

UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE USE OF FOOD BANKS

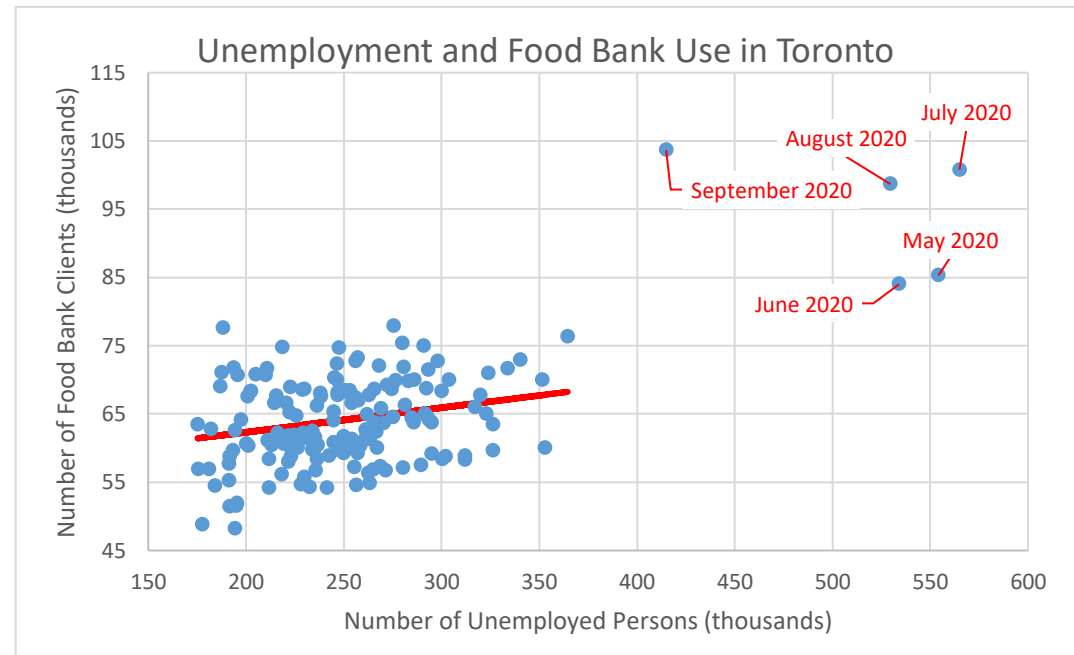
Food banks provide support to individuals and families in need. Rising unemployment increases the number of people seeking their services.

The figure shows the relationship between the number of people who are unemployed and the number of client visits to food banks in Toronto. Client visits represents the total number of people served in a month. For example, if a family of two visits their food bank twice in the month, it is counted as four client visits in that month. The data is monthly and covers the period from January 2007 to September 2020.

Each blue dot identifies the number of unemployed people and the number of client visits to food banks observed in Toronto during a particular month. For example, in May 2020 there were just over 550 thousand unemployed people in Toronto and just over 85 thousand client visits to food banks.

Between February and July 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was largely responsible for an increase in unemployment in Toronto of 363 thousand people and an increase in client visits to food banks of 48%.

The red line represents a statistical relationship between the number of unemployed people and the number of client visits to food banks. It is calculated after controlling for a sizable fall in client visits that is observed during the December holiday season each year. The slope of the trend line is calculated using data from January 2007 to February 2020 and is therefore not impacted by the



Source: Number of clients visits to food banks is from the [Toronto Progress Portal](#). Number of people in Toronto who are unemployed is from Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0295-01. Reliable data on food bank client visits is not available for March and April 2020.

COVID-19 pandemic. The slope of the trend line is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and indicates that an additional 1000 unemployed people is normally associated with an additional 36 client visits to food banks.

The location of observations for May to September 2020 shows that the normal relationship between food bank use and unemployment consistently underpredicts the impact of the COVID-19 induced increase in unemployment on the number of food bank client visits. This suggests that COVID-19 impacted food bank use in ways other than by increasing unemployment. Reduced working hours and reduced income of people who retained employment is one possible explanation. The underprediction also suggests the possibility that Canada Emergency Response Benefit payments were insufficient to enable households with low income from having to increase their reliance on food banks.