

**Beyond ill health:
Understanding the multiple
harms of fuel poverty through
the Capabilities Approach**

Victoria Pellicer (Universitat Politècnica de València)

Neil Simcock (Liverpool John Moores University)

The argument

- The well-being impacts of energy poverty are typically conceptualised relatively narrowly
- The Capabilities Approach provides a useful framework for understanding the **multiple** harms of energy poverty

The Capabilities Approach

- Well-being as the *capacity* to achieve valued states of being or undertake valued activities
- Requires access to social and material resources – including domestic energy services

Which capabilities matter? Nussbaum's theory of Central Capabilities

1. *Life*
2. *Bodily Health*
3. *Bodily Integrity*
4. *Senses, Imagination, and Thought*
5. *Emotions*
6. *Practical Reason*
7. *Affiliation*
8. *Other Species*
9. *Play*
10. *Control over One's Environment (Political and Material)*

Energy poverty's impact on the Central Capabilities

1. *Life*
2. *Bodily Health*
3. *Bodily Integrity*
4. *Senses, Imagination, and Thought*
5. *Emotions*
6. *Practical Reason*
7. *Affiliation*
8. *Other Species*
9. *Play*
10. *Control over One's Environment (Political and Material)*

Affiliation

“Being able to ... to engage in various forms of social interaction”

“Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation”

Now no one comes to visit us. Actually, it's me who doesn't want no one to come, I feel embarrassed if they see how we live. Here is frozen and dark.

Female, 40s, Valencia

Senses, Imagination and Thought

“Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason ... in a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education”

I love to read at night. I'd always loved it, it was a moment just for me. Now, I read but not for hours and hours... I don't want to spend electricity.

Female, 40s, Valencia

Practical Reason

“Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.”

You are ‘free’, but really you’re not free. The problem is that life goes by without you having had the chance to live it ... Do we really work just to be able to pay our utility bills?

Male, 40s, Budapest

Conclusions

- Energy poverty blights lives in multiple ways, beyond only ill health
- Qualitative methods offer a way to evaluate capabilities
- Eradicating energy poverty is a moral duty

Thanks for listening

n.d.simcock@ljmu.ac.uk