

DOUGLAS, F. and HUNTER, E. 2023. *Understanding lived experiences of navigating supermarket foodscapes when living on a low income*. Presented at the 8th United Kingdom congress on obesity (UKCO 2023), 14-15 September 2023, Belfast, UK.

Understanding lived experiences of navigating supermarket foodscapes when living on a low income.

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2023

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Understanding lived experiences of navigating supermarket foodscapes and living on a low income: the FIO Food Project

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on behalf of the FIO Food team

Interviews: The Lived Experience

WP1 quantitative survey → in depth interviews (n=30)

Aim: To understand the lived experience of people living with obesity (PLWO) and food insecurity (FI) when shopping for food in the supermarket context

Research Questions

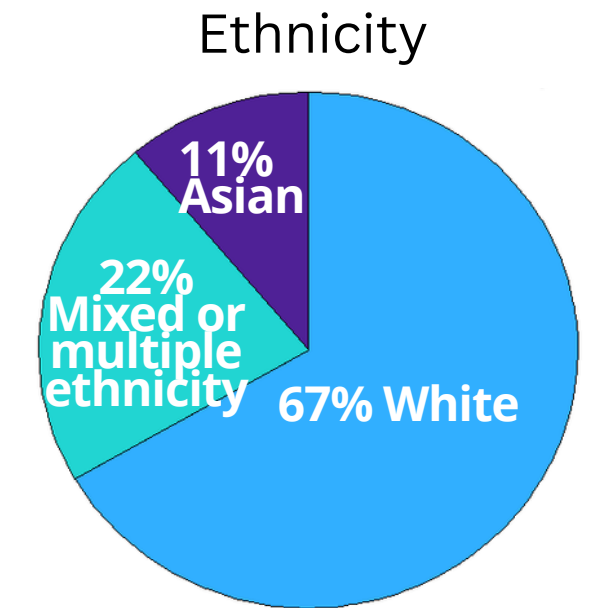
1. What are the experiences of PLWO and with FI, of shopping in a supermarket environment (in-store or online), for foods that meet their personal weight loss or maintenance goals?
2. What are key instrumental factors and environmental cues that hinder and/or help PLWO and FI, to purchase healthier, environmentally sustainable food items whilst shopping?



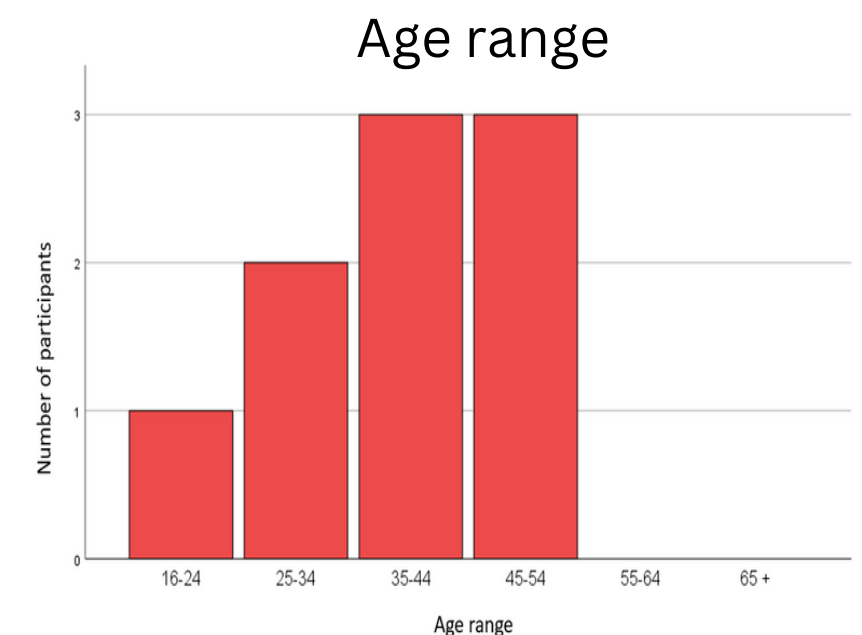
Interview Participants

- 479 Prolific participants expressed an interest in taking part in an interview
- Sent invitation email and information leaflet
- 50 responded:
 - sent link to screening questionnaire and Participant Information Sheet
 - 14 did not respond
 - 14 were not eligible (8 no food insecurity, 6 not living with obesity)
 - 2 did not attend
- 20 interviews conducted to date
- Preliminary data analysis undertaken (n = 9)
- **Findings subject to change as analysis continues**
- Method: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

Participant demographics



Gender: 6 women, 3 men



RQ1: The Conscious Consumer



Searching, planning and preparing

'We look at the lists, I've got like 1000 cash back apps on my phone so we look through those things, we militarily decide all these things that we're getting, we figure out recipes we're going to do... we'll get all the deals, we'll do the club card prices, we'll run the vouchers, we'll do pretty much everything to make sure that this works out and I'm talking everything'

(Participant 18)



Down to the penny: a working knowledge of food prices

'chickpeas, for example, they're still 46p in Lidl, but then other places, I mean, I...go to Lidl... cause Asda's expensive as well compared like, gramme, per gramme with the food weight is, it's a joke and it's like Iceland as well, they pretend they're cheap but they're ripping people off big time because they're...well overpriced compared to...well, I mean, Tesco's not so great but, you know, Tesco's is the cheapest I have found'

(Participant 08)



Checking the labels: Engaging and actively disengaging with nutritional information

'I try as much as possible to make um, the best possible choices...more often than not now I, I'm looking at the nutritional information and just kind of closing my eyes a little bit to what's on there. Which makes me feel pretty sad because I've always, I've always previously been quite on stuff like that but, um, and it's mattered but I find I'm still looking but then having to make, like turn a blind eye'

(Participant 11)

RQ1: The Restricted Consumer

Healthy options off the table

- Can't afford to buy healthy foods they would like to buy
- Often substitute with less healthy, more affordable alternatives

Shop where you can, not where you want

'I find like Lidl and Aldi quite visually, erm, it's just quite a confusing experience...the checkouts tend to be a bit speedier and people seem to be a bit, maybe a bit more impatient in general...I sort of do a bit of an intake of breath before I go in to say the Lidl and Aldis ...of course if you walk into somewhere like a Waitrose, everything's displayed beautifully, the staff are so helpful and friendly, er, there's space to sort of breathe and actually look at stuff, so kind of, in a sensory way, the, the, the more expensive shops are obviously. I, it's they're beautifully air conditioned, it's, it, you know, it's a very, you notice it'

(Participant 11)

The emotional toll of restriction

'it's effin miserable knowing that I've only got lentils and the eggs available. You know, that, it's repetitiveness is a crapper... I don't even recycle stuff sometimes, 'cause I cannot be arsed. I've gotta save my leg energy just for existing and that, phew, that's just a...I'm sure I'm not the only person who lives like this'

(Participant 08)

'I think about sustainability and I think about how healthy something is, and depending on what's going on for me at that time and what is available, I find myself making choices where I ignore, sustainability, environmental impacts in favour of getting the cheapest possible thing...Which makes me feel so ashamed saying that because no, I never used to be like that, urgh'

(Participant 11)

Sustainability: A little bit of what I want to do and a little bit of what I can afford to do

- Many were able to think about/ engage with this before the cost-of-living crisis
- Many try and do what they can
- Price determines what they buy- can't always afford to shop sustainably

RQ2. Deals and promotions: The **Good**, the **Bad** and the **Ugly**



Deals help navigate restrictions

- Offer the chance to buy products they previously couldn't afford
- Offers the chance to try new products

'sometimes it'll be something where like maybe I've thought about buying it before but I've never wanted to because I wasn't like too sure about like the prices of it or it was just too expensive in the past and now it's a bit cheaper'

(Participant 05)

Deals are subject to change

- Deals fluctuate
- Deals sell out

'I might do it one week when something ...healthier, is on offer and then that'll be for four weeks... four weeks isn't gonna have, is no, that drop in the ocean, you know, so it's just pointless. So in the end it's like... close your eyes, buy what you can afford and carry on'

(Participant 02)

Less healthy: a sensible economic choice

- Biggest reductions on less healthy products
- No discount on staples

'if you look at the core products that you buy and your family needs, almost there's, there's no discount. In fact, that's the stuff that seems to be going right up at the moment'

(Participant 11)

RQ2. Instrumental support: Upstream change required

'I would like to see some support for single people on Universal Credit without a family because I feel like, I get no support at all ...It's humiliating, giving people [food] vouchers. I don't wanna have a voucher, but I don't think the government would agree to up Universal Credit so that people could buy more fruit and veg. You know, I think on principle, they're just never gonna do that because it of the uproar it would cause it's like, 'you're give money to people, they should be working blah blah''

(Participant 08)

'I think it has to come from government... to make sure, hopefully that it happens and it happens properly, it needs to be done from on high, you know, the government are always telling us that, what we should eat...Yeah, they've gotta do something'

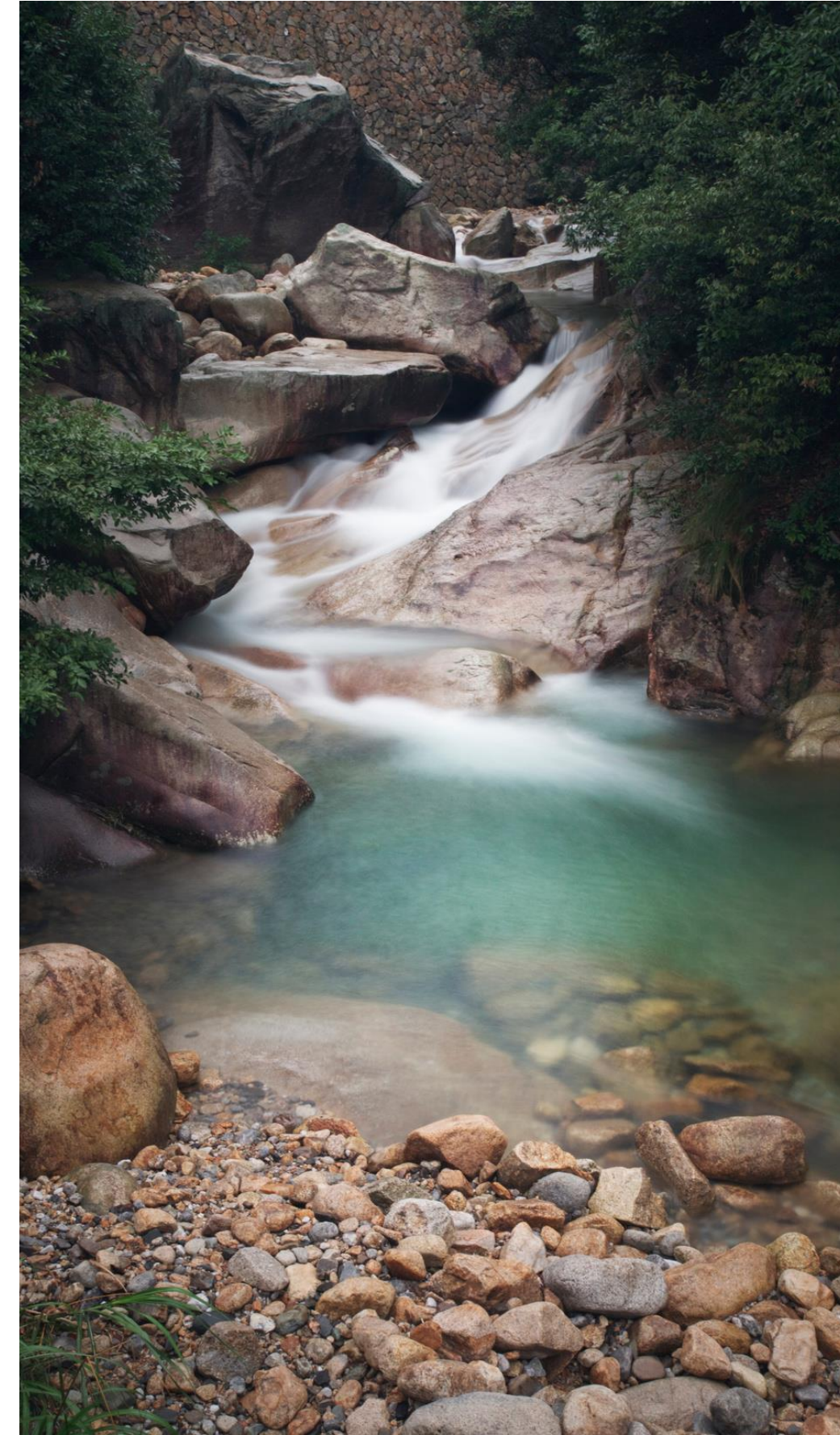
(Participant 02)

'I think the government could be doing more all the time anyway with, with helping people with their finances, especially at the moment no one, no one has the money to buy the food that they want to do...I'm not sure what else supermarkets can be doing with regards to reducing the price of their, their products at the moment. So I think that is the government's area of jurisdiction'

(Participant 11)

'I think the onus, as a say, should fall on these companies to lower prices. It should fall on government initiatives to force these companies to keep things at the same price and not raise them more than a certain percentage over time to just sneak it back up there either...I think that's where the legislation should lead. It should be about making the good choices, both ethical, sustainable, healthwise, accessible to people like me to people like you, to people, like everyone in the world'

(Participant 18)



Summary



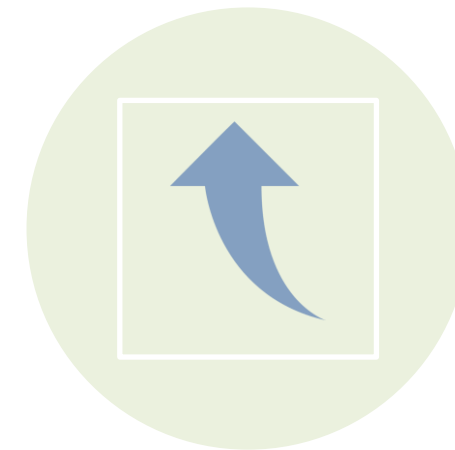
Shopping involves conscious decisions and effortful practices for people living with obesity and food insecurity



Low income and high food prices restricts the purchase of healthy, sustainable food, the supermarket used and takes an emotional toll on individuals



Deals may help add variety to an individual's diet, but unhealthy deals appear more prevalent in the supermarket context



Participants believe upstream change is needed to allow people living with obesity and food insecurity to buy the food they want to buy to meet their weight loss or weight maintenance goals

What next?



Continued data collection and analysis



Targeted sampling

Acknowledgments

Research participants

Our fellow FIO Food team members

Our PPI partners:

FIO Food Ambassadors

Community Advisors Group

Morelife Group

Our funders

Thank you

FIO Food:

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/rowett/research/fio-food/index.php>



Food insecurity in people living with obesity in the UK
Supporting sustainable and healthy food choices in the retail food environment

This research was funded through the Transforming the UK Food Systems for Healthy People and a Healthy Environment SPF Programme, delivered by UKRI, in partnership with the Global Food Security Programme, BBSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC, Defra, DHSC, OHID, Innovate UK and FSA.

