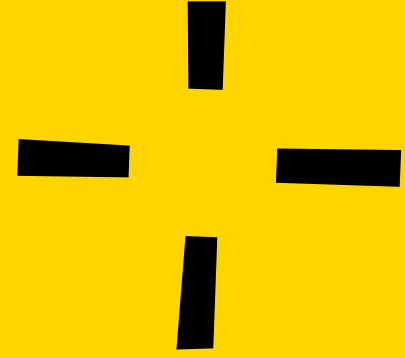


FUEL CRISIS REPORT



FOREWORD

Fuel Bank was launched in 2015 to support prepayment meter customers of all British energy suppliers who have to make a distressing choice between heating or eating: quite simply, when the money runs out the meter does too, and the lights stop burning and the gas stops flowing. We were concerned about the drastic impact that living without energy had – on health and wellbeing, on education, and on resilience, and was alarmed that the issue was largely hidden and not talked about.

The work that Fuel Bank Foundation does is vital in providing same day support to households in crisis to enable them to get access to energy for the basics, to heat their homes and cook and giving them the breathing space to get back on their feet and resolve underlying issues. At the same time clients also receive advice detailing additional help to give longer term support for sustainable energy use. Over the past five years we have helped more than 400,000 people across Great Britain over £6 million of fuel crisis funding has been provided to Fuel Banks.

The impact of COVID-19 on our clients has highlighted the plight faced by many consumers up and down Britain. From highlands and islands of Scotland to the very tip of Cornwall, restrictions have meant more time than ever is spent at home, working, schooling, and socially distancing, and therefore using more energy on heating and lighting, placing extra pressure on already stretched household finances. **Like-for-like Fuel Bank need has increased by approximately 23% since the outbreak of COVID-19. This masks however some the local spikes in need that we have seen, where demand has increased by over 300%.**

COVID-19 has also highlighted the reality for many of running out of money for gas and electricity. For some this is something that has happened in the past, and for many years, and was a common event when growing up.

But for an alarming number, COVID-19 has brought this about for the very first time, with many finding themselves without the support networks or tried and tested ways to get through a gap in household finances where you are forced to literally live without energy. The impacts of waking up one day cold, unable to cook a hot meal nor keep food chilled, not able to have a warm shower or wash clothes and no access to wi-fi or TV for school learning, and unable to connect with family or society is significant and should not be understated.

National and devolved governments, the regulator, charities, and the energy industry have provided additional and much-needed support to prepayment customers during the COVID pandemic. This includes enabling the creation of additional Fuel Bank capacity, where over the last 12 months we have welcomed 42 new partners to join our network. Through this report we highlight our clients' experiences and share our insights to help inform and shape future policy that will provide the best outcomes to those that need it most and move towards our vision of people in Britain living without energy being a thing consigned to history. Until that point, it is essential that consistent and guaranteed crisis support is available for families who otherwise would 'self-disconnect' and live without energy.

Living without energy, without heat, light and power has untold impacts on families across Britain and we urge you to share some of our conclusions and to support us in ensuring that we do whatever we can to avoid this in the future.

Thank you for your support.

Matthew Cole

Matthew Cole, Chair of Trustees



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE NEED FOR THIS IMPORTANT SUPPORT

➔ **The support provided by Fuel Bank Foundation is invaluable** to the many who have had to make difficult decisions when it comes to basic physical living needs:

96% The vast majority of those we spoke to (96%) have had to make the choice between topping up their meter and buying food for their family. Of these, 60% have to make that choice every day or weekly.

91% Have to ration when using heating and hot water – of these, 76% have to ration every day or weekly.

80% Four fifths (80%) have had to make the sacrifice between having a cooked meal and relying on cold food instead – 49% have had to make that choice daily or weekly.

➔ Our findings show that 89% of people that reached out for Fuel Bank support are **currently struggling to top up their prepayment gas and/or electricity meters**. Of those surveyed 82% said that the COVID-19 crisis and **national lockdowns had made them more worried** about running out of money to pay for energy.

➔ Fuel Bank Foundation crisis support is clearly **hugely important and much needed** amongst those who are facing financial hardship.

HOW FUEL BANK VOUCHERS CHANGE LIVES

➔ Fuel Bank vouchers have a significant impact on the lives of those who have received them – physical wellbeing has significantly improved for 85% and mental wellbeing has improved for 89%.

➔ The impact this support has on lives is two fold – firstly, it enables basic physical needs to be met such as a warm home, a warm meal and personal hygiene. These are all factors of life which most deem as normal, but for the people we spoke to and many others who need this support, these are a luxury.

➔ Many mention struggles with mental health as a result of money, food and living worries. By having their physical wellbeing improved by the Fuel Bank vouchers, there is a sense of relief from these worries, even if just in the short term.

FUTURE SUPPORT WILL BE REQUIRED

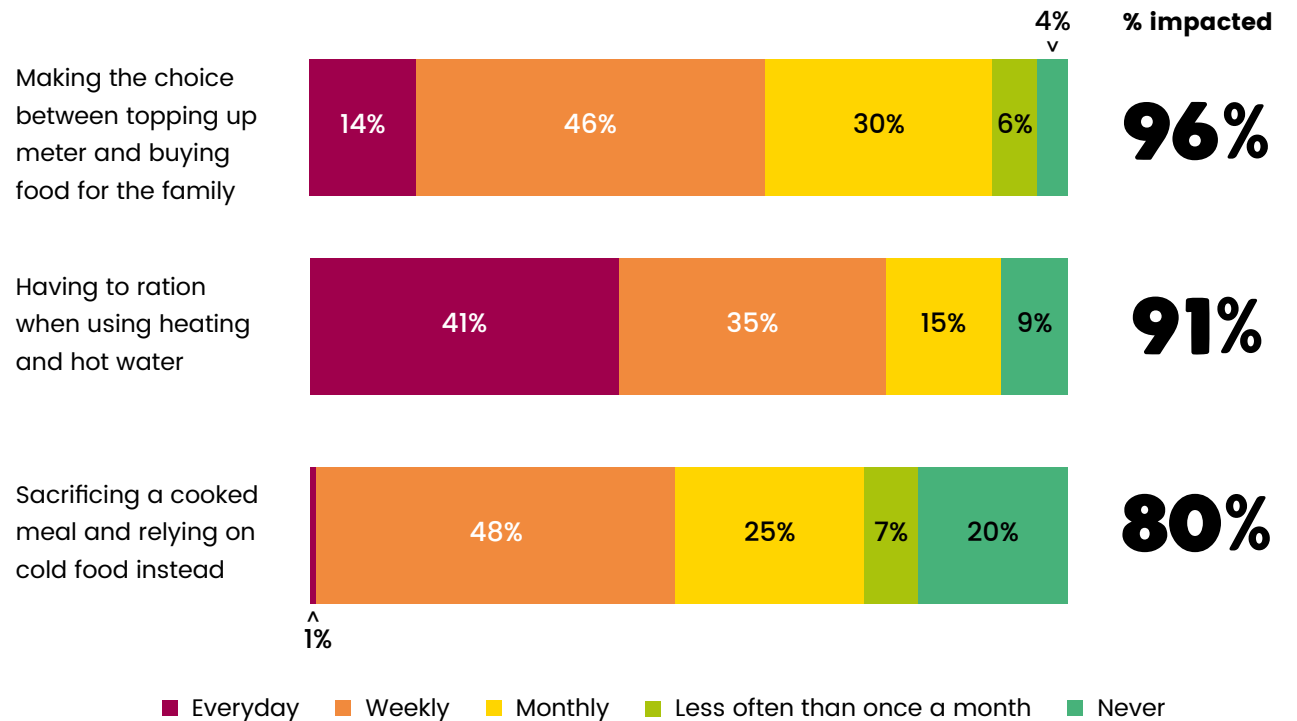
Fuel Bank Foundation provides an invaluable support service and there is a high and increasing need for future support – almost nine in ten (89%) people that we spoke to are struggling today to top up their meters and eight in ten (81%) are struggling with essential household bills. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, living and financial situations are likely to worsen nationally and the need for support may increase further.

“Physically, I wasn’t even taking a bath I was saving up the money, mentally it was impacting my health, I was losing my health, I saw a decline in my health, I was cutting down on so many things. I was holding off with the laundry, even going out looking for a job because you need washed clothes.”

“When they stopped my benefits I was so stressed I didn’t even think of electricity I just thought of food. When I was at the food bank and they mentioned the Fuel Bank voucher, I just felt like I had won the lottery. It was a massive weight off my shoulders. They saved me from doing something stupid.”

THOSE IMPACTED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

The support provided by Fuel Bank Foundation is crucial in helping the many who have had to make difficult choices when it comes to basic living needs – from rationing heating and hot water, to sacrificing hot meals for cold food and making the choice between heating or eating.



WHEN THE FUEL BANK VOUCHER WAS PROVIDED...

The findings highlight the complex circumstances that led people to seek financial support from Fuel Bank Foundation.

Many people that we spoke to were already calling upon a range of measures, so they may have been borrowing money to keep their meter working whilst using emergency credit and then in some cases running out of gas and electricity, causing their meters to be switched off – all in a potentially short timescale and a variety of sequences of events.

The majority of those who end up in this situation were or had been borrowing money from friends or family and using emergency credit on their meter – it's likely they had exhausted their options for support and had no choice but to self-disconnect.

RUNNING OUT OF FUEL COMPLETELY AND HAVING METERS SWITCHED OFF IS THE MOST EXTREME SITUATION.

38%

had run out of gas and electricity causing meters to be switched off

69%

were using emergency credit on their meter

59%

were borrowing money from friends/family to keep their meters working

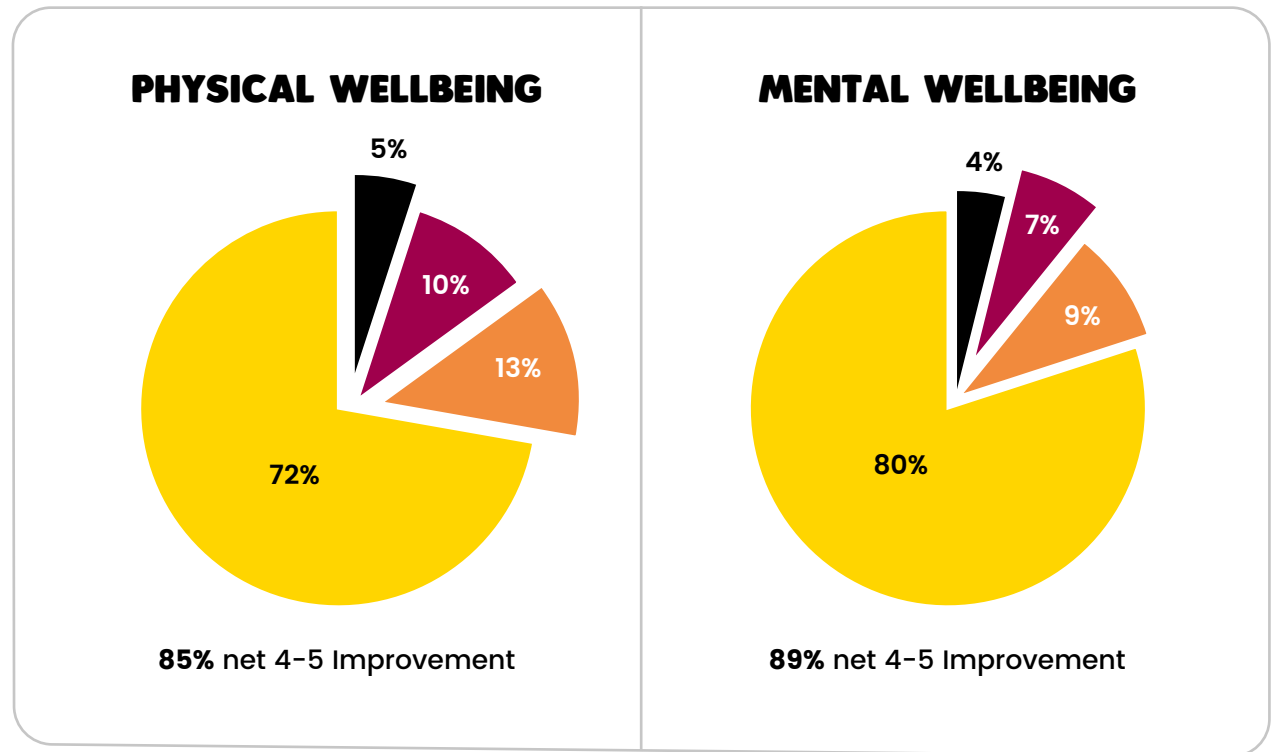
THE IMPROVEMENT THE FUEL BANK VOUCHER HAS MADE TO FAMILIES

The vast majority who have received Fuel Bank vouchers feel they have made a significant improvement to both their physical and mental wellbeing.

Amongst the minority who said the Fuel Bank voucher had no/little impact on their mental and physical wellbeing, comments relate primarily to a feeling of appreciation at the time, but concern around current struggles and the worry returning.



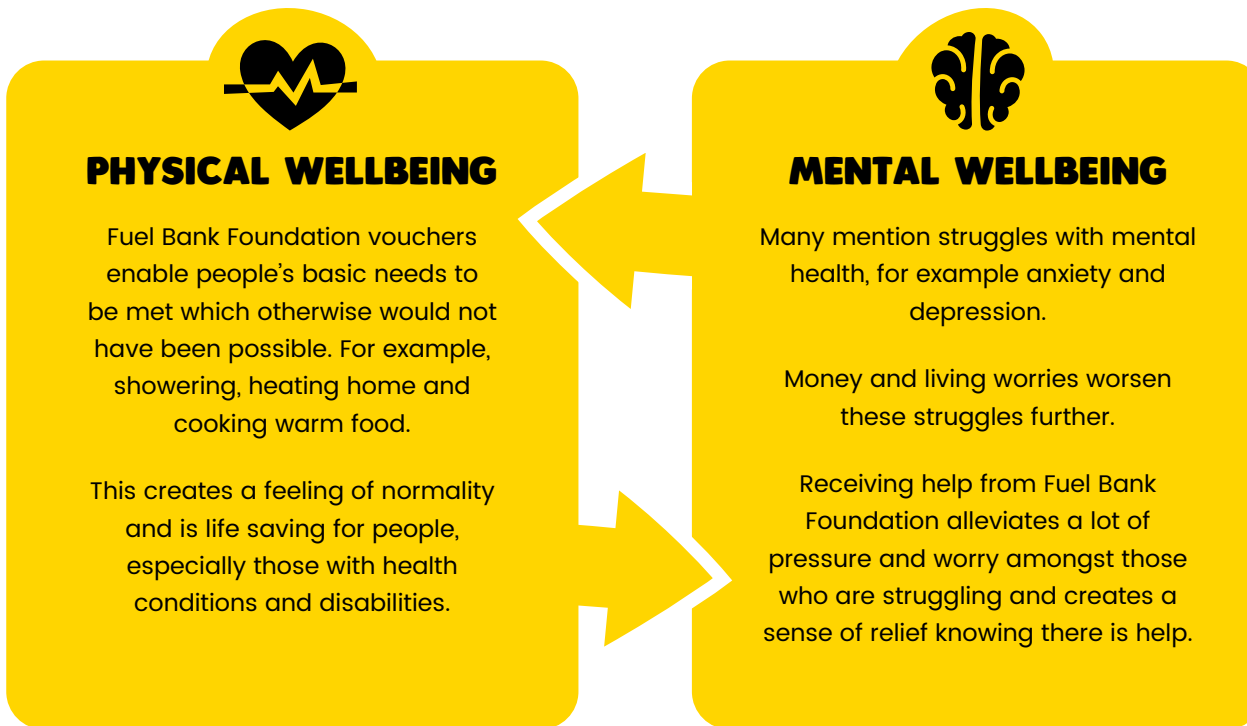
I WAS HAVING MONEY ISSUES AND I WASN'T IN BEST PLACE WITH DIFFERENT THINGS IN MY FAMILY LIFE AND MONEY WORRIES BUT BEING ABLE TO COOK, CLEAN HAVE A SHOWER WHEN YOU WANT AND DRY WASHING ON THE RADIATOR ON RAINY DAYS ALL LIFT YOUR SPIRITS.



■ No/little improvement at all (1-2) ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 - Significant improvement



The improvement Fuel Bank vouchers make to mental and physical wellbeing comes hand in hand, when people's basic physical needs are met their mental wellbeing improves as this provides some relief from the significant worry. This further supports the importance and need for this crucial support service.



Clearly, mental and physical wellbeing are dependent on one another. Improving one improves the other which is why the support from Fuel Bank Foundation is so important.

“I have a high depressive and anxiety disorder. I was really relaxed, my head wasn't going overtime. It is nice to sit in the warm and have warm dinners.”



“It kept us warm, well it made us happy. We had heating, we could have showers.”



“I would be able to walk around the house with ease rather than sitting still under blankets to keep warm, was getting lethargic sitting still to keep warm.”



“It made us be able to cook and clean i.e. bath for work so we could resume the normal life.”

“I suffer with arthritis and my son does too, we were worried as it was turning very cold and we worried how to keep ourselves warm, we had to use hot bottles. Massive relief once it was sorted I could get to the job centre.”

“We were struggling and we had to go to the food bank as well, it helped me to put the electricity back on, my son has health problems and I had to make sure that there was electricity so that he could take his medication.”

“They helped me out and we are really grateful for what they are doing. I get upset when things are running out, and it affects me and my daughter I get worried. I panic when things are running out.”

THE IMPACT ON FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

The offering of support to families with children is of huge importance.

50% OF THOSE WHO WE SPOKE TO HAVE CHILDREN



- Those with children are significantly more likely to feel that the COVID-19 pandemic has made them worry more about running out of money to pay for energy (92% feel worried compared to 72% of those without children).
- Understandably, parents speak about the additional worry that is placed on them when money difficulties cause them to struggle with food and electricity. This further highlights the importance of Fuel Bank Foundation and the offering to families with children.

FUTURE SUPPORT

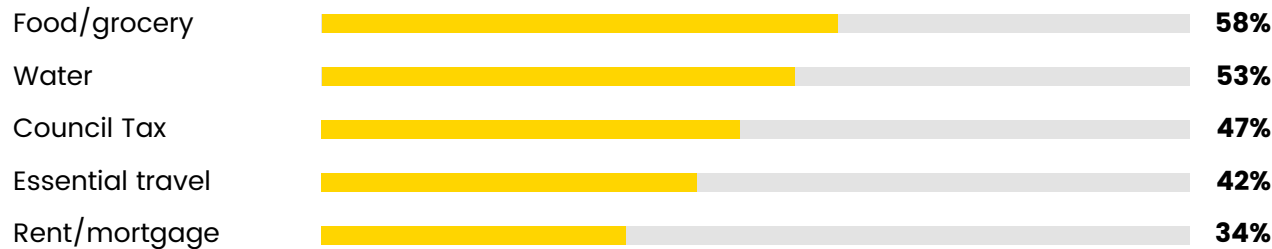


Clearly there is a great need for future support – almost nine in ten people we surveyed are struggling today to top up their meters, and eight in ten are struggling with household bills. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, living and financial situations are likely to worsen nationally and the need for support may increase further.

89% ARE STRUGGLING TO TOP UP THEIR GAS &/OR ELECTRICITY PREPAYMENT METERS

Of these 51% are running out of money to keep their meter topped up monthly, 39% weekly and 6% everyday.

81% ARE STRUGGLING WITH ESSENTIAL HOUSEHOLD BILLS, MAINLY FOOD & WATER



COVID-19

82% agree that COVID-19 and lockdown has made them worry more about running out of money to pay for their energy. Families with children are significantly more likely to worry (92%) than those without children (72%).

As the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic continues, further employment and financial implications are likely and the situation amongst some may deteriorate further. Support from Fuel Bank Foundation and partners will be key during this time.

THE WAY FORWARD

Fuel Bank Foundation makes a huge difference to the lives of those who access the service and there continues to be a need for this support going forward, particularly in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Fuel Bank Foundation will continue to work with our strong network of partners to provide immediate support for people who struggle to afford access to gas and electricity.

Over the last year the charity has expanded its reach and is delighted to have enriched the existing partner network and is working with new partners in healthcare, money advice, local crisis support, housing and Local Authorities. We will continue to secure additional funding and will seek new partners to help us reach more people and improve the lives of people living in fuel crisis.

We want fewer households to have to experience fuel crisis and we will continue to engage and work collaboratively with stakeholders to drive positive policy change to support this.

Our priorities are:

- Driving a greater recognition of self-disconnection as a poverty and not an energy issue; removing it from being something that is largely hidden, to something that we can consciously avoid.
- Helping the energy sector think about the additional measures they can put in place to mitigate the factors which lead to self-disconnection. We support the roll out of smart prepayment meters and encourage that the opportunity is used to engage with prepayment customers to educate and advise about available support.
- Ensuring that government policy reflects the differing costs households incur for energy, the cross-departmental impacts of living without energy including health and education, and considers how more targeted support can be provided.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 381 respondents were interviewed between 26th October and 1st November 2020 across Britain. All of the people that we contacted had previously accessed Fuel Bank services. Of this sample, 74 respondents took part in a telephone interview and 307 through a SMS survey.

In the 12 months before you received the fuel bank voucher, how often had you made the choice between topping up your prepayment meter and buying food for your family?

Base: CATI (74) + SMS (307) = 381

In the 12 months before you received the fuel bank voucher, how often did you have to sacrifice having cooked meals and relied on cold food instead?

Base: CATI = 74

In the 12 months before you received the fuel bank voucher, how often did you have to ration when you used heating and hot water?

Base: CATI = 74

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is no improvement at all and 5 is a significant improvement, how much of an improvement did the Fuel Bank voucher make to you and your family's mental wellbeing at the time?

Base: With an opinion CATI (72) + SMS (307) = 379

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is no improvement at all and 5 is a significant improvement, how much of an improvement did the Fuel Bank voucher make to you and your family's physical wellbeing at the time?

Base: With an opinion CATI (73) + SMS (307) = 380

Do you have any children?

Base: CATI = 74

To what extent do you agree that COVID-19 and the coronavirus lockdown has made you worry more about running out of money to pay for your energy?

Base: All with an opinion CATI = 73

Do you still struggle to afford to top up your gas and/or electricity prepayment meters today?

Base: CATI (74) + SMS (305) = 379

How often do you run out of money to keep your prepayment meters topped up?

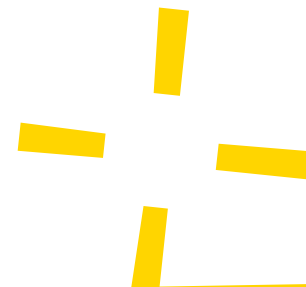
Base: All who struggle to afford to top up meter
CATI = 53

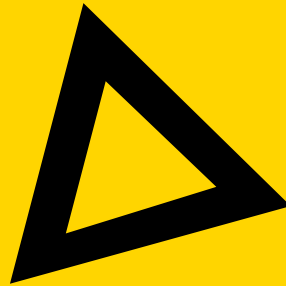
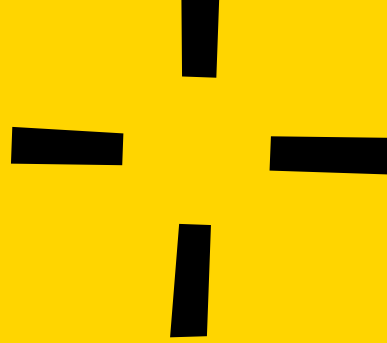
Do you struggle to pay any other household bills?

Base: CATI = 74

To what extent do you agree that COVID-19 and the coronavirus lockdown has made you worry more about running out of money to pay for your energy?

Base: All with an opinion CATI = 73





FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like to know more about Fuel Bank Foundation and its work and how you could support us:

Visit: fuelbankfoundation.org

Email: team@fuelbankfoundation.org

Fuel Bank Foundation is a registered charity in England & Wales (1175049) and Scotland (SCO48330)
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