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Briefing Paper:

Life in Lockdown in Wales

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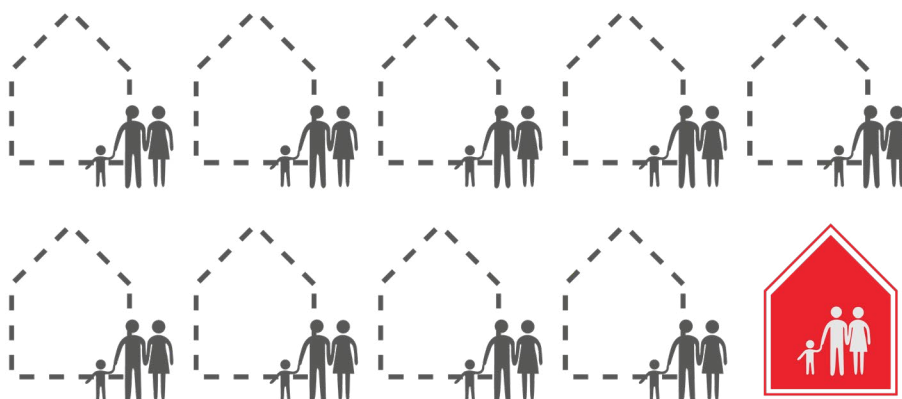
Life in lockdown has been hard, but it has been much harder for some people than for others.

Covid-19 has exposed huge inequalities in Welsh communities. It has shown how people on modest incomes have suffered the worst financial impacts, and how people in poor quality housing have been more exposed to the virus. It has shown how, for some people, home is not a safe space: domestic violence increased in lockdown, and some children and young people have been exposed to violence and abuse at home.

This briefing paper presents data on people's experiences of home during the initial lockdown period. It is based on a national YouGov online survey¹ carried out towards the end of that period in July 2020². The timing of the survey allowed us to take into consideration many of the key policy changes relating to lockdown rules.

These findings give us a better understanding of the lives of people during lockdown in Wales. Only from gaining this understanding can we prepare for the possibility of similar situations occurring in future.

Summary of key findings



10% of households with children - the equivalent of 63,000 children -³

**had no access or not enough access to outdoor space
(including garden or communal garden) during the lockdown period**

1 All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,017 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 10th and 14th July 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted (unless specified otherwise) and are representative of all Welsh adults (aged 18+).

2 The lockdown period officially began in Wales on 23rd March 2020 and easing of restrictions began on 6th July 2020

3 Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data



More than one in three with children (38%) – the equivalent of **220,000 children** –⁴
lived in homes that saw a **decrease in income** during lockdown



An estimated 7% of parents/guardians with children – the equivalent of
30,000⁵ children – had to **choose between paying for food or**
paying housing costs before and during the lockdown⁶



Only 42% of private tenants said their current home set-up would
enable them to self-isolate very effectively

⁴ Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data

⁵ Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data

⁶ 5 per cent before the lockdown happened and 2 per cent during the lockdown – net figure of 7 per cent



32% of families with children

experienced problems in their home

such as damp, mould, electrical hazards, and leaking roofs or windows

more than half (54 per cent) were unable to get any of the problems resolved by the end of lockdown, whether they tried to get them fixed or not⁷

- By the end of lockdown an estimated 14,913 private renters⁸ (4 per cent) had been asked to leave their homes due to falling behind with their rent



18% of families – equivalent to 114,000 children⁹ –

lacked a computer or laptop

⁷ Caution: small base size of 63 respondents qualifying

⁸ Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data

⁹ Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data



while **16% of families – equivalent to 101,000 children¹⁰ –**
did not have access to a home
broadband connection

Did people have enough space at home?

People were asked if they would describe their home as having enough or not enough space during lockdown: 11 per cent of people felt that they did not have enough space, rising to 17 per cent of private tenants and 29 per cent of social tenants.

In total **10 per cent of households with children – the equivalent of 63,000 children¹¹ – had no access to outdoor space** during the 14 weeks of lockdown.

One-fifth of private renters and nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of social renters had no access to outdoor space¹² during lockdown.

Many people felt that their home **did not work effectively** during self-isolation. Among the people surveyed who felt self-isolating was not effective at all¹³, they indicated that two ways to improve lockdown conditions would be to have an additional room in the household (28 per cent) and to be able to go outdoors (26 per cent - who said this could be through having access to the countryside or access to a garden or a bigger garden). More than half of private tenants (54 per cent) and 61 per cent of people living in social housing felt that an additional room and being able to go outdoors would have improved lockdown conditions.

Among people who expressed concerns about not having enough space in their homes, three-quarters (75 per cent) said that their **mental health had deteriorated during lockdown**, compared with just over half (53 per cent) of people who felt they did have enough space.

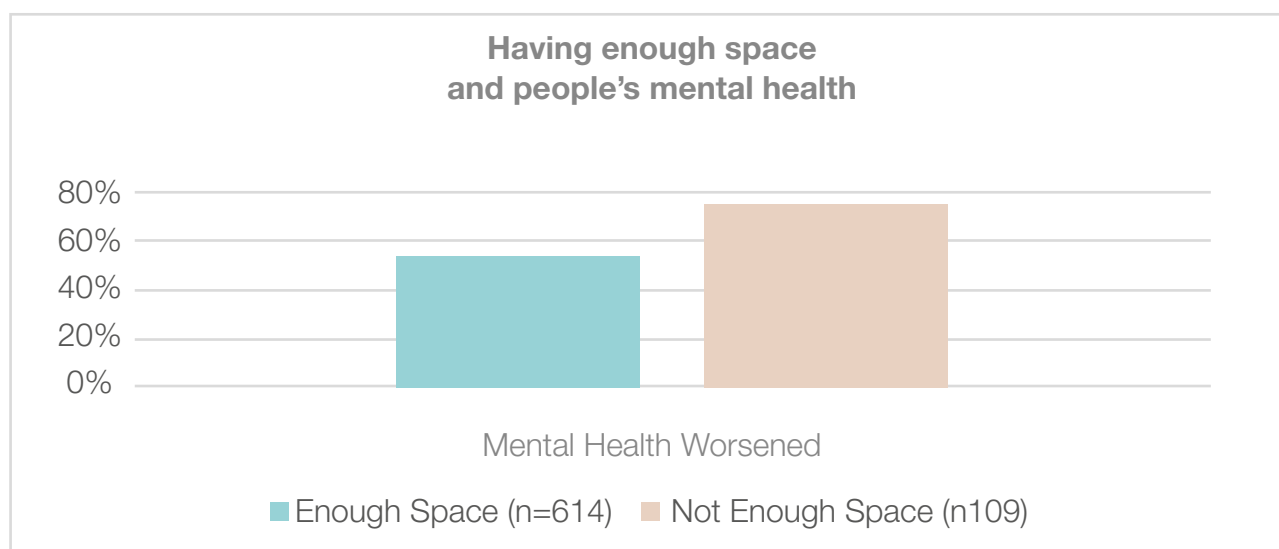
¹⁰ Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data

¹¹ Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data

¹² Outdoor space refers to a garden or communal garden

¹³ 109 respondents

Table 1: Percentage of people with and without enough space who felt their mental health had worsened since the start of the lockdown¹⁴



Did people's homes have what they need to live and work?

Nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of respondents were expected to work from home for the first time as they switched from working at their workplace, **although only 44 per cent of them had an office or study** to work from. More than a quarter (28 per cent) of people working without a study said that additional rooms in the home would have improved their experiences of lockdown.

The proportion of people without an office or study was higher for people renting their homes in the social sector (96 per cent) than in the private sector (81 per cent).

Although parents were expected to home-school their children, **many lacked basic equipment** to do so:

- 18 per cent of families – **equivalent to 114,000 children¹⁵** – lacked a computer or laptop
- 16 per cent of families – **equivalent to 101,000 children¹⁶** – did not have access to a broadband connection in their home
- Nearly one in five children (18 per cent) – **equivalent to 120,000 children¹⁷** – had an unreliable or unstable internet connection at home.

These barriers to learning are reflected in recent research which suggests that 72.5 per cent of pupils accessed less than an hour of online learning per day¹⁸. A lack of digital access will have had a negative impact on children's education and in some cases exacerbated already-existing educational inequalities.

¹⁴ Unweighted figures

¹⁵ Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data

¹⁶ Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data

¹⁷ Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-53082152>

What conditions were people living in?

More than a quarter (26 per cent) of people told us that they had **one or more problems with their home**¹⁹ of whom less than a quarter (24 per cent) said that all problems were resolved.

People renting their homes were more likely to experience problems with their homes: 41 per cent of private tenants had at least one problem, of whom 61 per cent said **none were resolved** during lockdown whether they wanted to get them fixed or not.

Experience of **mould, damp and condensation was highest among private tenants** (21 per cent), compared with 13 per cent of social tenants. Nearly one in five households with children (19 per cent) reported issues with mould, damp and condensation. Spending prolonged periods of time in these conditions may cause reduced lung function and chronic health conditions, such as asthma²⁰, as well as negatively impacting people's mental health²¹.

Impacts on people's finances

Overall almost one in three people (29 per cent) said that their personal disposable income had decreased during lockdown. The **people hit hardest financially were the people on the lowest household disposable incomes**²², 37 per cent of whom said their personal disposable incomes had decreased.

More than one in three children (35 per cent) – the equivalent of 220,000 children²³ – lived in homes that saw a decrease in income during lockdown. An estimated 30,000 children²⁴ (5 per cent) lived in homes where parents or guardians had to **choose between paying for food and paying housing costs**.

Some people found themselves with more personal disposable income and they tended to be from the higher household disposable income groups²⁵: 43 per cent of people on the highest incomes, and only 13 per cent of people on the lowest household incomes²⁶, found they had **more money in their pocket** during lockdown (i.e. via an increase in personal disposable income).

19 Problems in your home refers to problems with damp and/or condensation; problems with leaking roof/windows, electrical hazards, fire hazards, poor insulation/excess cold, problems with mould, problems with pests/animal infestations, poorly secured locks and doors, gas leak, problems with flammable cladding that has not been replaced, problems which may cause falls, a fire in the home, broken appliances that were provided with the home, problems that pose a direct danger to you or anyone in your household, and other problems.

20 [https://theconversation.com/health-check-how-does-household-mould-affect-your-health-48341#:~:text=Inhaling per cent20mould per cent20fragments per cent20or per cent20spores,health 20problems per cent20such per cent20as per cent20asthma](https://theconversation.com/health-check-how-does-household-mould-affect-your-health-48341#:~:text=Inhaling%20mould%20fragments%20or%20spores,health%20problems%20such%20as%20asthma)

21 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1994167/>

22 This refers to respondents whose personal disposable annual income was lower than £15,000 per year

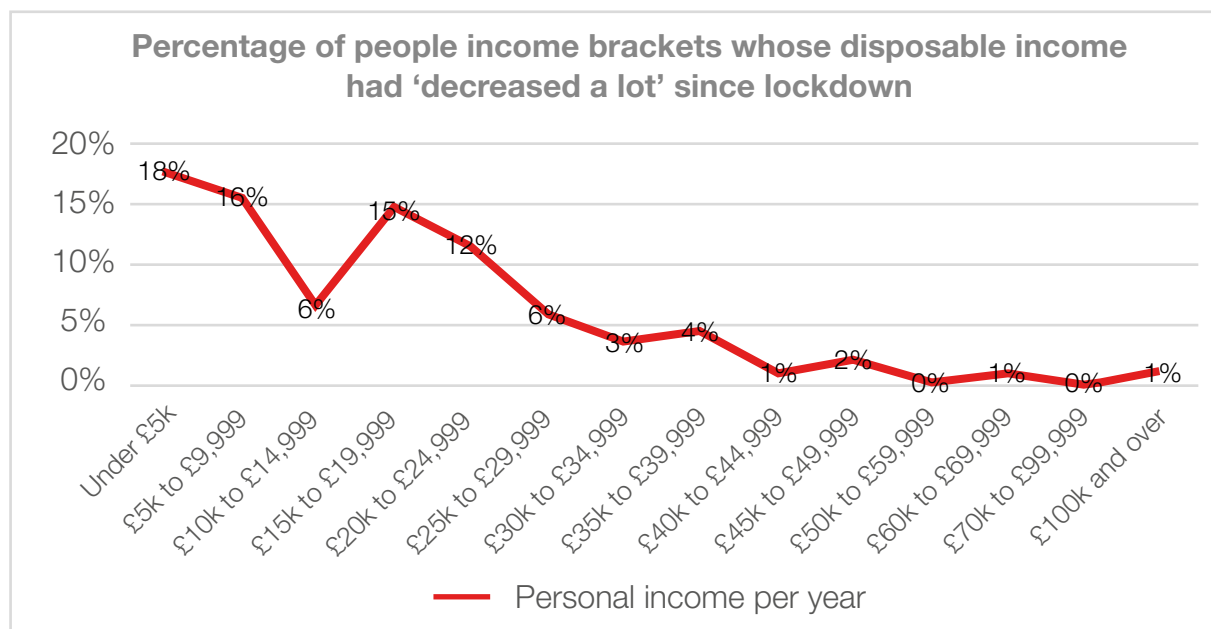
23 Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data

24 Calculations done by Shelter Cymru based on Census 2011 data

25 Higher household disposable income was £60,000 and over with 96 respondents from overall sample

26 Lowest household disposable income was £15,000 or lower with 174 respondents from overall sample

Table 2: Percentage of people in income brackets who said their disposable income (e.g. income after paying rent or mortgage, electricity and water bills, food, etc.), had decreased a lot since the start of the lockdown²⁷



More than half of private renters (58 per cent) and social renters (53 per cent) said that they **had too little, or no communication, from their housing provider** through the lockdown period. When asked what would have made their experiences of lockdown better, 19 per cent of private tenants and 17 per cent of social tenants said they would have benefitted from more information about financial support and housing rights.

Conclusions

This survey shows the extent of problems in Wales' housing stock and the impact of those problems during an exceptional time of crisis, when people had very limited opportunities to be out of their homes due to Covid-19. People on modest incomes and households with children were hit particularly hard.

Shelter Cymru is committed to tackling the root causes of the housing emergency that is causing so many people to have to struggle in accommodation that is expensive, poorly designed and badly maintained.

We are campaigning for a Wales in which homelessness and bad housing is a thing of the past.

²⁷ Unweighted figures

Together with other members of the Homes for All Cymru coalition, we are calling for:

- funding to support the development/acquisition of 20,000 social sector homes in the next Senedd term (excluding Help to Buy and taking into account the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Affordable Housing Supply). We estimate that this would require an investment of £1.5-£2billion over the Senedd term
- meaningful investment within the social housing sector and work to develop models and approaches to enable decarbonisation in the private rented and owner-occupied sectors in the next Senedd term in order to implement the recommendations of the Independent Review on Decarbonising Welsh Homes
- funding for support to be increased to meet need
- adequate funding for public services so that legislation and policy can be effectively implemented, including enforcement where needed.

We are calling for manifestos of all parties in the 2021 elections to:

- prioritise investment in new social housing and in retrofitting of existing homes across tenures
- use this investment as a stimulus for jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities and supporting Welsh supply chains
- commit to action that will end homelessness in Wales as set out in the March 2020 report from the Homelessness Action Group
- commit to increased funding for support
- the right to adequate housing made a legal and practical reality in Wales.

https://sheltercymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Homes-at-the-core-of-post-Covid-recovery_XPHG-discussion-paper-1.pdf

If you would like to discuss this paper further, contact us at policyandresearch@sheltercymru.org.uk.