



Keeping warm in later life project

# Factors influencing older people keeping warm at home

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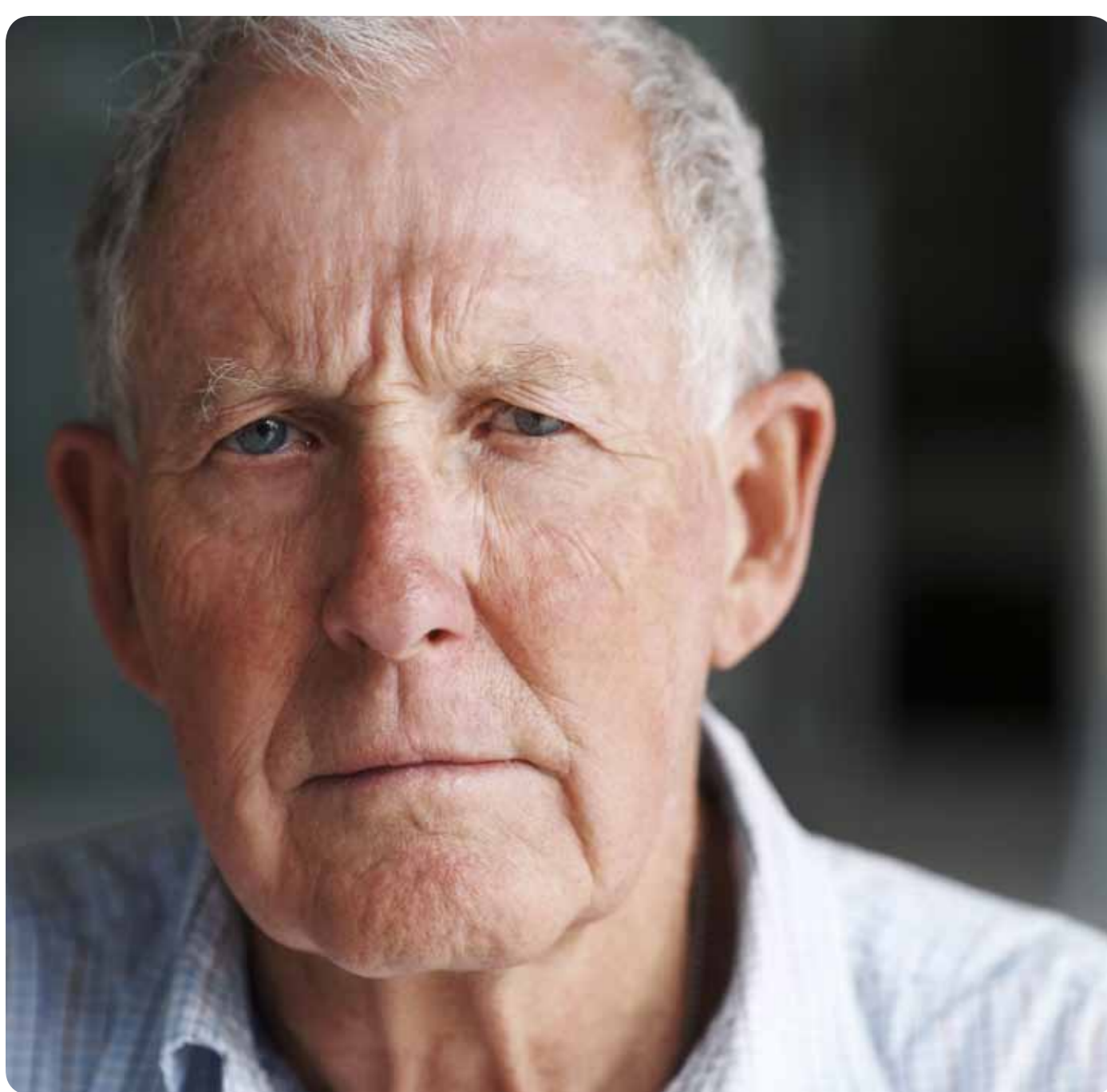
## PURPOSE OF THE POSTER

The aim of this poster is to present selected findings from the Keeping Warm in Later Life Project (KWILLT). Proposed changes to affordable warmth policy will impact on factors which influence the ability of older people to keep warm. This presentation considers the challenges on local authority and public health professionals to develop interventions and influence decision makers in order to support older people to keep warm and well in the home.

## AIM OF THE KWILLT STUDY

To examine the knowledge, beliefs and values of older people regarding keeping warm at home, and identify the barriers they experience that prevent them accessing help in keeping warm.

To use information from the study to develop social marketing 'keeping warm' interventions, including brief intervention training materials for health and social care staff



## Illustrative case study

This case study illustrates some of the factors which influence an individual's ability to keep warm. In this case study we find that limited social connections, lack of information on the available schemes, and behavioural factors such as trust and awareness influenced this gentleman's capacity to keep warm.

A single male 58 years old who has suffered from a nervous breakdown and finds it difficult to keep his house warm. He has no job. His main problems are the type and nature of the house he is living in, low income and poor social connections. His house was built in the 1920's and it does not have cavity wall insulation.

"I have a big problem with this exterior wall which is a complete mess. The damp's coming through, you cannot decorate it because it just furs up and everything".

Fuel bills are high, in part because the house is energy inefficient. Because of the high fuel bills, he is worried, frustrated and depressed.

"It's always at the back of my mind, you need to turn this heating off now, you can sort of cope....I seem to be falling a little bit backwards in every direction with all sorts of things... what worries me more is the way the Government is talking about stopping even more benefits. I mean I might as well just put my head in a noose you know, because there's just no way I can sink any lower anymore, it's just a real bind trying to get through now."

During winter months, he went to the library most of the days to avoid staying in his freezing house. He only has one friend he trusts. He does not trust the banks or the energy companies.

"I think the energies are wrong though because what they've done is they've made people never believe them anymore about its costing that, they're putting it up just for their own greed or because they can get away with it."

## Background

Living in cold, damp housing is linked to health problems, high levels of avoidable winter deaths and low quality of life in older people (Liddell & Morris 2010; Marmot Review 2011). The study was based in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, a former coal mining town. There were an estimated 137 excess winter deaths in Rotherham in 2009/10 (ONS 2010). In this study older people discuss various external and social factors which influence their ability to keep warm.

## Methods

- Individual in-depth interviews and room temperature measurement with older people (n=50) and interviews with health and social care professionals (n=25) to explore the knowledge, beliefs and values of older people regarding keeping warm at home.
- Six focus groups, three with older people (n= 24), one with staff (n=8), and two with strategic leads in the public and third sector (n=13).
- The data was collected from older people in the winter months of 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.
- Staff interviews were completed in the summer of 2010.
- The data was analysed using a framework model.

## Results

The link between keeping warm and health was not always understood by older people<sup>a</sup>. Many demonstrated poor knowledge about recommended room temperatures<sup>b</sup>, fuel payment and tariffs, and heating technology<sup>c</sup> which ultimately impaired their ability to heat the home well.

<sup>a</sup>"They get to the stage where they will switch it off, they'll wrap up but they don't understand the importance of the house being warm because they've lived in conditions like that for many years when they were younger, damp cold houses, and they don't realise the effect it can have on their health". (staff)

<sup>b</sup>"Keeping healthy is through what goes in your mouth and what you do like exercise and things like that; keeping warm is another side of the issue though. Keeping warm is a private thing, a private thing that knows whether you're cold, hot, you're just heating and warmth to your own liking." (OP27)

<sup>c</sup>"Like I said I've got them storage heaters and they're no more use than ornament because they come on at twelve o'clock at night and they go off at seven. So really you're boiling in bed and then during the day you're cold." (OP29)

Behaviour was also influenced by previous experience and mistrust of banks<sup>b</sup> and utility companies

<sup>a</sup>"We changed from company A to go to company B, and it was a nightmare, and I spent hours on the phone trying to get money back that they owed me. And you inform them and they say oh you can ring this number and you can get help. They did nothing! They said they would but they did nothing! I had to do it all myself and I bet that went on for over six months and I said well if that's changing I'm never going to change again. It was a nightmare." (OP9)

<sup>b</sup>"She pays cash. She thinks that she doesn't trust them; they might charge more with direct debit". (OP 6 – though interpreter)

The invisibility of fuel consumption<sup>a</sup>, and internet banking<sup>b</sup> was identified as a barrier. This influenced older peoples ability to make judgements about heating their home.

<sup>a</sup>"Another problem is that people don't have a feel for how much it is costing them to turn things on do they? You hear the boiler going away and you've no idea whether its costing you £10... the natural reaction is going to be to put it on when you need....using the fire rather than the heating. Because they get an instant response and they know when its on, when its off" (staff)

<sup>b</sup>"I don't know what the bill will be with this, this time round, but everybody says it'll eat it up. But you see I don't put the gas on" (OP6)

<sup>c</sup>"They'll not do direct debits a lot of them, they don't know how to do it; they like to physically go and pay a bill. So I would say the majority of the pensioners that I see do use the Post Office. Apart from the ones that have been brought up to date by family members and have got direct debits set up for them." (staff)

Social connections and existing values<sup>a</sup> and mindsets<sup>b</sup> have a profound impact on the ability of older people to overcome barriers in order to heat their home and pay for their fuel.

<sup>a</sup>"I don't, I've never been spoiled, and I'm not bothered about being right warm." (OP21)

<sup>b</sup>"I think you are influenced to think a little bit, in our generation I think you tend to think they're a bit nannied. Talk about a nanny, you know, but they're so coddled with everything and that it shouldn't really be much of a hardship to be cold occasionally. ....I wouldn't see it as a life-threatening issue to have been without heating for a month." (OP)

<sup>c</sup>"I like to pay it as it comes. If it came this afternoon I'd go down to the post office the same day as I got it and I'd pay it - that's the way I like to pay my bills." (OP)

## Conclusions

Older people are at an increased risk of living in fuel poverty, and suffering from the negative impacts that living in a cold home has on health. The study has revealed a complex array of factors that impact on decisions and behaviours which prevent older people to keep warm at home. The barriers older people face are influenced by their previous experience and by a lack of awareness and knowledge. The current period of change to existing policy and structures which provide interventions and support to older people could further hinder any attempts to change behaviours. The findings suggest proposals such as the Green Deal initiative will do little to change the mindset and values of older people or overcome the barriers they experience. Behaviour is not always anticipated or understood by policy. There is a need to support health and social care professionals to recognise those at risk of cold homes and promote interventions which influence older peoples behaviours in keeping warm at home.

## References

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