



Invisible Energy Policy and Energy Capabilities

Abstract This chapter explores the value of bringing thought about invisible energy policy together with key analytic endeavours in the field of energy poverty. It uses empirical material to develop understanding of how capabilities that are linked to experiences of energy deprivation are shaped by (non-energy) policy. Within this, the chapter explores the potential for the invisible energy policy orientation to advance existing work related to the ways that wider discourses and framings shape experiences of energy poverty issues. The chapter gives particular focus to the implications of relations between discourses of fuel poverty and those of broader poverty, arising from energy and welfare policy, respectively, extending analysis by exploring how such discourses act upon subjects in ways that affect possibilities for challenging conditions of energy poverty.

Keywords Invisible energy policy · Energy poverty · Welfare policy · Energy precarity · Capabilities

INTRODUCTION

This chapter uses in-depth empirical data derived from interviews with people implicated in welfare policy (see Chapter 1 for details of the research) to explore and draw together different conceptual ideas from across energy demand research (see Chapters 2 and 3 for a discussion

of key concepts). Centrally, it examines how the practice theory-inspired invisible energy policy agenda (Cox et al., 2019; Royston et al., 2018) can be combined with key ideas from energy poverty research (Day et al., 2016; Middlemiss, 2016; Middlemiss et al., 2019; Petrova, 2018) to create distinctive insights into energy deprivation.

The chapter looks at how policies in the non-energy area of welfare directly shape energy deprivation by affecting access to energy services and related capabilities. This aligns with previous invisible energy policy research (see Cox et al., 2019) but brings greater focus on the value of this research agenda for energy poverty. However, the analysis also goes beyond this to suggest the reorientation of perspective offered by looking outside of energy policy brings insights important for understanding the dynamics of energy poverty amid wider forms governance. I build from the assertion that using analysis of welfare policy as a starting point takes one outside of that which would conventionally form the focus for looking at issues of energy deprivation. It gives a view of governance processes that orients analysis beyond the existing categories and structures of government and policy at the outset (see also Butler et al., 2018). Specifically, the analysis reflects on the ongoing concern with the links and disconnections between energy and poverty, or across fuel poverty and wider poverty, and the wider structural conditions that are implicated in energy deprivation (e.g. Bouzarovski, 2018; Middlemiss, 2016; Petrova, 2018).

The chapter thus builds to develop the invisible energy policy agenda by going beyond analysis of more direct forms of policy influence on energy poverty to examine *policy discourses* across energy and welfare policy (cf. Middlemiss, 2016) and, crucially, develops this by examining the ways they act upon people and shape practice. This analytic endeavour works to show how policy and political discourses shape experiences of energy poverty in fundamental ways, and it reveals what they obscure in terms of understanding and addressing energy poverty. Centrally, it demonstrates how welfare policy contributes to marginalisation in ways that are inextricably connected to, and foundational for, experiences of energy poverty and its normalisation as part of everyday practice.

The analysis adopts an approach to energy poverty that builds from and advances the capability-based frameworks discussed in Chapter 2, drawing in practice theory ideas relating to invisible energy policy (discussed in Chapter 3). This conception is put to work in ways that afford a flexible approach to energy poverty looking across multiple services and elements

of practice. This includes those energy services conventionally addressed within policy (e.g. heat) but also those outside of current policy remits, such as mobilities and travel, or considered as only of minimal importance because of relatively low levels of direct energy requirement, such as information and communication technologies (ICTs). The chapter offers insight into the ways that the invisible energy policy agenda can have value for examining issues of energy deprivation and advances key lines of enquiry for understanding the dynamics of energy poverty.

LIVING WITH ENERGY POVERTY

The analysis in this first section highlights implications of major welfare reforms for capabilities related to energy poverty and unpicks policy distinctions between fuel poverty and wider poverty (cf. Middlemiss, 2016) building insight into broader social and political processes that shape the issues. In the following discussion, all extracts are labelled to distinguish between the type of interviewee (i.e. *biographical* for those affected by the welfare system, *stakeholder* for those with professional roles in this area) and the location of interview (i.e. *Bristol* or *York* as the case study areas or *national* for those working at this scale). They are also numbered to allow for different interviewees to be identifiable and where quotes are from the workshops this detail is added to the descriptor. For more detail on the methods see Chapter 1.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the period since 2010 in the UK has seen major reforms related to welfare provision for working-age people. Key changes include: (1) the introduction of new conditions for receipt of benefits (e.g. claimant commitments) and associated sanctions if these are not met; (2) work capability assessments for those currently in receipt of disability benefits and related cuts; (3) the introduction of a new system for delivery of benefits—namely Universal Credit—again with associated cuts to benefits in real terms and new monthly payments replacing weekly or bi-weekly ones; and (4) changes to housing benefit involving the introduction of the under-occupancy charge (or the bedroom tax) being applied to people living in properties deemed as having more bedrooms than necessary. The research here highlights how these reforms have severely affected multiple aspects of life that have key implications for energy poverty and related capabilities. The analysis explores this with focus on revealing how current policy definitions restrict recognition of the ways that experiences of energy poverty are intimately bound up with those of wider poverty. The first quote below highlights severe

domestic energy deprivation because of a person's benefits being stopped following a work capability assessment (WCA), in which the participant was deemed fit for work. The benefits were later reinstated after a lengthy appeal process through which the original WCA decision was overturned.

Interviewer: May I ask how you coped over that year when they stopped your payments?

Interviewee: With huge difficulty. Huge, huge difficulty. It was not an easy year at all. Definitely one of the hardest I've experienced. Yeah, very dark... it was a really bad situation.... In a lot of debt with bills and stuff... The power for the flat would turn off, sort of thing... I never had the heating on. Never, ever had the heating on. I only had it for hot water for showers...The flat was just horrendously damp... You know, blankets, all the rest of it. Just shiver. Yeah, it could get very cold in that flat..." (Biographical Interviewee 4, Bristol)

The prevalence of problems associated with incorrect assessments in welfare reform has been revealed by analysis of cases elsewhere across both academic research and news media (e.g. Duffy, 2014; Morris, 2013; Roulstone, 2015). The example here is to highlight the implications of such experiences for energy deprivation. The emphasis is on what one might think of as the conventional focus of fuel poverty policy—namely heat and electricity in the home—with these services either severely limited or lost entirely. This case brings to light the obvious and clear connections between policies that relate to poverty more widely and energy poverty. However, this clear overlap is more difficult to see or perhaps engage with from the technologically and efficiency-oriented perspectives that characterise much fuel poverty policy.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, though such policies utilise assessments of income they tend to emphasise building efficiency as the primary focus for resolution (also see Middlemiss, 2016). In this case, the house in which the participant lives had identifiable issues with building efficiency and quality (e.g. damp), but tackling this alone would not have addressed the problems the person faced in terms of energy deprivation and having basic capabilities, primarily because their income was at such a low level that building efficiency measures would still not have afforded them the capability to access adequate lighting and heat. Given this, the quote brings into focus an initial set of questions about the distinction between fuel poverty and wider poverty.

Centrally, in examining experiences like the one above some of the inherent problems with such distinctions become apparent. Clearly, the issue here was not one solely of energy efficiency or being able to afford heat but was bound up with their inability to pay for any basic daily needs for an extended period. This, in turn, resulted in mounting debt that left a legacy even when the person's benefits were eventually reinstated. In this example, then, the role of welfare policy in shaping energy deprivation is direct and clear but by virtue of a policy distinction, would not be considered as an example of fuel poverty; rather, this would simply be poverty.

Across the research, the inextricable links to wider poverty and the production of energy deprivation were clear (see also Mould & Baker, 2017). The next example concerns a participant who experienced six months of sanctions for failing to attend an appointment. She also was struggling to repay emergency loans provided through the welfare system and had become subject to the so-called bedroom tax following her partner's death (which resulted in her two-bedroom flat being reclassified as under-occupied).

I can't afford to heat that [home] at all, no. I don't. Just put a quilt round me, dog's got a little blanket, can't afford it. The night storage heaters I can't afford to use...The cooker don't work so I've been without a cooker for the past three years so I've only got a toaster and a kettle, basic....
(Biographical Interviewee 8, Bristol)

This example goes beyond issues of energy affordability to highlight limited access to energy services related to materials and infrastructure but not confined to efficiency. The participant talks about their lack of basic appliances for cooking, as well as the specific form of heating system they have (electric storage heaters), which tends to be more expensive. A capability-based approach to energy poverty brings focus on how these conditions shape possibilities for access to food and mental health as well as the more often acknowledged implications of cold for physical health. The orientation of the research toward invisible energy policy brings focus onto the wider systemic processes and policies shaping these conditions. Noticing the impacts of welfare policy on energy poverty highlights challenges associated with both narrow definitions of the problem and policy solutions confined to energy efficiency.

This orientation also directs attention to more specific forms of cross over between policy areas that are otherwise not in view. For instance, existing fuel poverty policy only addresses problems with income through the winter fuel payments (for those in receipt of state pensions only) and the cold weather payments—the latter of which is allocated based on receipt of existing benefits (and other vulnerability characteristics). The advent of processes that stop people receiving benefits (such as capability assessments) has implications, then, not only for income more generally but also for access to the limited fuel poverty policies targeted at income issues. Such changes within welfare policy thus both compound issues of energy deprivation and affect access to forms of fuel poverty support.

The next example addresses wider dimensions of welfare policy—beyond eligibility assessments, sanctions, and cuts—that shape energy deprivation, focusing on policies that result in people being more likely to live in poor housing. Key dimensions of welfare policy related to housing, both historically and in the context of contemporary reforms, have had important implications for energy deprivation. Historically, major reforms to welfare policy have seen housing move from a position where it was predominantly built and owned by the state to one of private construction and ownership (see Butler et al., 2018), such that ‘proper’ housing consumption is now synonymous with home ownership (Petrova, 2018). These processes along with recent reforms related to the level of benefits for housing and the removal of payments direct to landlords (see Chapter 4 for discussion) have seen increasing concentrations of people on welfare in private rented sector accommodation (as opposed to council or social housing).

...people are being pushed more and more into bad landlords as they can't afford to live anywhere else.... (Stakeholder Interviewee 2, National Agency)

As highlighted in Chapter 4, private rented sector accommodation has often been neglected within fuel poverty and wider policy, with limited steps taken to regulate the sector and ensure housing meets efficiency standards. Even with contemporary regulations, significant problems remain in enforcement, with local councils being largely responsible but lacking in funding to support major programmes of action (BEIS, 2021). The research data were revealing not only in terms of the poor quality of housing experienced by the participants, but in terms of other dimensions

of policy that restricted their ability to select appropriate or better-quality housing. The next extract speaks to how a combination of reforms and processes for accessing housing within welfare provisioning shapes not only experiences of domestic energy poverty (related to the quality of housing) but also forms of deprivation related to transport and mobilities (arising from the location of housing). In line with Middlemiss et al. (2019), the relations between capabilities and energy poverty are cast as complex with social relations (a basic capability) ultimately shaping the ability to negotiate better housing conditions within systems that tend not to support vulnerable people.

Basically [Name], my housing [provider], they told me that this was my only option... When I look back on it now and the position I'm in, they weren't actually allowed to do that. I could have refused it. They would have had to offer me somewhere else. But at the time I was so vulnerable emotionally because I just wanted to get away from where I was and they just offered me this...I constantly have problems with them now, with my housing. (Biographical Interviewee 6, Bristol)

This participant experienced problems with their quality of housing, having issues with mould and damp, and their location, being distant from family, friends, their work and services. This underpinned a lack of adequate warmth and created requirements for travel but without the means or access to fulfil them. Bound up within this participant's narrative were multiple ways that these issues, related to energy services, shaped their capabilities, such as their ability to maintain social relations and to have mental and physical health. But as highlighted above their capabilities were also important in the processes through which these forms of energy deprivation were initially constituted (cf. Middlemiss et al. 2019). The extract above exposes two important ways that welfare policy shaped these experiences: first, it points to the relevance of constraints on people who are subject to welfare policy in terms of choice in housing; second, it highlights the ways that forms of capability are shaped by wider policies and structural processes to result in further marginalisation. In particular, this participant discusses their social relations and vulnerability at the time of negotiating new housing as affecting their allocation. Underlying all of this, of course, is the prevalence of poor and inadequate housing but I argue that the processes through which people in contexts of low income are pushed into inadequate housing are equally

as important to examine. This resonates with Großmann et al.'s (2014) findings in the German context, where mechanisms of housing market discrimination and subsequent residential segregation were shown to have caused low-income households to live in low-quality housing. In later work, Großmann and Kahlheber (2017) argue that such processes remain largely invisible in the context of energy poverty research and policy, occluding the recognition of wider systemic processes in the constitution of energy poverty. By looking outside of energy policy, in this case to experiences of welfare policy, analysis is afforded greater possibilities for understanding the wider processes that underpin the creation of energy poverty.

All this undermines the idea that there is a wholly positive outcome of upholding a firm and clear distinction between energy poverty and wider poverty. However, it is not to say there is nothing distinctive about energy poverty—quite the contrary. This type of evidence also demonstrates the *essential* nature of energy in being able to enact practices and fulfil multiple basic capabilities, such as those related to living a healthy life, and if anything reinforces the importance of addressing it with targeted policies. However, it does also bring into sharp focus the insight that the causes of energy poverty could be better addressed both within energy policy and in wider policy through greater attentiveness to the interlinkages between issues.

This argument about interconnection can be taken further by looking at the ways that energy poverty further entrenches poverty more generally. In the quote below, the participant discusses challenges related to their low income that was destabilised as they transitioned to Universal Credit. The focus in this part of the narrative is on access to transport as an important energy service that supports multiple capabilities, in this case relating to the ability to secure income.

I don't go out because I can't really go out... Say if you have meetings or appointments or like a job interview or whatever, it's the most embarrassing thing asking where it is or whatever and then having to walk all that way. (Biographical Interviewee 10, Bristol)

Here, the participant highlights the implications of energy deprivation for capabilities relating to social respect and access to work or income. This foregrounds the interrelations between energy poverty—in this instance related to mobilities—and wider poverty as access to work and income is

restricted. Their ability to afford and use transport options was, in turn, shaped by changes within welfare policy that saw cuts to their income as well as changes to the timing of payments. In other work, Mattioli et al. (2017) have noted the recursive link between transport poverty and economic stress, highlighting issues such as car dependency required for access to work. The above quote foregrounds the role of transport poverty in affecting possibilities for accessing work at all through constraining abilities to participate in interviews and meet appointments. This signals a cyclical relationship between energy poverty and wider poverty highlighting again the importance of engaging with the relations between these issues. It is possible to see how energy poverty when understood in terms of capabilities—as opposed to building efficiency and income—can underpin and shape experiences of wider poverty in fundamental ways. As much as being a subject of welfare policy can have serious implications for energy deprivation, then, so can lack of access to energy services shape the reproduction of poverty.

In analysing the interlinkages between energy poverty and wider poverty, an important point has been articulated about the very different politics of fuel poverty policy as compared to welfare policy (which is meant to alleviate poverty) or indeed wider political discourse about poverty (Bouzarovski, 2018; Middlemiss, 2016). Middlemiss (2016) highlights how while welfare policy has long been entrenched in notions of deserving and undeserving subjects, of individualised causes characterised in terms of personal deficits (e.g. in willingness to work or skills) (e.g. see Butler et al., 2018; Pemberton et al., 2015), the subjects of fuel poverty have been cast in a very different blameless light where recipients are positioned as worthy of support and help.

This foregrounds a central challenge relating to the conclusions one might reach from the analysis here. While I have problematised the boundary between fuel poverty and wider poverty, the very distinctiveness which obscures the links between policy areas also creates room for both a governmental budget that does support those living in (fuel) poverty and a far less punitive discourse around the issues. However, the next section addresses questions about the differing discursive repertoires of those subject to both welfare policy and energy poverty and opens up the analysis of the fuel poverty/poverty distinction further. The research data suggest that such differences in the framing of fuel poverty and wider poverty do not necessarily translate into more positive experiences for those people that are subject to both narratives. The analysis highlights

the institutionalisation and normalisation of practices that evolve from living without energy as an important way that political discourses and policies—beyond energy policy—shape experiences of fuel poverty.

LIVING WITHOUT ENERGY

There has been much discussion within policy and analysis of fuel poverty about issues of *self-disconnection* and the closely associated idea of *self-rationing* (e.g. Hargreaves & Longhurst, 2018; Meyer et al., 2018). The former involves people on prepayment meters not putting money into their meters and therefore being without access to energy in their domestic context. The latter refers to people deliberately limiting their energy use for reasons of income and affordability. This would include things like not using the heating system in a house or not using appliances for cooking and is already exemplified in the extracts discussed above. These forms of under-consumption are highlighted in the data as important foci for attempts to address energy poverty. However, in this section, I want to look in more detail at such forms of practice and examine the role that political discourse and policy plays in their normalisation as part of everyday life.

The research here highlights issues that go beyond ideas of self-disconnection and self-rationing—both of which infer something of a conscious somewhat calculated choice that is a temporary measure. Instead, I show how self-disconnection is often a regular and *enforced* part of coping with insufficient incomes that mean people cannot afford basic energy costs, and how self-rationing is for many normalised as part of everyday practice and connected to feelings about the self (such as worthlessness) that are, in part, engendered by policy. In these cases, the issues are not ones of a calculated short-term self-disconnection or rationing but concern ‘living without energy use’ as a normal part of life for reasons of unaffordability. Crucially, this is not necessarily related to the effectiveness of a heating system or building fabric, nor to access to suitable infrastructure or appliances, for example in transport or cooking. Rather, it concerns daily living practices in which energy services are to some extent considered a luxury good that a person can be expected to live without. With this first extract, I highlight the contention that self-disconnection is often not a conscious or calculated decision but something that people are forced to live with:

...every morning I wake up freezing cold. I know I could put the heating on, but say I put it on... like it doesn't maintain where there are so main draughts... You just learn to live with it. I think that's what you do... It makes you feel worthless. You haven't got no place in the world because nobody even knows or cares you're even here, because the government's just paying for you. (Biographical Interviewee 6, Bristol)

This extract attests to the ongoing and persistent nature of experiences of living without warmth. Notions of self-disconnection or self-rationing appear wholly inadequate to characterise the experience of waking to the cold every day. Importantly, in this quote, the pejorative welfare narrative of undeserving subjects, rather than the more positive discourse of fuel poverty, is reflected in the description of being made to feel 'worthless'. This suggests the overwhelming dominance of prevailing narratives about wider poverty, such that any subversions that might be offered by 'fuel' poverty as a specific category do not readily connect with or shape lived experiences and affective engagement. Instead, lack of access to energy services feeds into the negative individualised narratives of undeservedness. This is particularly problematic if considered in terms of the ways it may limit self-identification of energy poverty and thus be detrimental to responses and wider political mobilisation (cf. Petrova, 2018). In this next quote, as elsewhere in the research, the focus is on the normalisation of self-rationing as part of everyday life.

I don't put the heating on until it is freezing, I've got blankets and throws everywhere, I'll just put a jumper on and put that over my knee, I don't put the heating on until it is really cold because it costs a lot of money and I don't ... It does get warm, if you have that one on and the little one on but it just costs so much money, I'd rather just put a jumper on, *I'm used to living in the cold, when I was young we didn't have any heating, we just had a fire when I was little so I'm used to cold, it doesn't bother me! It's fine.* (Biographical Interviewee 1, York)

In this extract, the participant—who is in receipt of disability benefits—discusses not using their heating unless 'it is really cold' as a normal part of her life and characterises it as 'fine' explaining how the cold 'doesn't bother' her. This can be related to other work on energy vulnerability and precarity where participants often reject the characterisation of themselves as living in fuel poverty (Day & Hitchings, 2011; Petrova, 2018). But such narratives can also be seen as related to the normalisation of

energy precarity as part of everyday life (Petrova, 2018). These forms of positioning are potentially exacerbated by decarbonisation discourses that stress self-restraint and rationing without recognition of those people who should be using more to maintain basic capabilities, such as health and wellbeing. This also resonates with a concern that runs through the capabilities literature relating to how to determine or understand needs in any given context (Day et al. 2016). The normalisation of deprivation is important in this respect as it speaks to challenges in characterising needs from bottom-up perspectives.

The forms of accepted energy deprivation and under-use at issue here were common across the participants' narratives, with many not identifying non-use of energy as an issue but accepting it as a normal part of life. Again, in this next extract, the participant—who in this case has young children—discusses not using the heating as a way of coping with low income and unaffordability of energy.

I don't really use the electric fire, it's more for show... so [I cope] by not using things really. The heating only goes on if it's really cold, things like that. (Biographical Interviewee 5, York)

Such descriptions of lives characterised by energy self-rationing in ways that affected capabilities extended far beyond heat to other forms of energy use, both within and beyond the home. For example, participants discussed processes of 'cutting back' on many other energy services from transport to communication technology.

Interviewer: "Could you tell me a bit more about the impact of that [benefits cuts]?"

Interviewee: "You know, having to cut back on shopping, gas and electric, having to cut back on going places in the car... So it's sort of luxuries, little luxury things... It's like my mobile phone..." (Biographical Interviewee 7, Bristol)

Here, the participant characterises multiple basic energy services as 'luxuries' further exemplifying normalisation of expectations surrounding lack of access to energy services. In addition to domestic uses of gas and electricity, this participant refers to energy services associated with transport and information and communication technologies. These energy services have been highlighted in research as having heightened significance for multiple capabilities within contemporary life (Day et al., 2016; Mattioli

et al., 2017; Petrova, 2018; Simcock et al., 2016). Indeed, several participants cited transport needs, in particular, as something they would often forego out of necessity, again often normalising this as part of everyday practices.

The only thing that I think that does impact us going out sometimes is bus fare and things like that. Really since we've moved... I feel really bad because we have not left [the area], we're always stuck here. I know it sounds silly, but £4 for a bus can be quite expensive sometimes.... ...We walk everywhere really, yeah. ... (Biographical Interviewee 3, Bristol)

Within the literature on transport poverty, the focus has tended to be on affordability of fuel and tendencies for lower-income groups to both live in areas with fewer transport options and drive older less efficient cars or be subject to enforced car ownership (Mattioli, 2017; Mattioli et al., 2017). As in the example of heating above, there has been little examination of people that do not access transport at all, instead opting to walk—sometimes very long distances—as their only option. Importantly, this set of quotes attest to the ways that these forms of deprivation, which relate to capabilities in multiple ways, are normalised. Such processes of normalisation by those subject to the welfare system connect back to literature that highlights how oppression and marginalisation shape what people see as acceptable in terms of human needs (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010; Mahali et al., 2018). Crucially, I argue here that discourses of welfare and undeserving subjects appear, in part, to shape expectations regarding access to energy services in ways indicative of an acceptance of energy poverty. This is revealing for the ways that poverty and energy poverty overlap in terms of the differing discursive narratives that characterise these policy areas (Middlemiss, 2016). Though as highlighted above fuel poverty is characterised by less pejorative discourses than welfare policy, the analysis highlights now this does not necessarily translate into experiences.

The research data in this chapter speak to the foundational nature of energy poverty in compounding and perpetuating poverty more widely. The challenges of being able to access employment, for example, are highlighted and the role of energy services in the cyclical nature of wider poverty is brought to the fore (Macdonald et al., 2020; Mattioli et al., 2017). The limited direct support for energy needs within welfare policy arguably also compounds processes of normalisation around lack of access

to energy services, as people are met with expectations for them to be able to fulfil such needs, such as travel to interviews, without (further) support—at least not at the point it is required. These normalised experiences of living without energy use, of not using transport methods other than walking, of not turning heating on, or of not cooking or using lighting, also create issues in identifying people that need help (including in cases where local services make referrals). The below quote from one of our local stakeholder participants highlights this issue.

I suppose the other bit for me is I can sit here and say I work with very vulnerable people, but actually they might not think themselves as vulnerable. When you're talking about fuel poverty...we're talking about *generations that have had nothing, so actually that's normal for them, that's their ordinary life*.... there are a huge amount of people that won't [take help] and they will sit in their living room and they will go cold and they won't eat meals, or they'll just provide for their family, because they don't see themselves as vulnerable, they're just surviving. (Stakeholder Interviewee 3, York—Workshop)

This is again indicative of the normalisation of energy poverty and its deep relation to entrenching poverty more generally. Such processes of normalisation and institutionalisation are damaging, then, in perpetuating poverty precisely because they affect the extent to which people do (or even can) mobilise to change their situations. Petrova's (2018) research has highlighted normalisation and institutionalisation of energy deprivation specifically amongst young people living in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and the private rented sector. She asserts that the production of precarity reflects governance processes and approaches that enshrine home ownership as 'proper' housing consumption and neglect strategic interventions that ensure decent housing provision in these sectors.

The data discussed here chime with Petrova's analysis but suggest further that acceptance of energy deprivation is pervasive, reaching across different working-age cohorts affecting people living in very different circumstances, and even those typically positioned as vulnerable within policy (e.g. disabled people, young children). In the case of this research, focusing as it does on people affected by welfare policy, the mechanisms of 'bearable acceptance' identified by Petrova (2018, p. 26) are comparable with the troubling forms of complete normalisation that here can be

seen as arising, at least in part, from politicised individualised discourses of ‘unworthy’ and ‘undeserving’ subjects. I argue such normalisation also arises from the constitution of expectations for accessing energy services and engaging in forms of practice, without recognition of the constraints people face. But this is addressed further in the following chapter.

In Petrova’s research, the temporality of the present was a salient aspect of precarious situations as the young people that were the focus of her study accepted poor living conditions based on their being provisional and non-permanent (even if this in some cases was not borne out over time). There is a temporality too in the narratives of energy deprivation arising from the research here, but as the quotes above attest this was one of cyclicity and perpetual precarity (see also Macdonald et al., 2020), such that this becomes accepted as a normal feature of life. In this instance, then, it is the ongoing—rather than short term—nature of the difficult conditions in which people are living, allied with entrenched narratives of undeservedness, that serve to institutionalise energy poverty and decrease the space for political contestation. Arguably, this space is also further limited by the separation between fuel poverty and wider poverty, which though important and ‘pioneering’ (Bouzarovski, 2018, p. 10) in many respects belies a lack of interrogation of the connections between them, such as the central significance of energy services in contributing to the cyclical temporalities that characterise poverty.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

By looking at an area of invisible energy policy—namely welfare policy—and examining the ways that it shapes capabilities related to energy services, the analysis in this chapter has taken a first step toward realising some of the insights afforded by drawing together these areas of energy research. In this conclusion, I reflect on the implications of the analysis for advancing understanding of energy poverty, including what is gained by shifting the analytic focus beyond energy policy.

To begin, it is clear from the analysis presented here that the by now widely accepted argument of fuel poverty extending well beyond contemporary preoccupations with heat and older people is crucial for understanding problems of energy deprivation. The focus in this research was on working-age people, intentionally excluding analysis of welfare policies related to older people as this group has been given the most attention historically in energy poverty analysis and policy (Simcock

et al., 2016). Examining working-age people has been revealing both for thinking about other groups (beyond older people) and for considering the ways that energy is intricately interwoven with multiple capabilities essential for social participation (e.g. relating to work), including but also going far beyond heat and domestic settings. This chapter thus speaks to the value of an expanded understanding of energy poverty as affecting multiple different groups and entailing access to energy services to support capabilities, but takes this further to suggest the value of such an approach for more fluid engagement with multiple domestic energy uses *and* mobilities.

By looking at welfare policy as an area of invisible energy policy, this research has brought into view the ways that policies outside of energy have important implications for energy services that connect with people's capabilities, such as those related to health and wellbeing, but also income and social respect. This brings focus onto invisible energy policy as an important agenda for understanding not only the formulation of increasing patterns of energy consumption and over consumption, but the reproduction of under-use and energy poverty. In this, I highlight both more direct forms of policy intervention and wider political narratives and framings as important foci for analysis (see Butler et al., 2018). Welfare reforms have been examined here for their more direct roles in shaping people's energy-related practices and experiences of under-use, affecting basic capabilities. But the wider discourses that pervade welfare policy and fuel poverty policy domains have also been examined for their role in shaping processes of normalisation and the social reproduction of energy poverty. Overall, the analysis of welfare policy has been important in bringing into view the relations between energy poverty and wider poverty, highlighting the importance of attentiveness to the interconnections.

Much prior research has tended to focus on emphasising the distinctiveness of energy poverty given the hard-fought battles to have it recognised as a separate issue with requirements for policy to address it. In this context, while there are clear links between welfare policy and energy deprivation, and between fuel poverty and wider poverty, it is not as simple to conclude that poverty should be the focus of policy, rather than fuel poverty. There is history here and there are positives to the identification of fuel poverty as a distinctive issue—not least the budgetary allocations and obligations on suppliers to fund supportive measures to address this issue (Bouzarovski, 2018), as well as the depoliticisation of

the subjects of fuel poverty policy in contrast to welfare policy (Middlemiss, 2016). However, there are issues identifiable in the research here concerning how such positives translate into lived experiences.

Centrally, this research offers insight into how the pejorative discourses of welfare policy appear as far more dominant and prevailing within the narratives of many of those experiencing (energy) poverty, than the ‘worthy’ subjects of fuel poverty policy. Indeed, not only here but across the growing literature on lived experiences of fuel poverty more generally, it is difficult to find a case where such depoliticised understandings of what it is to be subject to fuel poverty are expressed (e.g. Chard & Walker, 2016; Willand & Horne, 2018). This means that while it is useful within policy and politics, it does not necessarily have such effects within the lived experiences of energy poverty. One consequence arising, at least in part, from the inculcation of such subjectivities is the apparent normalisation of severe energy deprivation (Petrova, 2018). Such normalisation is problematic in terms of the way it constrains political mobilisations around the issues, preventing energy poverty from being brought to light. And it is relevant to challenges of identifying and targeting help and support as people do not self-identify as in need of help or recognise that they would be entitled. Though there is significant scope within policy for local implementation and allocation of fuel poverty measures, which can better attune to specific circumstances, this does not fully overcome challenges in contexts where entitlement is both derided and obscured.

This is not a call, then, for the subsumption of fuel poverty into the wider category of poverty, but rather for the recognition of energy poverty as an even more fundamental underpinning to multiple social issues. Crucially, the research here reveals that energy deprivation contributes in fundamental ways to the cyclical patterns of poverty identifiable within wider literature (e.g. see Macdonald et al., 2020). Highlighted here are the ways that different forms of energy poverty, across domestic lives and within mobilities, relate to capabilities in fundamental ways. Where other societal problems, such as health, are often in focus when it comes to energy poverty, the tendency has been to avoid confrontation of the relations between energy poverty and wider poverty. However, I argue that the importance of addressing energy poverty is underscored, rather than undermined, precisely by recognising its connections to wider poverty and the ways these relations are important to processes of reproduction.

Finally, the analysis also nods toward the importance of thinking about the politics of under-use, its normalisation and social reproduction, together with practice theory-based ideas about the specification of need (Shove et al. 2012). In the next chapter, I turn to wider concepts from practice-theory based analyses to examine the dynamics relations through which need for energy is constituted. This takes in the wider systemic and seemingly non-energy-related processes contributing to creating needs and examines them as central to understanding the reproduction of energy poverty. The analysis brings recognition of the ways that the patterns and trends that shape rising consumption for those with financial means, also have implications for the capabilities of those without. These arguments are advanced by the analysis in the next chapter, where I move to focus on the constitution of energy demand and the ways that this, which is typically the focus of practice-based energy sustainability research, can be revealing for understanding energy poverty.

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