

Book Review

Housing and Health: The relationship between housing conditions and the health of council tenants

Authors: D. S. Bryne, S. P. Harrison, J. Keithley, and P. McCarthy (1986). Gower, England. 149pp. Hardcover. ISBN: 0 566 00864 5.

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The Book *Housing and Health: The Relationship between Housing conditions and the Health of Council Tenants* was a report of research work carried out on council housing in metropolitan District of Gateshead in England. The five-chapter book, written by four authors, gives the historical and contemporary accounts (that time) of the relationship between housing and health as its first two chapters respectively. It is one of the 'ground-breaking' (pioneering) scholarly efforts in housing and health study.

The authors in chapter one, deal extensively with historical context of housing and health chronologically and thematically, spanning a period of about a century. The importance of this chapter is acknowledged by the authors who offer that **"An account of these historical developments is of the greatest importance in providing a basis for understanding the health consequences of housing..."** The thirty (30) page chapter made extensive use of local gates head material and really showed the health potential of good housing. Relying on the works of Bradbury (1933), Blume (1982), Bryne (the leading author) (1980, 1982 to 1984) among others, the authors identified three themes namely; (1) the understanding of the relationship between housing and health outcomes, that is the social epidemiology of housing and health; (2) the contribution of this understanding to the formation of housing policy and (3) the health consequences of housing policies themselves.

While considering the contemporary situation as of that time, they explicitly acknowledged the relationship of traditional housing quality indicators (structural condition, density of occupants and possession of basic amenities) to health.

They rightly observed that "housing quality indicators (HQI) are more than what have been discussed. For example, it has increasingly been argued that the **location** and **environment** of dwellings are important dimensions of housing condition". However, it should be pointed out that it has **cultural dimensions** to it. Even though other measures of quality of housing environment include size of garden (if any), safe outdoor playing spaces for families with children and air pollution, yet the importance attached to a variable as a quality indicator varies from one cultural and physical environment to the other. For example, Afon (2006) discovered that availability of open space (albeit green area) is not one of the ten most important environmental quality indicators to residents in the core of Ogbomosho City in South Western Nigeria. This is because it (open space) has become part of their cultural life, hence, it is taken for granted.

The third chapter discusses the issues which influenced the methods chosen for the 'housing and health' study, the way in which the housing areas were selected and also the research procedures that were used. Because of the pioneering and complex nature of the exercise, the authors noted that "the research was designed as a pilot study to explore ways of doing research in this field and also to suggest relationship between health and housing which merit further consideration on a wider scale". The complexity of this exercise underlies their submission that 'this is not an easy area in which to do research'.

Recent studies (Krieger et al., 2002; Breyse et al., 2004; Cohn et al., 2006; Chenoweth, 2007) among others, have also established that poor quality housing can impact health, especially on children. These and other studies suggest that the quality of housing can make a big difference in the extent of, and costs related to, children's exposure to health

hazards (Lubell et al., 2007).

The chapter on “the sample of households and the analysis of the findings” is very interesting. Taking 57 pages, it gives an overview of all the methodological issues relating to explanation and investigation of housing, health and class, and discusses the account of sampling of housing areas and households, the structure of the interview, the conduct of the survey and the subsequent analyses of data.

The concluding chapter discusses four policy implications emanating from the study namely; action with regard to the existing housing stock, action with regard to the organization of the health services in relation to housing areas, action with regard to the design, construction and location of housing in the future and lastly, research into housing and health. The import of these is that in whatever housing policy, health, especially of man, should be paramount.

Altogether, notwithstanding its short comings, the book remains logical and detailed in its presentation, provides a solid introduction and stimulant for researchers in housing and health study; hence it should be a great companion for all advocates of a livable built environment.

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