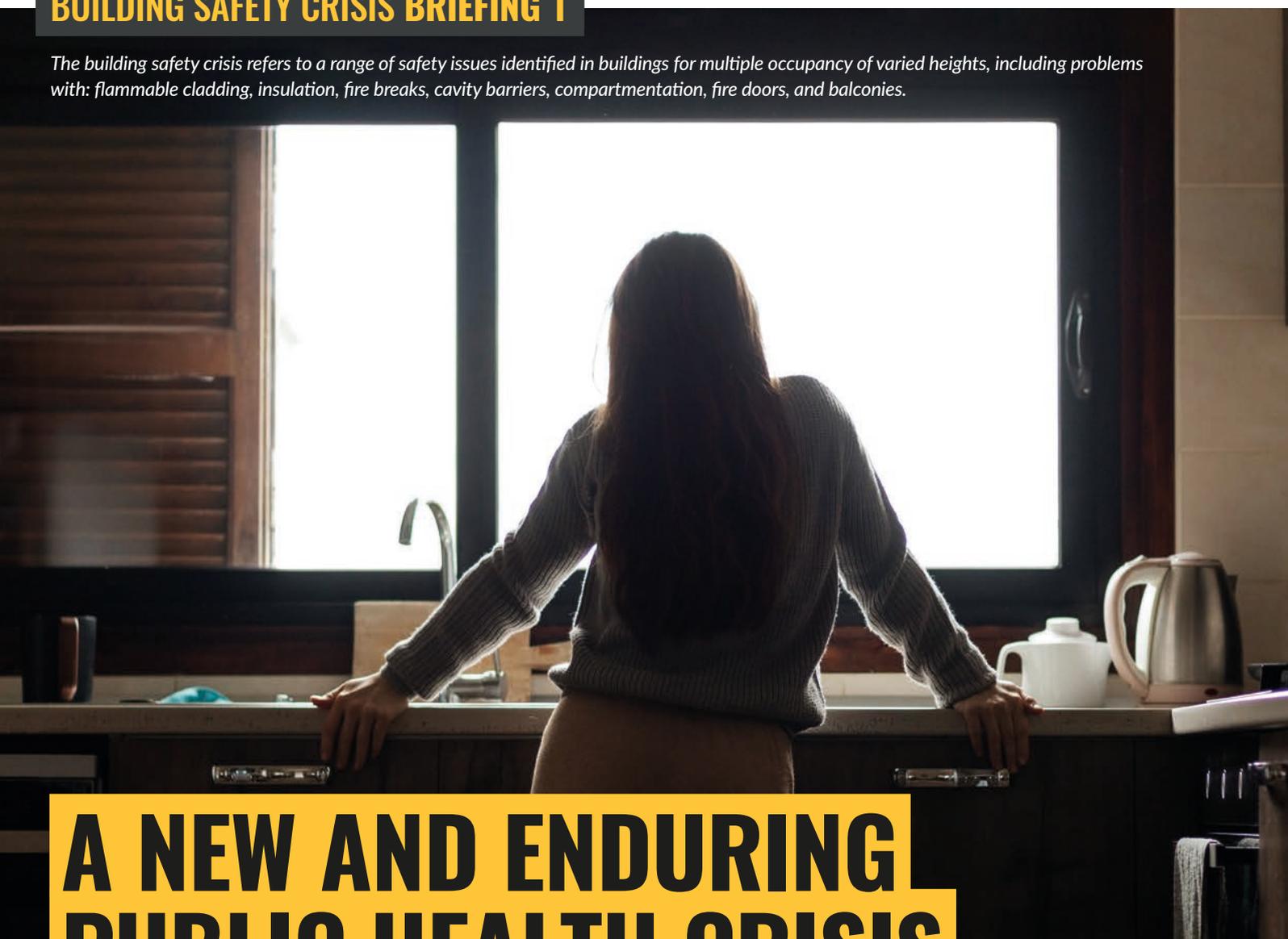


BUILDING SAFETY CRISIS BRIEFING 1

The building safety crisis refers to a range of safety issues identified in buildings for multiple occupancy of varied heights, including problems with: flammable cladding, insulation, fire breaks, cavity barriers, compartmentation, fire doors, and balconies.



A NEW AND ENDURING PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

SUMMARY

- The financial impact of remediation, and increased day-to-day costs, are key drivers of negative wellbeing outcomes
- Leaseholders report widespread negative impacts on their mental health, including stress, anxiety, depression and suicidal feelings
- This affects leaseholders in buildings of all heights, with a range of safety problems

POLICY SOLUTIONS

- Legislative protection for all leaseholders from the costs associated with remediation of cladding and other safety problems, to ensure the completion of all work to make buildings safe
- Extension of financial support to all impacted buildings, including those under 11m
- Forward funding by Government to facilitate swift and risk-based remediation

BUILDING SAFETY CRISIS : PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Many leaseholders have been living through a public health crisis since before the coronavirus pandemic. They described long-term stress and anxiety from living with building safety problems. Our research found widespread and severe impacts on mental wellbeing, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal feelings. These negative impacts are not limited by building height or the type of safety problems identified.

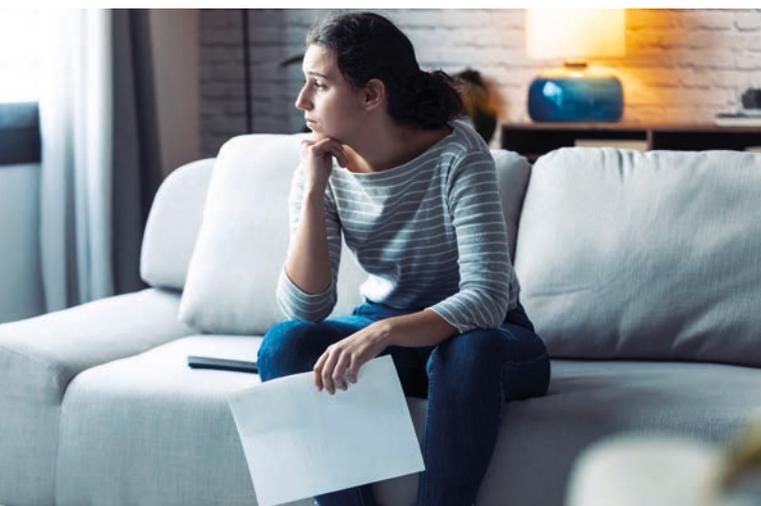
“I started to just think about chucking myself off of my balcony...I take no enjoyment of anything. I used to have hobbies and go out with friends for a laugh and stuff, that doesn't happen anymore”

George, age 25-34, Cambridge

The cost of these mental harms falls not just to individuals and their households, but to wider society as well. This will be felt through the cost to health services, such as through GP appointments, crisis interventions, medication, and counselling services, but also through loss of productivity due to time taken off work. Leaseholders worried about enduring impacts on their mental wellbeing as a result of the stressful experiences that they were living through. Consideration needs to be given to the ongoing support that will be required to recover from this experience.

“I lost three weeks of work because I was feeling quite down and depressed, and I had anxiety and I had to take time off as well. So it does affect your daily life”

Benat, age 35-44, London



FINANCIAL PATHWAYS TO MENTAL HARM

Fear of fire was a significant source of stress for some leaseholders, whilst others did not view their buildings as particularly unsafe; this was influenced by factors such as the identification of escape routes and perceived ability to self-evacuate. Financial stressors were one of the most common drivers of mental harm. Leaseholders are a diverse group and include a wide range of household circumstances and income levels: those living alone faced rising costs on a single income; retirees were living on a fixed income; and shared owners may be more likely to be living on lower incomes, with limited equity. Remedying the negative impact of the building safety crisis partly rests on effectively insulating leaseholders from financial damage.

“I'm a single person, I have taken a long time to get here...and it wasn't actually until I received an inheritance that enabled me to have a deposit on a shared ownership property”

Richard, age 54+, London

COMPOUNDING THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

Many leaseholders have already had to absorb higher costs for things like spiralling buildings insurance, paying for new fire alarm systems, or fire safety patrols of their buildings. These were commonly viewed as poor value for money, with little ability to 'shop around', and without necessarily delivering tangible benefits. Financial stressors have been made worse by living through a pandemic in which many people had seen reductions to their incomes. Alongside many others, leaseholders now also face dramatically increased energy bills, but without even the basic protection of the price cap, if energy is delivered from a communal system.

“I thought that as a homeowner and a retired person, I was immune from all the ills of the world...Made it. This is my time. Then, pension's gone, and your home is worth zero and you owe, I don't know what it's going to end up being”

Kate, age 54+ Manchester

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This briefing is based on in-depth interviews with leaseholders in England impacted by the building safety crisis, living in buildings of different heights. The full report can be found here: housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/living-through-the-building-safety-crisis/

Author: Jenny Preece (jenny.preece@sheffield.ac.uk), UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, University of Sheffield, March 2022

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