More Than a Meal: A Qualitative Study of the Needs of Diners in Cork Penny Dinners

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CARL Research Project

Community & Academic Research Links

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What is Community-Academic Research Links?

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a service provided by research institutes for the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in their region which can be grass roots groups, single issue temporary groups, but also well structured organisations. Research for the CSOs is carried out free of financial cost as much as possible.

CARL seek to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;

- provide their services on an affordable basis;

- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;

- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;

- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and

- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers (www.livingknowledge.org).

What is a CSO?

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

Why is this report on the web?

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public. We are committed to the public and free dissemination of research results.

How do I reference this report?

Author (year) Project Title, [online], School of Applied Social Studies, Community-Academic Research Links/University College Cork, Available from: http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/completed/ [Accessed on: date].

How can I find out more about the Community-Academic Research Links and the Living Knowledge Network?

The UCC CARL website has further information on the background and operation of the Community-Academic Research Links at University College Cork, Ireland. http://carl.ucc.ie

CARL is part of an international network of Science Shops. You can read more about this vibrant community and its activities on this website: http://www.scienceshops.org

Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

Background to the Study

This study began as a BSW dissertation, and as part of the Science Shop initiative by University College Cork. Research was carried out in Cork Penny Dinners, an independent charity based in Cork city. The charity provides a nourishing mid-day meal, seven days a week all year round. The charity hopes to reconfigure their existing service, and consequently sought the views of the diner's, with a view to including their perspectives in the planning process.

Objectives

The aim of this study was to elicit the views of the diners of Cork Penny Dinners, in order to ascertain if the charity could improve on its current level of service. Interviews were conducted with a sample of the diners to gain their perspectives of the service, and a brief demographic profile compiled. A literature review was undertaken to explore the themes of food poverty, social exclusion and social support.

Methodology

The methodology used was qualitative while the theoretical perspectives utilised were phenomenology and interpretivism. Primary research was executed by means of twenty semi-structured interviews with diners, and a further eight with volunteers. A literature review was conducted as secondary research.

Results

All of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the service provided by Cork Penny Dinners. A sense of sincere gratitude was evident throughout all of the interviews conducted. The diner's spoke of the non-judgemental and courteous approach adopted by staff and volunteers when using the service. Eighty five percent of respondents reported having some social support from family or friends, however, seventy percent of the sample lived alone. A large percentage of respondents stated that the possibility of spending time in the company of other diner's was an important aspect of their visit. Insufficient income and food poverty were dominant issues in the lives of diner's. All of these findings are discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

Recommendations

All respondents expressed complete satisfaction with the quality of the midday meal they receive. Some structural changes to the layout of the premises were suggested by diners in addition to extended opening times. These recommendations and other individual suggestions are discussed in more detail in chapter five.

Author's conclusions

This was a rewarding and interesting research project. Although the diners made recommendations, their satisfaction with and gratitude for the service is noteworthy. It has been a privilege to work with the diners, staff and volunteers of Cork Penny Dinners, and above all, to facilitate in bringing the voices of the diners to the fore.

Chapter 1: Introduction

'For George Smith, the Tabernacle Soup Kitchen became the site of life's ultimate rite of passage, just as in life it had become the centre of his social existence'.

(Glasser, 1988)

1.1 Introduction to the Research

This quotation refers to a man who was a guest at one of many soup kitchens in the United States. In addition to having his nutritional needs met, George was unconditionally accepted into the community at the charity. The Tabernacle soup kitchen provides its diners with a public space where all are welcome, accepted and have the chance to fulfil a basic human need – human contact (Glasser, 1988). A non-judgemental cohort of volunteers treat the diners at Cork Penny Dinners with dignity, respect, acceptance and offer their diners a hot, nutritious meal without preconditions. This research project will examine the concepts of food poverty, social support and social exclusion. Additionally, the origins of charitable food relief in Cork will be briefly discussed. The research will then offer a brief demographic profile of a sample of diners in Cork Penny Dinners and an analysis of the data collected. Recommendations will be made with reference to the diners. Cork Penny Dinners and its diners are central to this project, and this focus will be maintained in all aspects of this project.

1.2 Cork Penny Dinners

Cork Penny Dinners is situated at Hanover Street in Cork city. It is an independently run charity that states

The mission of Cork Penny Dinners is a very simple one – To offer a nourishing mid-day meal to all those in need. (Cork Penny Dinners)

The charity provides approximately 850 meals a week, as well as dispensing sandwiches and fresh fruit for diners to take away. It opens its doors everyday at 11.30 and serves dinner until 13.30. The service provides a hot, nourishing meal to its diners seven days a week, every week, including Christmas day. The ethos of the charity is founded on a non-judgemental attitude and a courteous respect of the dignity and regard of its diners. Diners are expected to treat the staff and facilities in the same manner, and this ethos is upheld in a non-

confrontational manner at all times (Cork Penny Dinners website). It is administered by a non-denominational committee of volunteers, and is funded entirely by voluntary donations. One paid staff member, assisted by two FAS trainees manage the kitchen and dining area (ibid). It attracts a continuous cohort of volunteers, with many regular volunteers assisting in the preparation of food and waiting on the diners. There is no formal application to be made by a potential volunteer, but it is expected that volunteers abide by the ethos of the charity.

1.3 Science Shop

Science Shop schemes were established in the early 1970's by many European universities. The initiatives vary in shapes and sizes, but all share a common purpose, which is to *'to extend research support to socially marginalized groups'* (Science Shops: Knowledge for the Community, 2003:5). University College Cork established a Community – Academics Links initiative in 2006, based on the Science Shop Model (UCC Community & Academic Research Links, 2011). The aims of Science Shop projects are to provide independent, participatory research support to civil society organisations (CSO's). The use of the term 'science' in this context refers not only to the physical sciences, but also encompasses the social and human science disciplines (ibid).

This research is as a result of the researchers desire to be involved with the Science Shop initiative. As a social work student, the participatory nature of Science Shop accords with the researchers own values and those of the social work profession. The 'bottom up' approach to knowledge transfer (Science Shops: Knowledge for the Community, 2003) and the concept of empowerment are congruent with the ethos of social work, to which the researcher is committed. The proposal from Cork Penny Dinners arose because the charity wish to refurbish their existing premises. This CSO require information about the overall needs of its clients. This positioned the clients centrally, and allows for their experiences, insights and suggestions to contribute to the proposed reconfiguration and improvement of the service.

1.4 Rationale

The researchers previous career background is based on service, consequently the notion of being of service, while at the same time meeting the academic requirements of a student social worker appealed to the researcher. Given the researchers commitment to the values of the social work profession e.g. social justice and human rights, and his own person centred values, the decision to conduct research with this CSO was a logical one. The concept of empowerment is an important element in social work practice; consequently, the researcher believes that inquiry into the views of the service users of Cork Penny Dinners is in accord with the notion of empowerment. Additionally, a review of the service provided by Cork Penny Dinners may add to the discussion on food poverty and social exclusion. Finally, the researcher hopes that this research will inform and assist the decision making process CSO that are made by the CSO regarding future service delivery.

1.5 Research Aims and Objectives

The issues of food poverty, social exclusion and social support will be examined. The perspectives of a sample of the diners at Cork Penny Dinners will be collected, and a demographic profile based on this sample will be created. Furthermore, the views of a sample of volunteers will be elicited in order to include their perspectives of the service. Following an analysis of the information gathered recommendations will be made.

1.6 Research Question

The research question defined this research and was essentially the initial question posed by the CSO itself:

What are there needs, other than nutritional, of the diners of Cork Penny Dinners?

1.7 Conclusion

Although limited in scope and size, a substantive research project was attainable and every effort was made to achieve this. The needs of the participants determined the design of the research project. The participatory nature of the Science Shop initiative required collaboration between the researcher and the CSO, however, the researcher remained impartial throughout the life of the research project.

1.8 Chapter Summaries

Chapter two will review the methodology and methods used by the researcher while conducting this research. The theoretical perspective of the researcher will be examined, as will the data collection and analysis methods. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the study and the issue of ethical considerations will be raised.

Chapter three will offer a review of literature relevant to the subject matter in a systematic manner. The issues of food poverty, social exclusion and social support will be examined in addition to a brief overview of the origins of food relief in Cork.

Chapter four will present the findings and analyse the data. A brief demographic profile of a sample of participants will be provided, as will the views of the participants and volunteers. An analysis of the data in conjunction with the literature will then be presented.

Chapter five will discuss inferences that may be drawn from the themes which were analysed, and recommendations offered.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will review a methodology suitable for this research and describe how data is to be collected and analysed. The author's theoretical perspective will be summarised, as this will have an effect on the data collection process and analysis. Ethical considerations will be discussed, as will the limitations to the research.

2.2 Methodology

Methodology can be described as qualitative or quantitative, however, both methodologies can be integrated. Qualitative research is concerned with attitudes, behaviour and the lived experience of people, and utilises data collection methods such as interviews or focus groups. This methodology endeavours to gain an in-depth opinion from participants, consequently reducing the number of people taking part. Quantitative research generates statistics, usually by administering questionnaires or conducting structured interviews on a large scale, consequently requiring less time with individual participants (Dawson, 2009). Qualitative research endeavours to explore the nature of social relations, and offer a description of the facts of existence as experienced by the respondents (Sarantakos, 1994). This research project methodology is qualitative. With the research question in mind, the preference for qualitative methodology was a logical choice as this research attempts to engage with *'explanations, trends, themes, outcomes which help us to explain and understand'* (Carey, 2009:4).

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Social research is concerned with the investigation of social reality, however social scientists approach this task from different theoretical perspectives, that is to say opinions differ as to what exists that can be scrutinised (Gomm, 2008). Ontology addresses the question of what types of things actually exist (O'Leary, 2007). Epistemology examines how we come to have accepted ways of knowing e.g. a belief that only things that can be observed through the senses can be known (ibid). Therefore, the epistemological position of a researcher refers to how he or she acquires knowledge. The researcher takes the view that humans create social phenomena e.g. religion or race, and that these constructs become ingrained in a society, these constructs are then assumed to be 'real' by members of that society. This social constructivist ontological position accords with the researcher's humanistic worldview. The researcher contests the conception of an objective social reality that can be investigated from a positivistic perspective. The researcher concurs with the assertion that it is through social interaction, and the meaning that social actors ascribe to social exchange, that reality is constructed. From this perspective, reality is subjective rather than objective (Sarantakos, 1994). Given the researchers interpretive epistemological disposition, this research was viewed through a phenomenological lens. Phenomenology is concerned with individuals' perceptions of phenomena as they occur in their lives. As such, it has the potential

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to allow a researcher to enter an individual's world and in the case of this research, to help gain an insight into the effects of food poverty, social isolation and exclusion. This approach is compatible with the ethos of social work, with which the researcher is affiliated, as a phenomenological perspective situates the diners of Cork Penny Dinners at the centre of this research. Additionally, its inclusive nature is consonant with the participatory values of Science Shop research.

2.4 Methods

This research project utilised a combination of both primary and secondary methods of inquiry. Primary research entails the study of a subject through firsthand observation and investigation (Dawson, 2009). Secondary research involves the use of information generated by other research studies of the same topic (ibid). It is essentially primary data that has been processed or evaluated and usually published in a book or journal. Secondary research data was not sufficient to carry out this research project. Given that this project is in essence a needs based analysis, the views of the diners in Cork Penny Dinners were required. Consequently, primary data was collected through the medium of semi-structured interviews. A literature review was also conducted in order to augment the primary data collected.

2.4.1 Literature Review

Initially, the researcher conducted a search of the UCC Boole library catalogue, using the keywords *'food poverty'* which provided fifty-seven related titles. These were manually refined by the researcher based on relevance, and four titles were utilised. Further keyword searches using the terms *'social exclusion'* and *'social support'* yielded 245 and 325 results respectively, using the same process of filtering eight titles were used. The bibliographies of the selected titles provided guidance in the selection of further books and articles. As the researcher was familiar with the Proquest ASSIA database, this became the main search engine of choice. Using the advanced search facility to filter for *'soup kitchens'* provided forty-two results. Again, reading the abstracts and searching for the term *'social support'* assisted the manual refinement of these. The references contained in seven of the journal articles provided the researcher with further book titles and official publications of Ireland and the UK. Additionally, the websites of the Combat Poverty Agency, the Homeless Agency and the Society of St. Vincent De Paul were searched for relevant literature, which yielded three results.

2.4.2 Semi-structured Interviews

With due regard to confidentiality and respect for the diners of Cork Penny Dinners, focus groups were ruled out in favour of individual interviews. Additionally, as informality was a primary goal of the researcher it was felt that a structured interview, where questions are usually very specific and ordered (Bryman, 2008), would not be suited. A semi-structured interview on the other hand allows researcher flexibility in administering questions, which can vary from participant to participant. Moreover, unlike a structured interview with closed questions, a semi-structured interview allows for further questioning where areas of interest are identified in participants'

responses (Bryman, 2008). A qualitative semi-structured interview is conversational in nature, with the respondent doing most of the talking, however, the interviewer establishes a general direction for the discussion (Babbie, 2007). For these reasons, it was decided to use semi-structured interviews with the diners of Cork Penny Dinners. An interview guide was prepared[1] so as to provide the researcher with a framework from which to work from, whilst also allowing a degree of latitude in an interview.

2.4.3 Sampling

A sample is a small group of research participants (Carey, 2009). Sampling facilitates the researcher in studying a relatively small number of units in place of the target population. Essentially, there are two types of sampling; probability and purposive sampling (Dawson, 2009). Probability sampling encompasses the target population i.e. every unit of the population has an equal and calculable chance of being selected for the sample. This type of sampling utilises simple random selection methods e.g. lottery method, and lends itself toward providing a high degree of representativeness (Sarantakos, 2004**).** Purposive sampling on the other hand provides little or no degree of representativeness as it is the researcher who decides who will be part of the sample. Given the non-bureaucratic nature of service delivery in Cork Penny Dinners and time constraints, it was not possible to use probability sampling. Therefore, the researchers focus was *'to gather enough people to be able to collect sufficient data and, more importantly, begin to interpret, explore and understand the topic under investigation'* (Carey, 2009:41). Consequently, convenience sampling was the method used. Although there is a large throughput of diners on a daily basis in Cork Penny Dinners, the target population are relatively homogeneous; therefore a very large sample was not necessary (Bryman, 2008). Nevertheless, a sample of twenty was decided upon in order to collect a proportionate sample.

2.4.4 Data Collection

Interviewing was conducted in partnership with committee members of Cork Penny Dinners, whose advice was sought before the interviewing process began. The contents of the interview guide were discussed and where suggestions were made, adjusted accordingly. The researcher familiarised himself with the service for a considerable period of time prior to the commencement of the data collection process. This entailed working in the kitchen as a volunteer several times, and on numerous other occasions joining the diners in the dining area, sometimes having soup or tea. Communication with committee members was ongoing at all times. The challenge for the researcher was to identify willing participants in an as unobtrusive and respectful way as possible; moreover, the privacy of the diners was a paramount consideration of the researcher. The researcher would get a cup of tea, and ask a guest with an empty seat nearby if it would be okay to sit there. This was done in order to respect what Glasser calls *'the privatising of public space that often occurs in public settings'* (1988:37). After a general conversation, a guest was told that the committee of Cork Penny Dinners were interested in the views of the diners, with the aim of making improvements to the service. The guest was then

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[1] Please see Appendix A

invited to participate in a voluntary and anonymous interview. Using this process, twenty participants took part in the semi-structured interview. An interview guide with nine areas of interest was utilised by the researcher to conduct interviews.

2.4.5 Data Analysis

The use of recording equipment was not permissible; therefore the researcher devised a shorthand method for note taking during interviews. Interview notes were then retranscribed and an interview summary form completed. This process served to familiarise the author with the collected data, and set the thematic analysis process in motion. The data analysis was conducted from an interpretive perspective and refined further by the phenomenological interest of the researcher. In this way, the researcher endeavoured to focus on the disposition of the respondent, while maintaining an awareness of his own attitudes, understandings and life history. Themes were interpreted in terms of the positions unearthed in the literature review (Knight, 2002); this measure assisted the researcher in limiting any personal bias when identifying links between participant themes. The use of previously published material, and a sound theoretical framework from which to assess subject matter are essential for thematic analysis (Carey, 2009). Additionally, for thematic analysis to be useful, data must be repeatedly processed and reviewed in order to identify all possible themes in the data. Knight suggests that in reviewing data, it is helpful for a researcher to identify counter-examples of themes as a way to limit 'tunnel vision' (2002). This was an exercise that the researcher engaged in continuously when reviewing the data.

The collected data was analysed using the constant comparison method. This method was deemed suitable by the researcher because during the data collection phase, and indeed the analysis phase, copious memos were written. Boeije suggests that memo writing, close reading and rereading as well as coding are among the aids that support the principle of comparison (2002). Additionally, the researcher maintained a research journal throughout the data collection phase, which recorded the initial impressions and reactions as well as observations on the environment. Coding commenced almost immediately and was general in nature, however, as the data was read and reread the coding became more definitive. Key themes were colour coded and associated with material gleaned during the literature review, with a view to eliminate any personal preconceptions. Moreover, the study could be seen as validated if its findings are supported by other studies (Sarantakos, 1993).

2.5 Limitations

The researcher is conscious of the limitations inherent in this research project. Firstly, the process of data collection was constrained to note taking; therefore the researcher spent a portion of each interview writing, losing eye contact with respondents. Secondly, because of time constraints, only a relatively small number of volunteers were interviewed. Therefore, the main focus of the research was predominantly based on the

experiences of the diners. Thirdly, other diners interrupted a number of interviews, although it must be said that these interruptions were genial and usually involved diners exchanging greetings. However, given the environment in which the interviews took place i.e. a large dining area, this was anticipated by the researcher. Nevertheless, a more suitable venue for interviewing would have been preferable. Finally, although the researcher endeavoured to be objective when choosing the sample, the researcher believes that a probability sample would have ensured a more complete objectivity.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The Principals of Ethical Research as laid down by the Economic and Social Research Council (ERSC 2005:1 cited in Gomm, 2008:366) were perused by the researcher, and strictly adhered to. Additionally, the ethics approval form for the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee was downloaded from the UCC University Research Ethics board website and examined by the researcher. Although it was not possible to obtain written informed consent, given the nature of the research, no other ethical implications were identified. All participants were informed of the purpose of the interview, and that no identifying information would be elicited, and all information given treated as confidential. While there is a large throughput of diners in Cork Penny Dinners, and a relatively large sample was chosen, there is a possibility, albeit negligible, that a respondent may be identifiable to the committee members.

2.7 Conclusion

An interpretive and phenomenological perspective informed the conduct of this research. Secondary research was carried out by means of a literature review, which influenced the analysis of the collected data. Primary research was carried out by using semi-structured interviews. Limitations of the research were discussed, as where ethical consideration.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will review the origins of food relief in Cork and the discourse surrounding food poverty and social exclusion. The underlying ameliorative social functions created by communal dining, such as sociability, inclusion and the potential to establish social networks will be discussed.

3.2 Food Relief in Cork: A Historical Perspective

Soup kitchens have been in existence in Ireland, and indeed globally, for a considerable period of time. Goodbody (1995:28) suggests that soup kitchens had been used in Ireland during the famine of 1739 - 1741, with soup being an effectual way of distributing nourishment to the hungry. It is contended that material relief rendered to the poor was quite often sold or given as security for a loan, whereas the provision of cooked food was almost certain to benefit the recipient. Providing pre-cooked food also removed the necessity for cooking utensils or fuel, which aid recipients frequently did not have access to. (ibid).

The Society of Friends are widely regarded as having made an extensive contribution to poor relief during the great famine of 1846-1851, and are frequently associated with the emergence of soup kitchens. Hatton (1993) draws attention to the journals of Ireland's original Quaker community, which bear this out, and asserts '*Whether they actually invented them is not clear, but soup kitchens were soon solidly associated with the straightforward practicality of Quaker magnanimity'*. (1993:42).

With regard to the establishment of a soup kitchen in Cork, the same author states that soup kitchens were in situ during the Wolfe Tone rebellion of 1798. The fastidious recording practice of the Society of Friends provides a definitive narration of the creation of one such soup kitchen. The Minutes for the Cork Monthly meeting of November fifth 1846 notes that one Ebenezer Pike provided a premises in Adelaide Street for the purpose of establishing a soup kitchen. The Society of Friends in Cork was eventually to provide 1,016 gallons of soup a day to the starving masses (Harrison, 2006:121).

It is unclear when Cork Penny Dinner's was established at its present location. However, the charity states that its origins can be traced to the soup kitchens organized by the Society of Friends in the 1840's.

3.3 Food Poverty

Low income is one of the key factors that when combined with others e.g. family structure and modern food retailing practices, contribute to the creation of food poverty (Hitchman et al 2002). Friel and Conlon (2004:61) concur with this assertion, pointing out that '*Access and affordability are key factors in food poverty and relate*

to the availability of food, the cost of food and the proportion of the household budget located to food'. Modern food retailing methods favour the siting of large 'one stop shop' retail outlets away from city centres. Steel goes further, stating that *'supermarkets aren't really compatible with cities'* (2008:112). The logistical requirements needed by supermarkets to maintain their ascendant position in the grocery trade include accessible road networks for distribution. Moreover, the all-party parliamentary committee report 'High Street Britain 2015' anticipates the closure of many small local shops across the UK, asserting that *'their loss will damage the UK, socially, economically and environmentally…people (as consumers and members of communities) stand to be disadvantaged the most with restricted choice, entrenched social exclusion'* (2006:6).

Although the geographical concentration of poverty is open to question, Dowler and Leather (2000:209) suggest that poor people tend to live in inner cities or large local authority housing estates. Therefore, this flight to greenfield sites by supermarkets has had consequences for those who depend on public transport. Leather (1996:42) draws attention to research that suggests the distance consumers in the United Kingdom must travel in order to shop has increased by sixty percent between the mid 1970s and late 1980's. Additional research in the UK indicates that sixty eight percent of disadvantaged households i.e. those dependent on benefit, do not have access to a car (Sharpe, 2003 cited in Manandhar et al, 2006). In Ireland, the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (2009) indicates that twenty six percent of individuals at risk of poverty i.e. those whose income is at or below sixty percent of median income threshold, have difficulty accessing public transport. It follows that those households must bear additional costs when procuring food. Moreover, where transport availability is limited and/or expensive, some households are restricted to shopping at small convenience stores. Consequently, disadvantaged shoppers are limited in the choice of foods, and pay higher prices (ibid). The fact that modern retail practices can contribute to food poverty, leads Dowler and Leather to conclude that the social is an important aspect when considering food poverty, particularly families *'for whom shopping is a stressful experience because of insufficient money, or the shops they can reach are inadequately stocked with poor quality goods'.* (2000:211). Nevertheless, in terms of nutrition, food poverty is defined as an inability to avail oneself of enough food to meet basic nutritional requirements (Dowler & Conlon, 2004:22). Hitchman (2002) argues that in contemporary society, food poverty frequently manifests as nutritional rather than calorific. Sharpe (2003) develops the point *'It is a cruel paradox that one of the most obvious symptoms of food poverty is fatness'.*

This is borne out by a substantial body of global research, which confirms that people in lower socio-economic groups have diets which are considerably deficient in foodstuffs which promote health, as recommended by health professionals (Sharpe, 2003). This dimension of food poverty has been extensively researched. Based on Irish Government recommended food consumption and nutritional intake guidelines (Food Safety Authority of Ireland, 1999), considerable dietary deficits were identified among homeless people in Dublin. Compared to other socio-economic groups, Hickey and Downey (2003) found lower intakes of fibre, protein, carbohydrates, iron and vitamins essential for good health among the homeless population in Dublin (2003:56). However, these dietary inadequacies are not restricted to this particular social grouping. Although low-income households spend

a larger proportion of income on food, food poverty persists. These families must spend an even greater percentage of income on foodstuffs such as fresh fruit and vegetables, bread, rice and pasta, than do higher income groups (Leather, 1996:). As with Hickey & Downey's research (2003), Leather points to research that clearly identify similar dietary deficits among families dependent on welfare benefits (1996:37). Consequently, vitamin and mineral poor diets have serious negative effects on disadvantaged families in terms of health outcomes (Dowler, 1998:59). The Faculty of Public Health in the United Kingdom (2005) is more explicit about the health consequences of poor diet. The Faculty states that poor diet contributes to almost fifty percent of coronary heart disease deaths, thirty three percent of all cancer deaths as well as increasing child morbidity and mortality (2005:2). Moreover, the faculty's briefing statement points to increasing evidence that supports a link between poor diet and anti-social behaviour. To illustrate, inmates of a male prison had their diets supplemented with vitamins and minerals in a placebo controlled study, this was associated with a thirty seven percent decrease in serious incidents (2005:2). It would appear that food, as well as being a determinant to health, also has sociological implications, which will be discussed, in section 3.5. However, before proceeding and because of its centrality to the matters at hand, a brief review of social exclusion is warranted.

3.4 Social Exclusion

The idea of social exclusion is one rooted within the economic, political, cultural and social structures of society. It is a comparatively new and indeed contested concept (Taket et al, 2009:5). The term originated in France, where it was first used to identify those not protected by the social security system (ibid). Definitions of the term abound and offer a broader conception of poverty beyond that based only on material resource deprivation. Considine & Dukelow view the concept of social exclusion as *'the consequences of poverty and inequality'* (2009:73). Nevertheless, it is a concept that has become a central element within the discourse of poverty and thus social policy debates. Hills et al argue that the term entered social policy parlance in the United Kingdom because of political expediency i.e. Conservative politicians refusal to acknowledge the existence of 'poverty' (2002:3). It may be said that substituting 'poverty' with the term 'social exclusion' was in part because *'Poverty in the world's richest societies is an embarrassment to the* elite' (Gough et el al, 2006:13). Moreover, the use of the term 'social exclusion' suggests that a contrary condition exists, i.e. 'social inclusion', which leads Gilroy and Speak (1998:97) to conclude *'definitions of social exclusion, no matter which definition is chosen, set up a crude division of insiders and outsiders'*. Taket et al (2009) suggest that rather than simply dichotomizing between 'included' and 'excluded', it may be beneficial to view social exclusion in terms of a fluid continuum between the two conditions. Nevertheless, low income is central to the discussion of social exclusion. Section 3.3 (above) has drawn attention to how low income, coupled with modern retail practices may combine and contribute to create food poverty, however, other conditions exist which preclude some citizens from participating fully in social life. Given that almost eighty percent of individuals at risk of poverty are financially unable to face any unexpected expenses (SILC, 2009), access to credit could be seen as vital. However, as

pointed out by Leyshon & Thrift *'The poor are systematically denied access'* to financial services (In Gough et al, 2006:55)). This assertion is given weight in that almost twenty eight percent of individuals identified in the Survey of Income and Living Condition as at risk of poverty reported difficulties with accessing banking services (2009:76). Yet it may be said that these are the people who need access to financial services the most. Citizens with no financial resources faced with unexpected expenses, are frequently left with no option but to borrow from loan companies, and pay extortionate rates as a consequence (Gough et al, 2006:55). This denial of financial services also has the effect of excluding low-income households from the property market i.e. restricting access to mortgages. Moreover, when individuals on low incomes are able to access the rental property market they may be limited to substandard accommodation. Although social policy addressed the need for housing by low income families, by increasing construction of social housing during the 1960s and 1970's, this situation began to decline during the 1980s (Considine & Dukelow, 2009:346) Among the factors contributing to declining investment in social housing during this period was population growth, which increased demand for private housing. Additionally, incentives aimed at encouraging home ownership such as a Surrender Grant (1984) for local authority tenants (ibid). This inclination toward owner-occupier tenure brought with it unintended consequences. As more affluent tenants of social housing availed of the policy instruments e.g. mortgage income tax relief and first time buyer grants, those local authority tenants without the financial means to purchase a home remained in situ. Moreover, the large estates built during the 70s and 80's were, by design, sited on cheap land and on peripheral green field sites (Gough et al, 2006:115). These factors essentially aided the spatial segregation of low-income families from their more affluent counterparts.   The resultant residualisation has in itself created social exclusion on a mass scale, and indeed compounded the poverty experience such as that discussed in section 3.3. Spatial segregation however, is but one of the contributing factors to social exclusion. Social exclusion involves marginalisation within public consciousness; the poor are rendered invisible or indeed perceptions of the poor as architects of their own misfortune may be promoted. Demonizing those less well off has a long history in society e.g. the categorization of *'deserving'* and *'undeserving'* poor by social policy makers during the nineteenth century. This process continues in contemporary society, facilitated by distorted media reporting and political ideology. Welfare fraud in the United Kingdom is estimated to cost the treasury £1 billion annually, however, detailed investigations by chartered accountancy firms reveal that £70 billion in revenue to the exchequer is lost because of tax evasion (Owen, 2011:31). The same author points out that there has been no public outcry about middle class 'spongers' to compare with public outrage directed at welfare 'spongers'. It has been suggested that the stigmatization of the poor is also as a result of growing strain on economies due to the provision of a social safety net. The last thirty years has seen large scale de-industrialization in developed economies, much of it brought about by political ideology (Owen, 2009). It is also a consequence of the economic system, as capital flows to where profit can be made, in this case to developing countries where production costs are cheaper. The resultant surplus labour force, many of who face the possibility of permanent exclusion from a formal labour market, become

dependent on informal low paid employment, or the social safety net (Gans,1996). Consequently, as taxpayers are compelled to fund a growing demand for social protection, the notion of 'undeserving' poor gains traction (ibid). The idea of an 'undeserving' poor is also politically expedient. Morris (1996) views the notion of a related term i.e. the 'underclass' as an exercise in conceptual containment. She points out that much of the literature on this subject defines this term as a social stratum, which excludes itself from mainstream society by rejecting its norms and values. The absence of a work ethic and dependency on the state are among the evidence suggested to support the idea of an 'underclass'. Owen develops the idea of conceptual containment, stating *'to admit that some people are poorer than others because of the social injustice inherent in our society would require government action.'* (2011:37). Nevertheless, social exclusion is a consequence of poverty, the effects of which necessitate some way of coping by those experiencing it. Gough et al assert that *'The poor have traditionally survived through the material and moral support of their neighbourhood, which enabled them to maintain some sense of agency, control and dignity'* (2006:108). For this reason, it may be relevant and advantageous to explore this contention.

3.5 Social Support and Social Networks

The level of social interaction between individuals is a key determinant to their overall well-being. Furthermore, it is also vital for the creation and maintenance of a sense of self (Ferrante, 2009:87). There is much evidence that supports the theory that social support is conducive to good health, and that social isolation increases the potential for ill health (Stansfeld, 2006:148). For example, Putnam asserts that a diminished level of social support is a contributing factor to the diagnosis of depression. Conversely, high levels of social support ameliorate the symptoms and indeed aid recovery from depression (2000:332). Social support may be gauged by the type of support e.g. emotional, informational or practical, whereas social networks can be measured in terms of contacts, number of contacts, frequency of contacts and density of contacts (Stansfeld, 2006:149).

Social support is a by-product of social networking; moreover, membership of a social network enhances self-esteem, identity and provides opportunities for sociability (Cattell, 2004:143). Levels of social interaction and the opportunities presented for sociability can be described as primary, secondary or tertiary. Primary sociability refers to whether an individual lives with others in a household. Secondary sociability is associated with employment i.e. contact with work colleagues, friends and neighbours and tertiary sociability refers to an associational aspect of life e.g. membership of a sports club, neighbourhood or political group (Gallie et al, 2003:13-16). However, Cattell (2001) in identifying social network types, points out that it is unclear which kind of network is most effective for the creation of social support and health protection. Among the network types referred to by the author are homogenous, heterogeneous, traditional and socially excluded or truncated network (2001:1507). Its small number of membership groups within a given locality i.e. extended family members and their friends and neighbours characterizes the homogenous network. The traditional network is comprised of family members, old school friends as well as friends from social or sports clubs. Cattell suggests

that this social network is an interconnected grouping who have probably lived most of their lives in the immediate area. The heterogeneous network, as the name suggests, is an open network consisting of a variety of membership groups, a voluntary organization being an example. Heterogeneous networks are diverse in membership and loose knit (2001:1507). Constituents of the socially excluded network have fewer membership groups to avail of, and fewer people within those groups' e.g. unemployed people, isolated elderly people, carers or single parents without local families.

In her study of a soup kitchen, Glasser points out that *'Analysis of social networks is especially useful in viewing the world of guests at the soup kitchen'* (1988:117). Moreover, the fact that food is an undisputed need, it follows that *'It has the potential to be a site of universal experience, a mark of communal cohesion and a solidifying social force'* (Friel & Conlon, 2004:22).

3.6 Conclusion

The provision of food relief in Cork has a long history, and this charitable practice continues today in Cork Penny Dinners. Food poverty arises from a number of social conditions such as low income and environmental situation. It is a contributing factor to poor health, social isolation and social exclusion. Charitable enterprises such as Cork Penny Dinners *'serve an overt nutritional function for their guests. Beyond that are the important latent social functions they serve.'* (Glasser, 1988:8).

Chapter 4: Presenting The Findings And Analysing The Data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present, analyse and discuss the information that was gathered during the data collection phase. The information will be presented in the form of tabulated data of the responses of interviewees, thus providing a brief demographic profile of the respondents. The data will then be discussed by drawing on individual perceptions, as a phenomenological perspective attempts to gain understanding from the individual's perspective. The themes that emanate from the data will be analysed, using the literature to develop issues identified.

4.2 Brief Demographic Profile

During the data collection stage, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a sample of twenty diners. At the core of the interview guide was a brief survey, designed to gather basic demographical information. **Table 4.1.1** summarises the findings of the survey.

The results of the brief survey indicate a large proportion of the sample are middle-aged, with eighty percent giving their age as between forty and sixty. The distribution of males and females within the sample indicates that four-fifths were male and one-fifth female. This concurs with the researchers observations prior to and during the data collection stage i.e. the population of Cork Penny Dinners is predominantly male. The survey results show that the majority of respondents are Irish, with two respondents being Polish. A relatively small percentage of respondents stated that the purpose of their visit was to meet nutritional needs only, whereas seventy five percent reported that socialising with other diners was important. All of the respondents indicated that they had visited Cork Penny Dinners more than once during the preceding seven days. Seventy percent of respondents reported that they lived alone, however, over eighty percent of the sample stated that they had some social support from either friends or family, or both. In an attempt at limiting ambiguity the researcher defined 'cooking facilities' as access to a cooking appliance capable of preparing several food types simultaneously. Seventy percent had access to cooking facilities, while the remainder did not. Two thirds of respondents affirmed that they sometimes prepared a meal when not dining at Cork Penny Dinners.

Table 4.1.1

Results of Brief Survey of 20 Diners

Age	Male	Female	%
20-30	1	1	10
30-40	1		5
40-50	9	2	55
50-60	5		25
60-70			
>70		1	5

Nationality			
Irish	15	3	90
Polish	1	1	10

Reason for Visiting			
(may have more than one answer)			
Food Only	2	3	25
Company	14	1	75
Kill some time	4	1	25

Visits per Week			
One Time			
Two Times	2	2	20
Three Times	4	1	25
Four Times	1		5
Five Times	5		25
Six Times		1	5
Everyday	4		20

Social Support			
Live Alone	12	2	70
Have family or friends	13	4	85
No family or friends	3		15

Cooking Facilities?			
Yes	11	3	70
No	5	1	30

Prepare a meal at home?			
Yes	10	3	65
No	6	1	35

4.3 The Diners Perspective of Cork Penny Dinners

All of the participants expressed satisfaction with the nutritional aspect of the service and indeed gratitude: *'The food is great, 'tis grand to know I wont go hungry, sure I'll always have this place, somedays I'd be lost without it'.* Some of the diners voiced the opinion that the service had continued to improve: *'There are napkins on the table now, before it felt like I was shuffling up for a bowl of gruel'.* A recurring theme that was identified among the respondents was the sense of acceptance they perceived:

'People might fall from drinking, they'd be all cut – no one cares, get your dinner and sit down, there's no one takes a tack of notice'.

'They don't want to know nothing, only do you want a bowl of soup? Are you ready for your dinner?

'The people working here are grand, I comes in the door and gets me dinner served up to me, no bother, I mean where would you get it?'

However, some of the respondents noted that anti-social behaviour would not be tolerated. When questioned further on this there appeared to be a tacit agreement among respondents that there would be no alcohol consumed on the premises: *'people should do their drinking outside of here, I don't want anyone acting the* [expletive] *while I'm eating me dinner'.* During the data collection stage, the researcher noted that the ethos of mutual respect between the diners and volunteers was observed. Nevertheless, Glasser (1988) asserts that sociability is enhanced in this atmosphere of acceptance.

4.4 Sociability Among The Diners

The high percentage of respondents who visited for the purpose of socialising would appear to indicate that Cork Penny Dinners might be a significant factor in the social life of diners, in addition to being an important nutritional source. Opportunities for sociability are contingent on a number of variables, for example primary sociability refers to the sphere of the household (Gallie et al, 2003). It follows that if a person lives alone, then that person is potentially more at risk of being socially isolated. However, this may be ameliorated by a person's access to informal social networks, which the literature refers to as the secondary sphere of sociability (Gallie et al, 2003). It is clear from the survey data collected that a relatively large proportion of respondents engage in secondary sociability. Moreover, many of the respondents actively seek company during their visit: *'If company's there, I'll stay longer'*, was one diner's response to the researchers question *'do you leave after you've eaten?'*. This was a variation of a line of questioning adopted by the researcher to ascertain any additional purpose to the visit; an attempt to not unwittingly suggest an answer, but rather seek the respondents

view, as advocated by phenomenology. Other respondents alluded to the fact that visiting Cork Penny Dinners had become part of their routine: *'A few times a week I go to the library, then come over here for me dinner and meet* (refers to two diners)'. This was one of several occasions when the researcher had identified this theme i.e. respondents incorporating a sometimes-daily visit into their social life: *'I'm always up at eight, I go over to the centre for the unemployed, read a paper and call in then for the grub and a cuppa, you'd nearly always meet someone here'*. Informal connections are crucial in sustaining social networks, which offer a potential source of support (Putnam, 2000). Stansfeld states that this support can be emotional, informational or practical (2006): *'I got great help in the hostel, that's how I found out about this place, another homeless bloke told me about it'*. Research by Glasser indicates that Cork Penny Dinners may well be a setting that also meets some of the social needs of those that are marginalized. Moreover, it may also offer *'a previously untapped potential resource for self-help'* within that grouping (1988:12). In addition to the social support that may arise from being a member of a social network, other benefits can accrue such as self-esteem, identity, a sense of belonging and perceptions of control (Cattell, 2004). Throughout the data collection period, and for some time before, the researcher observed that there were distinct groupings around particular tables. As an example, one diner remarked: *'the Polish people usually sit at the table near the door'*. Due to time constraints and the scale of this research, a more in depth ethnographic study was not possible, but it was apparent to the researcher that affiliations between diners exist. However, due to the nature of the study there was an element of participant observation from which another theme emerged. Several diners were at varying times seen to be taking on the role of volunteers. When all meals had been served for example, a number of diners would frequently assist in cleaning the dining area and setting tables for the next day. During interviews it became clear that many diners in the sample would assist in the running of Cork Penny Dinners if asked to do so.

4.5 Diners Experiences of Poverty

In response to the researchers enquiries regarding the preparation of a meal when not visiting Cork Penny Dinners, many participants revealed the extent and experience of food poverty. When asked if he cooked a meal for himself, one respondent replied: *'it depends on what's on the 'reduced' counter in Tesco's'*. Lack of financial resources was a constant feature in the responses of diners:

'If I don't need to, I don't come here'

'I get paid on Tuesday's, its always gone by Saturday'

'They cut the fuel allowance, that's a good few dinners for me'

'I have food at home today but the gas is gone, I can't get a bottle until I get my money tomorrow'

'There's people here who'd starve if they'd to live on the money they gets'

'I get fruit here with the dinner, only for that I'd get no fruit, its very dear'

The last observation reflects the findings of studies that low-income households consume low amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables (Friel & Conlon, 2004). One respondent referred to the difficulty experienced when trying to shop for a single person: *'you can't buy one chop or chicken fillet in the supermarket, its always two of this or that, it'd be grand if you'd a freezer'*. Another diner spoke of difficulty furnishing a local authority house, recently acquired: *'getting me dinner in here saves me a few bob, I need a new bed, I can't do it all, their always saying food is cheap,' tis if your earning good money'*. All respondents reported having an insufficient income with which to support an adequate diet. Moreover, several respondents stated that their accommodation was poor:

'There's no natural light at all; I've a small window, that's it. If I cook the place is full of steam even with the window open. Its damp enough as it is'

'It's a RAS (Rental Accommodation Scheme) *apartment, badly built and very damp, its impossible to heat the place, the landlord doesn't give a* (expletive)

'A kip, I get out of it as much as I can, I'm trying to get a deposit together and get something better'

Many of the respondents indicated that they lived close to the city centre, or on its outskirts. During the course of several interviews, a number of respondents stated that they made their way to Cork Penny Dinners on foot. The relatively high number of respondents who reside in, or close to the city centre would appear to give credence to Dowler and Leather's assertion that there is a tendency for poorer households to be located within inner cities (2000).

During the data collection phase one respondent identified as being homeless. This participant stated that two weeks had elapsed before he had the opportunity to avail of a shower. Furthermore, he stated that he had been the victim of an unprovoked assault on several occasions and felt that there was an increased feeling of hostility toward homeless people *'by settled people'*. He also remarked on the non-judgemental attitude of volunteers in Cork Penny Dinners, in contrast to being refused entry to some shops or: *'being followed around by security while I'm in a shop'*.

4.6 Volunteers Perspective of Cork Penny Dinners

Cork Penny Dinners attracts a steady cohort of volunteers, many of them returning on a regular basis. Prior to the data collection stage, the researcher informally interviewed eight volunteers. The atmosphere in the kitchen during meal preparation was harmonious, with much good-natured bantering and a palpable feeling of purpose among the volunteers. In fact this was a theme that was commented on by all of the volunteers the researcher spoke with. One respondent said: *'I love the positive atmosphere in here, everyone gets on with the job and I get a great feeling of doing something worthwhile'*.

All of the volunteers shared in the commitment to ensuring that a hot meal was ready by the time doors opened at 11.30. Other respondents cited the non-judgemental attitude of volunteers as being an attraction to giving some of their time. A key issue that emerged in discussions with many of the volunteers was the accessibility to the service by potential volunteers: *'there are no forms to fill in, just come in off the street, roll up you sleeves and get on with it'*. This is in contrast to some of the experiences encountered by respondents when volunteering with other Civil Society Organisations*: 'I offered to help out at (named a CSO), they told me they had enough volunteers, so I did the same with (named another CSO), they wanted me to fill out a Garda clearance form, then attend induction training – forget it!'*. Flexibility was further theme identified by two of the volunteers: *'I can volunteer in here whenever I like'*. Another respondent echoed this view: *'in (names a CSO) they wanted me to commit to two hours every Tuesday for a minimum of three months, I just couldn't'*. One volunteer expressed gratitude: *'I've been on both sides of that counter and I just want to give something back'*.

4.7 Conclusion

The task of analysing the data collected was laborious and time consuming, but vital to the execution of this research project. Data was presented in tabulated form, and subsequently considered with attention to the literature. The views of the diners and volunteers at Cork Penny Dinners were presented in order to provide a phenomenological perspective.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1 Recommendations

All of the respondents expressed complete satisfaction with the nutritional aspect of the service and indeed the manner in which it is delivered. Many of the diners expressed an opinion as to how they thought the service could improve; this section presents those views

Many of the diners viewed Cork Penny Dinners as a potential source of sociability. While the focus is the noontime meal, the information gathered suggests that food and companionship are closely related. The high percentage of the sample who stated that food was not the only purpose of their visit lends weight to this suggestion. Several of the diners put forward the notion of extending the hours of service. One respondent voiced the view that the premises would be a good place 'to hang out in that doesn't cost money'.

With regards to the premises itself, two respondents suggested the construction of a smoking shelter for use during inclement weather. It was suggested that this could be sited in the area that the diners use as a smoking area i.e. the back yard. One diner felt that a larger serving hatch would be more useful. Another recommended the use of better food containers for taking hot food to housebound diners: 'Like the foil containers that they use for meals-on-wheels for the elderly'. Many of the respondents felt a separate room with newspapers and small library for socialising in would be a welcome addition to the premises. One diner suggested that the diners themselves would supervise this room. Indeed many of the respondents expressed a willingness to act as volunteers if the need arose e.g. help in the kitchen or with preparing the tables for the next day.

Two diners raised the issue of access to information i.e. that they would like to see an informal advice clinic run once a week for an hour. Both diners felt that if advice were available regarding social welfare entitlements or housing issues in Cork Penny Dinners, that many of the diners would utilise such a service. One diner suggested that trainee counsellors might be willing to donate some counselling sessions for the benefit of the diners.

All of the volunteers noted the ease with which they were able to give their time, and expressed satisfaction with the informal nature of volunteering in Cork Penny Dinners.

5.2 Conclusions

This research explored the issues of food poverty, social exclusion and social support. A literature review revealed how low income combined with modern retail practices can create food poverty.

All of the respondents expressed complete satisfaction with the midday meal, and it is clear that the charity alleviates the food poverty that many of the diners experience.

The information gathered from a sample of the diners in Cork Penny Dinners indicates that socialising is an important part of their visit. Given that a large percentage of respondents live alone, the dining room in Cork Penny Dinners provides many diners with opportunities for sociability. Throughout the data collection period, the respondents constantly expressed gratitude, this may account for the high number of diners who are willing to volunteer in Cork Penny Dinners.

The provision of food relief in Cork has a long history, and through the service provided by Cork Penny Dinners this tradition continues today.

5.3 Recommendations For Further Studies

The researcher believes that a further and extended ethnographical field study would generate much quantitative data relating to the population of Cork Penny Dinners. Additionally, the concept of deprofessionalism as it pertains to the attraction and retention of volunteers in Cork Penny Dinners, could be researched. A research study in this area would be beneficial to other civil society organisations that may not have sufficient volunteers.

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Interview Guide

(A) Frequency of visits to CPD
How many times in the last 7 days have you visited CPD?

(B) Reasons for coming to CPD
1. Just for the food?
2. Company?
3. Kill some time?
4. Other?

(C.)Age
1. 20-30
1. 30-40
2. 40-50
3. 50-60
4. 60-70
5. Over 70

(D) Nationality
Any language problems?

(E) Accommodation
1. Type
2. Furnished
3. Facilities – cooker, kettle, fridge
4. Good or bad?
5. Live locally?

(F) Do you cook when not dining at CPD?

(G) No Accommodation
1. Access to other services?
2. Bathing facilities?

(H) Access to welfare
1. Claiming all your entitlements?
2. Any difficulties accessing entitlements i.e. form filling, information

(I) Social Support
1. Live alone?
2. Friends?
3. Family?
4. If you were ill, who could you contact – friend or relative?

(J) Health
1. Any health problems?