

The risks and trade-offs of renting from a private landlord

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People living in the private rented sector are forced to make hard choices in order to meet their basic needs, a new study from the University of Glasgow led UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence [CACHE] reveals.

Poor-quality, overcrowded, and unaffordable accommodation are substantial drivers of poor health and wellbeing. The impact of housing on [widening health inequalities](#) has been highlighted by the pandemic but these are systemic issues which need to be addressed if we are to 'build back better.'

According to [figures published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government](#), since COVID-19 more people are feeling lonely and experiencing deteriorations in wellbeing, especially private renters. A new study from CaCHE, funded by the TDS Charitable Foundation and the SafeDeposits Scotland Charitable Trust, explored the human face behind these statistics by carrying out in-depth interviews with 53 tenants from across the UK in March 2021.

Some participants spoke positively about their

landlord and/or letting agent, highlighting their responsiveness, flexibility, and good communication, whilst for others managing this relationship was challenging and had negative impacts on their wellbeing. Reflecting findings from [a wider body of research](#), some tenants taking part in the study said they would refrain from asking landlords to carry out repairs or upgrades because of a fear of possibly putting the tenancy at risk if, for instance, the landlord was perceived to lack the necessary funds to carry out the repairs. Tenants worried about their ability to remain in an area or neighborhood and made pragmatic trade-offs—they were willing to accept poorer quality properties that detrimentally impacted their health and wellbeing in order to access a particular location for convenience to social networks, employment, schools and childcare.

Author Dr. McKee, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy & Housing at the University of Stirling, said: "The relationship between the tenant and their landlord is particularly important. Yet it was not always easy for tenants to speak up and raise their concerns, especially for those on the lowest incomes who had limited alternative housing options available to them."

Whilst some tenants do enjoy the flexibility associated with renting privately, other renters can feel uncertain about their ability to sustain the activities and functions needed for good wellbeing (e.g. social connections associated with particular places). Older renters were particularly concerned about their ability to rely on the private rented sector over time. This at times led to low expectations. For example, because of the housing problems he experienced in the past, one participant described not being too unhappy with his property even though there was a rat infestation, no usable shower or kitchen, and violent threats from neighbors.

Author Dr. Harris, Senior Research Associate at the

University of Bristol, said: "These findings show that satisfaction statistics alone do not provide an adequate measure of [wellbeing](#) or how well the sector is operating. Some people may report being satisfied because their last housing situation was significantly worse, or because they don't expect to achieve any better."

The report makes the case that the [housing](#) we should strive for as a society must be better than what currently exists and makes several recommendations for improving the sector. This includes improving the support that is available to tenants as well as training and advice for landlords. Adequate funding for councils to enforce against poor property conditions is also essential.

Steve Harriott, Board member at the TDS Charitable Foundation [which co-funded the research with the SafeDeposits Charitable Trust]" said: "This is a fascinating piece of qualitative research which provides insight into what tenants think about living in the private rented sector."

More information: Health and wellbeing in the private rented sector Part 1:
[housingevidence.ac.uk/publicat ... 1-literature-review/](https://housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/1-literature-review/)

Health and wellbeing in the UK private rented sector | Enhancing capabilities Part 2:
[housingevidence.ac.uk/publicat ... m-tenant-interviews/](https://housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/m-tenant-interviews/)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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