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# Understanding lived experiences of navigating supermarket foodscapes of people living with obesity on a low income: the Food insecurity in people living with obesity (FIO) food project.

DOUGLAS, F. and HUNTER, E., on behalf of the FIO Food Team.

2024



# Understanding lived experiences of navigating supermarket foodscapes of people living with obesity on a low income: The Food Insecurity in people living with Obesity (FIO) Food Project

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





# The FIO Food Project



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## Food insecurity...

'the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food'<sup>1</sup>



15% UK households are experiencing food insecurity in 2024<sup>2</sup>

Approx. 8 million adults and 3 million children<sup>2</sup>



In the UK, healthier foods are three times more expensive per calorie than unhealthy foods<sup>3</sup>

limits dietary choices to a low-price, high-energy combination, which can promote weight gain<sup>4</sup>



The existing food system negatively impacts the environment<sup>5</sup>

Sustainable, healthy diets should be promoted and affordable for all



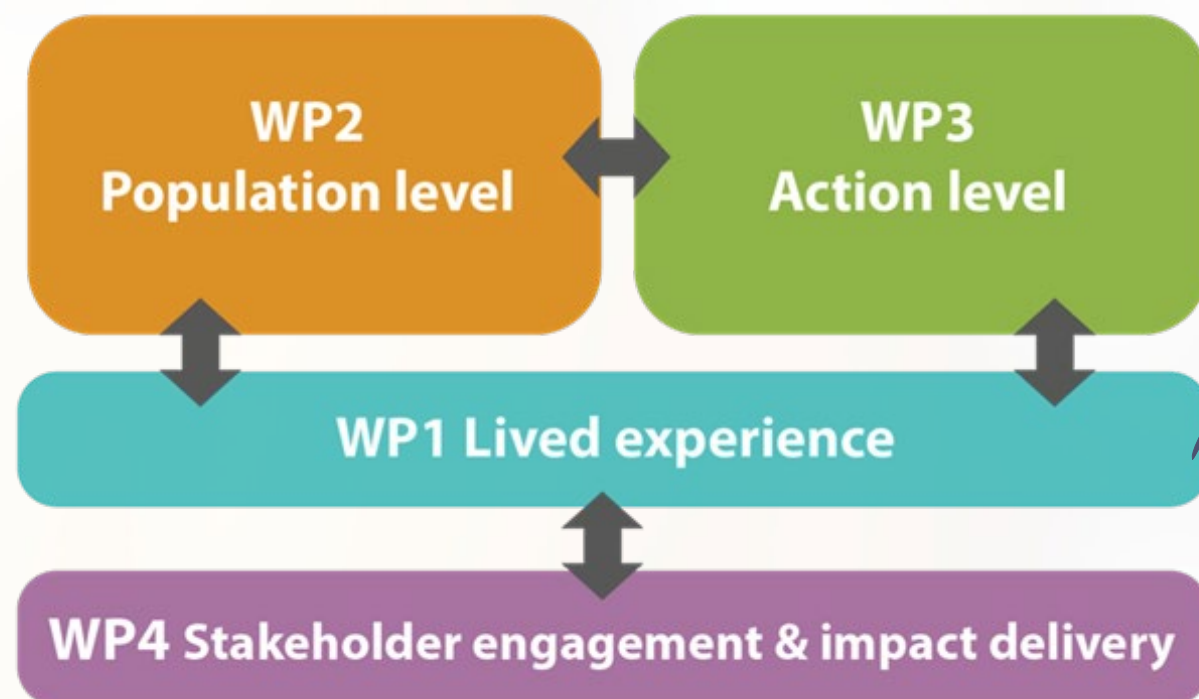
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Over all Aim:

To provide actionable evidence for policy on retail strategies to address dietary inequalities in people living with obesity and food insecurity, to support sustainable and healthier food choices in the UK food system.



WP1 Objective: Capture the lived experience of food shopping in people living with obesity and food insecurity.

Key milestones:  
Establish PPI groups  
UK Prolific quantitative survey  
Retail sector qualitative study  
Lived experience qualitative study





# FIO Food WP1:



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## Qualitative Research

Aim:

To understand the lived experience of people living with obesity and food insecurity when shopping for food in the supermarket context

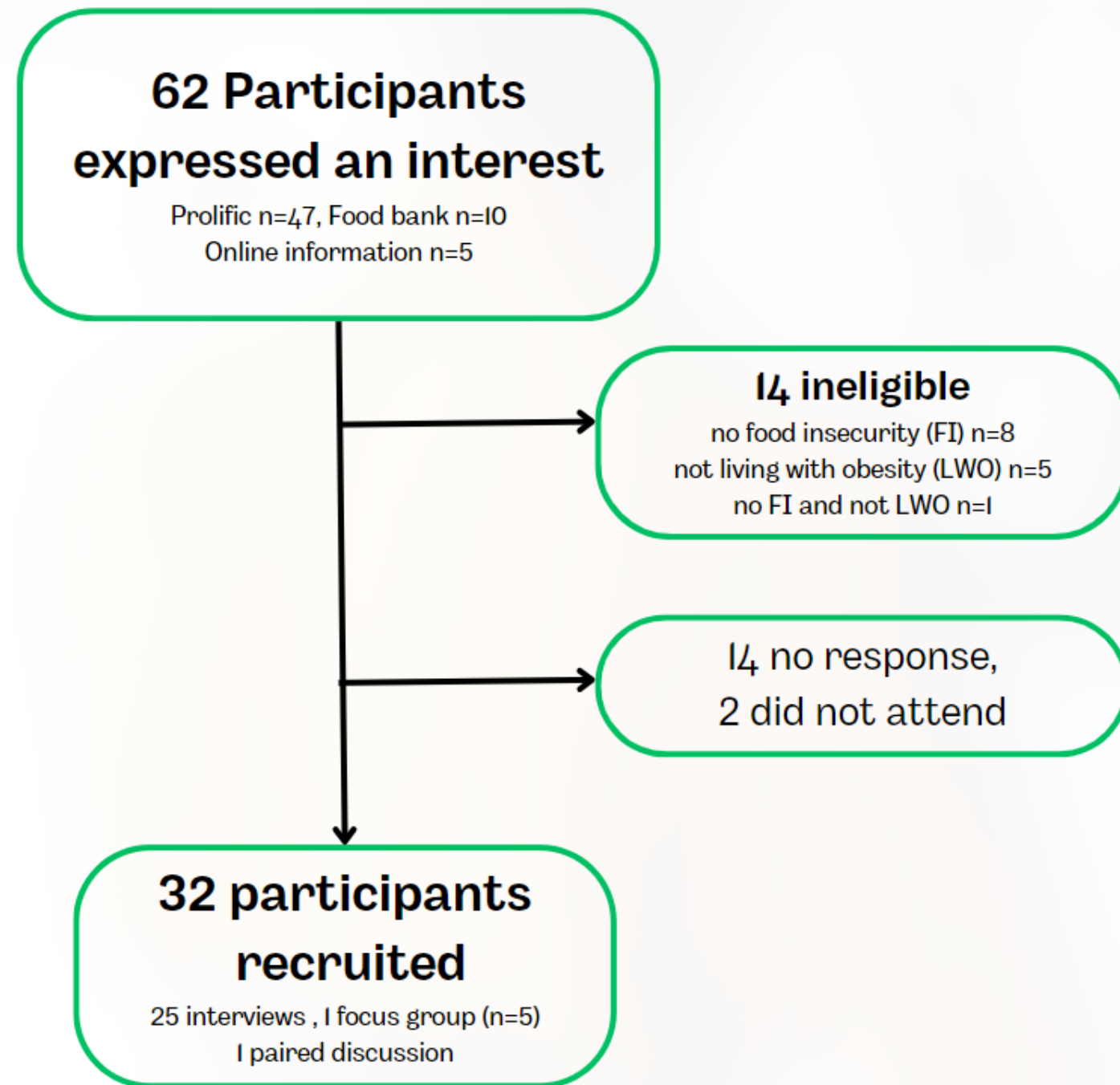
1. What are their experiences of shopping in a supermarket environment (in-store or online), for foods that meet their personal weight loss or maintenance goals?

2. What helps or hinders them to purchase healthier, environmentally sustainable food items whilst shopping?

# Participants: Recruitment & demographics



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BMI: median 35.5kg/m<sup>2</sup>



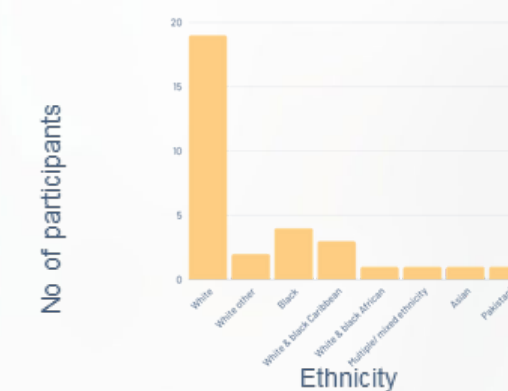
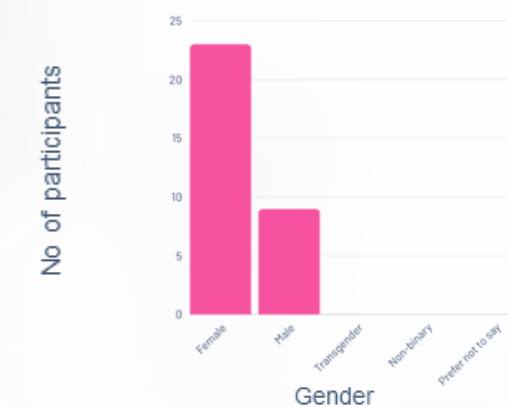
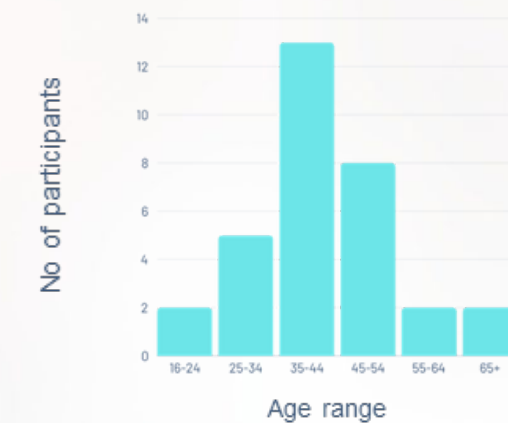
Age: majority aged 35-44



Gender: 72% female



Ethnicity: 65.6% white



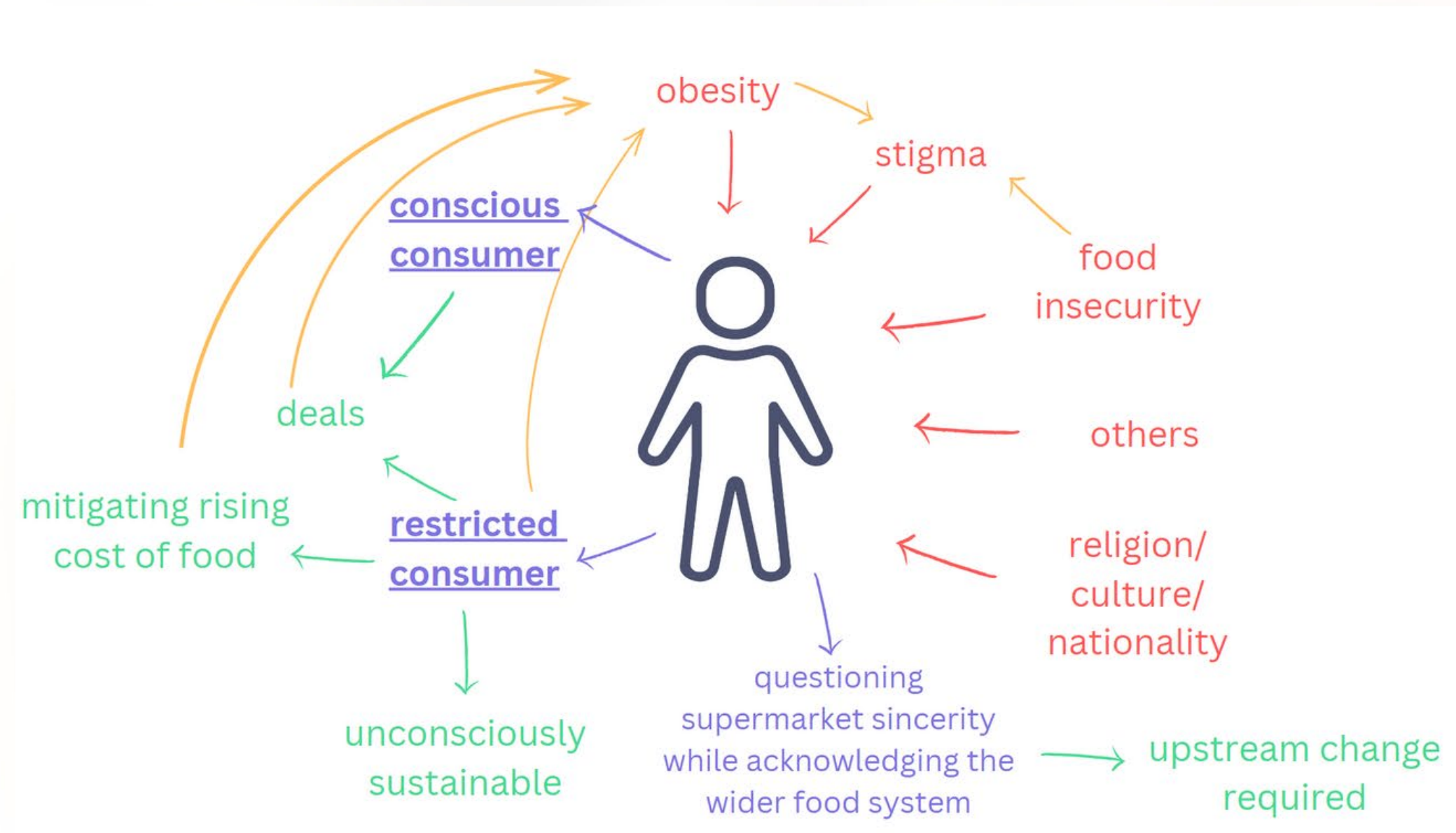
# Results



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Analysis Method: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022)<sup>6</sup>

## Main themes



### The Conscious Consumer

- Searching, planning and preparing
- A good knowledge of food prices
- Checking the labels: Engaging and actively disengaging with nutritional information

### The Restricted Consumer

- Healthy options off the table
- Shop where you can, not where you want
- Sustainability: A little bit of what I want to do and a little bit of what I can afford to do
- The emotional toll of restriction



# Results:

What are the experiences of people living with obesity and food insecurity when shopping in a supermarket environment for foods that meet their personal weight loss or maintenance goals?



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## 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)

'on Lidl, on the website they have like, erm, lists of foods that are discounted for that particular week like erm, like chickens and like apples, oranges, you know, broccoli, stuff like that. So, usually I try and like, make the shopping list and the recipe around those particular things that are gonna be discounted this week.'

(Participant 15)



'lots of people say, oh, shop around but that's alright if you live in a city where everything's readily accessible but we live in a market town...if I want to go a place where there is an Aldi and a large Tesco and a small Asda that's an 8-mile drive there and so you're working out the petrol prices as well so, you know.'

(Participant 36)



# Results:

What are the experiences of people living with obesity and food insecurity when shopping in a supermarket environment for foods that meet their personal weight loss or maintenance goals?



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## The Conscious Consumer

### A good knowledge of food prices

'fish was like £ 2.50 to buy two of them, now they're £ 4.50...Before it used to be like buy two of those packets for like £ 4, now they're very rarely on offer'

(Participant 10)

'sometimes for my own sanity I will go into Waitrose and look at the cheap stuff and get it. But you know, their sardines are 15p dearer than other places'

(Participant 08)

'the other day...it was £ 2 something a kilogram for courgettes, and I just think, that used to be like 30p a kilo, for like a courgette, you know.'

(Participant 35)



### 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)

'I do look at the...like the red and the yellow and the green...but sometimes, you know, I might look at the nutritional kind of information and then there's a product next to it like on promotion and it's a lot cheaper and that always seems to kind of win over.'

(Participant 44)



# Results:

What are the experiences of people living with obesity and food insecurity when shopping in a supermarket environment for foods that meet their personal weight loss or maintenance goals?



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## The Restricted Consumer

### Healthy options off the table



'I've gone to buy chicken and I, I've only got a £ 150 budget and I can't, the only chicken or turkey that I can get within that price range is a Bernard Matthews turkey, breaded turkey escalope... I could get two of them reduced from £ 1.99 to £ 1, so that's within my budget but it's nowhere near as healthy as just buying the plain chicken'

(Participant 54)



'High processed goods in supermarkets are always the cheapest and are pretty much what I live off of now. So I know I'm doing myself harm. I know it's not gonna make me any better. It's not gonna help me lose weight 'cause they're always high fat'

(Participant 02)



'I used to buy loads of fruit and at the minute I tend to just buy like maybe one or two. I don't even buy bananas anymore because the kids will just sit and eat them in one go, which I think, great, like fruit but it's...gone like within five minutes'

(Participant 17)

### 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's and Aldi's ...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'

(Participant 11)



# Results:

What are the experiences of people living with obesity and food insecurity when shopping in a supermarket environment for foods that meet their personal weight loss or maintenance goals?



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## The Restricted Consumer

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



'I try and buy British when I could, you know, I used to think about, you know, how far things had to travel. I used to kind of, you know, look at things that maybe had better packaging that I could kind of recycle, and all those kind of things, but a lot of that freedom seems to have kind of gone. You know, I'm not, I wish I could be more driven like that but, you know, again, all the promotions they're not, they're not ever taking things like that into account.'

(Participant 44)

'So I do try and do things that help the planet, I have started looking at the packaging on things. Um... it's a little bit of what I want to do and a little bit of what I can afford to do, so if I see something in a plastic bottle and then right to it is something that comes in just a cardboard box, so then I know, hey, I can recycle all the packaging, there's nothing going in landfill and they are the same price or close enough the same price, I'm gonna pick the one that's not the plastic'

(Participant 06)

'when I had a full-time job, I would look at where things came from and I wouldn't buy things if they were wrapped in excessive plastic which, some places used to do...it is a, something that I'm interested in but I can't sustain myself frankly Emma, on this budget. So, yeah, that's, that's gone out of the window.'

(Participant 08)



# Results:

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## The Restricted Consumer

### The emotional toll of restriction



'the price of the food is ridiculous. I've got four children, I'm a disabled single mother and I think that, very, it's very distressing and there's not, it used to be fun. I used to enjoy going shopping..you're looking for goodness, you're looking for vegetables and you cannae afford the price of vegetables cause it's gone sky high and I find that ridiculous, and that's what causes me anxiety, causes me depression as well, really makes me down'

(Participant 58)



'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 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'

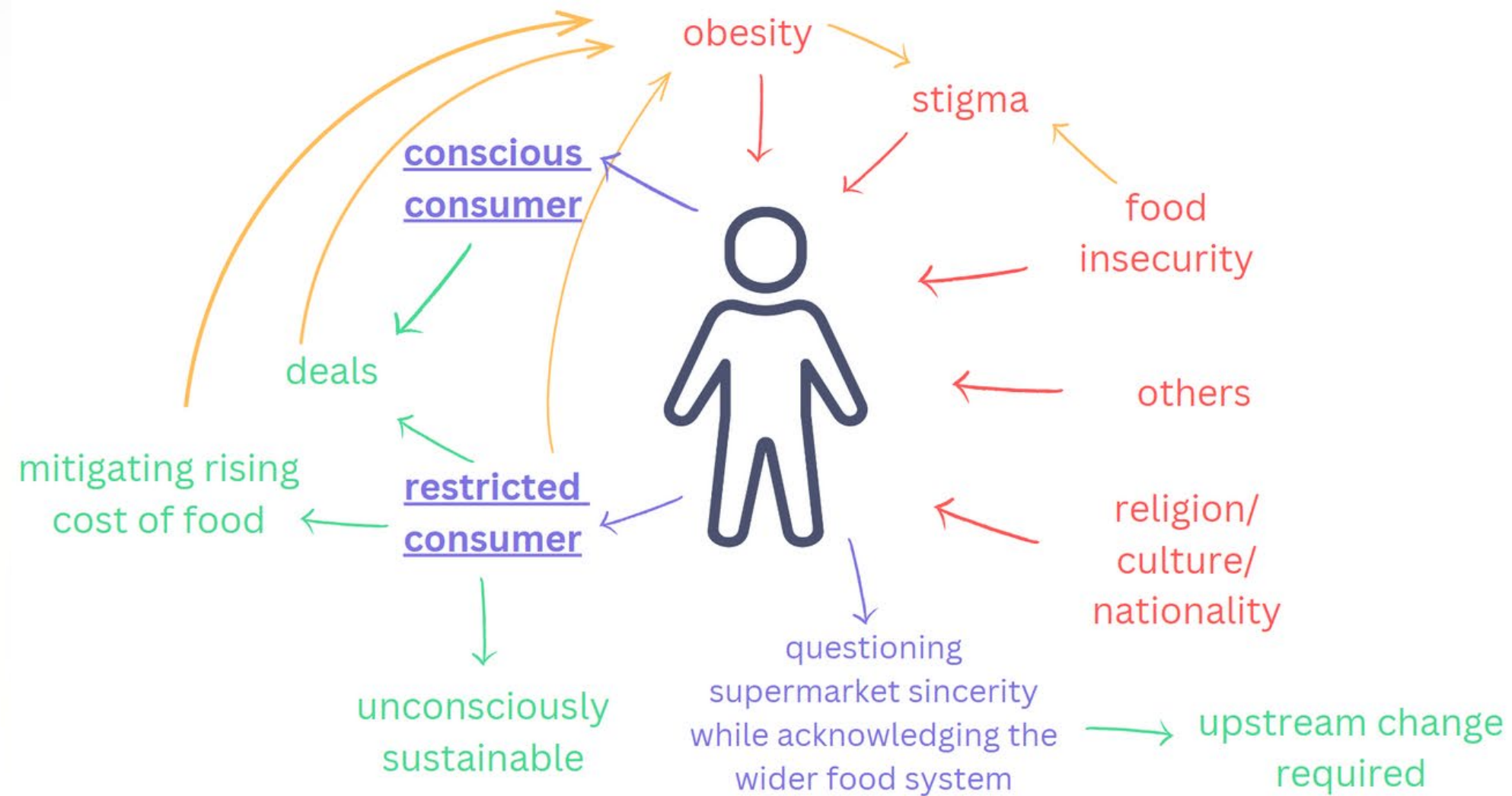
(Participant 11)



# Conclusions



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## The conscious consumer



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

## The restricted consumer



High food prices and low income restricts the purchase of healthy, sustainable food in the supermarket and takes an emotional toll on individuals



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# Thank you for listening

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