

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Essex		
Unit of Assessment: 2 – Public Health		
Title of case study: Shaping social housing policy to address the mental health impacts of poor quality housing		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007-2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
David Pevalin Caroline Barratt Gill Green Mark Taylor	Professor Lecturer Professor Professor	1999-2016, 2017-2020 2010 – current 1995 - current 1994-2015
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Longitudinal research using national household survey data indicates that insecure, poor quality housing can lead to a worsening of mental health over time. Qualitative analysis indicates possible mechanisms for this including low autonomy and control. Combined Essex research supports a case for public health interventions to address lack of security and related social housing issues to improve mental health. Impact from this research includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influence on policy recommendations and lobbying by leading UK charities, including MIND; leading to 2. Informing UK Government 2020 Social Housing White Paper 		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>A 2015 briefing paper for Public Health England calculated that poor housing was costing the NHS GBP1.4bn per year, affirming the importance of housing as a public health issue. This impact case study is specifically concerned with the relationship between housing and mental health. Correlational research has long shown an association between poor housing and mental ill health. However, this could equally well support a social drift hypothesis (people with poor mental health end up in poor housing) as an idea that poor housing might lead directly to mental ill health. If public health interventions on housing are to be proposed, it is important to demonstrate causality and possible mechanisms. Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) to examine this would be ethically, politically and logistically very difficult and unlikely to be carried out. Alternative approaches to examining causation include the examination of longitudinal data, so that the effect of a housing change on mental health can be examined. Longitudinal research at Essex has examined this causal link. Observational data nevertheless remains subject to confounding effects and potentially limited as an evidence base without further supporting evidence. Therefore, potential mechanisms for the observed impact of housing on mental health have been examined in qualitative research at Essex.</p> <p><i>Understanding Society</i> is the UK Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS) based at Essex. It is built on the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) which ran from 1991-2009. BHPS had around 10,000 households. These are annual surveys allowing tracking of individuals and households over time. Using BHPS data from 1996-2002, Essex research examined the effects of housing on health [R1] [G1]. This analysis of a large representative longitudinal dataset established that over the long- term, the mental health of people living in poor quality housing declines; whereas people who move to better quality housing experience mental health improvements [R1]. The research also found that <i>“housing payment problems and entering arrears have significant detrimental effects on mental well-being”</i>, over and above the effects of general financial hardship on mental health [R2]. Further analysis based on 17 years’ of data from BHPS found that affordability of accommodation impacts on mental health. Specifically, housing repossession was associated with an increased risk of common mental illness and homeowners with high mortgage debts were at particularly high risk of mental health problems [R3]. Combining BHPS data with the Household,</p>		

Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey data found that the relationship between housing tenure and health can be dependent on national welfare frameworks and that (prior to 2016), the UK welfare system offered mental health protection for private renters experiencing unaffordable housing [R4].

To further explore potential mechanisms whereby housing quality can impact on mental health, a Knowledge Transfer Partnership project at Essex with Tendring District Council [G2] explored the ways in which living in bedsit accommodation impacts on individuals' mental health. Residents living in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are eight times more likely to have mental health problems and there are increasing numbers of young and vulnerable people living in HMOs. Interviews with HMO residents in a deprived area of Essex found that insecurity of tenure can lead to feelings of limited control and increased stress [R5]. Some residents reported feeling threatened by the behaviour of other residents, particularly when they were drunk or acting aggressively. The living arrangements in these HMOs were felt to be detrimental to efforts to overcome existing drug and alcohol problems [R5, R6]. Whilst some residents reported getting helpful support from their property manager or caretaker, others felt particularly stressed by the intrusive and controlling surveillance and security arrangements at the residences [R7] and reported feeling trapped, which increased stress and lack of control [R6].

Combined, longitudinal statistical research, plus in-depth qualitative research by Essex has enabled housing to be understood as a social determinant of health, supporting a case for public health interventions around social housing quality and conditions to improve mental health. Although there are limitations associated with residual confounding in social determinants research, and the evidence base cannot deliver the same degree of certainty as clinical trials based topics in public health, public health can nevertheless be usefully informed by a range of methodological approaches such as those represented by this body of Essex research.

3. References to the research [can be supplied by HEI on request]

[R1] Pevalin, D., Taylor, M.P. & Todd, J. (2008). The Dynamics of Unhealthy Housing in the UK: A Panel Data Analysis. *Housing Studies*, 23:5, 679-695.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02673030802253848>

[G1] Pevalin. Extending the use of former measures of social class beyond 2011. 2011 British Academy. £5411

[R2] Taylor, M., Pevalin, D., & Todd, J. (2007). The psychological costs of unsustainable housing commitments. *Psychological Medicine*. 37(7), 1027-1036.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291706009767>

[R3] Pevalin, D. (2009). Housing Repossessions, Evictions and Common Mental Illness in the UK: Results from a household panel study. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*.

63(11), pp.949–951. DOI: [10.1136/jech.2008.083477](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2008.083477)

[R4] Bentley, R.J., Pevalin, D., Baker, E., Mason, K., Reeves, A. & Beer, A. (2016). Housing affordability, tenure and mental health in Australia and the United Kingdom: a comparative panel analysis. *Housing Studies*, 31:2, 208-222. DOI: [10.1080/02673037.2015.1070796](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2015.1070796)

[R5] Barratt, C., Kitcher, C. & Stewart, J. (2012). Beyond safety to wellbeing. *Journal of Environmental Health Research*, 12 (1). 39 – 51 <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/19477163.pdf>

[R6] Barratt, C., Green, G. and Speed, E. (2015), Mental health and houses in multiple occupation, *Journal of Public Mental Health*. 14 (2), 107-117. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMH-11-2013-0070>

[R7] Green, G., Barratt, C. & Wiltshire, M. (2016) Control and care: landlords and the governance of vulnerable tenants in houses in multiple occupation. *Housing Studies*, 31:3, 269-28., DOI: [10.1080/02673037.2015.1080818](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2015.1080818)

[G2] Green. To improve social & environmental conditions. 2010. Innovate UK. £141,384

4. Details of the impact

Influencing UK charity policy and lobbying

MIND is the UK's leading mental health charity. In 2017, MIND launched its 'Brick-by-Brick' report drawing heavily on Essex research [S1]. Citing Essex research [R1], the report noted that moving to better quality accommodation leads to reduced use of mental health services. Drawing on insights from [R3], it noted that homeowners with high mortgage debts are at greater risk of mental health problems; that *"unaffordable accommodation has a negative effect on mental health and has a bigger impact than general financial pressures or debt"*; and that repossession *"significantly increases risk of experiencing a mental health problem"*.

The MIND report drew on Essex research [R6] stating *"living in HMOs... made it harder for people to overcome drug and alcohol addictions"*; *"many problems were caused by behaviour of other tenants rather than physical characteristics of the buildings"*; *"short tenancy agreements and general insecurity can be stressful and limit recovery"*; and *"residents have little choice or control over how they interact with other people"*. Referring to [R6, R7], the report highlights issues of tenant harassment by landlords, feelings of insecurity by tenants, the limited control residents have over their living space and the impact of close proximity of other residents.

The report called on policymakers to act: *"This evidence makes it crystal clear that good quality housing is critical to good mental health... without preventative measures to keep people out of homes that are causing or worsening mental health problems, we'll only see the issue grow...."*

The 'Brick-by-Brick' report directly informed several responses by MIND to national and local government consultations and proposals including: London Housing Strategy (2017) [S2a], Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) (also directly citing [R3]) [S2b], Supported housing funding (2018) [S2c], Private rented sector: Longer tenancies (2018) [S2d] and Social housing: Response to the Government's green paper (2018) report [S2e]

Following on from the Brick-by-Brick report (which informed all of MIND's housing campaigns from 2017 onwards), MIND held a parliamentary launch of their housing campaign in February 2019 attended by MPs including the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and the Shadow Secretary of State for Housing [S3]. In preparation for this event, and since Essex hosts UKHLS and has experts on housing and mental health, MIND commissioned Essex to carry out an update analysis of UKHLS on the links between housing and mental health which confirmed previous findings *"people living in both the social rented sector and private rented sector are significantly more likely to have experience of poor mental health than home owners"* [S3].

In 2019, MIND compiled evidence reviews for the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (a UKRI funded multidisciplinary partnership between academia, housing policy and practice), circulated as policy briefings. The briefing for Welsh authorities cited [R5] when emphasising *"Local authorities should consider the active role of landlords within housing and social care strategies...Evidence has highlighted the importance of...recognising landlords as key partners who assist individuals living with mental ill health in general needs housing"* [S4 – p32]. The policy brief for UK and devolved governments, research communities and mental health charities [S5] drew on research insights from [R4], [R5] and [R6] and highlighted the role of welfare support, vulnerability of young people on low incomes living in HMOs for financial reasons and the impacts on families of sharing with strangers.

Informing UK Government 2020 Social Housing White Paper

There are currently 4,000,000 social homes in the UK. MIND campaigns for changes to social housing to improve mental health have targeted UK local and national government over a number of years as detailed above. There have also been a range of charities and lobbyists campaigning for change for other reasons including safety, physical health, dignity, rights and so on. There are clearly social and political arguments for improving or changing social housing provision and amongst this plethora of causes and campaigns, it is challenging to untangle the role of evidence

in directing a policy with so many implications. Housing is a relatively neglected area in terms of science and evidence-based policy with political drivers traditionally being more prominent and the field being unsuited to controlled experimental research. The MIND campaign is notable for its heavy reliance on science and research, be it entirely observational or qualitative; but this indicates that going forward it may be possible for science to have a greater role in influencing this charged area of policy. The Social Housing White Paper released (after many delays) in November 2020 is clearly responding to many different issues, including Grenfell, which has been a high profile driver of housing politics since the tragedy. Unlike clinical guidelines, White Papers do not directly cite research; but we can trace a reasonable indirect link between a number of commitments made in the White Paper which relate to mental health and housing and Essex research, via the evidence-based campaigns led by MIND.

Interim uptake of Essex research by parliamentarians is evident, firstly in a 2018 POSTNOTE [S6] which used Essex research to establish the link between poor housing and mental health, concluding that landlords could be incentivised to improve quality of housing and that more joint-working across LAs and other providers could further improve conditions. More prominently in 2018, the APPG for Healthy Homes and Buildings undertook a major review which led to a White Paper “Building Our Future” [S7]. This was informed by MIND’s report [S1]: *“MIND put forward their analysis of the situation, stating that ... the link between poor quality housing and mental health is too strong to ignore.”* Recommendations 2.1 and 2.2 of this White Paper indirectly draw on Essex research [R1, R6] via MIND report S1:

- Recommendation 2.1: *“Government needs to commit to the construction of larger numbers of healthy new homes, including greater numbers of quality social and affordable housing, which can help to alleviate issues of overcrowding and poor physical and mental health.”*
- Recommendation 2.2: *“Priority must be given to ensuring people’s health and wellbeing is foremost when building new homes. There should be increased focus on delivering quality and performance alongside delivery of greater numbers of new homes.”*

The APPG White Paper was discussed in Parliament in 2019 [S8] and it was widely anticipated that the Conservative Government’s manifesto promise of a Social Housing White Paper would be informed by the APPG report and the parliamentary debate noted above.

2020 Social Housing White Paper [S9]: this ‘Charter’ for social housing sets out a range of principles, initiatives and regulation which will compel landlords to meet certain standards.

- A strong emphasis in the Charter is ‘empowerment’ of social housing residents *“to support more effective engagement between landlords and residents, and to give residents tools to influence their landlords and hold them to account.”* Referring to [R5, 6 and 7], MIND frequently emphasised the importance of lack of choice and control being a factor in deteriorating mental health.
- The Charter acknowledges that *“For residents, knowing you live in a safe, secure building is of paramount importance, for your physical safety and for your mental health.”* It commits to *“Tackle anti-social behaviour by enabling tenants to know who is responsible for action and who can support and assist them if they are faced with anti-social behaviour.”* Again, drawing on [R7] in particular, MIND had emphasised the impact on mental health of the behaviour of other tenants and that the conditions of social housing made it harder to overcome drug and alcohol problems. Thus the Charter recognises *“from discussions with agencies involved in tackling anti-social behaviour and from recent research studies that, in some cases, the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour suffer from mental health problems or have issues involving alcohol and drug use. In those cases, providing the right support and interventions can have a positive outcome in terms of preventing further offending behaviour.”*
- The Charter therefore also sets out a broader plan to integrate mental health support into the social housing system including equipping staff *“to work with people with mental health needs and encourage best practice for landlords working with those with mental health needs”* – informed by the MIND briefing to Welsh authorities citing [R5] in stating that *“landlords should be seen as “key partners who assist individuals living with mental ill health.”*

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1 MIND/Association of Mental Health Providers (2017) Brick by Brick: a review of mental health and housing (p8, 12-13, 20-21, 31, 38, 40, 42, 49-50)

<https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4432/20171115-brick-by-brick-final-low-res-pdf-plus-links.pdf>

S2 MIND responses to consultations drawing on the Brick by Brick report/Essex research

a. London Housing Strategy (2017)

<https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4452/minds-london-housing-strategy-response.pdf>

b. Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) (also directly citing R3, p2)

<https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4453/20171211-minds-submission-to-homelessness-reduction-act-guidance-consultation.pdf>

c. Supported housing funding (2018)

<https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/government-listened-to-concerns-about-supported-housing-funding/>

d. Private rented sector: Longer tenancies (2018)

e. Social housing: Response to the Government's green paper (2018) report

S3 MIND launch in Parliament finding from Essex analysis – pdf consists of the Essex research summary and the MIND news item February 2019

<https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/mind-calls-on-mps-to-tackle-housing-and-mental-health-as-research-shows-link/#.XJDaqbiLjcc>

Pelikh, A. & Borkowska, M. (2019). Understanding Society – Housing research summary. Internal research summary produced for MIND using ESRC funded Understanding Society data

S4 UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (2019). Housing insecurity and mental health in Wales: an evidence review (p36) https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/190327-Housing-insecurity-and-mental-health-in-Wales_final.pdf

https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/190327-Housing-insecurity-and-mental-health-in-Wales_final.pdf

S5 UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (2019). Housing insecurity and mental health - policy briefing (page 3)

<https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Housing-insecurity-and-mental-health-Policy-Briefing.pdf>

S6 Houses of Parliament POST NOTE 573 2018: Health in Private Rented Housing

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0573/POST-PN-0573.pdf>

S7 APPG for healthy homes and buildings (2018). White Paper – Building Our Future

<https://healthyhomesbuildings.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/HHB-APPG-White-Paper-V1.pdf>

S8 Unhealthy Housing: cost to the NHS – Hansard 26 February 2019 Volume 655

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-02-26/debates/FFA25138-87B2-4307-A3BE-044AE433C3ED/UnhealthyHousingCostToTheNHS>

S9 The Charter for Social Housing Residents – Social Housing White Paper (Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, 2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper>