

Policy Briefing: The Impact of Housing Problems on Mental Health

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https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1364063/Housing_and_mental_health_-_detailed_report.pdf

Purpose of document

Housing and mental health are two important issues which have been given attention in public debates. Housing problems can affect people's lives such as relationships, work, mental and physical health. Shelter wanted to explore the relationship between housing and specifically mental health. They worked together with a research agency called ComRes to carry out research in January and February 2017 to explore the relationship between housing conditions and mental ill health among English adults. The purpose is to increase awareness of the interaction between poor housing conditions and mental health ill health, and also to use the evidence to guide further debates on how best to reduce the negative impact of housing problems on people's mental health and their use of health services.

Summary of contents

The report describes the research and discusses the results, divided into two stages: *Stage 1* - involved 20 in-depth phone interviews with GPs in six of England's largest cities including London and Manchester. GPs were asked questions including: their understanding of patients' mental health; the common mental health conditions of patients attending GP practices and whether they felt supported and confident to address mental health as a result of housing issues with patients.

Stage 2 - involved interviews with a representative sample of 3,509 adults using an online survey that asked 6 questions including: experience of having a housing problems; impact on physical and mental health and the types of mental health problems reported to be associated with a housing problem or worry.

Summary of outcomes

The vast majority (69%) of people who have experienced housing problems in the last five years such as poor housing conditions, struggling to pay the rent or being threatened with eviction reported having experienced a negative impact on their mental health. For many of them, their experiences *created* mental health problems or *worsened* existing mental health conditions including long-term stress, anxiety, depression, sleeping problems, panic attacks and, in a minority of cases, suicidal thoughts. Also, 17% reported that the pressure of housing problems affected their physical health. The evidence shows that it is the affordability of rent or mortgage that is having the biggest impact. Although the research found evidence of people visiting their doctor due to bad housing, 74% of the public who experienced a housing problem that they said had a negative impact on their mental health and/or physical health, *did not* go to see their GP. Where patients did go to see their GP with a mental health condition that was linked to problems with housing, the GP identified a gap in their knowledge and support provided to patients.

Summary of recommendations

- Increase awareness of the links between housing and mental health, and Shelter's advice and support services for people with housing issues.
- Consider new policies about housing that accommodate the overlap between housing conditions and mental health.
- Better help and guidance for GPs to build their knowledge and confidence to support patients with housing issues and signpost them to appropriate services.

Further information and resources

- 2013 The Effects of Bad Housing on People's Health (Shelter & NatCen Social Research)https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/policy_library_folder/people_living_in_bad_housing_-_numbers_and_health_impacts
- GPs Interview Report - *Shelter Research Among GPs - Housing and Mental Health*<http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Shelter-GPs-Interviews-Report.pdf>