TCPA alterative for June 2017

Time to spread a little happiness

David Cameron was interested in national wellbeing, as a possible alternative to GDP growth for the ultimate goal and index of government, and what contributed to it. He was mocked at the time, but data on national wellbeing remain a stealth legacy of his. ONS have developed four measures of wellbeing, and two have been incorporated into the English Housing Survey. For the first time, we have good data on the relationship between housing and life satisfaction, and housing and anxiety[[1]](#endnote-1) Over time, we will learn more about ?? and trends.

Anxiety linked to housing may be an important route for housing to affect health, mental and physical.

[lack of good data before].\*\*add more sources

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? The mean answer in England in 2013-5 was 7.5 out of 10, although there was a huge range. Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? The mean answer was 2.9 out of 10.

Most of the variation in life satisfaction and anxiety between individuals can’t be accounted for by characteristics recorded in the English Housing Survey. Factors may be at play such as personality and life experiences which are not explored in the questions asked in our key and purposeful housing and planning resource. Factors in the survey do explain about 20% of the variation in life satisfaction. Of these, though, the majority do relate to interviewee characteristics, rather than to features of their current housing. Reflecting other studies, the top predictors of life satisfaction were self-reported health, marital status, employment status, and income. The difference between very good’ and ‘very bad’ health meant a 2.7 out of 10 difference in life satisfaction. In fact, people’s current housing features can explain only 3% of the variation in life satisfaction overall. Does this mean we shouldn’t bother about the nature of housing? No, housing makes a contribution, and (unlike marital status) it’s a contribution that can be influenced by built environment policymakers and professionals.

So is it a cottage with roses round the door that people are after? Again, no. The housing factor most associated with both life satisfaction and avoiding anxiety was being up to date with rent or mortgage payments. Being in arrears reduced an individual’s life satisfaction by 0.6 out of 10, equivalent to the difference between being in the top 20% of income (ie a higher rate tax payer, more satisfied) and someone in the bottom 20% (ie in poverty, less satisfied). Thus, when looking at the factors in the English Housing Survey, housing mainly affects life satisfaction through the Micawber factor: *“’Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen, nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pound, nought and six, result misery’"*[[2]](#endnote-2). Tenure, building type, condition, damp, warmth, and overcrowding – most of the traditional concerns of housing policy – have less of an effect on life satisfaction than whether residents were currently in arrears. Being in arrears also increased anxiety by 0.6 out of 10.

Thus we should try to plan and build housing and allocate it in ways that make arrears less likely: cheaper to buy and run. However, the jobs market, mortgagors, landlords, the benefits system and residents themselves have big responsibility for avoiding arrears or making them less miserable or worrying.

Some of the characteristics of housing you might be most interested in eg?? may not be included in the study – and could be important or not, it remains to be seen. As planners, designers, and other professionals, we should bear in mind that\*\*

For life satisfaction, the second most important property-related predictor was the type of tenure. Outright owners had the highest life satisfaction, followed by mortagees, the private renters and finally social renters. However, these raw figures reflect that owners may be healthier, more married, more employed and on higher incomes. Advocates of the psychic benefits of home ownership might be surprised to learn that once the characteristics of renters and owners and the features of their homes have been ironed out by statistical controls for, social tenants have higher life satisfaction than owners and private tenants, and are ahead by 0.2 out of 10 .

Building form also has an effect on life satisfaction, but again there is a surprise: living in terraced housing is associated with higher life satisfaction than semi-detached houses or flats (after controls). Living in a bungalows, sometimes ideaolised/\*\*lauded, did not have a significant effect on life satisfaction. The value of repairs required to the home did have a small effect on life satisfaction.

Anxiety – not housing.

Diff unemployed-employed 0.4

Does this suggest it is irrational to spend so much money on housing and so much time choosing, maintaining and improving it? No, not necessarily.

[blog\*\*]

Experiencing common mental health disorders is also associated with not being able to achieve residential mobility desires over time (Woodhead et al 2015).

This concurs with UK evidence showing Right To Buy did not improve mental health in people who had rented (Popham et al 2014\*\*).

Security of tenure also impacts on child health (Pillau et al 2014) and adult well being (Robinson 2014).

**Overcrowding impacts on child wellbeing controlling for SES and health impacts can persist through life (Solari et al 2014).**

**MH improved in residents experiencing housing improvements vs a control (Egan et al 2013) but possibly only short-term. Housing improvements in social housing improved SR mental wellbeing of residents in high-rise flats and facilitated improved health behaviours (Sowden and White 2013)**

**\*\*Housing affordability interacts with tenure, with private renters more vulnerable than home owners to mental health effects of unaffordable housing (Mason et al., 2013) [as feel not getting anything for their pain?]**

**If husing is unaffordable when resditns spent 30%?? Or more of their nome on it, then when owners switch move from beign in affordable to unaffordable their mental halth is affaceted (Bentley et al. 2016)**

1. DCLG (2016) *English Housing Survey: Housing and well-being report, 2014* London: DCLG www\*\* [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Dickens, C (??) *David Copperfield??* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)