

### ENERGY USE

## Healthy privilege

*Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* **44**, 250–259 (2018)

How health affects an individual's energy consumption has long been a question of contention. Some argue that loss of mobility with ill health increases household energy use, while others — focusing on the strong correlation between income and health — argue that poorer health signifies lower income and so would also translate into lower energy use. Now, Milena Büchs and colleagues in the United Kingdom and Ghana show that poorer health does correspond to higher household electricity consumption even as it decreases mobility by air, road and foot for members of the household.

The researchers looked at the UK's Understanding Society data from 2012–2013. The survey has a sample size of more than 47,000 individuals in nearly 26,000 households and it includes data on travel by various modes, car mileage, self-assessed health status on a scale of 1–4 and home energy expenditure. The researchers combine these data with government statistics on household spending on electricity and gas. Income and energy consumption were correlated with health status as an independent variable. The researchers found strong linkages between health and income. When they controlled for factors such as income and age they found that a one-level decrease in health score led to a 2% increase in electricity consumption, a 21% decrease in flights per household per person and a 6% decrease in car travel. While the researchers note that the relationship between health and energy consumption is nuanced, their findings underscore the need for careful consideration of disadvantaged populations, like the unhealthy, in energy policy design.

---

Fouad Khan

Published online: 8 August 2018

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41560-018-0226-9>