

Social Housing and Transitions to Adulthood

In Britain, living in social housing as a child has been consistently linked to a wide range of indicators of disadvantage during adulthood, including health, employment and life satisfaction (Feinstein et al., 2008, Lupton et al., 2009), but there is evidence that the relationships have changed over time. For children born just after the Second World War, links between public housing and subsequent well-being were usually significant once controls for family social background were included in the analysis. Over time, limited supply and policy reforms have meant that the profile of social housing tenants has become increasingly disadvantaged, and of the positive association between social housing during childhood and subsequent disadvantage can no longer be explained solely by socio-economic controls. An examination of the years between childhood and adulthood and how they are related to social housing experiences might shed light on the underlying processes.

In this paper we examine differences in transitions to adulthood by the type of housing individuals experienced during their adolescence. We hypothesize that differences in the timing of important transitions might help explain the significant link between childhood social housing and negative adult outcomes by setting in place pathways to disadvantage. For example, childhood social housing might be associated with earlier parenthood which in turn influences education and labour market trajectories. Together, these should have important economic consequences which, in turn, might lead to poor outcomes more generally.

The overall aim of this paper is examine how the timing of key milestones in the transition to adulthood is related to housing during adolescence and how this relationship changed over time. The five milestones we examine include school leaving age, first stable employment, first independent residence, partnership (cohabitation or marriage) and parenthood. Although we have thus far focused mainly on the demographic transitions (home leaving, partnership and parenthood); the final paper will include analyses of all five outcomes. While differences in the timing of transitions to adulthood by education or family socioeconomic position have been examined extensively (for example Coast, 2009, Hawkes et al., 2009, Smith and Ratcliffe, 2009), few studies have explored in depth the role of social housing (Kiernan, 1997, Hawkes et al., 2004). This is surprising when we consider that childhood housing tenure is so strongly linked to adult outcomes and to parenthood (Kneale, 2009). Although explored in earlier studies (Murphy, 1986), the possibility that the transition to adulthood differs by housing status has received relatively little attention in recent years.

In this paper, we examine how living in different forms of housing during adolescence (age 16) is associated with differently timed and ordered transitions to adulthood, and whether this relationship has changed over time. We use data from two of the four prospective national British birth cohort studies– the National Child Development Study (NCDS) which has followed the lives of all individuals born within

a single week in March 1958 and the British Birth Cohort Study (BCS70) which has followed the lives of all individuals born in a single week in April 1970. Despite having been born only twelve years apart, the two cohorts have grown up and entered adulthood under very different social and economic circumstances. The NCDS started with a sample of almost 17,500 in 1958 and now has collected information from CMs at ages 7, 11, 16, 23, 33 and 42 and latest at age 46 years¹. For the BCS70, information has been collected at ages 5, 10, 16, 26, 30 and 34 years with an initial sample of over 17,000. Key to both studies in this project is the availability of detailed employment, educational, partnership, housing and parenthood histories. The sample size for each of these histories is impressive with over 10,000 histories collected for each cohort. Furthermore, experience of social housing during childhood is measured during each childhood sweep of data collection, though our focus is on housing tenure at age 16.

To examine the timing of key transitions, we use event history regression models to calculate the predicted median time to event based upon social housing group in childhood and controlling for other background antecedent characteristics. After reviewing a number of model specifications, we have already used a Lognormal specification for our event history models to examine parental home leaving, partnership and parenthood. For these outcomes we found that this model best reflects the non-monotonic distribution of the hazard. We anticipate using the same model for the other two outcomes. Preliminary analyses suggest, consistent with previous work on the transition to adulthood, that across the two cohorts, age at first parenthood, age at leaving continuous education and age at first stable employment have all increased. There have been smaller rises in age at first partnership, while the median age at leaving the parental home (which is relatively late in the UK compared to many other European countries Aassve et al, 2002) has remained relatively stable. When we compare transitions by housing tenure preliminary results suggest that the transition into adulthood for those who grew up in social housing becomes 'squeezed'. Transitions from the parental home and in the family formation process are experienced both earlier and closer to one another for this group of children. In contrast, for children who lived in owner occupied housing the transition to adulthood appears to be a more drawn out and 'fuzzy' process. We find that this tenure effect is robust, even when we include controls for socio-economic disadvantage in the family of origin. For example, for 1958-born women who fall within the middle quintile of our index of disadvantage, the difference between the median age at first parenthood and first partnership is four years for those from owner occupied housing, and 2.9 years for those from Social housing. For the 1970 born cohort, this gap grew by a modest 0.7 years for those from Social housing and a more substantial 2.6 years for those from owner occupied housing. Because these models examine each outcome independently, we will supplement our findings and aid interpretation by examining descriptively the sequencing of the five transitions by housing status at age 16. This should bolster our finding that the transition to adulthood is more compressed for those who lived in social housing but should also show that the sequencing of transitions is more heterogeneous than for other more advantaged children.

References

¹ In addition, a biomedical survey was conducted at age 44/45

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