

It's another cold night for poor

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Households on low incomes will feel the cold pinch of winter more than most as rising energy bills and promised cuts to welfare benefits threaten to push them beyond the brink of their financial limits. So suggests a report from the Centre for Sustainable Energy and the University of Bristol, proving that poverty, fuel hardship and financial difficulty are inextricably linked.

Among households with the lowest annual incomes, of £6,000 or less, 63% of those surveyed said their homes are cold in the winter, with single adult and lone parent households hit especially hard. And with the government's 'progressive' budget, things will only get worse for these households who will see no benefit from the rise in the tax threshold because they are already below it.

The report, '[You just have to get by - Coping with low incomes and cold homes](#)', presents the results of a national survey of 699 households living below the official poverty line, funded with a grant from eaga Charitable Trust.

The survey was complemented by 50 in-depth interviews which revealed the details of the daily reality of living on a low income in a British winter. Many interviewees expressed a determination to make ends meet despite the financial pressures of everyday life.

Low income households with highly constrained budgets typically cut back their spending on both food and fuel - 65% of those cutting back their spending on heating were also cutting back on food and 59% cent of those cutting back their spending on food were also cutting back on heating.

While hunting for bargains was an effective cost-saving measure for food, many households felt that their only option for reducing [energy bills](#) was to turn the heating off for prolonged periods or heat only one room. Many were also doubtful that the deals being offered by energy companies could deliver real savings and feared that they would simply have to cope with unaffordable bills.

The authors of the report, Will Anderson from the charity The Centre for Sustainable Energy and Andrea Finney from the University of Bristol's Personal Finance Research Centre (PFRC), say changes to public policy should consider the consequences for the most deprived households, who are already struggling with high energy and living costs.

“Welfare cuts and higher energy prices will result not only in an increase in the number of [households](#) in fuel poverty but also an increase in their severity of hardship,” say the authors. “Most of the debate about the definition of fuel poverty is necessarily focused on technical and

quantitative measures. Ultimately, this is the only way policy can progress at a national level. This ought not, however, to be at the expense of other perspectives, above all the perspective of people who are struggling to stay warm in winter.”

Provided by University of Bristol

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