



The Health Impacts of Fuel Poverty on Children

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Policy Briefing



The impact of Fuel Poverty on Children

Professor Christine Liddell

This paper is a policy briefing commissioned by Save the Children, written by Christine Liddell Professor of Psychology University of Ulster.

Introduction

Save The Children's *Impact of Fuel Poverty on Children* is the first report to focus on fuel poverty and its effects on children, young people, and their families.

It documents the prevalence of fuel poverty in households that contain children, illustrates how patterns have changed over time, and compares data for Northern Ireland with comparable data from neighbouring regions.

Drawing on new research evidence, it documents the effects that fuel poverty has on infants, children, and young people. It provides information on the public health costs associated with fuel poverty among the young, and the benefits that are likely to accrue from ensuring that children are placed centre-stage in the fuel poverty strategies of the future.



Executive Summary

- A household is classified as being in Fuel Poverty if, in order to maintain an acceptable level of temperature throughout the home, the occupants would have to spend more than 10% of their income on all household fuel use.
- Fuel poverty rates in the homes of children and young people in Northern Ireland are amongst the highest in the developed world.
- According to the most recent official estimates, the prevalence of Fuel Poverty in the homes of children and young people increased from 12% in 2004 to 27% in 2006.
- With more than 1 in 4 households containing children and young people in Fuel Poverty, this amounted to a total of 51,640 families containing an estimated 100,698 children.
- Of all household types in Northern Ireland, lone parents experienced the highest increase in Fuel Poverty rates between 2004 and 2006.
- 1 in 2 households headed by a lone parent was fuel poor in 2006, an increase of 30% on 2004 estimates.
- Being employed offers only limited protection from Fuel Poverty for couples with families. For lone parents it offers even less since lone parents who work part-time are more likely to be fuel poor than are lone parents not in work.
- Across the 11 proposed local government areas, there is significant variation in Fuel Poverty rates. Belfast has the highest rate of Fuel Poverty in homes containing children (37%), and Antrim & Newtownabbey the lowest (18%).
- For infants, living in fuel poor homes is associated with a 30% greater risk of admission to hospital or primary care facilities when other contributory factors have been accounted for.
- For children, living in fuel poor homes is associated with a significantly greater risk of health problems, especially respiratory problems. Poorer weight gain and lower levels of adequate nutritional intake have also been found – a “heat-or-eat” effect.
- Adolescents living in fuel poor homes are at significantly greater risk for multiple mental health problems when other contributory factors have been accounted for.
- Cost-benefit analyses of the return on investment that could accrue from preventing Fuel Poverty amongst children and young people suggest that, for every £ spent on reducing Fuel Poverty, a return in NHS savings of 12 pence can be expected from children’s health gains. When adults in the family are also included, this increases to 42 pence.
- Fuel Poverty is unlike most other forms of Child Poverty and should be accorded special status in policymaking and legislation concerning the young.
- A Fuel Poverty Children’s Charter is recommended as a means of generating a more co-ordinated strategy for improving the priority accorded to children and young people in future Fuel Poverty Strategies.

Defining Fuel Poverty

Living in a cold home creates health risks for people of all ages. It is for this reason that the World Health Organization (WHO) has set minimum standards for home temperature, which apply to all countries of the world. WHO prescribe that living room temperatures should be 21⁰ C, and bedrooms 18⁰ C¹.

Households are said to be *in Fuel Poverty* if the house they live in :

- a) has to be heated to attain WHO– recommended temperatures
and
- b) if the cost of heating would be 10% or more of the household’s income.

“A household is in Fuel Poverty if, in order to maintain an acceptable level of temperature throughout the home, the occupants would have to spend more than 10% of their income on all household fuel use.”²

Being *in Fuel Poverty* is the product of three factors. These are :

1. The energy efficiency of the house a family lives in, which determines how expensive it will be to heat.
2. The cost of heating fuel.
3. The family’s income, which determines how much a 10% spend on heating would be.

In reality, very few households can afford to allocate 10% or more of their income to heating their home, with the inevitable consequence that many people live in homes that are cold and damp. In the UK, for example,

senior citizens spend only 67% of what would be required to meet WHO standards in their home. Although couples with children spend more of their income on home heating than senior citizens do, their investment in home heating stretches to only 80% of the spend that would be required to keep their home at WHO levels; the spend of lone parents covers somewhat less (75%)³.

Fuel Poverty and the Young

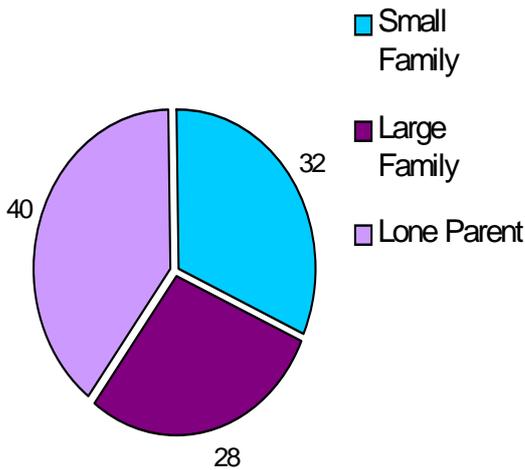
For many years, senior citizens and people with disabilities have been the primary focus of Fuel Poverty interventions. This is not surprising, since they are most likely to live on low incomes, and least likely to be able to keep warm by being active. Both are classified as vulnerable groups in the UK’s Fuel Poverty Strategy, which has been in place for almost 10 years. This has meant that the resources that are allocated to alleviating Fuel Poverty have been primarily targeted towards these 2 vulnerable groups. Though less conspicuous in the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, a third vulnerable group has commonly been acknowledged, namely children. One of the consequences of a 10-year Fuel Poverty programme targeting seniors and people with disabilities is that children have become increasingly marginalised.

Fuel Poverty, children and young people in Northern Ireland

The most recent Fuel Poverty statistics available for Northern Ireland were collected as part of the Northern Ireland House Condition Survey (2006)⁴. These indicate that 27.4% of households containing children were living in Fuel Poverty (51,640 families or an estimated 100,698 children.).

Figure 1 shows how these 51,640 households are distributed across 3 different family constellations, namely small families, large families, and single parent households.

Figure 1: Fuel Poverty in households containing children and young people : Distribution across family types.



Sample = 51,640 fuel poor households containing children, 2006

Small family = household headed by a couple and containing 1-2 children under 16 years
 Large family = household headed by a couple and containing 3 or more children
 Lone parent = household headed by a single adult and containing children

Source : NIHCS, data for 2006

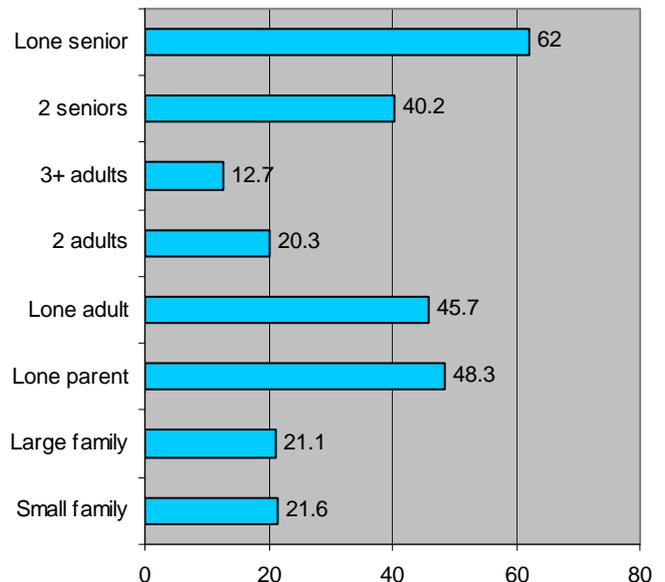
It is evident that all three constellations are significantly affected by Fuel Poverty. Couple-headed households (i.e. small and large families) account for more than half (60%) the households with children that are in Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland. This is not surprising, given that more than three-quarters of households with children in Northern Ireland are headed by couples (78%). In fact, as Figure 2 illustrates, lone parent households are over-represented amongst the fuel poor – although

they account for only 22% of households containing children, they also make up 40% of the fuel poor households containing children.

With the exception of lone seniors, Figure 2 illustrates that a greater proportion of lone-parent households are in Fuel Poverty than any other household type. They are more than twice as likely to be in Fuel Poverty when compared with couple-headed households containing children (i.e. small and large families).

Nor is greater Fuel Poverty risk amongst lone parents a new phenomenon in Northern Ireland. Comparing data from the 2001⁵ and 2006⁴ House Condition Surveys indicates almost identical prevalence rates : 1 in 2 lone parents were fuel poor in both.

Figure 2: Fuel Poverty rates: Percentages in Fuel poverty across all household types in Northern Ireland



Source : NIHCS, data for 2006

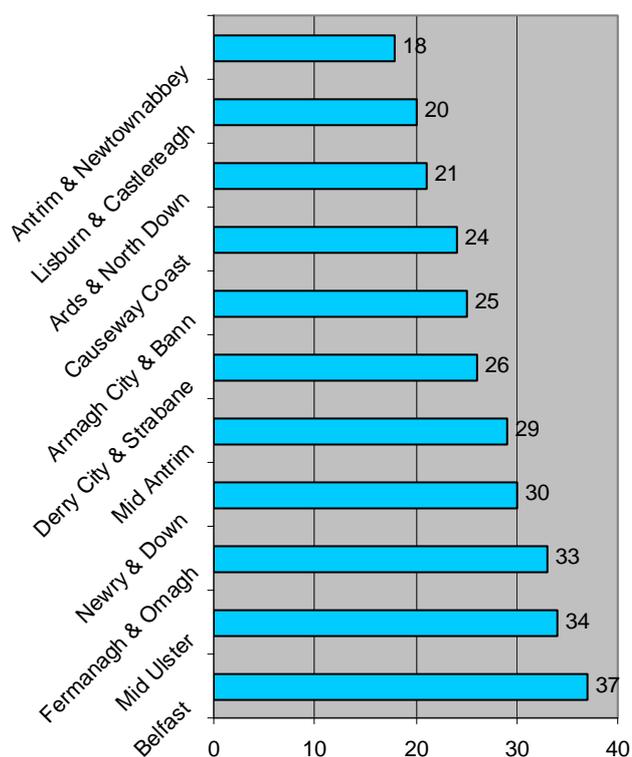
Lone parents are more vulnerable to Fuel Poverty for many reasons. As detailed earlier, Fuel Poverty rates are the product of three factors,

namely the energy efficiency of the house a family lives in, their income, and the cost of heating. Two of these - energy efficiency and income - make it more likely that lone parents will experience Fuel Poverty. Proportionally more lone parent households live in private rented accommodation, which is significantly less likely to be energy efficient than other types of housing⁴. Additionally, 9% of lone parents rely on older less-efficient solid fuel systems to heat their homes in Northern Ireland, compared with 3% of couple-led families⁴. In terms of income, lone parent households earn less on average than couple-headed households, and are more likely to purchase child care⁶.

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of Fuel Poverty in households containing children, by the 11 proposed super-Councils or local government areas. This highlights the uneven distribution of Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland. In Belfast, Mid Ulster, and Fermanagh & Omagh, at least 1 in 3 homes containing children are estimated to be fuel poor. By contrast, 1 in 5 homes containing children are fuel poor in Lisburn & Castlereagh, Antrim & Newtownabbey, and Ards & North Down.

Table 1 provides information on the employment status of households containing children. It highlights the extent to which a parent being in part-time work fails to protect households from Fuel Poverty. Since part-time work offers parents with children greatest flexibility – and may be the only viable option for many lone parents – this finding is particularly noteworthy. In fact, among lone parents, Table 1 indicates that rates of fuel poverty are highest for those who work part-time (60%), a rate higher than for lone parents who are not in work (46%).

Figure 3 : Percentage of household with children in Fuel Poverty by proposed local government area.



Source : NIHCS, data for 2006⁴.

* Estimate less robust than other areas, due to relatively small numbers in NIHCS

Table 1 : Households containing children under 16 years : Percentage in fuel poverty by employment status of adults

Household type	% in Fuel Poverty
Couples	
One or more working full time	17
One or more working part-time	29*
Neither working	40
Lone Parents	
Working full-time	30
Working part-time	60
Not working	46

Source : NIHCS, data for 2006

* Size of sample is small, estimate may not be robust.

Having at least one adult in full-time employment also offers somewhat limited protection for households with children. In couple-headed families with at least one full-time job, 17% are fuel poor. For lone parents working full-time the rate is almost double that of working couples with children (30% for lone parents working full-time,).

Northern Ireland in regional context

Table 2 compares Fuel Poverty rates for three regions of the UK as well as Ireland, based on the most recent comparative data i.e. 2006.

Table 2 : Fuel Poverty percentages for households containing children in 2006 : Regional Comparisons.

% Fuel Poor	Northern Ireland	Scotland	England	Ireland*
Couples with children	21	10	4	7
Lone parents with children	48	14	14	37
All households in the region	34	25	7	16

Sources : UK Fuel Poverty Monitor (2006)⁷ and Scott et al. (2008)⁸

*2005 data.

Comparable data not available for Wales

Looking firstly at all households in the region (the bottom row), Northern Ireland had the highest regional rate of Fuel Poverty (34% across all households) in 2006. The prevalence rate is five times that of England, and double that of Ireland.

Northern Ireland's high rate of Fuel Poverty when compared with other regions is accounted for not least of all by its colder and wetter climate. Meteorological data indicate that, in order to keep a home warm enough to meet WHO standards, homes in Northern Ireland would need to have their heating systems on for more than 310 days of the average year⁹. Heating fuel costs are also significantly higher in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK, with a greater reliance on oil.

These and other factors result in households in Northern Ireland spending 60% more on heating their homes than the UK average.¹⁰ Earnings in Northern Ireland are significantly lower too⁶, meaning that heating costs are being drawn from smaller household incomes.

Consequently, whilst the average UK household spends 3% of its income on heating, Northern Ireland households spend 5%¹⁰.

From Table 2 it can also be seen that - for households with children - Fuel Poverty rates are about 2-3 times what they are in the rest of the UK and Ireland. All regions show similarly elevated risks for children living with lone parents, although this is particularly notable in England and Ireland.

Changes in Fuel Poverty rates: 2004 2006

Since 2004, Northern Ireland has made great strides in improving the quality of its housing stock. Between 2004 and 2006, more than 20,000 homes were improved as part of the government's Regional Fuel Poverty Strategy i.e. Warm Homes and its subsidiary schemes¹¹. Newly built homes also met increasingly stringent energy efficiency criteria. Family income rose too, albeit modestly. Perversely, the cost of domestic heating rose so dramatically that the reductions in Fuel Poverty rates which *should* have been generated by improved housing stock and increased income, were in fact negated so extensively that Fuel Poverty rates rose rather than fell. Table 3 compares the changes in Fuel Poverty prevalence for 2004 and 2006.

A reduction in Fuel Poverty between 2004 and 2006 was only evident among senior citizens and homes containing 3 or more adults without children. This is testimony, probably, to the effects of a regional Fuel Poverty strategy which explicitly targeted older people and people with disabilities or long-term illness. Among households with children, couple-headed families experienced an increase in Fuel Poverty rates which approximated the NI average of 10%, whilst lone parent families experienced an increase three times the NI average.

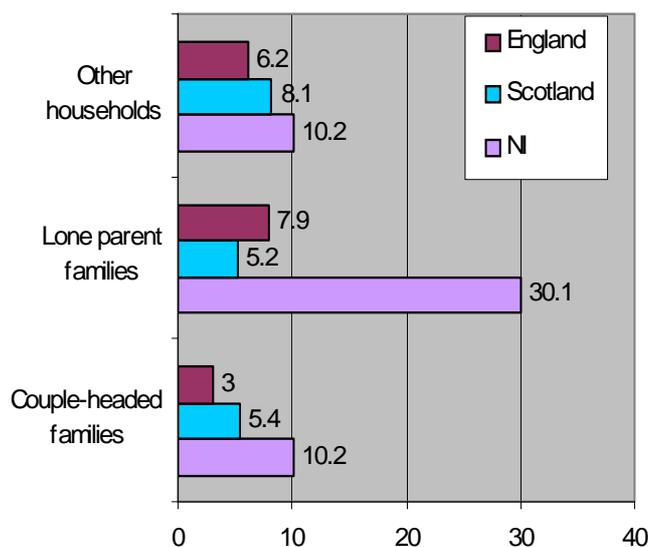
Comparing Northern Ireland with other regions of the UK sets these results in context. Comparative data are available for Scotland, England, and NI. Figure 4 presents the results.

Table 3 : Fuel Poverty by household type in Northern Ireland, 2004 and 2006.

	2004 % fuel poor	2006 % fuel poor	Absolute change (percentage point)
Small family	9.4	21.6	12% increase
Large family	12.4	21.1	9% increase
Lone parent	18.7	48.3	30% increase
Lone adult no children	24.8	45.7	21% increase
2 adults no children	15.3	20.3	5% increase
Several adults no children	24.7	12.7	12% decrease
2 older people no children	42.5	40.2	2% decrease
Lone older person no children	42.5	62.0	20% increase
NI Average (all households)	23.9	34.2	10% increase

Sources NIHCS data for 2004¹², 2006⁴.

Figure 4 : Percentage increase in Fuel Poverty rates between 2004 and 2006 : Regional Comparison.



Sources : NIHCS 2004¹², 2006⁴; SHCS 2004¹³, 2006¹⁴; EHCS 2004¹⁵, 2006¹⁶.

As would be expected given Northern Ireland's particular vulnerability to Fuel Poverty, increases in prevalence are greater than in the other 2 regions. Proportionally, however, increases are greatest for lone parents in Northern Ireland (30% increase). This increase is six times greater than for lone parents in Scotland (5%), and around 4 times greater than for lone parents in England (8%).

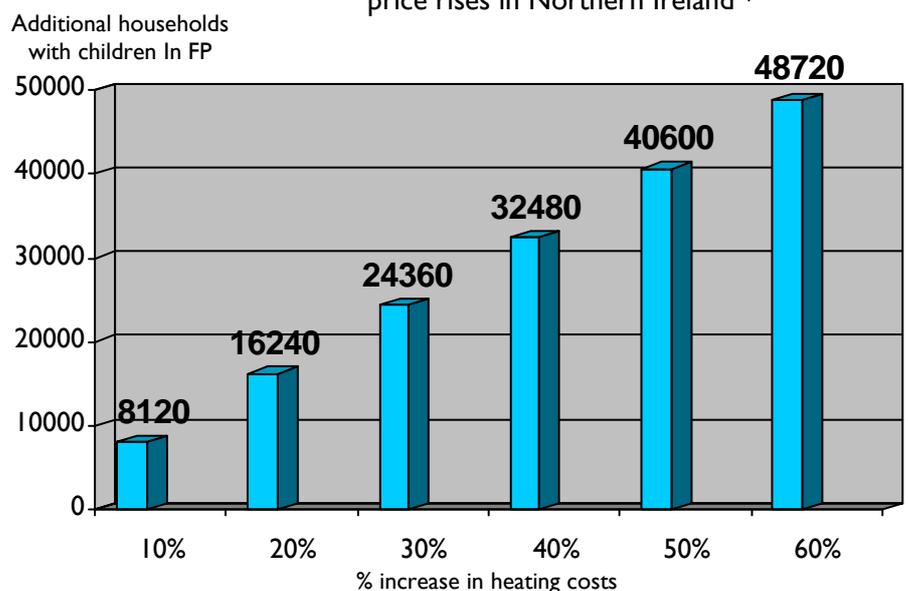
Changes in Fuel Poverty rates: beyond 2006

At present, the biggest driver of increases in Fuel Poverty rates is the cost of domestic heating. Economists have estimated the changes in Fuel Poverty prevalence that can be expected with each 1% increase in the cost of domestic heating fuel ^{eg. 8,17}. It is noteworthy that most estimates limit projections to a 15% increase, probably because estimates beyond this become unstable. Whilst domestic energy prices fell by 2% in 2007, they rose by 27% in the first 9 months of 2008¹⁸. Such dramatic increases, as well as short-term volatility over

time and many other factors besides, make it difficult to generate precise estimates of how changing prices affect Fuel Poverty rates in a relatively short space of time. For these reasons, the estimates made here and on Figure 5 are approximations, based on the assumptions of the 15% ceiling model that others have used in the past. In 2006, it was estimated that 51,640 families with children in Northern Ireland were fuel poor.

For every 1% increase in domestic energy costs, it is estimated that an additional 2,800 households become fuel poor¹⁹. Of these, 812 are likely to contain children. If domestic energy costs over the period 2007 - 2008 stabilise at 15% higher than they were when the NIHCS 2006 estimate was made, then the Fuel Poverty rate amongst families with children would increase to about 63,000 families with children (or from 27% to 34%). This amounts to approximately 123,000 children. If they stabilise at 40% higher than in 2006, then about 84,000 families with children will be living in fuel poor homes (45%). This amounts to approximately 160,000 children. Taking into account the moderating effects of inflation, increased earnings, the effects of housing stock improvements over time, and the fact that income distribution is not smooth, a real terms increase in domestic heating costs of between 60% and 70% since 2006 could mean that around half of Northern Ireland's families with children would be in Fuel Poverty in autumn 2008, or 184,000 children.

Figure 5 : Estimated effects of domestic heating price rises in Northern Ireland *



Sources : Scott, et al.⁸ EST¹⁷,

* Increases over 15% may be unstable.

Living in Fuel Poverty - effects on infants, children, and young people

Relatively little attention has been paid to the effects that Fuel Poverty may have on children's wellbeing. The majority of research in this area has focused on effects amongst senior citizens, amongst whom the benefits to mental wellbeing appear to be substantial. Whilst studies also hoped to find significant benefits for physical health among seniors, these are less convincing. Given that many senior citizens may have lived in cold damp homes for many years, adverse impacts on their respiratory health, cardiovascular systems, arthritis and rheumatism are likely to have become cumulative and entrenched. Nevertheless, following the improvements in energy efficiency that follow from having central heating, insulation, and draught-proofing installed, seniors report significant improvements in their mood and outlook, better domestic relationships as a result of being less crowded into one or two rooms, a greater interest in social and community engagement, and more frequent contact with their families. Most especially, they report relief from the anxieties associated with affording their home heating costs. It is likely to be via this route that most other mental wellbeing gains become manifest²⁰.

“Fuel poor households simply do not have enough income to afford to heat and power their homes adequately. The consequences are multiple debts, the forgoing of other essential needs, ill health and mental stress due to the difficulty of paying bills.”¹⁷

For children, on the other hand, whilst studies

are even fewer and farther between, the effects of living in a warmer home free from damp seem to be found in both mental and physical health. Given that these gains have a lifetime of potential benefit, they are of prime importance.

In reviewing the evidence base on effects concerning children and young people, care has been taken to cite only studies of the highest scientific quality. For example, it is not sufficient to compare children whose families are fuel poor with families that are not, since many other aspects of these children's circumstances may also differ – neighbourhood, educational opportunities, ethnicity, access to resources, etc. It is vital to take account of these bigger differences in children's lives before looking at the smaller and subtler effects of Fuel Poverty. This is feasible provided studies are well-designed, have large samples, and use sophisticated statistical procedures for distinguishing between different effects. The studies described in this report all meet these criteria.

The effects of Fuel Poverty for infants and children are primarily on physical health, which in turn might affect overall wellbeing and educational achievement. Amongst adolescents by contrast, effects appear to be primarily on mental health. Taken together, these findings offer a lifespan perspective on Fuel Poverty's impacts on the young, suggesting that there may be lifelong benefits from targeting Fuel Poverty strategies towards the young.

Infants

A five-city study in the USA compared 2 groups of low-income children. One group

lived in families who were receiving a winter fuel subsidy, the other was a similar group who were not. Infants living in homes without winter fuel subsidy were 30% more likely to be admitted to hospital or primary care clinics in their first 3 years of life. They were also 29% more likely to be underweight²¹. Like everyone else, infants stay warm by burning calories. The more calories they need to keep warm, the fewer are available for growth and the building of a healthy immune system. This, researchers believe, is likely to account for these differences²². Paediatricians involved in this research have speculated that longer term risks to children's cognitive development could accrue from their being underweight in the early years of life. This issue is currently being investigated.

Children

Further research followed the five-city study infants into childhood. Although children not receiving winter fuel subsidy probably needed to burn *more* calories in order to stay warm, they in fact consumed 10% fewer calories during winter months than did children in homes that received the subsidy. This is often referred to as the "heat-or-eat" dilemma which many households in Fuel Poverty confront during cold weather. Whilst previous studies had shown that *parents* consume less food as a way of affording more heating in winter, this is the first study to suggest that young children do too²¹.

Other studies have compared families who have had their homes made warmer and drier through energy efficiency measures (the experimental group) with similar families whose

homes have yet to be upgraded (the matched control group). A year after improvements have been made to the experimental group homes, both groups are followed up. A study of this kind, undertaken in New Zealand, found that children in the experimental group had 15% fewer days off school than the matched controls. This may be attributable to fewer respiratory ailments after a house is made warmer and drier, since children are particularly vulnerable to respiratory problems if they live in cold, damp conditions²³.

This likelihood is borne out by a study of 14,000 English children who were followed over a period of 5 years by a research team at the National Centre for Social Research (NATCEN). Respiratory problems were more than twice as prevalent in children who lived for 3 years or more in cold homes (15%), compared with similar children living in energy efficient homes (7%). For children living in homes that had damp and mildew, 16% had respiratory problems compared with 6% of similar children living in energy efficient homes. Evidence also suggests a significant reduction in the prevalence of allergies in children after homes are made more energy-efficient. This may be as a consequence of better air quality and a reduction in dust mites²⁴.

Two studies indicate that children are more likely to complete homework in a separate room post-improvement, probably as a consequence of more rooms in the house being heated^{23, 24}. Together with the finding that there are fewer days off school post-improvement, it is possible that Fuel Poverty measures may have small but significant effects on children's longer term educational achieve-

ment. Studies are currently underway to evaluate this possibility.

Adolescents

The mental health of adolescents living in Fuel Poverty was also investigated by the NATCEN team²⁴. When many other contributory factors were controlled for statistically, Fuel Poverty had highly significant effects on adolescent risk-taking (e.g. early alcohol and tobacco abuse) and truancy. Living in a home that was inadequately heated emerged as the only housing quality factor to be associated with 4 or more negative outcomes in adolescent's mental health status. Among adolescents who had lived for long periods in poorly heated homes, 28% were at significant mental health risk, compared with 4% of similar children who lived in homes that were adequately heated.

How might these results be explained? More than most other age groups, teenagers appreciate and take full advantage of having their own space at home, not only to be alone in, but also to be with friends. Where heating is limited to family living rooms, and family members cluster together, the opportunity for privacy and personal space may be harder for teenagers to achieve. Domestic relationships often come under strain during adolescence, which could make crowding especially challenging for this age group. This is supported by the fact that 10% of the NATCEN adolescents in fuel poor homes felt unhappy in their family compared with 2% of similar teenagers living in warmer homes. They were also more than twice as likely to have run away from home. Factors such as these may lead to adolescents spending more time in public spaces such as

Parks and shopping precincts where they are more vulnerable to harm, anti-social behaviour and other mental health risks. This was borne out by the finding that NATCEN teenagers from inadequately heated homes were significantly more worried about bullying and mugging than their counterparts living in warmer homes.

Tackling Fuel Poverty in the homes of children and young people : costs and benefits

Very little research weighs the costs of tackling Fuel Poverty against the benefits, and almost none examines the costs and benefits amongst children and families. Warm Homes – Northern Ireland's Fuel Poverty Strategy – is the only regional strategy to have undertaken a cost-benefit analysis²⁵. Of the £109M invested in Warm Homes between 2001 and 2008, savings to the NHS (as a consequence of fewer children needing treatment for respiratory ailments, allergies, and mental health problems) were estimated at £13M. Hence, 12% of the Warm Homes investment could be recovered from improvements to children's health and mental wellbeing. When health effects for adults and seniors are added, almost half (42%) of the Warm Homes investment could be recovered. Similar estimates of returns on the investment in tackling Fuel Poverty have been reported in studies undertaken in New Zealand²³ and Ireland²⁶.

When viewed even more in the round, additional savings in carbon offsetting are estimated to return another 100% of the initial investment in energy efficiency over the lifetime of the efficiency measures²⁶.

Reviewing the evidence : Is Fuel Poverty a special kind of poverty?

Fuel poverty amongst families with children could simply be construed as an integral part of Child Poverty. However, in Northern Ireland, Fuel Poverty merits special status and for several reasons.

Fuel Poverty's special status for children

- Legislative policy accords Fuel Poverty special status for Northern Ireland's children.
- Fuel poverty rates amongst children in Northern Ireland are more than twice the UK average, whilst Child Poverty rates are closer to the UK average.
- Not all children who are income poor are also fuel poor
- Tackling Fuel Poverty requires a specific strategy, distinct from what is needed to tackle income poverty.
- The effects of Fuel Poverty on the young are distinct from the effects of income poverty
- Fuel poverty is more amenable to solutions than is income poverty

1. Legislative policy accords Fuel Poverty special status for children in Northern Ireland. One of the goals articulated in Lifetime Opportunities, Northern Ireland's Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy, released under Direct Rule in 2006, is :

“[That] by 2020, every child and young person lives in a decent and safe home, which is warm.”²⁸

If Fuel Poverty is monitored as a distinct contributor to Child Poverty, this may increase the chances that this goal is met. It remains achievable.

2. Fuel poverty rates amongst children in Northern Ireland are more than twice the UK average.

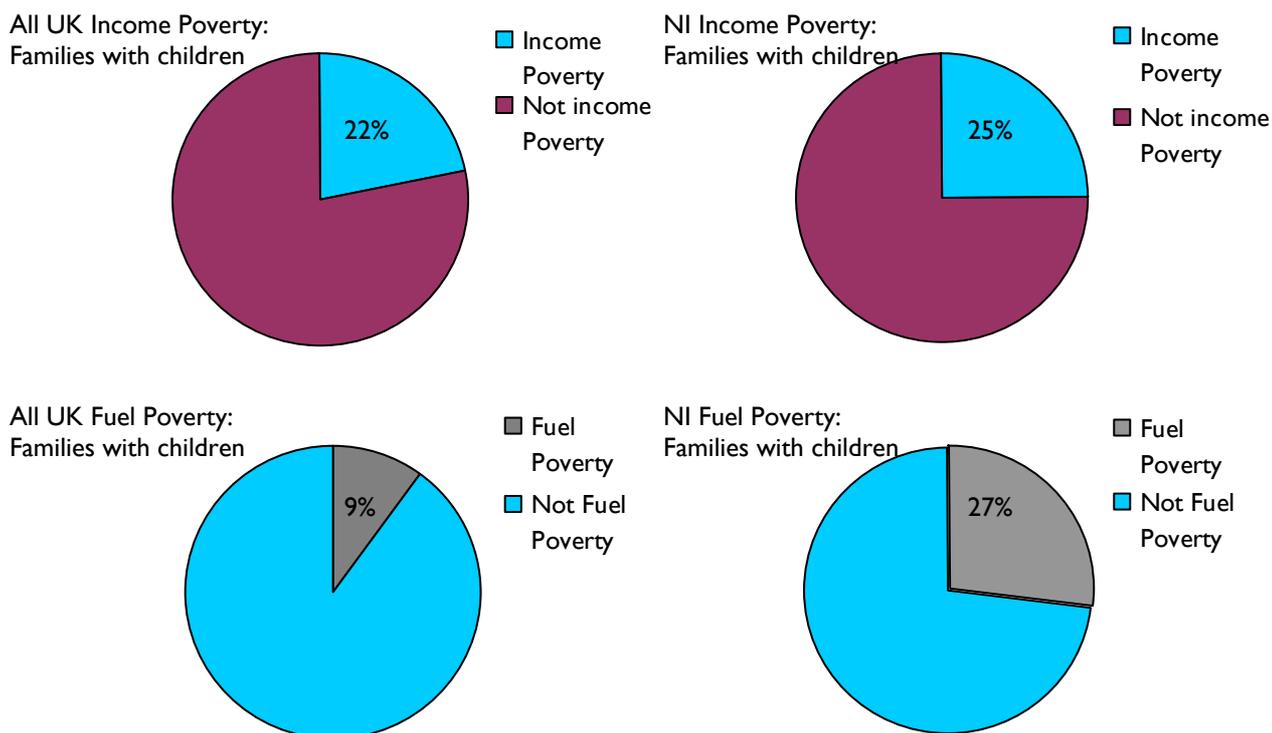
Children in Northern Ireland have one of the highest rates of prolonged exposure to the effects of Fuel Poverty of any group in the developed world. By contrast, as can be seen in Figure 5, Child Poverty rates in Northern Ireland are closer to the UK average.

Northern Ireland's Warm Homes scheme has proved to be more effective than other schemes in the UK, delivering targeted interventions to senior citizens and disabled people with better focus and less waste. Whilst immensely good news, this has widened further the gap between young and old in terms of Fuel Poverty prevalence in Northern Ireland. All of these considerations make Fuel Poverty a particular source of regional inequity for children in Northern Ireland.

3. Not all children who are income poor are also fuel poor.

Living in an income-poor family does not always mean that children will experience Fuel Poverty. Among the poorest quarter of homes containing children in Northern Ireland, more than half (59%) are headed by caregivers who feel they are able to keep their homes warm⁶. Reasons for this are many, but a primary one is that many income-

Figure 5 : Income Poverty and Fuel Poverty among families with children : UK and Northern Ireland.



Sources : NIHCS 2006⁴, Kenway, et al.⁶

poor children are living in newer housing stock which is relatively energy efficient⁴. The point is an important one because it suggests that being income poor does not automatically mean that families have to be fuel poor. Affordable heating is achievable for the vast majority of families, no matter what their family income, provided they live in decent, well-insulated and energy efficient homes. This leads to Point 4.

4. Tackling Fuel Poverty requires a specific strategy, distinct from what is needed to tackle income poverty. The primary determinant of Fuel Poverty is the home itself. Regardless of who lives in it, homes which have high quality cavity wall and loft insulation, efficient central heating systems, draught-proofing, and double-glazing are least likely to create fuel poor residents, even when the residents themselves are in income poverty.

5. The effects of Fuel Poverty are distinct from the effects of income poverty. Living in Fuel Poverty has specific effects on the young, as this report has shown. Even among the young, the effects of Fuel Poverty differ across infants, young children, and adolescents.

6. Fuel Poverty is more amenable to solutions than is income poverty. As cost-benefit analyses indicate, the cost of bringing even the poorest standard of home to an acceptable level of energy efficiency is small relative to the lifetime savings made to the wellbeing of children and their families. The many other elements that contribute to Child Poverty - such as low income, poor educational opportunities, limited employment options, and inequities in resource allocation – are formidably more complex.

A Fuel Poverty Children's Charter.

Tackling Fuel Poverty in a way that is more inclusive of families with children is strongly supported by the evidence base. Ensuring that children are able to live in warm dry homes offers a relatively simple, cheap, and highly cost-effective programme of child- and family-focused solutions.

None of the UK's regional Fuel Poverty Strategies are currently focused on families with children. In fact, housing hardly features at all in any aspect of policy or legislation relating to the young. As a consequence, there is no co-ordinated approach to tackling Fuel Poverty amongst families with children. The impacts of Fuel Poverty require action from groups responsible for housing, public health, planning, environmental health, and social welfare. The political agenda surrounding Fuel Poverty, when viewed in terms of its rounded impacts on society, means that responsibilities are dispersed across many different government departments.

There is no single body that is accountable for delivering a Fuel Poverty Strategy on behalf of children. The scientific findings concerning the impacts of Fuel Poverty on children, highlighted in this report, are all less than 5 years old. For the first time, it is within the gift of practitioners and policymakers to act upon these findings.

With these facts in mind, a Fuel Poverty Children's Charter could offer a useful way forward, giving opportunities for a wide-ranging but coordinated strategy.

Recommendations which might be included in a Charter are on the next page. The Charter might act as a starting point or platform for discussion and debate.

A draft Fuel Poverty Children's Charter

- Households with children should be accorded special status in future UK Fuel Poverty Strategies, at both National and Regional levels, with special status also being reflected in each of the regional Fuel Poverty Strategies.
- Fuel poverty should continue to be accorded special status in Child Poverty Strategies. Action to reduce Fuel Poverty risks for children should be integrated into the Child Poverty milestones and targets.
- Inter-departmental collaborations within government, and coalitions between government, NGO's, and communities should be strengthened to reflect the multi-faceted impacts of Fuel Poverty. Budget allocations should reflect the wide dispersal of responsibilities and returns on investment that accrue from tackling Fuel Poverty amongst the young.
- Cross-Border initiatives should be built which reflect the significant impacts of Fuel Poverty on the young throughout the island of Ireland.
- Winter Fuel Payments should be extended to fuel poor households with children of all ages, given that children of all ages are vulnerable to the effects of Fuel Poverty.
- Winter Fuel Payments to fuel poor households with children should be weighted regionally to accommodate the fact that domestic energy costs are substantially higher in Northern regions of the UK, and highest of all in Northern Ireland.
- Discounted tariffs on domestic energy should become mandatory for all households with children, as they are in other regions of Europe. These should apply regardless of how households with children pay their fuel bills.
- Energy suppliers and distributors should be supported in making Fuel Poverty among young people a primary corporate social responsibility.

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Save the Children

We're the world's independent children's charity. We're outraged that millions of children worldwide are still denied proper healthcare, food, education and protection. We work to promote justice for children globally and locally. Here at home we are determined that child poverty is eliminated; that children get a good quality and inclusive education and that child rights are protected and promoted. We're determined to make further, faster changes. How many? How fast? It's up to you.

Notes:



Save the Children publications on child poverty:

Young people's opinions on poverty (2008) Written by Alex Tennant and Marina Monteith. This short research paper analyses responses to questions included in the ARK Young Life & Times Survey 2007.

Persistent Child Poverty in Northern Ireland – Key Findings (2008) Written by Marina Monteith, Katrina Lloyd and Patricia McKee. Full Report to be published shortly.

The impact of poverty on young children's experience of school. (2007) Written by Goretta Horgan. Published in conjunction with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. A Round-up of the evidence, findings document and Good Practice Guide for Primary Schools has also been produced.

A 2020 Vision: Ending Child Poverty in Northern Ireland. Annual Child Poverty Report 2007. Our first report on the State of Child Poverty—we explore the extent and impact of child poverty in Northern Ireland.

Participation, happiness and achievement: the impact of poverty on the school experiences of 16-year olds (2007) Written by Dirk Schubotz, David Simpson, Alex Tennant. In collaboration with Ark Social and Political Archive at Queens University Belfast. This short research briefing analyses response to questions in the ARK Young Life & Times Survey 2006.

The Bottom Line: Severe Child Poverty in Northern Ireland, (2004). This report outlines the grim reality that 8% of all children in Northern Ireland are severely poor . The Executive Summary is free to download from our website.

Severe Child Poverty in the UK (2007) Monica Magadi and Sue Middleton. Following previous research on Britain's Poorest Children this latest study adds a further dimension to our understanding of severe poverty, using a new measure that combines household income with recent data on other indicators of deprivation.

Why Money Matters(2008) Edited by Jason Strelitz and Ruth Lister. It looks at family income, poverty and children's lives.

Forthcoming in 2009

- **Voices of Children and Young People experiencing poverty** - qualitative research with children and young people experiencing poverty across Northern Ireland.
- **Indicators of Child Poverty** - children and young people experiencing poverty across the UK discuss what children need to have a good life and these are translated into a set of child poverty indicators
- **Government spending on child poverty in the UK** - an analysis of pro-poor spending on children across the four regions of the UK.

Christine Liddell is a Professor of Psychology and Distinguished Community Fellow in the School of Psychology at the University of Ulster. She has worked in child research, education, and development for more than 30 years, during which time she was a founder member of South Africa's National Education Policy Initiative which advised the African National Congress on its education policies during the transition to democracy. She was Founding Director of the Early Education Research Unit at the Human Sciences Research Council, and has been commissioned to undertake research by organisations such as Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Sesame Street, Spencer Foundation of Chicago and the British Academy. She has advised local government departments on Fuel Poverty and is a member of a number of regional and national bodies concerned with Fuel Poverty Strategy.

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