Housing injustice and children’s outcomes: does growing up in rented accommodation affect children’s health, wellbeing and cognitive development?

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Programme: PhD in Geography (Science)

Topic area: Quantitative data analysis in population or environmental geography

Background

Housing has received growing attention from social scientists as a potentially important context for children’s health and development. Housing tenure is one among the features of the dwelling unit that have deemed to be of physical, psychological and financial importance. Previous studies found that growing up in an owned rather than a rented home has a positive effect on children's outcomes. More recent work, however, have questioned the existence of a “housing tenure effect” and posited that the relationship might be instead driven by self-selection, or by other features associated with housing tenure (such as housing quality and residential stability) (Leventhal and Newman 2010). Given the increasing proportion of children being born (Tocchioni et al 2021) and raised (Bailey, 2020) within the private rental sector within the UK context as well as in other advanced societies, this project intends to enhance understanding of the mechanisms through which housing tenure affects children’s health as well as their socio-emotional and cognitive development.

The project addresses the following themes and associated research questions:

The changing trajectories of housing tenure during childhood

1. Which housing tenure trajectories do children experience? And have they changed over time?
2. Which family and geographic characteristics are associated with the likelihood to grow up in rented accommodation?

The relationship between growing up in rented accommodation and children’s outcomes

3. What is the relationship between growing up renting and children’s outcomes?
4. To what extent is the relationship between growing up renting and children’s outcomes explained by:
   a. Children’s (and their families’) socio-economic background?
   b. The characteristics of children’s housing (size, quality, location)?
   c. Other demographic processes associated with living in the private rented sector, such as residential mobility or parental instability?
Data and methods

The project will apply advanced quantitative methods to a combination of UK nationally representative secondary data (such as Understanding Society, the Millennium Cohort Study and the two Scottish cohorts of the Growing Up in Scotland Study).

Changing trajectories of housing tenure from birth to age 15 will be analysed through methods of longitudinal data reduction, such as sequence analysis and longitudinal latent class analysis. Regression models will be employed to assess the characteristics associated with growing up in private renting, and the effect this has on children's outcomes. Moreover, methods of causal inference (such as Inverse Probability Weights) and of mediation analysis will be employed to understand the mechanisms explaining the worse outcomes of children growing up in rented accommodation.

Policy relevance

The project has the potential to inform policies on housing quality, affordability and security of tenure to ensure that every family has access to affordable, secure and high-quality housing.

References

