What is fuel poverty?

In Scotland, a household is in fuel poverty when they need to spend more than 10% of their income to maintain an adequate heating regime, defined as 21°C in the living room and 18°C in other occupied rooms. Often those who cannot afford to spend their income on heating will choose to be cold, which can make fuel poverty difficult to measure. The inclusion of some benefits as ‘income’ can also skew the fuel poverty calculation.

Who is in fuel poverty?

In 2012 an estimated 770,000 households in Scotland were defined as being in fuel poverty. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 set out aims to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016 but since this was implemented fuel poverty levels have risen, mainly due to rising fuel prices. In response to this Scotland may adopt a similar definition to the UK Government who, as of July 2013, changed the definition of fuel poverty in England to better target those in need - households whose total income is below the poverty line with above average energy costs.

What causes fuel poverty?

The three main causes of fuel poverty are:

- Low incomes
- Rising energy prices
- Poor energy efficiency of homes.

Who is affected?

People most commonly affected are:

- Disabled people
- Elderly people
- Low income households
- Young families
- Lone parents
- People with health issues
The impact of fuel poverty

Health impacts for those living in cold or damp homes\textsuperscript{ii}:

- Higher risk of:
  - Cardio-vascular and respiratory diseases
  - Respiratory problems among children
  - Mental health issues
  - Minor illnesses such as colds and flu and exacerbated existing conditions such as arthritis and rheumatism
  - There is a link between excess winter deaths\textsuperscript{iv}, inefficient housing and low indoor temperature.\textsuperscript{ii}

Other impacts:

- **Debt** – Those heating their homes despite unaffordable costs are likely to end up struggling in debt
- **Heat or eat** – For households living on a low income the choice between turning on the heating or buying food for dinner is a common one.
- **Social isolation** – People (especially older people\textsuperscript{iii}) in cold homes are less likely to invite people into their home.

Support

Changeworks Affordable Warmth Team provides in-depth, impartial advice and support to households struggling with fuel poverty, and organisations whose service users are at risk.

Get in touch:

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W: www.changeworks.org.uk

Useful Links

Changeworks
Home Energy Scotland
Scottish Fuel Poverty Forum
Energy Action Scotland
Citizens Advice Scotland
Energy Saving Trust

\textsuperscript{i} Interim Report May 2012, The Scottish Government’s Fuel Poverty Forum 2012
\textsuperscript{ii} The Health Impacts of Cold Homes and Fuel Poverty, Marmot Review Team UCL 2011
\textsuperscript{iii} The Relationship Between Fuel Poverty and Health, Energy Action Scotland 2012
\textsuperscript{iv} Winter Mortality in Scotland 2011/12, National Records of Scotland 2012

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