About the research

The rise in house prices throughout the 1990s and 2000s outstripped average earnings and has led to a significant decrease in housing affordability in many areas. Many younger people and those on low incomes are priced out of the market and face significant constraints on where they can afford to live, shows research from the ESRC Centre for Population Change.

These constraints impact on other aspects of life, such as starting a family and employment opportunities. Age segregation between neighbourhoods can also reduce interaction and increase tensions between generations, as different age groups compete for limited national and local public resources, and even affect political outcomes.

The analysis, focusing on England and Wales, suggests that residential age segregation is a symptom of the operation of the housing system – specifically the lack of affordable private sector housing in many areas. Aspirations for home ownership have been significantly hampered by recent housing market failures, just as public resources have become constrained and employment conditions have worsened.

Many younger people and those on low incomes face significant constraints on where they can afford to live.

Key findings

- Levels of residential age segregation between older (65+) and younger (25-44) adults in England and Wales increased in the 2000s, following an already upward trend in the 1990s.
- At the same time as the residential distribution of older and younger adults has changed, so has the composition of the UK housing stock, with the main focus shifting from home ownership to private renting. Increases in the residential separation of age groups are a widespread phenomenon and are happening in both urban and rural areas, in London and elsewhere.
- Residential age segregation in England and Wales is most pronounced in areas where housing is least affordable, and the number of neighbourhoods with higher segregation more than doubled during the study period from 1,036 (14.4%) to 2,270 (31.5%). This suggests that younger adults are being priced out of the market in more expensive neighbourhoods.
- Age segregation is least pronounced where housing is most affordable, and the number of neighbourhoods with low segregation increased only slightly from 431 (6%) to 583 (8%).
Policy implications

- An important precondition for the creation, maintenance, and commitment for the next generation is to have mixed neighbourhoods in terms of age. The potentially serious implications of further age segregation for the social fabric of Britain therefore suggest the need for strategies to mitigate the underlying causes of unaffordable housing.

- Overall, strategic focus should be on improving the operation of the housing market by increasing the supply of both private sector and social housing.

- Policymakers should consider policies that increase the affordability of housing and encourage age mixing in local communities.

- The planning system should be reformed to:
  - incorporate a requirement to ensure affordability mix in an area when approving new developments
  - encourage the sub-division of larger houses where this would improve the affordability mix.

- Local authorities should promote greater accessibility to a variety of services and amenities for both older and younger people in local areas.

- Initiatives on age-friendly cities need to be extended to suburban and rural areas.

The potentially serious implications for the social fabric of Britain suggest the need for strategies to mitigate the causes of unaffordable housing.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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CPC Briefing Paper: (Un)Affordable housing and the residential separation of age groups

Web: www.cpc.ac.uk/docs/ BP45_UnAffordable_housing_and_the_residential_separation_of_age_groups.pdf

The ESRC Centre for Population Change (CPC) is investigating how and why our population is changing and what this means for people, communities and governments. The centre is a joint partnership between the Universities of Southampton, St. Andrews, Edinburgh, Stirling and Strathclyde.

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The views expressed in this evidence briefing are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the ESRC.

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