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At Home with Children

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Policy Brief

At Home with Children: Learning from Lockdown

Professor Rosie Parnell (Newcastle University) Dr Sandra Costa Santos (Dundee University)

KEY INFO

Research questions

What made home spaces 'liveable' for families with children during lockdown?

What is the role of domestic space in alleviating and/or exacerbating the psychological and social impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people, as experienced by families?

Policy area or themes: Places and Communities

Methods: Survey (n=1246); Qualitative interviews (n=45); Focus groups (n=10)

Geographical area: England and Scotland

Research stage: In progress

Summary of the research

We explore how lessons learned from lockdown can help to re-imagine, refurbish and design 'liveable' homes for the contemporary needs of families with children. We have spoken to families about how their home supported, or hindered, their practical, social and psychological needs during lockdown. We have recorded the adaptations that families made to their homes to better support their wellbeing. The project will share the tactics and home adaptations that families have found helpful, through a 'Home Hack Toolkit', so that others can directly benefit from these ideas. Our findings and recommendations will also target housing policy and professionals in family support roles, identifying the settings and scenarios that present the greatest challenges to families, and providing a crucial resource to inform domestic space standards that are geared towards the wellbeing of contemporary families with children.

This research is conducted by Newcastle University (PI: Professor Rosie Parnell, RA: Husam Kanon, Emily Pattinson, Alkistis Pitsikali) and the University of Dundee (Co-I: Sandra Costa Santos (Co-I), RA: Heba Sarhan) and is funded by the UKRI/AHRC Covid-19 Rapid Response Fund [Grant number: AH/V014943/1].

Policy recommendations

House size, number of rooms and density of occupation

Review domestic space standards and policy definitions (such as 'decent home') to address the quality and nature of space required for a family, including attention to spaces for alone time, work and home-schooling.

Adaptability

Prioritise design (and refurbishment) for adaptability in national and local authority housing design codes and guidance. Adaptability is here interpreted to extend beyond issues of access and mobility (Part M) over

a resident's lifecourse, to include responses to the everyday diverse and changing activities of families and their related social and mental wellbeing needs.

Environmental comfort

Refine environmental comfort standards and guidance to support householders' physical and mental wellbeing. Consider conflicts between reducing carbon demands and addressing wellbeing demands (e.g. window area).

Housing-related CPD for professionals in family support roles

Include 'dwelling liveability' in the education and continuing development of professionals in family support roles. Social workers, child psychologists and family therapists are well-placed to explore the potential to mitigate tensions and conflicts that might be exacerbated by domestic space and patterns of space use in the home with families.

Key findings

Satisfaction with the home during lockdown

Our survey of 1246 families (representing 2521 adults and 2158 children) showed that:

- 24% of people were dissatisfied with their home's ability to meet their household's needs, more specifically: 40% of people living in flats were dissatisfied and 35% in small terraces, compared with 18% in medium or large terraces and 15% in detached homes
- 50% of people were dissatisfied with their home as a space for home schooling. Low income families and people living in flats, were least satisfied.
- 33% of people were dissatisfied with their home as a space for alone time. People living in flats, non-binary people and females were least satisfied.

Tension, wellbeing, time and space to yourself

- 51% of people agreed that there was more familial conflict or tension during lockdown.
- 71% of people agreed lockdown made it more difficult to have 'time and space to themselves'.
- 52% of people agreed that lack of time and space to themselves had a negative impact on their wellbeing: families living in more densely occupied homes (more people, fewer rooms) and families with SEN children were more likely to agree.
- Adults had to use unusual spaces to get time and space to themselves, such as alleyways behind the home or the garden shed.

Challenges and adaptations

- Challenges with the home's spaces were particularly felt in small terraces and flats. Some challenges are related to environmental comfort e.g. lighting/heating. These were a particular problem in the newest homes post 2010.
- The majority (82%) of families made adaptations to their home during lockdown and of those, more than half (57%) said that they expected to keep the changes they had made.

The qualitative interviews are being analysed - findings will be available soon from:

<https://athomewithchildren.ac.uk>



Further information

Website: <https://athomewithchildren.ac.uk>

Survey findings summary: <https://athomewithchildren.ac.uk/findings/surveyfindings.html>

Intergenerational foundation article: <https://www.if.org.uk/2021/05/28/at-home-with-children-be-part-of-the-research/>

British psychological society article 1: <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/project-exploring-impact-people%E2%80%99s-living-spaces-their-mental-wellbeing-urges>

British psychological society article 2: <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/study-presents-evidence-impact-people%E2%80%99s-housing-their-health-and-wellbeing>

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