

# Experiencing Water Insecurity in England & Wales

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## Introduction: Re-imagining 'Security'

Water insecurity is often considered to **a.** exist predominantly in the so-called 'Global South' and **b.** pertain to quantities of available water. This research challenges common notions of secure and equitable service provision.

The aim is to develop a relational theory of water security in England & Wales, grounded in the lived experiences of people who perceive their water services as being insecure.



## (1) Water Poverty

Water poverty is the lived condition households experience when they are struggling, or unable, to afford their water bills.

Despite a relatively low public profile, it affected approx. **20%** of households in England & Wales in 2020.

A rigorous review of **354** documents revealed...



- Water poverty is a structurally-produced problem
- Industry has accumulated **£3.5 billion** in 'bad debt'
- Regulation prioritises business interests over customer interests

## (2) Boat Dwellers

Public attention on canals as dwelling & leisure spaces is increasing. The essential services that enable Boaters to live well are hence more important than ever.

This population is not counted as **customers** of private water utilities... Therefore Boaters' experiences shed light on wider issue of Household Water Insecurity in England & Wales.



A study was conducted by collecting interview and autoethnographic data. Using Sen's capability approach, it was found that **6 core human capabilities** were restricted by precarious access to water & sanitation services on the waterways.



## (3) Rivers, Politics and Pollution

Rivers have emerged as a focal point in the water sector, due to wild swimmers, industry critics and the wider public. Particularly during Covid-19 lockdowns, the local environment became a place of increased awareness and value. CSO and associated sewage pollution have become hugely emotive in public and political discourse.

Research is being carried out to build a multi-stakeholder picture of the problem, supporting collaborative and creative solutions. Situating it in the wider political and technical context will support clearer dialogues. Narratives will be interrogated to reveal where policy and activism have become intertwined, for 'better' or for 'worse'.

## Conclusion: A Relational Theory

These 3 studies are being integrated into an overarching theory of water security in England & Wales. Drawing from grounded theory methodology, this iterative process centres lived experiences. Coined by Jepson et al. (2017), 'relational water security' refers to the dynamic and subjective ways in which water is known.

The application of this theory will be to re-imagine what equity in service provision may look like. The fundamental principle behind this is that services should enable people to live in ways they chose, value and find meaning. One practical implication is the representation of non-customers and environmental entities in decision-making processes.

