the livelihoods framework.

Bourdieu’s ‘capitals’ are already reflected in, and behave similarly to, livelihood framework capabilities and include economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capitals.

The first three find analogues in financial, human, and social capabilities, respectfully. However, symbolic capital reflecting prestige, status, and authority, is missing from the livelihoods framework. Its inclusion would begin to facilitate a richer interpretation of food related behaviour. For example, it may inform us about why some parents bought organic, or why some choose the premium cheese.

The concept of habitus is particularly useful to mediate between the social structures that constrain behaviour, what Bourdieu refers to as the ‘field’, and the agency of individuals (Shilling 1993). Habitus reflects a person’s ‘world-view’ (Gatrell *et al.* 2004), or what Bourdieu and Wacquant describe as the, “mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.16). It suggests that while the social environments, or fields, we experience, are structured and constraining, habitus guides each person’s unique navigation of these fields. A popular analogy is the football player who does what he wants on the pitch, but is constrained by the rules of the game.

The livelihoods framework does acknowledge ‘culture’ as a transforming structure and process, which could be interpreted as reflecting habitus. However, its peripheral allocation deemphasises individual agency afforded by habitus and arguably disempowers the subject of analysis.

## **Conclusions**

Despite these potential shortcomings, the livelihoods framework approach provides critical insight into the needs and challenges of the food insecure population pertinent to policy intervention. These parents, although not consistently food insecure, were found to be exposed to risk of food insecurity resulting from subtle shifts in

vulnerability context. This elevated risk is reflected in the deprivation of financial and time capabilities, accompanied by high levels of capability substitution, as parents endeavour to compensate for that deprivation. The framework illuminated potential spaces for policy intervention including increased transparency of supermarket pricing schemes and promotions and supporting increased regulation of food markets, through taxation and subsidies as opposed to industry self-regulation.

These insights into the lived experience of these parents and subsequent policy options were made visible through the livelihoods framework functioning as both analytic lens and organizational structure. Researchers and policy makers should consider the livelihoods framework when they encounter social outcomes with complex determinants and when policy makers desire to empower individuals to improve their own circumstances.

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Table 1 - Respondent demographics

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Number of children</i>	<i>Highest level of Education</i>	<i>Employment</i>
R1	34	F	1	Year 12	Disability
R2	48	F	2	Year 12	Casual Part time
R3	27	F	3	Year 11	Welfare
R4	27	F	1	Year 12	Casual Part time
R5	53	M	1	Year 10	Disability
R6	44	F	4	Advanced Diploma	Permanent Part time
R7	54	F	1	BSc	Permanent Part time
R8	25	F	1	Advanced Diploma	Permanent Part time