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Research article

Socio-spatial analysis of food poverty: the case of Turin

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Abstract. This contribution investigates the phenomenon of food poverty, focusing on the dimensions, forms and dynamics that this condition takes on in the urban context of the city of Turin. The general objective is to provide a theoretical advance in the scientific debate and to better contextualise the phenomenon at the local level to propose policy indications for the actors involved in forms of assistance/counteraction. In the last three years, mainly due to the socio-economic crisis triggered by the pandemic and the increase in the prices of necessities, the incidence and intensity of food poverty have changed, exacerbating the conditions of those who were already experiencing it and eroding the ability of a large segment of the population to protect themselves from material deprivation. Corresponding to this operational complexity there is a semantic polysemic – both in the scientific debate and in public discourse – due to a plurality of theoretical-disciplinary approaches that fragment the definitional framework with consequences on understanding and treatment of the phenomenon. In this framework, the contribution delves into this complexity, providing an operational and contextualised definition of the Italian case through the analysis of the results of the sample survey conducted at the end of 2021 on a group of 205 food assistance recipients in Turin.

Keywords: food poverty, material dimension, social dimension, psycho-social dimension, Turin, Italy.

JEL codes: I3.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Over the past three years the incidence and intensity of food poverty have changed its face, exacerbating the conditions of those already experiencing it and eroding the ability of a large segment of the population to protect themselves from material deprivation.
- The findings reveal that most respondents are women, on average 40 years old, coming from non-EU countries, 20% of the respondents have a university degree and employment.
- The severe deterioration of the living conditions of the beneficiaries, as well as the increase in new vulnerability profiles and the socio-spatial implications produced, calls for actions within both a welfare domain and food policies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The research, carried out within the food assistance project “Atlante del Cibo di Torino Metropolitana”¹, is part of a knowledge process that, for several years, has been investigating food poverty and the assistance system in Turin. In particular, this study questions the phenomenon from the voices of the people who experience food poverty to bring out specific dimensions, forms and dynamics. This kind of knowledge is helpful to contribute to the theoretical debate and, at the same time, fundamental to building place-based policies.

As the data show, the last three years – marked by the pandemic crisis – have exacerbated the incidence and intensity of food poverty, aggravating, on the one hand, the conditions of those who were already experiencing its burden and involving – on the other – many and often new subjects, whose capacity to protect themselves from deprivation has been weakened by the increase in unemployment, as well as by that of the prices of basic goods. In Europe, for the first time, since the Food Insecurity Experience Scale – FIES² data collection began (2014), the incidence of food insecurity has increased (FAO *et al.*, 2022). In Southern Europe, 9.2% of the population experiences moderate to severe food insecurity, while 2.3% are severely food insecure (*ibid.*). In Italy, according to EUROSTAT data (2021), 7.9% of households say they do not have the possibility of consuming a protein meal (of animal or vegetable origin) every other day. ISTAT (2022) estimates that in the North-West distribution, in 2021, about 6.7% of Italian households and 8% of individuals live in absolute poverty. In Piedmont, the incidence of individuals is 8.9%, equivalent to about 380,000 people (ISTAT, 2020). According to Marchetti and Secondi (2022), the number of people at risk of food poverty in Italy is estimated in about 11.5 million, while the Metropolitan City of Turin is in an intermediate position, with a lower incidence than other large cities such as Milan. By contrast, data at local and urban scales are practically non-existent. This implied, for our research, the absence of a statistically reliable dimensioning of people experiencing food poverty in Turin.

The main intent of our work is, then, not to quantify the phenomenon, but prevalently to qualify it. In this perspective, we have chosen to bring two different approaches into dialogue: the better-known FAO

approach to food security, with its four pillars (availability, accessibility, utilisation and stability) and that of the British sociological tradition, which has developed – from 2000 onwards – a strand of reflection and analysis on food poverty, in particular through Dowler’s definition (2003) and the empirical translations of O’Connell and Brannen (2021). This perspective has allowed us to hold together causes and symptoms, material and immaterial aspects, and – more generally – the complex and multifaceted expressions this condition takes on.

With this in mind, in the following section, we will focus on the definition of food poverty and its dimensions; in the third one we will introduce the territorial context and the methodology of the research. In the fourth section, we will present the main results in terms of (i) socio-demographic profiles of food welfare users and (ii) dimensions of food poverty. These results will then be discussed in the conclusions, relating food poverty studies to the concept of food policy and food welfare (Allegretti, Bruno and Toldo, 2023; Toldo *et al.*, 2023).

2. DEFINING FOOD POVERTY

As is well documented, the debate on food access – globally and locally, both in the North and South – is largely built around the concept of food security, defined by the FAO in the 1996 World Food Summit as the condition that: “exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. Although almost thirty years have passed, this important conceptualisation remains relevant, especially since it is one of the first to consider the multidimensionality of individual experiences. Food appropriate and healthy – must be available and accessible in sufficient quantity and quality for all, through the use of adequate resources, necessary to achieve a state of nutritional well-being permanently (i.e. guaranteeing stability to the food security condition). Furthermore, the so-called four-pillar approach (availability, accessibility, utilisation, and stability) makes it possible to capture spatially and temporally specific dynamics: for example, the pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine had implications in terms of food availability (Jagtap *et al.*, 2022) in areas of the world, such as Italy, where the issue of food security had long been predominantly a matter of economic access.

In our research and this paper, however, we have chosen to adopt a different theoretical (and not only semantic) entry, borrowing the concept of food poverty from the debate – particularly the sociological debate

¹ <https://atlantedelcibo.it/> (last access 13th July 2023).

² The FIES Survey Module (FIES-SM) consists of eight questions refer to the experiences of the individual respondent or of the respondent’s household concerning self-reported food-related behaviors and experiences associated with increasing difficulties in accessing food due to resource constraints (cfr. <https://www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry/fies/en/>).

of British origin. Although in the literature, food poverty and security are often used as synonyms (Pinstrup-Andersen, 2009; Dowler and O'Connor, 2012; Toldo *et al.*, 2023), the two terms are not interchangeable and imply different approaches.

Compared to other concepts, food poverty allows us to better intercept the relationship with other forms of deprivation (housing, education, social exclusion), focusing not only on the possibility of access to food, but also and above all, on the role that the food system and policies play in producing and reproducing inequalities (Caraher, 2022). Moreover, according to some, the reference to food poverty in place of other terms, mainly related to the idea of security, incorporates a political sense of urgency and, more importantly, a greater focus on causes rather than symptoms (Caraher and Furey, 2018).

In our research, we used one of the most well-known and internationally adopted conceptualisations – that of Dowler (2003) – which captures food's inherent social, relational, and psychological nature, along with the more obvious lack of material resources, already emphasised by many other definitions. In her work, she describes food poverty as one of the most severe and comprehensive manifestations of material deprivation. She defines it as “the inability to acquire or consume food of adequate quality or in sufficient quantity and in a socially acceptable manner, or the uncertainty of being able to do so in the future” (p. 12).

A further and more recent conceptualisation is that of Rebecca O'Connell and Julia Brannen (2021), who operationalise food poverty from Townsend's (1979) relative poverty by breaking it down into three main dimensions. The first, the material dimension, includes the qualitative/quantitative adequacy of food and the economic and physical accessibility of the food resource. It is strongly associated, first and foremost, with the role of nutritional components in keeping the individual healthy and is mainly related to public health studies. As widely discussed, food poverty in many countries of the Global North leads to a lack of physical and economic access to what is widely recognised as healthy food. Furthermore, this dimension is linked to how food is managed by individuals, especially when they live in families, focusing on the so-called foodwork, which includes the procurement and preparation of food, as well as the distribution among members, due to different priorities in accessing family resources. The second dimension, the social one, concerns the socio-cultural appropriateness of food and the marginalisation from the widespread practices of conviviality and commensality, which provokes processes of isolation and disaffiliation. Exclusion from consumption in socially acceptable ways concerns

not only the impossibility of being able to afford an adequate diet but also manifests itself in the reduction of individual agency: in modern societies based on consumption, the exercise of choice in the market, linked to the possibility of buying and consuming food according to one's preferences, is one of the places where individuals express their agency. Exclusion from choice, on the other hand, “means having to rely on foods or ways of obtaining food that is not considered socially acceptable” (*ibid.*, p. 38). This theme has a broad tradition of study: several authors have critically discussed consumerist societies and the role of individuals in opulent post-modern contexts (among others, Ritzer, 1998; Bauman, 2001), while others have addressed the issue of consumption as a practice through which the individual expresses and shapes his or her identity, cultural traits and social position (Sassatelli 2007, 2019). Finally, the psychosocial dimension focuses on the experiences of stigma, stress and psychological malaise that often accompany the experience of food poverty, especially in people who benefit from forms of assistance (e.g. through soup kitchens or the distribution of parcels). Psychological distress is usually associated with being a welfare recipient since receiving food aid results from (and implies awareness of) the impossibility of providing food for oneself and one's family in socially acceptable ways.

3. CONTEXT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the Italian North-West, Turin (almost 848.000 inhabitants in 2022) is one of the Italian cities most affected by the 2008 economic crisis. Well before the Covid-19 pandemic, Turin's crisis already had a food dimension, for which a food welfare system based mainly on the secular or religious social private sector was trying to compensate amid the progressive reduction of public policies. The social and economic impacts of the pandemic have imposed a reorganisation of assistance on the part of the Municipal Council. Alongside a system of small and large associations (Toldo, 2018) that have been involved in food assistance for years, a city-wide network, called Torino Solidale, has been developed to support people in economic vulnerability, isolation, social exclusion and food poverty.

Our research, carried out between October and December 2021, is based on a survey developed with an action-research perspective that involved 20 of the leading Turin food solidarity/assistance associations, collecting 205 interviews with people receiving food aid in the city area. The survey was co-designed with one of the prominent associations in food solidarity – Eufemia

Aps³ – active locally in the recovery and redistribution of food surpluses and nationally in the development of a network of organizations, called Food Pride⁴, aimed at reflecting upon which forms food poverty assumes and how to contrast them with innovative initiatives. Co-constructing the survey was fundamental for integrating the different positions and building a scientifically effective and potentially helpful tool for associations involved in the fight against food poverty (McIntrye, 2007).

Working with marginalised populations often does not allow for probabilistic sampling, as an exhaustive list of all individuals receiving food assistance does not exist (or is not available). For privacy reasons, it is also challenging to access individual association lists. To partly remedy this problem, which places numerous limits on the generalisation of the research results, we mapped the food assistance organisations. We offered them participation in the research as facilitating subjects. All major associations (47) in the area were contacted by email, and 20 organisations (29 distribution sites) participated in the survey. Within each organisation, staff proposed participation to all the beneficiaries present in the distribution activities, with varying daily response rates (between organisations and on different days). Therefore, it is a sampling carried out through non-probabilistic and non-random techniques, so it is not possible to extend the results to the entire target population.

After identifying the relevant dimensions and their research objectives supported by the relevant literature, we operationalised the key concepts. Following an “a priori” factor analysis of the topics and the pilot study, we identified the dimensions of interest based on the FAO definition of food security (1996) and the work above of O’Connell and Brannen (2021). In this logic, the 92 questions in the questionnaire are structured around five themes: (i) eating habits; (ii) spending, food use and eating practices; (iii) health; (iv) socio-relational aspects and (v) stress and psycho-emotional aspects.

The study has potential limitations. In addition to the impossibility of statistically generalising the outcomes (Agresti and Finlay, 2008), due to a sample constructed using non-probabilistic strategies, the response rate was affected by the health crisis and the significant changes taking place in the third sector, which occurred at the same time as the survey. The sample, consequently, suffered from a clear self-selection bias because only users from organisations with sufficient resources and energy to promote the research could answer the questionnaire in the first instance. Despite this, the work

represents an initial pilot experiment in monitoring the phenomenon of food poverty, which – in the presence of adequate resources and the collaboration of the various actors involved (public administration and the third sector) – could hopefully be carried out periodically, and not only in the city of Turin.

4. MAIN RESULTS

4.1. Socio-demographic profiles of food welfare users in Turin

The first outcome concerns user profiling based on the demographic section’s analysis. Considering age, the mean and median value is 44 years old. At the same time, participants are equally distributed between the two lowest age groups, 18-40 and 41-60 years old, comprising about 40% of the total. People over 61 represent 15% of the sample, and the oldest person is 83 years old. Comparing these results with the age composition of Turin, on average, welfare users are younger than the total average of residents by about three years.

Considering the gender composition, as in other studies (see ActionAid, 2021), a clear over-representation of female users emerges (about 60% of the total, compared to 38% of men). This result highlights women’s extensive involvement in family care activities, including foodwork, even and especially in conditions of socio-economic fragility (Parker and Brady, 2019). In fact, women are more likely to be in charge of collecting food parcels and other forms of aid. Although the sample is particularly young compared to the population of Turin, these results still mark the traditional gender division of production and care work.

Regarding origin, 44% of the people interviewed are non-Italian and come mainly from Africa and Eastern Europe. Since foreigners make up about 15% of those living in Turin, these data reveal their dramatic over-representation in terms of food deprivation in line with the literature and national statistics. It is well known that people with a migration background are more likely to fall into poverty than native individuals and families (Brandolini and Saraceno, 2007; Carannante *et al.*, 2017; Ambrosini, 2020). According to ISTAT (2022), in 2021, 26.3% of foreign households were in absolute poverty, compared to 5.7% of households with only Italian nationals. Considering food poverty, in 2021, 23% of FEAD beneficiaries in Italy had foreign citizenship (FEAD Annual Implementation Report 2022), almost 690,000 people, or 13% of the total number of foreigners in Italy.

Concerning family situations, most people interviewed live alone (34%) or in cohabitation, while 20%

³ <https://eufemia.eu/> (last access July 20th 2023).

⁴ For more details see the network website at <http://www.foodpride.eu/rete-food-pride/> (last access January 8th 2024).

are large families with five or more members. In particular, 35% of the households include minors, 12% are non-self-sufficient older people, and 17% are non-self-sufficient disabled people who need assistance. In 65% of the cases, this assistance falls on the same person in charge of foodwork and access to welfare programmes. Among the 65 people who answered the specific question on care, 50 were women: as with food-related activities, caring for the most vulnerable is predominantly a female responsibility within the family.

Demonstrating the gradual weakening of traditional protective factors against vulnerability (education and work), 19% of the sample – in line with national surveys on the entire population – have a university degree and above, and one-third have attained an upper secondary school diploma. Despite the high rate of people with a university degree, those having a high school diploma are half of the Italian mean value (Istat, 2022), while respondents who have achieved at least compulsory education or having none or only elementary education are 47% of the sample, while in the total population the value is around 17%. In some Italian studies (Franzini, 2013; Carrieri, 2012; Sarti, 2018), there is already evidence that the educational attainment is only partly protective from poverty, and it could depend more extensively on other factors, such as social class of origin, in a country in which social mobility is barely static, the type of job contract, whether it is fixed or permanent, and the age class of each individual, where younger graduates are disadvantaged in the labour market and are more likely to be at risk of poverty than older people with the same educational level.

A similar discourse can be made about employment: almost a third of those surveyed have a job (while 50% are unemployed and 22% inactive). The issue of being employed and below the poverty threshold has been widely studied in Italy and internationally (Saraceno, 2015; Ruggieri, Quarta and Mancarella 2018; Lohmann and Marx, 2018), as it is widely known the so-called phenomenon of in-work poverty, which characterises about 15% of those in work in Italy (one of the highest rates in Europe, Eurostat, 2022). Compared to education, having a job is still one of the most effective elements of protection from poverty; however, the extreme precariousness of careers, the spread of atypical contracts and the simultaneous downsizing of welfare measures in support of vulnerable workers have reduced the link between employment and absence of poverty, especially for manual and low-skilled jobs and for young people entering the labour market for the first time. In the case of women and people with a migrant background, this is more often the case even in the presence of a good level of education and/or a high qualification.

Regarding economic resources, the average value of the income received by the people interviewed at the household level is around € 797. However, a substantial number declare that they live without an income. In particular, 80% of the sample can count on less than €1,000 per month, summing income from work and social transfers. In comparison, 35 per cent live on less than €500, well below the Italian relative poverty threshold⁵, even for one-person households. Finally, within the sample, 60% of households with two or more members live on less than € 1000 per month.

Concerning access to economic welfare measures at times of writing (Reddito di Cittadinanza⁶, retirement/disability pension, aid from the municipality, unemployment benefits/supplementary allowance), half of the sample declares to be beneficiaries of social transfers: in particular, 60% of the people interviewed receive the Reddito di Cittadinanza, the leading Italian welfare measure to fight poverty, which – according to INPS data of 2022 – reached almost 3 million individuals and 1 million households. The importance of this measure in protecting against extreme vulnerability is widely acknowledged, as are its limitations, especially considering its strict inclusion rules and its inability to reintroduce beneficiaries effectively and stably into the labour market. Despite the perfectibility of the policy measure, there is no question of its role, especially during and after the Covid-19 emergency, when poverty rates have not been so high for decades. Considering other forms of monetary transfer, 15% of the respondents receive an invalidity or retirement pension, 9% access municipal aid (such as income support or the so-called *Assegno Sociale*⁷), 6% report not having a job and receiving a subsidy or being under-employed, paid through the redundancy programme⁸. Moreover, 10% rely on their family and friendship network to receive monetary aid.

The most frequent housing condition among the respondents is that of renters, while only 14% state that they own their own homes. These percentages are diametrically opposed to national values (where, according to ISTAT data for 2022, 70% of Italian households are homeowners, while 20% live in rented accommodation). Even though the sample is made up only of people with high levels of vulnerability and economic difficulties, only 13% live in a council house, where rent is partially covered by the municipality and social security contributions also moderate bills; on the contrary, very precarious

⁵ In 2021, the ISTAT reference value for a single person lying under the poverty threshold is EUR 629,9.

⁶ Citizenship Income.

⁷ Social Allowance.

⁸ Cassa integrazione.

housing conditions are highly represented in the sample: 12% live in co-housing buildings and 12% are homeless and live on the streets or in dormitories. The responses thus reveal the residual role of the public actor in protecting people from extreme housing poverty, as the average rent is € 338 per month, coming from an average income of € 796 for the average 3-person household.

4.2. The dimensions of food poverty

The second outcome regards the possibility of qualifying the phenomenon of local food poverty starting from the analysis of the three dimensions identified by O'Connell and Brannen (2021). This allows us to go into detail about this condition and give policy recommendations to local actors.

The first dimension is the material one. Considering the composition of diets as the main indicator, together with the variables linked to income and economic resources described above, Table 1 shows the percentage of daily consumption of the principal foodstuffs, as identified by ISTAT in the Survey on the Consumption of Italian Households.

Traditionally, the literature on food consumption links poverty with less attention to the healthiness and quality of the food consumed, partly caused by a lack of resources and partly by a supposed lack of knowledge and cultural tools (Lallukka *et al.*, 2006; Giskes *et al.*, 2011; Oude Groeniger *et al.*, 2019; Daniel, 2020). This research, as well as other evidence in the literature, refutes these positions, showing that (Table 1) in addition to water and hot drinks, the foods most consumed daily are precisely those associated with a healthy diet: 75% of the sample uses olive oil instead of butter and other oils, while almost 70% consume vegetables and cereals at least once a day, mainly considered the basis of a healthy diet. In addition, 60% eat fruit daily, and almost half consume dairy products frequently. It is also interesting to note which products are rarely or never consumed: butter, alcoholic beverages, fizzy drinks, cold cuts, and processed foods. Products often related to unhealthy lifestyles are the foods least mentioned by the sample. These results align with those for the general population in Italy and contrast to some extent with the representations of the diets of those in poverty. Despite this, those receiving food aid still have limited access to specific products, especially meat and fish, which are also the most expensive and rarely included in donated packages: 12% and 23%, respectively, of the people surveyed never eat these products, a percentage that only partly corresponds to those who say they follow a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle. When

Table 1. Frequency of daily consumption (% values).

Frequency of consumption of food products	Everyday	Never
Water	98	0
Coffee or tea	83	5
Olive oil	75	6
Vegetables	71	1
Pasta, rice and other cereals	69	3
Fruit	61	2
Dairy products and milk	45	19
Sweets	36	7
Other oils	34	23
Legumes	20	8
Butter	20	32
Eggs	17	5
Cheese	16	10
Meat	15	12
Alcoholic beverages	11	68
Carbonated beverages	8	52
Fish	6	23
Cold cuts	5	42
Processed foods	4	47

asked what they give up most due to poverty, most people refer to meat, fish, and nuts.

The second dimension is the social one. Eating with others is essential for individuals in maintaining social relations (Fischler, 1988; Sobal and Nelson, 2013) for every social group (Dyen and Sirieix, 2016; Brannen and O'Connell, 2021), both in every day and exceptional, festive forms of commensality (Grignon, 2001). While it may not strictly indicate food poverty, dining out serves as an excellent example of how a lack of resources can contribute to social exclusion. Not being able to afford to share a meal out with other people often means renouncing commensality and sociability through food. This, especially for younger people, can play a fundamental role in the deterioration or loosening of relationships, potentially leading to isolation and marginalization, particularly when combined with other factors.

In the context of our research, it emerged that more than half of the sample (58%) cannot afford such activity, and about 16% eat out less than they would like (Table 2). It is also interesting to note that, even among people in severe need, 26% still manage to eat out with relatives and friends when a special occasion arises: the sociability of food functions as a tool for inclusion and relationality, which many people feel as an incompressible necessity regardless of income level.

Table 2. Answers to the question “Can you celebrate special occasions by eating out?”

Periods	Absolute frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid (%)
Yes	48	24	26
Yes, but less than I would like	31	15	16
No	109	53	58
Total	188	92	100
Missing	17	8	
Total	205	100	

In this logic, it is not surprising that half of the people interviewed (Table 3) are not able to invite relatives and friends to their homes because of their condition of food poverty; as in many other manifestations of vulnerability, money is the main barrier for only a quarter of the respondents, while 17% have very precarious housing conditions or are homeless and 18% have no one to invite, declaring almost total social isolation. Loneliness and marginalisation, understood as dimensions of poverty (including food poverty), are often concretely transformed into the impossibility of sharing moments of socialisation through food, leading in cascade to forms of social exclusion, especially for those who experience very intense poverty (homeless people, the elderly or those living alone). Homeless people, in particular, have few opportunities to share meals with others because of the lack of material resources and the thinning, even total absence of parental and friendship networks.

Finally, our questionnaire investigated the third dimension of food poverty, the psycho-social one, concerning the relationship between poverty and social stigma, an element that has also been widely explored in multidisciplinary literature. Research on the association between the condition of poverty and social stigma has been widely deepened in the sociological literature, and not only (Goffman, 1963; Soss, Fording and Schram, 2011; Garthwaite, 2016; Romano, 2018; Anselmo, Morlicchio and Pugliese, 2020). Stigma and negative stereotypes can lead to social exclusion, marginalisation, and increasingly rarefied social ties, having severe implications for the psychological and emotional well-being of those experiencing this condition. As shown in Table 4, almost a third of the valid responses report that beneficiaries feel often or permanently – a sense of stress or sadness because of the experience of food poverty. In contrast, 50% of half of the sample do not report feeling these emotions: some may have adopted coping strategies by processing and accepting their condition and putting aside ‘emotional involvement’.

Table 3. Answers to the question “Do you invite relatives and friends to eat at your house?”

Do you invite relatives and friends to eat at your house?	Absolute frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	58	31
Yes, but less than I would like	29	16
No	97	53
Total	184	100

Table 4. Sense of stress or sadness associated with the experience of food poverty. Absolute frequency and percentage values.

Frequency of stress and sadness	Absolute frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid (%)
Never	67	33	35
Almost never	28	14	15
Sometimes	36	16	19
Often	25	12	13
Almost always/always	34	17	18
Total	190	92	100
Missing	15	8	
Total	205	100	

Table 5. Answers to the question “How much do you think you sacrifice your food-related happiness because of your poverty status?” Absolute frequency and percentage values.

How much do you think you sacrifice your food-related happiness?	Absolute frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid (%)
Never	87	42	46
Sometimes	57	28	30
Often	31	15	16
Always	15	7	8
Total	190	93	100
Missing	15	7	
Total	205	100	

The inability to enjoy food events due to food poverty is another widespread feeling which, in our sample, involves 24% of the persons interviewed (Table 5), mainly when this entails giving up – due to lack of economic resources – desired foodstuffs or an invitation to a ‘gastronomic event’, as discussed in more detail in the previous section. Happiness, like stress or sadness, is also linked to the ability to have satisfying social experiences or not due to the close connection between social and psycho-social dimensions, which cannot be considered as isolated aspects of the experience of food poverty (O’Connell and Brannen, 2021).

Table 6. Respondents hiding their welfare status from family and friends. Absolute frequency and percentage values.

Do you hide your condition from your family and friends?	Absolute frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid (%)
No	149	73	80
Yes	37	18	20
Total	186	91	100
Missing	19	9	
Total	205	100	

Table 7. Sense of shame in being a welfare user. Absolute frequency and percentage values.

Sense of shame	Absolute frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid (%)
No	146	71	78
Yes	42	21	22
Total	188	92	100
Missing	17	8	
Total	205	100	

Shame is undoubtedly the feeling most associated with the experience of poverty, as is stigma, which is generally associated with negative stereotypes, categorisation, loss of status and discrimination, social exclusion and progressive marginalisation, resulting in psychological distress. Considering the survey results, about one-fifth of the respondents hide their condition of need even from friends and family (Table 6) or are ashamed of being a welfare recipient (Table 7).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The study briefly presented has allowed us to qualify more precisely the condition of food poverty that involves a growing number of Turin residents. The results of the questionnaire, administered to beneficiaries of food assistance projects, reveal that most respondents are women (about 60%). At the same time, the average age of the sample is 44 years, and half of them come from non-EU countries. Some elements of interest reported here concern the sample's composition by educational qualification, considering that as many as 20% have a university degree and the employment situation, whereby one-third have a job but still cannot meet all the expenses essential for survival. The average income, including income from work and transfers from public authorities, is 800€ for a sample whose aver-

age household size is about three persons and among whom 25% are homeless. Regarding spending and eating habits, respondents say they spend about 45€ per week on food purchases, 180€ per month, about half the average monthly expenditure of a three-person household (ISTAT 2020). The foodstuffs most consumed are related to the main cultural and geographical origins of the sample (Italy, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe): tea, coffee, olive oil, vegetables, pasta or rice and fruit are the basis of the daily diet for more than half of the respondents. In terms of practices and utilisation, the majority state that they have daily access to a fully equipped kitchen and have enough time to prepare and consume an adequate meal, although those who are homeless, a form of poverty that is highly connected to the food sphere, are excluded from this majority. For most of those suffering from physical illness, it is difficult to follow an adequate diet due to the limited resources (economic, housing, food from assistance) on which they can rely. The questionnaire also reconstructs the worries, stress, sense of shame and sacrifice experienced daily by many who declare that they find a moment of satisfaction and tranquillity when they eat their meals. Finally, the FIES questions – administered at the end of the survey – reconstruct the intensity of poverty, ranging from moderate to severe in almost all cases.

These results show the different profiles involved in food solidarity practices and the multiple strategies of daily survival acted by food welfare users. In this logic, the project reconstructs the extremely precarious conditions of those who are beneficiaries of food assistance, not only in the material sphere but also in the social, relational and psychological ones, contributing both to a theoretical advancement on the theme of food poverty and to a contextualised knowledge of it in the area analysed, from which to start to provide policy indications both to institutions and to third sector associations. The severe deterioration of the living conditions of the beneficiaries, as well as the increase in new vulnerability profiles and the socio-spatial implications produced, call not only for the implementation of policies to combat food fragility but need to be read and addressed within a dual domain of policies. On the one hand, policies should counteract the causes of economic deprivation which, in turn, leads to food deprivation. On the other hand, food policies should be framed in a systematic and structured framework at the local and national level, guaranteeing the availability of healthy and sustainable food, physical access through the fight against food deserts, affordable prices in a logic of food justice, as well as the strengthening and the reconstruction of community social ties also through food.

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