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Title: Being Warm Being Happy: fuel poverty and adults with intellectual disabilities

Authors: The Being Warm Being Happy Team: Jodie Bradley, Melanie Chapman (presenting author), Chris Damm, Vicky Farnsworth, Annie Ferguson, Jan Gilbertson, Alison Owen, Bernard Stafford, Beth Taylor, Angela Tod and Dan Wolstenholme

Introduction

Living in a cold home is associated with poor quality of life, poor health and premature death. There is little evidence about fuel poverty for people with intellectual disabilities despite them being at greater risk of material deprivation and being more likely to experience health problems exacerbated by living in a cold home.

This study explored the experience and impact of fuel poverty on adults with intellectual disabilities.

Methods

An exploratory mixed-method participatory research study where people with intellectual disabilities were members of the research team.

Temperature and humidity measurements were taken in ten households followed by semi-structured interviews with adults with intellectual disabilities. Cards and pen portraits were developed to support framework analysis.

Results

Three interrelated themes were identified: energy need; emotions, attitudes and values; knowledge and experience.

Household occupancy, the health, views and practices of those sharing the home influenced energy need and use. There were challenges understanding information, heating and finance technology and accessing appropriate support and information. Managing money and paying for energy was a huge worry. There were examples of rationing and selective disconnection from heating.

Implications

Two co-production workshops identified policy and practice implications and potential solutions, including: awareness-raising about the Priority Services Register; easy-read information and energy bills; accessible advice; training for services providers to assess and respond to risk; technological responses.