

GROWING UP IN SOCIAL HOUSING IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS, AND EARLY OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN BORN IN 2000

February 2011

Rebecca Tunstall, Ruth Lupton, Dylan Kneale and Andrew Jenkins

SUMMARY

Introduction

This study is one of a pair funded by the Homes and Communities Agency and the Tenant Services Authority. The other report can be found at <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/CASereport64.pdf>. This pair of studies develops the findings of two previous reports on the relationship between housing and life chances (Feinstein *et al*, 2008, Lupton *et al*, 2009). These previous reports examined housing circumstances in childhood for those born in 1946, 1958, 1970 and 2000, and the relationship between childhood housing and adult outcomes across a range of measures for those born in 1946, 1958 and 1970. They found as yet unexplained connections between being 'ever' in social housing in childhood and worse adult outcomes on an overall measure of deprivation and a range of individual measures for those born in 1958 and in 1970 (but not for those born in 1946) (Feinstein *et al*, 2008, Lupton *et al*, 2009). Statistically significant associations remained after using a very large set of more than 50 controls for family and individual characteristics, for many outcomes and many ages, although the size of the associations was substantially reduced.

It draws on the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), a longitudinal study of children born in 2000. Almost 15,000 children have been tracked to the age of 5 in 2006. The research aims to explore:

- the housing and neighbourhood circumstances of today's children, in some detail;
- whether there are links between housing and very early childhood outcomes, which in some way might parallel the links seen for adult outcomes for earlier cohorts; and
- whether features of social housing neighbourhoods might either constitute all or part of any links between tenure and early childhood outcomes.

We looked at their family and individual characteristics at birth. We also used the information taken at age 5 to examine the children's housing tenure and neighbourhood circumstances, their parents' and siblings' views, and early outcomes as measured in simple tests. We focussed on children born in England.

Housing in childhood

- In 2006, most 5-year olds lived in houses with gardens. Most lived in homes which had four or more rooms and which were not overcrowded. Most were free from damp or condensation. Most of their parents said homes were tidy, not noisy and had a calm atmosphere.
- 65% of 5 year olds lived in owner occupied homes. 24% were in social rented homes (including homes rented from councils and housing associations and a very small number in 'shared ownership' - homes part-rented and part being bought with a mortgage from

housing associations). 9% were in private rented homes. The remainder (2%) were living with their grandparents in various tenures.

- We calculated an 'Index of Family Advantage', made up of the children's parents' highest educational level and occupational class when the cohort member was born in 2000. The situation of children in social renting stands out. In 2006, only 1% of 5 year old children of social renters had parents in the top quintile (fifth) of all families on the Index of Family Advantage, and only 7% had parents in the top two quintiles combined. 69% of children in social renting had parents whose education and jobs put them in the bottom two quintiles. In contrast, substantial proportions of children in both private renting and home ownership came from every quintile of family advantage, although in general private renting families were somewhat disadvantaged and home owners' families were more advantaged.
- 5 year olds in owner occupied homes were the most likely to be in homes with more attractive features (although we do not have direct evidence that these features were actually supportive to child development). 97% of children in owner occupied homes lived in houses rather than flats. 94% had access to gardens. 70% were in homes with six or more rooms, and 99% in homes with four or more rooms. 90% were in homes free from damp or condensation. Most of their parents said homes were tidy (86%), not noisy (86%) and calm in atmosphere (82%).
- Most children in rented housing were also in homes with these attractive and potentially supportive features. However, the proportion of children in rented housing who were in less attractive circumstances was higher than those in home ownership.
- Of 5 year olds in private renting, 89% lived in houses. 78% had access to gardens. 38% were in homes with six or more rooms, and 95% were in homes with four or more rooms. 78% were in homes free from damp or condensation. Most of their parents said homes were tidy (77%), not noisy (80%) and calm in atmosphere (85%).
- 5 year olds in social rented homes were the least likely to have homes with more attractive features. Of 5 year olds in social renting, 77% lived in houses. 70% had access to gardens. 20% were in homes with six or more rooms, and 93% were in homes with four or more rooms. 79% were in homes free from damp or condensation. Most of their parents said homes were tidy (72%), not noisy (75%) and calm in atmosphere (82%).
- Even though they made up a minority of children overall, those in social housing constituted a majority of all children in flats rather than houses (65% of the total), those without access to a garden (55%) and of those in homes with just one, two or three rooms (55%).

Neighbourhoods in childhood

- 5 year olds in social housing were sharply overrepresented in the most deprived neighbourhoods, and were largely excluded from more advantaged areas. For example, 28% of children from social renting families lived in the most deprived 10% of small neighbourhoods (Lower Super Output Areas, with typical populations of 1,500 people). 47% lived in the most deprived 20% of small neighbourhoods. Only 20% of 5 year olds in social housing were in neighbourhoods which were less deprived than average.
- Those in other tenures were more evenly distributed between different types of neighbourhoods.
- The majority of parents of 5 year olds living in social housing did not feel that their neighbourhood was 'excellent' or 'good' for raising children, in sharp contrast to those in other tenures. The cohort study included a self-completion survey of the five year olds' older siblings, median age 12. Older siblings in social housing were least likely to enjoy living in their areas.

- Parents of 5 year olds in social renting were more likely to be concerned about crime and racist attacks than those in other tenures. The older siblings of these children were also more likely to be concerned about crime, and more likely to have been victims of crime and anti-social behaviour than children in other tenures.
- On the other hand, social housing neighbourhoods provided 5 year olds and their families with opportunities similar to those of other tenures, in terms of the access to a range of services, including parks and playgrounds, a place at their first choice of primary school, and local family and friends.
- While higher proportions of older siblings in home ownership were in more attractive situations than those in other tenures, they constituted a majority of those who were worried being mugged or robbed (67%), who had experienced theft (62%), and who were afraid of going out at night (67%).
- Even though they made up a minority of children overall, those in social housing constituted a majority of all children whose parents thought their neighbourhood was poor or very poor for raising children (69%).

The role of housing and neighbourhood in early outcomes

- Past research has found associations between housing tenure in childhood and adult outcomes, between neighbourhood characteristics in childhood and adult outcomes, between adult housing tenure and adult outcomes and adult neighbourhoods and adult outcomes. Some researchers have suggested that there may be independent 'tenure effects' or 'neighbourhood effects' on outcomes, operating for example through exposure to housing conditions, neighbourhood conditions, or parental or community attitudes and behaviour.
- We examined early outcomes for 5 year olds through scores on tests of vocabulary and drawing skills. Past research has shown that results on similar early tests are associated with at least some adult outcomes.
- On average, children in social housing scored lower on these tests than those in private renting, and those in private renting scored lower than those in home ownership.
- Children in deprived neighbourhoods also scored lower than others.
- Children in from less advantaged families also scored lower than others.
- Regression tests showed that more than half the gap in test scores between children in both rented tenures and those in home ownership was removed by controlling for a small number of factors: whether or not they lived in the most deprived tenth of neighbourhoods, parents' education and occupational status, mother's age at first birth, family structure, and the number of siblings they had.
- Thus, the typically high deprivation levels of social housing neighbourhoods appear to constitute part of the link seen between tenure and early childhood outcomes, as do individual and family factors.
- We explored children's ethnicity as a further control and found that it altered the relationship between tenure and outcomes to some extent, although it did not remove it. It is possible that further controls (for example for factors known to be associated with scores such as parents' employment status and financial situation, parenting practices, parents' relationship quality, mother-child relationships) would reduce or remove the gap entirely.
- Whether the associations we have found are large or small or a concern for policy is a matter for judgment. However, after controls, the gap in scores between children of owner occupiers and those of social renters was less than the difference between children with one sibling and those with three or more. The gap in scores was similar to the difference between scores for children with a mother of average age (30-34 years old) at her first birth and a mother under 20 years old at her first birth.

- Importantly, however, overall the models and the variables they included – housing tenure as well as neighbourhood characteristics and family characteristics – all explain only a small proportion of the total variation in test scores.

Discussion and conclusions

Policy implications of research depend on policy goals. All of this report is important for those who are motivated by equalizing housing and neighbourhood conditions and resident satisfaction between different social groups. The first part of the report provides some positive news about the homes and neighbourhoods social housing provides for children, but compared to those in other tenures, 5 year olds in social housing in 2006 were more likely to experience less desirable housing conditions and much more likely to be in deprived neighbourhoods. However, both owner occupation and private renting provide quite diverse housing and neighbourhoods, and include some very disadvantaged families.

Those who aim to equalize opportunities in terms of early child outcomes and later social mobility should focus on the implications of the second part of the report. There are differences in early outcomes between children living in different tenures. Neighbourhood deprivation appears to play some role in this. However, controlling for a few family characteristics and neighbourhood deprivation reduced the gap in scores between children in home ownership and those in social renting to much less than the gap between those from more advantaged and less advantaged families."

Full text

The full text of the report is available at
<http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/CASEpaper143.pdf>.

References

Feinstein, I., Lupton, R., Hammond, C., Mujtaba, T. and Sorhaindo, A. with Tunstall, R., Richards, M., Kuh, D. and Jonson, J. (2008) *The public value of social housing: A longitudinal analysis of the relationship of housing and life chances*, London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education, University of London.

Lupton, R.; Tunstall, R.; Sigle-Rushton, W.; Obolenskaya, P.; Sabates, R.; Meschi, E.; Kneale, D. and Salter, M. (2009) *Growing up in social housing in Great Britain: The experience of four generations*, London: Homes and Communities Agency.