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A study evaluating Your Local Pantry membership

Submission date
04/03/2025

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
05/03/2025

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
14/07/2026

Condition category
Nutritional, Metabolic, Endocrine

[_] Prospectively registered
[X] Protocol
[X] Statistical analysis plan
[_] Results
[_] Individual participant data
[X] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Around 24% households in England experienced moderate to severe levels of food insecurity in 2023-2024. Food insecurity has multiple negative effects on diet quality, health, and mental wellbeing.
There has been an expansion of different types of community food projects in response to rising levels of food insecurity in the UK. One popular and rapidly expanding model is community food clubs (also referred to as social supermarkets, food pantries and community shops, among other names). Community food clubs, usually set up by not-for-profit or social enterprise organisations, offer low-cost membership fees and a retail shop-like environment where members can purchase their own food at significantly lower costs compared to the mainstream retailers. Often these models aim to promote dignity and choice in comparison to the perceived disadvantages of how food support is provided by food banks.
Reports from organisations operating these models suggest many benefits of membership including self-reported improvements in members' household finances, increased consumption of fruit and vegetables, and a positive effect on mental health. Social outcomes, such as having an opportunity to volunteer and feeling part of a community have also been emphasised. Academic studies of these models have included qualitative studies or surveys of users' experiences. However, challenges arising from an unreliable food supply due to a high reliance on surplus food redistribution have also been found.
From our examination of the grey and academic literature, there is a lack of independent high-quality evidence on the impact of membership in community food shop models using robust evaluation designs. Validated measures of outcomes of interest relating to food insecurity, dietary quality, and mental health and well-being have also not been utilised in this context. Prior studies have also relied on self-reports from members after they have already been members for some time, making findings vulnerable to selection and recall bias. To our knowledge, there have been no studies that have compared outcomes between people who have transitioned into membership compared to those who remain without a membership after making an application for one. Using a natural experiment design will allow estimation of the effects of membership that are closer to the causal effects.
The overall aim of this study is to understand the impact of joining a community food shop, namely, Your Local Pantry (YLP), on food insecurity and other health and well-being outcomes. The primary research question that will be addressed is "Does YLP food pantry membership

reduce food insecurity?"
The secondary research questions that will be addressed are:
Does YLP food pantry membership…
• …increase mental well-being"?
• …improve dietary quality"?
• …reduce financial hardship"?
• …reduce loneliness"?
• …increase self-rated general health"?
• …increase personal sense of dignity"?
• …reduce non-food material hardships"?

Who can participate?
Adults aged 18 years and over who are newly applying for membership in a Your Local Pantry food pantry in England

What does the study involve?
When people apply to join a YLP food pantry, they either move directly into membership or experience some delay before being granted membership. The delay may be administrative or because they are placed on a waitlist where the pantries are over-subscribed for membership. This study will exploit the natural flow onto YLP membership and waiting lists to examine outcomes at 2, 6 and 10 weeks after membership application.
People newly applying for memberships in the YLP network will receive information about the study when they submit their application. They will have the opportunity to express their interest in participating to the research team. They will then be screened for eligibility, and if eligible, receive study materials and be invited to participate. Participation involves filling out questionnaires, either online or over the phone, as soon as possible after they've made their application to YLP, 2 weeks after application, 6 weeks after application and 10 weeks after application.
Differences in the change in outcomes from baseline (no membership) will be compared between those who moved into membership and those who remain without membership. Using waiting times as a natural experiment allows us to estimate the causal effect of YLP membership. We will compare these causal estimates with estimates from a simple before-after design, comparing outcomes of participants after they obtain membership with outcomes of the same participants at the time of application, i.e. before obtaining membership. The primary outcome is food insecurity. Secondary outcomes include mental wellbeing, diet quality, financial hardship, loneliness and personal sense of dignity.
An accompanying process evaluation will include qualitative interviews with study participants at the end of the 10-week follow-up period to understand experiences of membership and perceived impacts. Interviews with pantry staff and volunteers will seek to understand mechanisms of impact and how these potentially vary across sites.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
There are minimal risks to participating. People will become YLP members as they normally would following an application for a membership. For some, this may happen after being placed on a waiting list. For others, memberships will be granted right away. Participating in this study will not change the "first come, first served" allocation of memberships practiced across food pantries in the YLP network.
Participating involves completing four questionnaires. These take 10 to 20 minutes for participants to complete so may be inconvenient for some participants. Some of the questions address sensitive topics, but participants can choose to not answer any questions they do not feel comfortable answering.
Potential benefits of participating include receiving thank you shopping vouchers for completing

questionnaires and the knowledge that they are contributing important insights about the impacts of community food shop models on food insecurity and other outcomes.

Where is the study run from?
The study is being run from the University of Liverpool (UK) with help from Your Local Pantry, who will promote the study to people newly applying for memberships

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
September 2023 to September 2025

Who is funding the study?
The study is funded by the Economic Social Research Council (UK) as part of a larger project called SALIENT

Who is the main contact?
Dr Rachel Loopstra, rachel.loopstra@liverpool.ac.uk

Contact information

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Scientific, Principal investigator

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
SALIENT-YLP

Study information

Scientific Title
What is the impact of Your Local Pantry membership on food insecurity, dietary quality and well-being? A natural experiment evaluation

Study objectives
The primary hypothesis is that Your Local Pantry (YLP) food pantry membership will reduce food insecurity.

Secondary hypotheses are that YLP food pantry membership will: increase mental well-being; improve dietary quality; reduce financial hardship; reduce loneliness; increase self-rated general health; increase personal sense of dignity; and reduce non-food material hardships.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 24/01/2025, University of Liverpool Central University Research Ethics Committee A (University of Liverpool, Foundation Building, Brownlow Hill, Liverpool, L69 7ZX, United Kingdom; +44 (0)151 794 2000; research.ethics@liverpool.ac.uk), ref: 14579

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Natural experiment (non-randomized) waitlist control study

Study type(s)
Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Food insecurity

Interventions
The intervention is YLP food pantry membership. In exchange for a pay-on-use fee that ranges from £3.50 to £7 depending on the pantry, membership provides access to a weekly “shop” for ten items of a variety of food, including frozen and chilled food, meat, dairy, vegetarian and vegan products, alongside a supply of tins and packets of long shelf-life foods, as well as fresh fruit and vegetables and bakery items from the members’ YLP food pantry. The value of items acquired after paying the usage fee has been estimated to be £21. In addition, most YLP pantries

offer additional services at their sites and access to these is part of YLP membership (described below).

It is not clear a priori whether pantry membership affects outcomes immediately or gradually. Therefore, in our analysis we will consider membership as a binary variable (access or no access), where the effects are assumed to be immediate for members because of both the felt and real benefit of being granted access to a pantry, and as a continuous variable, where the number of days of membership is measured, and where benefits are expected to increase over time as members become more familiar with the pantry and increasingly benefit from its services.

The comparison group for participants with YLP membership are people who have applied for YLP membership but have not (yet) obtained it. As explained in the study design above, we will make this comparison in two different ways. In a longitudinal before-after design, we will compare the outcomes of participants after they obtain membership with the outcomes of the same participants when they applied but had not yet obtained membership. In this case, the control group are the same people as the treatment group, but at a different point in time, shortly before they obtain membership. Second, we will use the variation in waiting lists across pantries as a natural experiment and compare participants who were on a waiting list but have now obtained membership with other participants who are still on a waiting list. In this case, the treatment and control groups both consist of people who have recently applied for membership and were placed on a waiting list, but the control group are those who happened to apply to pantries with a longer waiting list.

Determination of whether or not someone goes onto a waiting list depends on the capacity of the food pantry where the person applied for a membership to accept new members. When pantries do not have the capacity for new members (i.e. already at their maximum capacity, which is related to the quantity of food stock they have to distribute, operating hours, and staff and volunteer capacity), applicants receive an email or phone call telling them they have been placed on a waiting list due to a lack of space. Importantly, memberships are granted on a “first-come, first-served basis”, and no other criteria are used to allocate these. Therefore, time spent on a waiting list should be random, and there should be no systematic differences between people who apply and are granted a membership quickly and those who apply and have to go on a waiting list for a substantial amount of time.

Intervention Type
Other

Primary outcome(s)
Food insecurity measured by the Food and Agriculture Organisation's Food Insecurity Experience Scale at 2 weeks, 6 weeks and 10 weeks post application for a YLP membership

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Mental health and well-being score, as measured by the Short (7 item) Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Health and Wellbeing Scale
2. Diet quality score as assessed by a short 14-item FFQ validated in the UK adolescent and adult population (Crozier et al. Proceedings of the Nutrition Society. 2021;80(OCE5):E186; Shaw et al. Nutrition Journal. 2021;20(1):5)
3. Proportion reporting ability to keep up with bills, debts, and credit commitments (adapted from the UK Wealth and Assets Survey)
4. Proportion reporting loneliness as measured by the UCLA 3-Item Loneliness Scale
5. Proportion reporting good or very good health as measured by a self-rated general health

question used in UK-based surveys (e.g. Family Resources Survey)
6. Treated with dignity, measured using a single item from a self-perceived dignity measure: Hitlin S, Andersson MA. The Science of Dignity: Measuring Personhood and Well-Being in the United States: Oxford University Press; 2023
7. Proportion reporting going without one or more other non-food essential items based on Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Destitution Measure

All measured at 2 weeks, 6 weeks and 10 weeks post application for a YLP membership.

Completion date
01/09/2025

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Individuals who filled out an application form to join a participating YLP pantry
2. Older than 18 years of age, no upper age limit
3. YLP membership application forms are only provided in English, however, applicants who don't speak English may receive help to receive the form from YLP staff or volunteers or friends or family. To include participants who don't speak English but who have applied for a YLP membership, over-the-phone interpretation services will be made available for them to find out about the study and fill out questionnaires

Participant type(s)
Service user

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Mixed

Lower age limit
18 Years

Upper age limit
120 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
216

Key exclusion criteria
1. YLP sites located outside of England
2. Sites that opt not to take part in this study
3. Pantries that have been operating for 3 months or less at the start of data collection
4. Pantries that vary from YLP's standard model, including allowing members to shop more than once a week and/or deviating from the standard allocation of seven heart and three diamond

items
5. Individuals who are not able to provide informed consent
6. Due to the use of remote data collection in the study, individuals who are unable to complete questionnaires online or over the phone with a researcher

Date of first enrolment
04/03/2025

Date of final enrolment
31/07/2025

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
Your Local Pantry, Church Action on Poverty - Central Team
28 Sandpiper Court
Water's Edge Business Park
Modwen Road
Salford
England
M5 3EZ

Study participating centre
See study outputs table for sites of recruitment
Multiple addresses across England
-
England
-

Sponsor information

Organisation
University of Liverpool

ROR
https://ror.org/04xs57h96

Funder(s)

Funder type
Government

Funder Name
Economic and Social Research Council

Alternative Name(s)
Social Science Research Council, ESRC, SSRC, UKRI ESRC

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
National government

Location
United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
Supporting data generated during the study will be available from the University of Liverpool's Data Catalogue (https://datacat.liverpool.ac.uk/) after an embargo period from the date of data collection to allow for the publication of research findings.

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in non-publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Other files	Sites of recruitment		05/03/2025	No	No
Participant information sheet	version 2	15/12/2024	04/03/2025	No	Yes
Protocol file		04/03/2025	04/03/2025	No	No
Statistical Analysis Plan		04/03/2025	04/03/2025	No	No
Study website	Project website for participants		04/03/2025	No	No
Study website	Wider project website		04/03/2025	No	No
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes