Disabled people, fuel poverty, and energy efficiency policy

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End Fuel Poverty Coalition Seminar on Health Impact of Cold Homes and Fuel Poverty
6th February 2018
Presentation outline and disclaimer

• An introduction to our research to date
• Some findings from our first research project mapping welfare reforms and fuel poverty
• Some tentative findings and recommendations from our new project
• A disclaimer – homogeneity and the speaker
Findings from two projects

- Disabled People, Fuel Poverty and Policy Change: 2011–2014, funded by Eaga CT
  - The relationship between disabled people and fuel poverty
  - The impact of policy on disabled people (welfare reforms, fuel poverty policy)

- Policy Pathways to Justice in Energy Efficiency: 2016–2018, funded by UKERC
  - Considering the impact of energy efficiency policies on disabled people and low income families with children
Methodology

**Eaga project**
- **Evidence review**
- **Statistical analysis**
  - 2010–2011 English Housing Survey (EHS), using the 10 per cent and Low Income High Cost (LIHC) measures of fuel poverty
- **Qualitative interviews**
  - 16 key stakeholders working in energy/fuel poverty field
  - 19 disabled people/parents of disabled children

**UKERC project**
- National policy makers about policy development (n=17)
- Stakeholders involved in policy implementation across 4 UK nations (n=60)
- Householders who are disabled/have young children (n=40)
Energy and disability

Complex, different, and fluctuating needs:

- **Need for higher temperatures**
  - Some chronic conditions lower metabolism meaning that less heat is generated, others (such as stroke/dementia/Parkinson's) slow body heat generation and conservation
  - Some health conditions require higher heating regimes—e.g. some respiratory diseases require 21 degrees in order to prevent health from deteriorating

- **Need for longer periods of warmth**
  - Where a person spends longer in the home they will be required to heat their home for longer if they are to keep their home at a healthy temperature.
  - This is not recognised in current calculations of fuel poverty

- **Additional energy needs:** running equipment
- **Accessing fuel**
Energy and disability

‘I have a degenerative disease in my spine so when I get cold my bones get really sore’ (UKERC H14)

‘Winter is horrible for people with muscular dystrophy…everything is stiff…you have to have the heating on’ (EAGA R15)

‘I’ve arranged with the [provider] that my electric doesn’t go off at all even though I pay through a top up meter, it’s not meant to go off at all but it does…I have a daughter that’s on a feeding machine…she’s fed every night for 12 hours’ (UKERC H2)

‘There’s a Range…but I’ve not fit enough the last few years to cut any peat to run that’ (UKERC H22)
The measurement of fuel poverty has a masking effect by:

- Underestimating energy needs – assuming one size fits all
  
  ‘Winter is horrible for people with muscular dystrophy...everything is stiff...you have to have the heating on’ [R15]

- Overestimating incomes by treating Disability Living Allowance/PIP as disposable income
  
  ‘We’ve even got to a point last winter...I was already getting quite ill by then...friends have bought me coal for my birthday’ [R14]
Asking for and accepting help

- **Trusted:**
  - Citizens Advice
  - Social media e.g. facebook groups for disabled people/parents of disabled children e.g. 4UP
  - Family/friends
  - Government websites

- **Suspicious:**
  - Private companies
  - Energy companies
  - Cold callers
# Experience of applying for energy efficiency measures

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral/inquiry</th>
<th>‘a lot of people like myself out there that are not eligible for half of the stuff because they’re still on a low income but not as low as people who don’t work’ (H3)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>‘I would have preferred face to face...someone coming out, going over it...disruption, that was my concern’ ’ H36 (parent of disabled child who declined loft insulation)</td>
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<td>Work contracted</td>
<td>‘the wife helped out [with the installers] as well because at the time I was on really strong painkillers and I found everything slightly confusing’ (disabled adult H7)</td>
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<td>‘Because I have a disabled child they need to give me half an hour’s notice before they arrive at my door because I could be giving her medication or she could be on the nebulizer’ (H2 adult of disabled child)</td>
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<td>Aftercare</td>
<td>‘[installers] kept saying things that implied that I should be grateful...but I think that’s a common thing with charities that work with the disabled, they feel like they’re doing a good thing’ ’ H22 (disabled adult)</td>
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<td>‘I was severely anemic...at the time I was trying to sort this out...I’d barely got the energy to get out of bed let alone fight with people over stupid things’ (H22)</td>
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From an installer/supplier perspective

Are disabled people who are eligible for measures an appealing prospect or do they represent cost and hassle?

“A vanilla customer journey approach doesn’t work well for these groups”

‘How do you actually deal with all those issues in terms of ‘I don’t want my install today as I have a hospital appointment’
Conclusions

• Highly varied, fluctuating needs
• Measures of fuel poverty may hide vulnerability
• Accessing appropriate support may depend on:
  • Eligibility – e.g. passport benefits
  • Organisations involved
  • Level of support and flexibility
Thanks

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