

Pink paper – fuel poverty

Low income and fuel poverty

- **Average temperatures are lower in the Highlands than in the rest of Scotland or the UK.**
- **There is an association between living in a cold home and excess winter deaths (EWDs)**
- **The morbidity associated with living cold homes affects children, adolescents and adults.**

As the incomes of those on benefits fall claimants will have to decide how to meet the shortfall. One of the ways in which people may compensate is by cutting back on fuel.

There is a clear relationship between low income and fuel poverty, but this link is moderated by fuel costs. As fuel costs rise, the link between low income and fuel poverty becomes less profound. Palmer and his colleagues point out that, as a result of rising fuel prices, even if poverty had been eradicated between 2005 and 2007 there would still have been more people in fuel poverty at the end of the period than the beginning.

Risk factors for fuel poverty include low income, poor SAP ratings (Standard Assessment Procedures – a measure of energy efficiency), living in a house that is larger than 110 m², being single (at any age), owning the house and living in a rural area. (Palmer et al, 2008).

The Equality Impact Assessments for benefit changes show that single people are likely to be particularly badly affected by the proposed changes and, in particular, by the introduction of the Universal Credit which will see single people lose out quite significantly when compared with other sections of the population.

People in the Highlands are, in any case, living in a colder than average climate in both UK and Scottish terms and, all other things being equal, it will therefore cost more to heat a house in the Highlands than in the rest of Scotland or the UK. The most recent Met Office 30 year averages show that the aggregated annual average of monthly maximum and minimum temperatures were as follows:

	Maximum	Minimum
UK	12.1°	5.1°
Scotland	10.5°	4°
Highlands	10°	3.8°

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/averages/19712000/>

These average temperatures disguise a wide variation even within Highlands (and Argyll and Bute). The west coast of Scotland is warmed by the Gulf Stream and temperatures on the west coast are typically around 1.4 ° higher than average as a result. Of course, the “average” temperature for the Highlands is calculated including this anomaly and

temperatures away from the West coast are therefore likely to be even lower than the “average” temperature suggests.

In their study of the health impacts of cold homes and fuel poverty, the Marmott Review Team found a relationship between Excess Winter Deaths (EWDs), low thermal efficiency of housing and low indoor temperatures and that there were almost three times more EWDs in the coldest quartile of housing than in the warmest quartile. They found a strong association between cold temperatures and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

Though many EWDs are likely to be amongst older people who are less directly affected by, for example, changes to Housing Benefit (though they will be indirectly affected by the effect the changes are likely to have on familial carers), the effect of living in a cold home is felt in all age groups.

Children living in cold homes are more than twice as likely to suffer from a variety of respiratory problems than children living in warm homes and that mental health is negatively affected by fuel poverty and cold housing for any age group. More than 1 in 4 adolescents living in cold housing are at risk of multiple mental health problems compared to 1 in 20 adolescents who have always lived in warm housing and that cold housing increases the level of minor illnesses such as colds and flu and exacerbates existing conditions such as arthritis and rheumatism. (Marmott, 2011).

As far as indirect health impacts are concerned cold housing and fuel poverty negatively affects children’s educational attainment, emotional well-being and resilience, dietary opportunities and choices. It also negatively affects dexterity and therefore increases the risk of accidents and injuries in the home. (Marmott, 2011).

In relation to children, the Review Team found significant negative effects of cold housing in terms of infants’ weight gain, hospital admission rates, developmental status, and the severity and frequency of asthmatic symptoms. For adolescents there were clear negative effects of cold housing and fuel poverty on mental health and in adults there are measurable effects of cold housing on adults’ physical health, well-being and self-assessed general health, in particular for vulnerable adults and those with existing health conditions. (Marmott, 2011).

In older people the effects of cold housing were evident in terms of higher mortality risk, physical health and mental health. (Marmott, 2011).

References

Palmer G., MacInnes T., Kenway P., (2008) *Cold and poor: an analysis of the link between fuel poverty and low income*. London: New Policy Institute

Marmott Review Team (2011) *The health impacts of cold homes and fuel poverty* London: Friends of the Earth/Marmott Review Team