

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH, WELLBEING AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Through the Prosocial Place Research and Practice Programme, Rhiannon Corcoran directs translational research exploring what is known as the urbanicity effect or the urban penalty. She connects these research findings up with planning, regeneration and place-making initiatives via local professional practitioners working in the Living / Built environment professions.

The urbanicity effect is extremely robust in showing, since the 1930's, the pernicious impacts of disadvantaged urban living on mental health and wellbeing, influencing the prevalence of schizophrenia, depression, anxiety and languishing (low wellbeing). Particularly significant is the dose response relationship between later adult mental ill-health and childhood inner-city living. Furthermore, the negative consequences for mental distress seem tied to the perceived quality of the living environment.

Our research and practice programme builds on these issues, developing theory and evidence that illustrates how disadvantaged urban living circumstances lead to certain behaviours. We use mixed research methods including for example, walking methods, lab-based studies and qualitative methods that gather the rich data grounded in lived experience. Through local practitioners, we begin to translate these findings into built environment practice with a view to improving the outcomes for our young people and communities in general.

KEY FINDINGS

Through community insights work gathered within creative workshops, we have found that children's concerns about their living environment can be understood as falling under the following themes:

- Messiness of the environment
- Feeling scared and vulnerable when out
- Having trouble getting around
- Having nothing to do or nowhere to safely be
- Lack of a sense of community or of belonging and neighbourliness





“A sense of belonging in the environment is very important to stay happy”

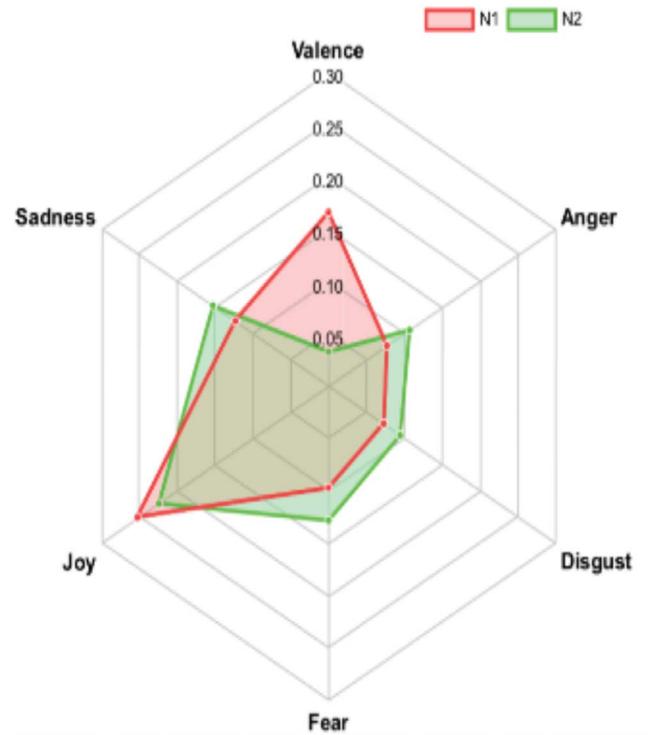
“...if people don't feel safe they don't want to be there”

“...its hard to have fun with friends outdoors because facilities like parks are being destroyed by graffiti and litter”

“Having evenings where young and old people can get together and bond”

“The ability to talk to others, regardless of age is important”

Prosocial Place Community Insights report for Halton Lea NHS Healthy New Town:
bit.ly/3nqGL4P



The image shows the feelings elicited from descriptions provided of different South Liverpool environments on our waking study using Sentiment Analysis software:
bit.ly/3FhKnvY

RELEVANCE FOR LIVERPOOL'S CHILDREN

Liverpool's children deserve to live in neighbourhoods that support their wellbeing. Those places need to feel safe, be welcoming, and look and feel clean. When children feel threatened or unsafe outside their homes, they will not go out, they will lack the opportunity to play and to develop their sense of autonomy. Lacking these experiences will negatively impact their wellbeing and their quality of life as children and may lead to future mental health difficulties.

Liverpool's children deserve to live within communities that provide a sense of belonging and that are well-resourced with activities that support them in getting to know their neighbours and others in the community who can provide learning and development opportunities beyond those offered by schools and parents. The old saying that it takes a village to raise a child still holds but is seldom enacted in the 21st century world.

When we do things better with our minds on our children's wellbeing, we can prevent the pernicious impacts that the quality of the living environment has on our children and young people. And, in doing things better for children, we will be improving outcomes for everyone.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Put children and young people's wellbeing at the heart of Liverpool's living environment agenda
- Scope local planning and regeneration guidance, looking to address any lack of child focus
- Develop local guidance that enables the translation of public mental health knowledge into built environment development guidance such as here: bit.ly/3kOhCPD
- Make good use of the skills of local place-making professionals who are signed up to putting children at the heart of built environment policy-making and practice. Doing so will build social value and local skills capacity

ABOUT LIVERPOOL'S CHILD FRIENDLY CITY PROGRAMME

- > [Liverpool City Council website](#)
- > [Email: cfc@liverpool.gov.uk](mailto:cfc@liverpool.gov.uk)
- > [UNICEF website](#)
- > [Email: cfc@unicef.org.uk](mailto:cfc@unicef.org.uk)
- > [Liverpool Health Partners CFC page](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.prosocialplace.co.uk

whatworkswellbeing.org/category/places-and-community/

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