

ENERGY POVERTY

Young, transient and cold

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Energy poverty arises when household income falls below the poverty line once costs for socially and materially necessary levels of energy services are accounted for. Young adults may be a particularly vulnerable yet overlooked demographic due to their transient rental housing and multiple occupancy living arrangements. Saska Petrova, from the University of Manchester, used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the experience of energy poverty in young adults (18–35 years old) in the Selly Oak ward of Birmingham, UK.

The majority of questionnaire respondents cut back on heating to save on energy bills to meet the requirements of the housemate with the smallest budget. Consequently, 35% of respondents reported an inadequate warmth level in their house; this was supported by interviews and diaries suggesting that heating was only used in shared lounge areas, and that bedrooms, bathrooms, and hallways were generally at 10–15 °C. Nevertheless, respondents said they did not feel affected by energy poverty because of the cultural view that youth is a transitional period when low-quality housing is expected, and because they regarded energy use for information and communication technologies as more essential than heating. Respondents cope with home discomfort by spending more time at school or work, effectively putting the burden of consumption elsewhere.

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