

Exploring the impact of housing insecurity on the health and well-being of children and young people: a systematic review

Emma Hock,^{1*} Lindsay Blank,¹ Hannah Fairbrother,²
Mark Clowes,¹ Diana Castelblanco Cuevas,¹
Andrew Booth¹ and Elizabeth Goyder¹

¹School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

²Health Sciences School, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

*Corresponding author emma.hock@sheffield.ac.uk

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Plain language summary

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Introduction

Housing insecurity is being at risk of moving house many times, due to poverty and having no choice, for example, due to a short-term rental house/flat, emergency housing and homelessness. Children's health and well-being are known to be affected by how suitable, affordable and stable their housing is. However, the reasons for this are poorly understood.

Methods

We looked for studies exploring how housing insecurity can affect the health and well-being of children and young people (aged 0–16) in the United Kingdom. We included the views of children, parents/close family members and professionals (e.g. teachers). We searched for studies published in academic journals, searched relevant websites and received suggestions from experts.

Results

We included 59 studies on the impact of housing insecurity on young people. We found that children are affected in many ways including their social life (e.g. being far from friends), schooling (e.g. joining a new school), health, financial and family well-being. This led to anxiety/stress, trouble eating and sleeping, wetting the bed and health problems, such as asthma, due to poor living conditions. Some things can help to protect children experiencing housing insecurity, including friendship and support, staying at the same school, and support from parents. The problems of housing insecurity may be made worse by life circumstances, including domestic violence, being a migrant/refugee/asylum seeker and a forced relocation. Most studies included parents/professionals, with few seeking the views of the children and young people themselves.

Conclusions

Our review suggests that it is important to reduce housing insecurity among families. All those working with children and families experiencing housing insecurity should give them as much choice and control over situations that affect them as possible. Future studies should gather the views of children and young people themselves.

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