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FEBRUARY 2024

Ethnic Minorities - An example of 'Hard to Reach' People

It is known that there is an above average incidence of overcrowding, low quality housing and fuel poverty among ethnic minorities. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/housing/housing-conditions/overcrowded-households/latest>
As communities across the region become more ethnically diverse, particularly in the inner cities & towns, engaging with & offering our Green Doctor support to people is challenging in terms of multiple factors including, language barriers, lack of knowledge of the UK energy market, tariffs, billing etc, awareness of support available & housing tenure, quality & affordability.

We've seen that many people take up accommodation in the private rented sector, which due to widely varying standards of landlord property management, lack of proactive tenant engagement & the ineffective application of the Minimum Energy Efficiency Regulations (MEES) by local councils on landlords not complying, the difficulties for the Green Doctors & other support services are compounded & hindered in our effectiveness. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-private-rented-property-minimum-energy-efficiency-standard-landlord-guidance>

According to the Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics report 2023 (2022 data), the highest level of fuel poverty was in the private rented sector with 24.1% of these households being fuel poor.

The average fuel poverty gap refers to the reduction in fuel costs needed for a household to not be in fuel poverty.

For more information or to arrange a free home visit* contact:

Phone: 0300 303 3292

Email: greendoctoryorkshire@groundwork.org.uk

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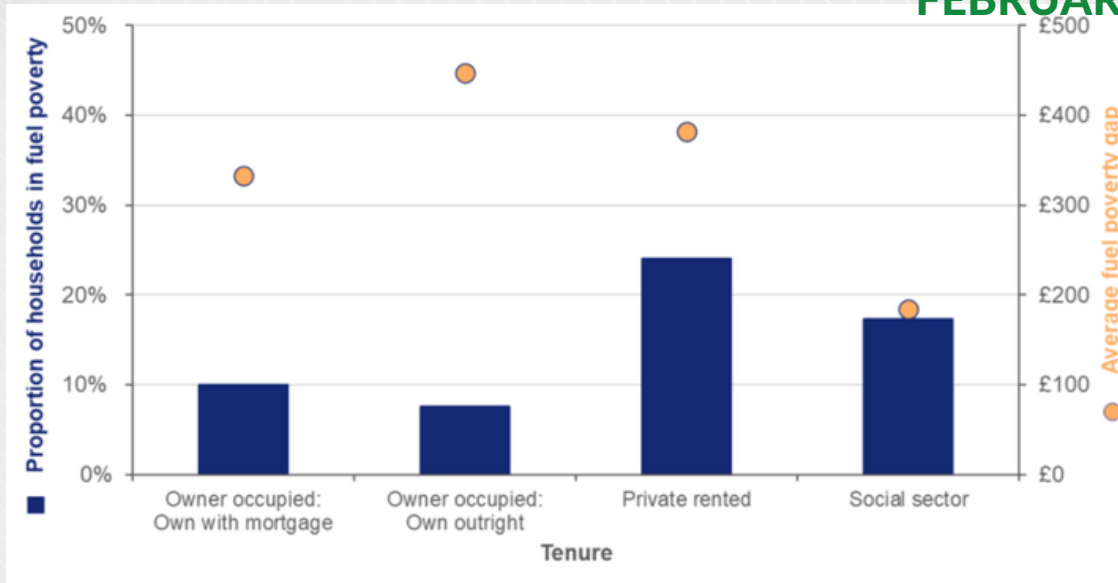
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The North East Child Poverty Commission's report on asylum seekers and refugees, found that many families live in poorly maintained, overcrowded accommodation characterized by quality and safety concerns, including cold, damp and unsanitary conditions. In addition, before being granted refugee status or leave to remain, utilities – including energy – are handled by the housing providers. Once people move out of this accommodation, they often have no experience or knowledge of dealing with bills, energy companies or energy-saving practices, meaning that they can quickly get into debt.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629622002201#bb0235>

The below case was referred to the Green Doctors by a family outreach worker in Beeston, Leeds, where there is a higher rate of both ethnic minorities & low standard private rented accommodation.

'Full Green Doctor visit please, family in a pickle at the moment in process of new benefit claim, can we see how we can save them money, unsure which supplier, gas prepaid electric monthly'.

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Notes made by the Green Doctor on the home visit.

House in disrepair, family from Eritrea have been living in this privately rented property for 2 years with his wife and 4 young children. Very severe damp, mould and condensation throughout the property.

Referred to housing standards/ environmental health. Water is pooling on carpet leading to holes in ceiling. Holes in roof. Landlord has said he fixed the property but all he has done has put gutter on.

This property was only meant to be temporary they are bidding for council houses every week. He showed me videos of water dripping through light fittings and the ceiling. The hole in the ceiling has come from plumbing issues and water dripping through the walls/ceiling. The carpet on the middle floor is permanently wet leading to the structural issues within the house.

Now on the Priority Services Register and advised about Warm Homes Discount. Referred to debt agency for energy trust fund application. £600 debt on water bill, applied for Water Direct & Water Support scheme. ACTS 435 request for bed/s.

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Sadly, although the damp & mould in this case was more severe than many, this type of situation is quite a frequent encounter for our team in the homes of people from ethnic minorities in the private rented sector.

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To enable more effective support for ethnic minorities, in 2016 the Green Doctors developed a 'tailored' energy awareness presentation delivered to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes across West Yorkshire. These involved groups of people from various countries & different levels of English understanding, attending a 2-hour information/advice session incorporating many visual explanations alongside a handout of key terms in 'easy to read' format. Not only did the students learn about energy, how to save money & where to access support, they also expanded their vocabulary & a follow-up session to embed the knowledge was held by the class facilitator. The level of 'proactiveness' shown by the class tutor was crucial in motivating & encouraging the students to engage.

We found that these partnerships with various ESOL courses to be well received & many people referred into the Green Doctor service for a home visit. 'Word of mouth' about our good service, spread amongst the communities & we made progress with a 'hard to reach' group.

The challenge came in accessing funding for interpreters/translators, the difficulty with inaccurate interpretations & the often very long visits required to go through all our Green Doctor advice, which then reduces our capacity to support more people without increasing the team size. Added to this, are the issues mentioned above relating to the Private Rented Sector & the complexity of structural issues such as, energy vulnerability, inequality & poverty faced by the most vulnerable.

From the learning gained, we then raised the issues with our funders & had an allocation for interpreters incorporated into many projects. We also developed our 'Fuel Poverty Training Course' for frontline workers, with the aim of creating 'Community Ambassadors', to help raise awareness, disseminate the course knowledge & better support members of their respective groups & organisations.

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Forming links with local councils, the health & finance sectors & partnering with specialised local community organisations is crucial to reducing the 'gaps' in provision to the 'hard to reach' groups of people. The above examples highlight the challenges still involved in actually making a 'sustainable difference' once those positive partnerships happen & the structural 'top-down' institutional impacts that reduce resilience, limit people's capacity for development & put stress on the often charitable organisations ability to deliver effective services & continue functioning.

There's many more vulnerable 'Hard to Reach' groups that I haven't mentioned such as those with sight, sound & speech conditions, those living in rural, off-grid homes, those living in more 'middle-class' suburban areas who own their home, but haven't the income to maintain nor heat it, Gypsy, Traveller, Roma communities & those people who don't qualify for insulation & renewable energy grants.

The Green Doctor team do incredible work & we do it because we want to be part of 'enabling' someone who may have been less fortunate in life, to gain more control of their own circumstances, in the hope that their 'self-confidence & increased resilience' will contribute to a better future.

With sufficient funding, we & many other organisations, can offer support to these many types of energy vulnerable people & in many cases, we are able to 'make a positive difference' to someone's circumstances. Yet without significant, sustainable, political, economic & societal changes, the lives of millions of people will continue to be 'trapped' in cycles of poverty, at best struggling to get by, unable to fully participate in society or live in a warm, damp-free home.

Simon Kilshaw
Green Doctor Yorkshire Manager.

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