

# Cold homes harm NZ youth health and schooling

February 13 2017

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Credit: University of Otago

A new study from the University of Otago, Wellington has found that young people are experiencing increased health problems, stress, and adverse social effects from cold housing.

The article in the journal *Social Science and Medicine* – Population Health by Dr Kimberley O'Sullivan at He Kainga Oranga/Housing and Health Research Programme was co-authored by researchers from the University of Otago and more unusually, young researchers from Waiopahu College in Levin, Horowhenua.

"Collaboration was at the heart of this study, with one goal being meaningful participation of [young people](#) as researchers working on the study to identify an issue that was important to them, develop the survey,

undertake analysis, and report the research findings," Dr O'Sullivan says. "They deserve to be named as authors and we're proud of the research we have done together".

Together the youth and adult researchers developed a nationwide survey of youth, which was completed by 656 Year 10 students from 17 schools across the country. Interviews carried out using email supported and expanded on the survey findings.

Almost half of the survey respondents (47 per cent) felt their home was sometimes [cold](#) during the winter; a further 40 per cent felt their home was often or always cold. This is almost double the number of adults reporting their home is often or always cold from a recent Statistics NZ survey. More than two-thirds of respondents (70 per cent) had shivered inside at least once during winter. More than one in eight youths (13.2 per cent) were contributing to paying for the household bills.

Young people from around the country made such comments as they "get stressed about homework because it's too cold to do it, too cold to think". They also described having bedrooms that were cold enough that they avoided using them, studying in other rooms of the house, and sometimes sleeping in the lounge.

Students from Waiopahu College involved in this research will present these results and more tomorrow at the 21st Public Health Summer School at the University of Otago, Wellington.

"Year 10s told us their homes are cold, it is an issue for them, and they want Government to fix it. We feel it's important to be involved in the research process and to make sure that youth voices are heard, so we're happy to be presenting the results and making them publicly available." Kelly Carline, Year 12 student of Waiopahu College says.

"This research has found that as well as the previously identified problems with keeping well physically and mentally, cold housing has youth-specific outcomes like affecting social and family relationships and whether they can comfortably do their homework." says Dr O'Sullivan. "Time and again our research finds that living in private rental housing increases the risk of experiencing living in cold homes and fuel poverty. Young people are adding their voices to the calls for Government to do more to improve the quality of housing and access to affordable heating."

**More information:** Kimberley C. O'Sullivan et al. Cool? Young people investigate living in cold housing and fuel poverty. A mixed methods action research study, *SSM - Population Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ssmph.2016.12.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2016.12.006)

Provided by University of Otago

Citation: Cold homes harm NZ youth health and schooling (2017, February 13) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-02-cold-homes-nz-youth-health.html>

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