



### The Impact of Poor Housing on Mental Wellbeing

#### Transcript:

#### The Mental Health and Wellbeing of Elders in Black and Minority Ethnic Communities

#### The Impact of Poor Housing on Mental Wellbeing

Adam Jones: The people who came over in the fifties and sixties are now older. And in many cases when they first came to Britain they couldn't access local authority accommodation. Many people moved into poor quality, either owner occupation or private rented accommodation. And now these people, the needs are getting greater, it is a growing section of the community; one researcher described it a few years back as a time bomb, because it is something that people hadn't really addressed.

Narrator: According to Adrian Jones, who has written several reports on housing for black and minority ethnic elders, the link between poor housing and mental wellbeing cannot be underestimated.

Adam Jones: We are not just talking about bricks and mortar, we are talking about people's quality of life; housing is an absolutely crucial element. Shelter and food are the two basic things people need, and it can have a major impact on your mental health.

Narrator: Mrs. Robotham has lived in her own home in Bristol for twenty-six years with her son Michael. She found that the poor state of her bricks and mortar was taking its toll.

Petrona Robotham: That smell coming up to you is not lovely, so I would say, oh my god what am I going to do, because it is wet, it is mouldy, and so it would probably stress me out if I didn't get help.

*Level that out please Mike.*

Michael: Sure, hold that.

Petrona Robotham: Yes, thank you.

Narrator: Like many older people of all backgrounds on low income, she didn't have the funds to fix the damp in her home, and the problem was affecting her mental wellbeing.

Adam Jones: I think there can be real problems of actually addressing the close relationship between housing and mental health. Some service providers are better than others, and we are seeing people becoming more aware of what they need to do for these particular people.

Individual people will have different needs, which is why we need a whole range of solutions and approaches to meet those needs.

Narrator: Adrian Jones believes that while older people from all backgrounds can be affected by housing conditions, black and minority ethnic groups can find it harder to access housing services. So are local authorities taking a person-centred approach to housing as a means of promoting mental wellbeing for black and minority ethnic communities?

Martin Hodges: For day to day work it is absolutely imperative that we look not just at the fabric of a house, but the way it is occupied, and what is important for all of the household. And when we do a holistic approach to understanding what is actually needed in the house we recognise that actually other agencies can deliver a very sensitive service, so we will accordingly signpost the clients to them.

Narrator: The charity, Bristol Care and Repair, are commissioned by the local authority to provide housing support services for home owners and private tenants, but they see their role as much wider than that.

Lindsay Hay: The conditions you are living in are absolutely vital to your health and your wellbeing, so if somebody is looking at a wall, for example, that is mouldy, it is not going to be helpful for their mental wellbeing. It is also maybe an embarrassment to them, and they shy away from social contact because of that.

The anxiety that is associated with a house that is in disrepair, sometimes it is quite small things like a patch of damp has appeared, where is the money going to come to pay for the work, and that can really pray on their minds.

Having an organisation such as Care and Repair, people know that they can contact easily and it is always on hand to help, I think it takes away that worry.

Narrator: Mrs. Robotham is one of Bristol Care and Repair's clients.

Petrona Robotham: *I think we have enough here, okay, alright.*

Narrator: Widowed nine years ago, she cares for her son Michael who has learning difficulties.

Petrona Robotham: *Who is there?*

Colin: *Hello Mrs. Robotham, Colin from Care and Repair.*

Petrona Robotham: *Can I see your ID please?*

Colin: *Sure thing.*

Lindsay Hay: Mrs. Robotham basically lives on her state pension, and she was struggling to cope with the maintenance of her house.

Narrator: The local authority fund the caseworkers and handymen at Bristol Care and Repair. Typically the caseworker then helps access local grants and charity funding to carry out works.

In Mrs. Robotham's case they used this approach to take down a dangerous chimney and address damp.

Lindsay Hay: She suffers from Asthma, so having mould spores circulating in her bedroom really isn't good for her. Having a dry and warm house will reduce the impact of these conditions.

Narrator: But one problem had a greater impact on Mrs. Robotham's mental health than any other.

Petrona Robotham: One day I cried living tears because I could not come into the garage. I didn't know what I was looking for because it was so full.

Narrator: The garage was full of her deceased husbands belongings, and her son Michael was adding to the pile.

Petrona Robotham: I just shouted, My god Michael what are you doing? And I called his sister and said, I need help. It really brings stress to me, you know. And I didn't have the money at the time to get somebody to come in and clean it up, and I couldn't.

Judy Mead: *Hello Michael.*

Michael: *Hi.*

Narrator: Recognising the impact on Mrs. Robotham's health her case worker Judy Mead got funding to clear the garage.

Judy Mead: *Nice to see you again, I haven't seen you for ages.*

It is really important for Mrs. Robotham to have that because she was really worried that her son wouldn't stop collecting things, and leaving them in the garage, until they actually had a fresh start.

*How is your health? I know you weren't too well last time I saw you.*

Petrona Robotham: *Yes, I am getting a bit better now, because the medication seems to be picking me up a bit better.*

Judy Mead: *Yes, you certainly look better than when I last saw you.*

Petrona Robotham: *Thank you, thanks.*

Judy Mead: *Have you got any other concerns that you think I could help you with?*

Lindsay Hay: Often people from black and minority ethnic population may have additional issues around organising repairs, or adaptations to their properties. They may have communication issues relating to language, or cultural needs that maybe aren't so easily translated to your average contractor working in Bristol.

- Male Speaker: *Hello ladies and gentleman. Now whenever we go upstairs we remove our shoes and cover the head. So I would request everybody to cover the head; there are some handkerchiefs you can take over there.*
- Narrator: At Bristol Care and Repair employees, from handymen to caseworkers, are invited to go on cultural awareness tours of local spiritual centres, organised by the charity Support Against Racist Incidents.
- Male Speaker: *Right, we would like to go upstairs now, and then we will discuss about Sikhism. If there are any questions I will be quite pleased to reply if I could.*
- Female Speaker: *Do prayers take place over the book at any other time of day, so that when we are visiting it is better to avoid visits at certain times of day.*
- Male Speaker: *Certainly people who are baptised there is a special programme for them. Because in the morning they will have their shower, after that one there is a ...*
- Jos Clarke: To go into their homes dressed respectfully at an appropriate time of the day, to take my shoes off if that is the desire of the household. It just means that I can start to form a relationship with people which has sustainability, because I need to maybe work with people for a year, two/three years.
- Martin Hodges: We recognise increasingly that once we go into a house it is a workplace to us, but more importantly it is a home to them. We take on board that we are there to do more than just deal with the property, we are there to help people, that is our mission statement. So if we can confer on the back of the work we do a positive outcome in terms of mental wellbeing, and physical wellbeing in the case of the adaptation service, then everyone wins.
- Narrator: So what does Mrs. Robotham feel about the service she has received?
- Petrona Robotham: They are so gentle, kind and loving people. They sit and they listen to you, and whatever you ask, if they can, it has been done no matter who you are, if you can tell them they help you. That's why I love them.

[End of Recording]