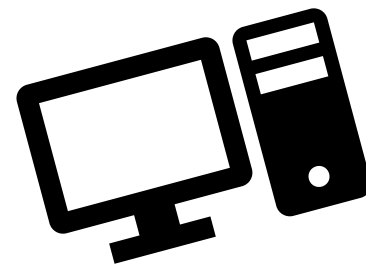


# The Relationship between Housing Inequality and Digital Exclusion in the UK

Dr Hannah Holmes and Dr Gemma Burgess

## Digital exclusion

- Devices, internet connections, skills, and motivation
- A continuum of inclusion-exclusion, rather than a stark divide (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007)
- 21% of people in UK lack basic digital skills (Lloyds Bank, 2021)
- 6% of UK households don't have broadband (Ofcom, 2021)



## Digital exclusion and poverty

- Digital exclusion should be viewed as a prominent component of deprivation in the 21st century (Robinson et al., 2015)
- Focus on individuals' skills and motivations risks overlooking broader inequalities which digital exclusion is rooted in (see Helsper, 2017)
- Tackling digital exclusion will require addressing poverty more broadly

## Research

- 18 semi-structured interviews
- Coaches and participants from a one-to-one coaching programme aiming to support people to get online, manage their money, and find work
- Focused on experiences of digital exclusion



# Digital exclusion and housing inequality – the literature

- There is limited literature on how housing circumstances shape experiences of digital exclusion.
- The UK government's Digital Inclusion Strategy (2014) acknowledges that people living in social housing are more likely to face digital exclusion (partly due to socioeconomic factors (see Yates et al., 2014)).



# Housing Type

- Construction materials can create a barrier to internet access
- In temporary accommodation, a lack of certainty can prevent people from taking out broadband contracts.
- A lack of a permanent address can be a barrier:
- 'We can't get broadband where we are... the post office won't recognize the address, so we can't get any broadband... We [spent] about four months trying to get [broadband], and in the end we gave up.' – Peter

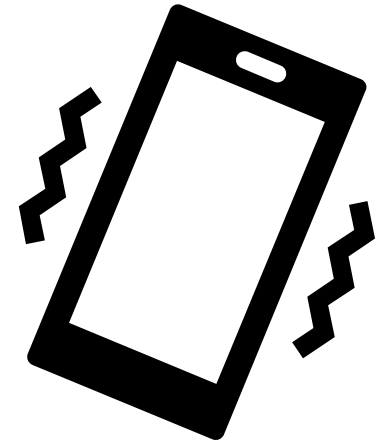


# The Spatial Dimension of Digital Exclusion

- Housing circumstances can limit access to online opportunities even when a person can get online:
- “I had tried [to do online food shopping], but because I was in a fourth floor bedsit – it was in the attic – they wouldn’t deliver to me. I’m like, ‘I don’t even care if you dump it outside the front door or by the back gate’, but no, they wouldn’t.” – Alex

# The catch-22 relationship between housing inequality and digital exclusion

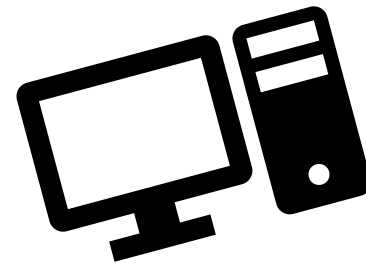
- Bidding for social housing is often done online
- 'When we were looking for a house [to bid on], we just saw small photos on [the] phone. We didn't have any access or anything in the temporary house. Nothing... One thing I remember when we took this house [that we currently occupy], the company that gave us the house, they said that the application, you cannot open it on a phone. We just asked our relatives to bring their computer, we just filled it in outside in the street, and gave him back the computer.' – Omar





# Conclusions

- A need for further research focused specifically on how housing circumstances shape experiences of digital exclusion
- Digital exclusion is embedded in structural inequalities
- Technical fixes will not be sufficient in the long-run



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