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**Food poverty in rural Ireland.** BY J. HARRINGTON and S. FRIEL, *National Nutrition Surveillance Centre, Centre for Health Promotion Studies, National University of Ireland, Galway, Republic of Ireland*

One of the main characteristics of poverty in rural Ireland is its seemingly invisible nature. Rural areas, unlike some urban areas, do not present homogeneous areas of advantage and disadvantage, they are diverse and the experience of poverty is often individual and dispersed over a greater geographical area. In many rural areas, disadvantage and marginalization remain significant problems. The present study is a collaborative project between the Centre for Health Promotion Studies, NUI, Galway and the Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre, UCD. Food poverty is defined as the inability to enjoy an adequate and nutritious diet impacts on both health and well-being of individuals and households as well as on the social behaviour of food-poor households and their members.

The SLÁN dataset (Friel *et al.* 1999) was further analysed focusing upon rural respondents only. A total of 2798 respondents were classified as living in rural areas as determined by the Central Statistics Office. Respondents were grouped by differing degrees of 'rurality': those living in areas with populations of 0–500; 501–1000; 1001–1500 and >1501 inhabitants. The data were analysed according to the shelves of the food pyramid, to determine whether there were differences in food consumption patterns based upon the differing degrees of 'rurality'. Little variation was observed in dietary behaviour across the rural groups as a whole. There was, however, substantial variation within each group, as seen in the Table, which shows compliance or not with the food pyramid according to population density and social indicators such as gender, social class, etc. The most persistent social variation was observed in the consumption of fruit and vegetables, meat, fish and poultry, and foods from the top shelf of the food pyramid, and was predominantly in the areas with fewer inhabitants. Notably, there was a greater fruit and vegetable consumption in females than males across all categories of population density.

**Significant social variations in food pyramid shelf compliance within rural groups**

	Population density			
	0–500 n=1468	501–1000 n=890	1001–1500 n=122	1501+ n=318
Gender	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry Top shelf	Cereal, bread & potato Fruit and vegetables Dairy Meat, fish and poultry	Fruit and vegetables	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry
Number of children	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry Top shelf	Fruit and vegetables	
Age	Fruit and vegetables Dairy Meat, fish and poultry Top shelf	Fruit and vegetables Dairy Meat, fish and poultry Top shelf	Meat, fish and poultry	
Social class	Fruit and vegetables	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry	Fruit and vegetables	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry
Number in household	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry Top shelf	Cereal, bread & potato Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry Top shelf	Dairy	Top shelf
Marital status	Fruit and vegetables	Fruit and vegetables Dairy Meat, fish and poultry		Top shelf
Medical card status	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry	Fruit and vegetables Dairy		Fruit and vegetables
Affluence level	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry	Top shelf	Fruit and vegetables	
Education attained	Fruit and vegetables	Fruit and vegetables Top shelf		Fruit and vegetables Top shelf
Home tenure	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry	Meat	Fruit and vegetables	
Employment				Cereal, bread & potato Meat, fish & poultry
Transport to shops	Fruit and vegetables Meat, fish and poultry		Fruit and vegetables	

Friel S, Nic Gabhainn S & Kelleher CC (1999) *Main Results of the National Health and Lifestyle Surveys, SLÁN and HBSC*. Galway: Department of Health and Children Dublin and Centre for Health Promotion Studies.