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Social inclusion, neighbourhood reputation and stigma: resident's experiences from within

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Abstract

In this paper the reputation of the neighbourhood is conceptualised as having important impacts on whether residents' are socially included or socially excluded. A stigmatised neighbourhood can affect access to employment and other opportunities, business and government investment in the neighbourhood and residents' ability to reach their full potential and become socially included. Living in neighbourhoods with poor reputations - viewed as 'problem places' that are home to 'problem people' - can reinforce many of the difficulties of already socially excluded individuals. Overall, the stigmatisation of particular neighbourhoods raises social justice issues as it accentuates the gulf between an apparently poor and spatially contained minority from a well-off majority. Taken as a whole, these issues undermine policies to establish a cohesive and pluralist society as well as diminishing political imperatives associated with social inclusion. Many of these stigmatised neighbourhoods consist of high concentrations of low-income rental housing that presents a significant challenge for policy-makers and practitioners. The evidence gathered from this study of three Australian neighbourhoods explores the impact of changes to social mix in neighbourhood regeneration on social housing tenants, home owners and private renters' perceptions of neighbourhood stigma. An unexpected finding was that the private rental tenure in regenerated neighbourhoods is increasingly becoming associated with stigma.

Key words: Social mix; urban renewal; neighbourhood reputation; stigma; social housing

Introduction

This chapter focuses on reputation as a neighbourhood characteristic which may have important effects on individual residents' opportunities and experiences and social inclusion. In other words it explores the debates about neighbourhood effects, specifically through viewing the role of stigma or reputation of an area as a key independent mechanism for affecting the life chances of residents. Australian debates, in part, cite lack of 'social mix', whereby social housing neighbourhoods consist of large concentrations of homogenous housing and tenants experience high levels of disadvantage, as a significant part of the problem in contributing to the negative reputations. The media has played an active role in supporting and embellishing pathological depictions of social housing estates as sites of disorder and crime, drawing on explanations that cite individual agency and behaviour as the problems (Arthurson, 2004). Residing in neighbourhoods with poor reputations has numerous impacts on residents' prospects and opportunities. The range of pertinent factors mentioned in the literature include, access to employment and educational opportunities and the shaping of residents' social networks and reactionary behaviours (Atkinson & Kintrea 2001). In turn, the perceived reputation of the neighbourhood is an important predictor of residents' intentions to leave the neighbourhood. Findings such as this question the sustainability of urban renewal policy directions that artificially create mixed tenure neighbourhoods without focusing on enhancing neighbourhood reputation. Those with choice may move out of the neighbourhood leaving only the most disadvantaged residents behind, in effect working against improvement to the neighbourhood reputation (Permentier et al 2009). The remaining residents may then feel trapped in the neighbourhood adding to the problematic reputation (Kearns and Parkinson (2001). A related literature is also developing that explores the effects of experiencing stigma on residents' health and wellbeing (Scrambler 2009; Warr 2005, Palmer et al 2004; 2005).

A stigmatised neighbourhood is seen to affect residents' access to employment as some employers, for instance, discriminate against potential employees residing in neighbourhoods with poor reputations on the basis of 'postcode' (Bradbury & Chalmers, 2003; Palmer et al 2005; Ziersch & Arthurson, 2005). Businesses may be reluctant to locate in or near these stigmatised neighbourhoods reducing the availability of quality retail outlets and local employers (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001). Other related adverse implications raised in the debates are about the substandard local services and amenities, including schools that may have difficulty attracting quality teachers or a diversity of pupils (Galster, 2007). A counter argument is that within some impoverished neighbourhoods specialised services are often available based on the high concentrations of residents in need that otherwise may not be available if this need falls below a certain service level 'threshold' (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001).

Related arguments are that the experience of living in an ill reputed neighbourhood may cause residents to adopt self-defeating behaviours. For instance, educational horizons and personal ambitions may be curtailed by fatalistic values linked to place of residence and the effects of experiencing spatially concentrated disadvantage or what some argue constitutes 'a culture of poverty' (Murray, 1994). Murray argues that a 'culture of poverty' is sustained through the workings of the welfare state, in this instance through the development of concentrations of homogenous social housing that facilitates sameness and tenants' dependency and feckless behaviour rather than building individual agency, aspirations and capacity for change. In a more structural conceptualisation of the issue of neighbourhood reputation that considers some of the broader societal determinants of poverty and inequality, MacIntyre and Ellaway (2000: 343) identify the reputation of an area as a separate dimension. Reputation is viewed as one of two "collective social functionings and practices" that are "socially patterned" but nonetheless impact on the availability of material or infrastructure resources. Within this framework they

conceptualise these latter features as ‘opportunity structures’. By ‘opportunity structures’ they refer to the features of the physical and social environment, factors that are envisaged as outside of individual control, which may be health enhancing or health damaging’. From this viewpoint the way that residents, policy makers and the business sector perceive the reputation of the neighbourhood has potential impacts on opportunity structures and behaviours of residents. The reputation affects the self esteem and morale of the residents, the available infrastructure and who is likely to move into or out of the neighbourhood. There are other pertinent examples of how ‘collective social functionings and practices’ impact in a practical sense. Hastings (2009) found, for instance, that staff may vary the quality of the services provided, depending on their perception of the reputation and subsequent merit of the neighbourhood, suggesting that stigma has detrimental consequences for peoples’ lives. Likewise, experiencing fear of crime (without necessarily being a victim of it) and the negative perceptions of lack of safety that are often associated with stigmatized neighbourhoods, are linked to lowered health and wellbeing outcomes for residents (Ziersch & Baum, 2004; Warr, 2005).

Interconnected with these debates is the proposition that the perception of control that residents have over the processes of experiencing stigmatisation is an important factor impacting on health and well being (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2001). In neighbourhoods with poor reputations harsh judgements are made about residents, including depictions about the receipt of welfare by an ‘undeserving poor’ (Palmer, Ziersch, Arthurson & Baum, 2005; Warr, 2005). Residents often have little control over these processes and the resultant feelings of shame, blame, devaluation and depictions of deviating from the ‘normal’ are interrelated with the health related effects of stigma, including decreased morale and self-esteem and increased anxiety levels (Scrambler, 2009). The feelings associated with the occurrence of stigma are likened by some to the experience of racial prejudice and may have analogous detrimental effects on health (Krieger et al., 2005; Kelaher et al., 2008). In totality, in current debates about neighbourhood effects residents’ experiences of living in neighbourhoods of concentrated social housing with poor reputations that are viewed as ‘dysfunctional’ places are thought to doubly reinforce many of the difficulties of already socially excluded individuals and their ability to reach their full potential and become socially included.

The association of social housing neighbourhoods with stigma and poor reputations has important damaging ramifications not only for social housing tenants but for other eligible individuals and families experiencing housing affordability problems. Recent social surveys undertaken in Australia by Burke et al. (2005) report that as many as 46% of Australian households, living in private rental accommodation and in receipt of Commonwealth Rental Assistance¹, claim they would never consider applying for public housing because of its poor reputation.

Thus, an overall but often understated aim of contemporary social housing estate regeneration projects, in Australia, is to improve the reputation of the neighbourhoods. This aim is thought to be achievable, in part, through changing the mix of housing dwellings in terms of quality, size and tenure type along with physical upgrading of social housing. Regeneration involves demolition, subdividing existing large backyards into a number of smaller allotments to construct two or more houses or a group of units, where there may have once been a single dwelling, thereby increasing the density of housing in the neighbourhood. Related initiatives seek to change the socioeconomic mix of the estates. Key approaches include building new housing for private sale to attract home owners into the neighbourhood and permanently relocating many social housing tenants to other neighbourhoods, in effect attempting to rebalance neighbourhood social mix. Some studies suggest that increasing the balance of home owners in areas of concentrated social housing through regeneration activities is associated with enhanced reputations of the overall neighbourhoods (See, for instance, Beekman et al., 2001; Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001;

Martin & Watkinson, 2005). Likewise studies of long established mixed tenure neighbourhoods, which were originally planned that way, rather than being created through estate regeneration activities suggest that social housing tenants in these types of 'mixed' neighbourhoods do not identify themselves as stigmatised. This seems in part due to residents' awareness that people residing outside of the neighbourhood and the wider public do not directly associate the neighbourhoods with social housing (Ruming et al., 2004). However, on some estates with long histories of poor reputations, despite changes implemented to social mix and other regeneration activities the problems of stigma appear more intractable to change (Robertson et al 2008, Hastings & Dean, 2003).

This paper seeks to contribute to knowledge and understandings of the dynamics of neighbourhood stigma and reputation from residents' perspectives and whether the situations are improved post regeneration, especially with changes made to social mix. Despite the growing debates about neighbourhood effects and the question of whether living in disadvantaged areas contributes to or compounds social exclusion for already socioeconomically disadvantaged residents, little is known about the way residents perceive the reputations of their neighbourhoods (Permentier et al 2009). As Link and Phelan (2001: 365) argue, much of the research is uninformed by the lived experiences of people who are deemed as stigmatised. In particular, little is known about the extent to which the experiences and dynamics of neighbourhood reputation and stigma differs between housing tenure groups (Permentier et al., 2009). Throughout history the middle classes have tended to speak for the disadvantaged as if they know what is best for them with some exceptions such as the work of Mark Peel (2003), which has enabled people to tell their own stories. With these discrepancies in mind, while this paper draws first on survey data it also utilises qualitative findings from in-depth interviews conducted with social housing tenants, home owners and private renters to inform the spectrum of residents' perceptions of changes to social mix and the impacts on neighbourhood reputation. The exploration focuses on reputation as a neighbourhood characteristic which may have effects on individual residents' opportunities and outcomes. In other words it explores some of the debates about neighbourhood effects, specifically presenting the role of stigma or reputation as an independent factor.

The case study neighbourhoods

The data collection for the research was conducted in three neighbourhoods, Mitchell Park, Hillcrest and Northfield all located within the metropolitan region of Adelaide. Prior to the regeneration projects commencing, all three neighbourhoods were characterised by high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and concentrations of social housing. The housing in the neighbourhoods was highly identifiable as social housing, concentrated and in run down condition. As shown in Table 1, post-regeneration the concentrations of social housing were reduced by as much as 50 per cent. The neighbourhoods were extensively revitalised over the past fifteen to twenty years with changes made to the social mix of the areas through demolition and sales of public housing, urban infill and building of new housing for private sale to attract homebuyers into the neighbourhoods. At Northfield although as in the other two case study areas the concentration of social housing within the neighbourhood was reduced (27 per cent to 19.9 per cent respectively) it differed in that the overall number of social housing dwellings increased slightly (n=226 to n=238), (Table 1). This was due to the specific project focus on urban consolidation and utilisation of vacant land that was released for new housing construction.

Table 1: Changes in concentrations of public housing in the three regenerated neighbourhoods

	Public Housing Concentration			
	Before (%)	After (%)	Before (n)	After (n)
Mitchell Park	75	35	1000	350
Hillcrest	60	10.2	350	118
Northfield	27	19.9	226	238

Source: City of Port Adelaide Enfield (2010a), City of Port Adelaide Enfield (2010b), SAHT (2005), Phillips (1994)

A questionnaire survey was posted to a random sample of 800 households across the three case study neighbourhoods and 325 surveys were completed and returned. Respondents consisted of 117 males (37%) and 199 females (63%) and there was no significant association between tenure and gender (Chi-squared=4.080, df=3, n=299, p=.253, Cramer's V=.117). After accounting for the non-deliverables (i.e. insufficient address; empty house, non residential, n=78) the overall response rate was 45 per cent. Participants for the in-depth interview phase of the study were recruited through an expression of interest form that was included with the survey questionnaire. Sixty-five people returned the forms indicating their interest in participating in an interview. Forty interviews were conducted. Of these, sixteen lived in homes they owned or were paying a mortgage for, fourteen lived in social housing and ten were renting in the private sector. The interviews were recorded and transcribed providing insights into residents' understandings of social mix and the relationship to neighbourhood reputation. The transcripts were collated by drawing together thematic issues in order to identify patterns, similarities and differences (Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

Survey findings

Stigma and the neighbourhood

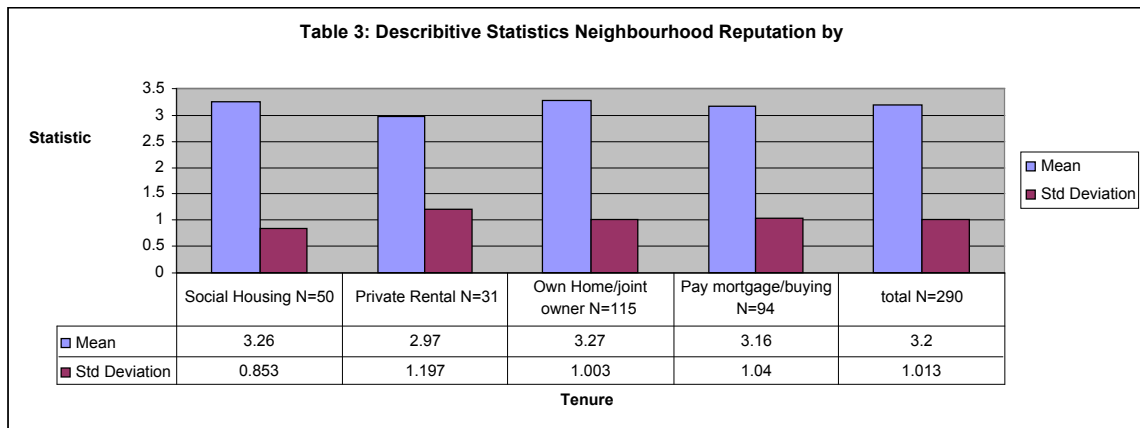
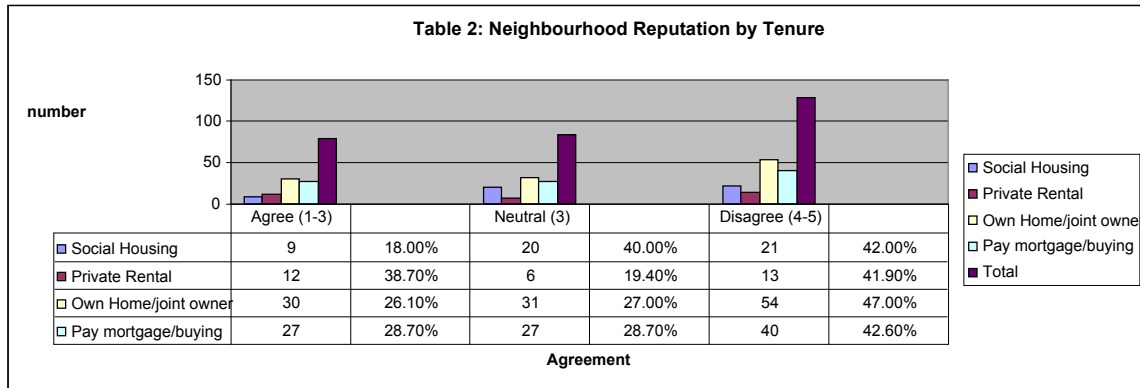
Respondents were asked to tick a box to show how strongly they agreed with a series of five statements on a scale that ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) that were specifically relevant to the reputation of the neighbourhood. The statements were concerned with the topics of the local *neighbourhood reputation*, *discrimination because of the type of housing they lived in*, expressions of *pride in the neighbourhood*, how much they *liked living in the neighbourhood*, and the extent to which *people react positively to where they live*.

It was considered important in the current study to address the specific point identified in the literature that little is known about whether there are any differences in residents' perspectives about neighbourhood reputation across the individual housing tenure groups. To this end residents were presented with a statement that 'this neighbourhood has a poor reputation'. Studies also indicate that residents' perceptions of the neighbourhoods are strongly influenced by how they think others from outside the area will view it (Blockland, 2008; Curtis & Jackson, 1977 in Permentier 2008). Thus, if residents feel that from the viewpoint of outsiders the neighbourhood has retained a negative reputation, despite efforts at urban renewal and changes to social mix, then we have to question whether much has improved (Permentier et al 2009). For this reason the statement that 'People react positively to where I live' was also included.

Neighbourhood reputation

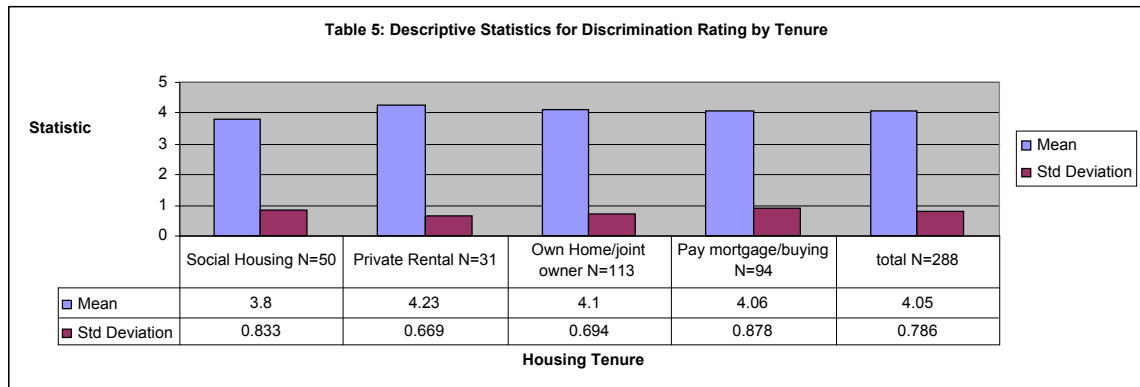
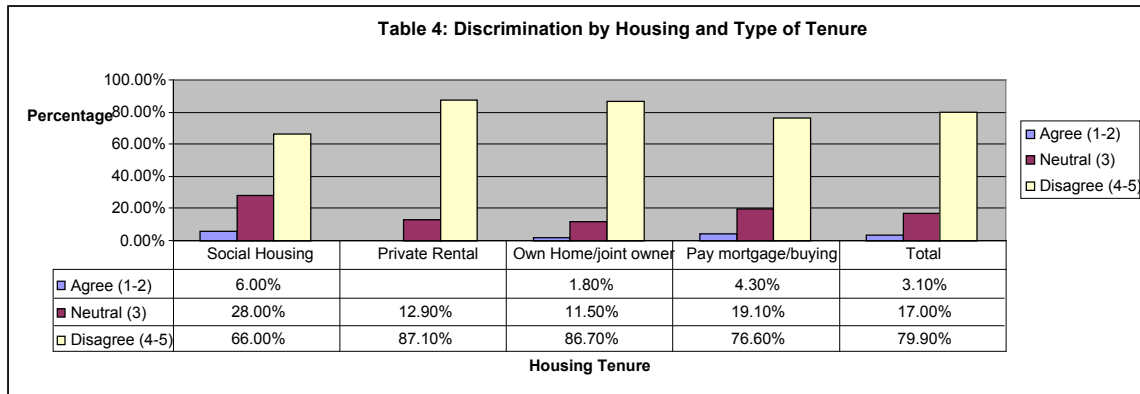
The majority of respondents within each housing tenure group, home owners, home buyers, private renters and social housing tenants, disagreed with the statement that 'this neighbourhood has a poor reputation' (Table 2). A Chi-square test for independence indicated no significant

association between the four different housing tenure groups and their ratings of neighbourhood reputation (Chi-squared=6.823, df=6, n=290, p=.338, Cramer's V=.108). While private renters (2.97) were the most likely to agree with the statement (Table 3) and homeowners (3.27) on average were the least likely, the average agreement scores were not significantly different for the tenure groups (F=.831, df=3,286, p=.478, η^2 =.009).



Discrimination due to type of housing and tenure

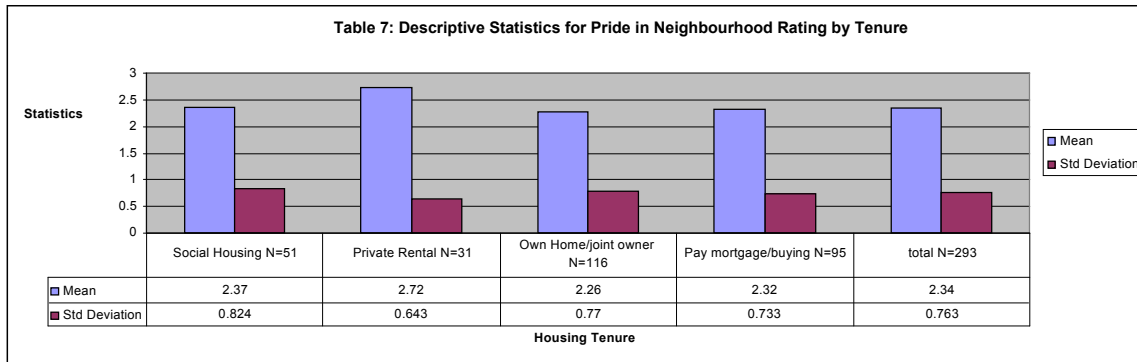
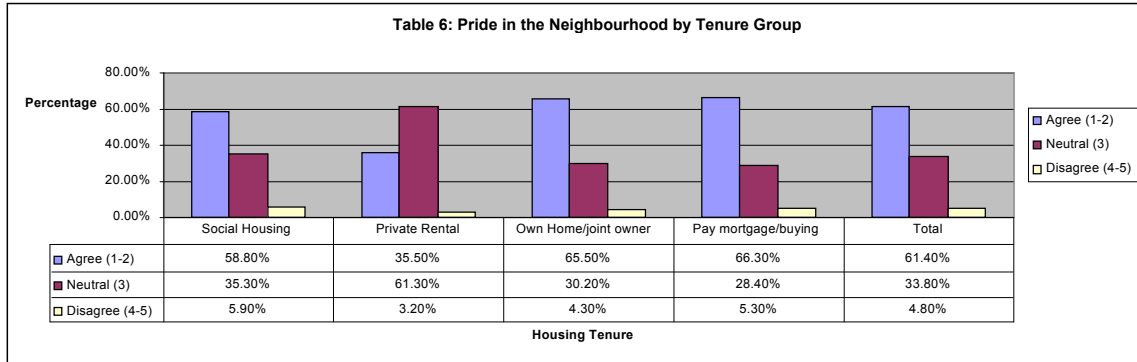
Across the four housing tenure groups the majority of respondents also disagreed with the statement that that *'I am discriminated against because of the type of housing I live in'* (Table 4). A Chi-square test for independence (with Fisher's Exact Probability test) suggested no significant association between housing tenure and discrimination (Chi-squared=10.889, n=288, p=.067, Cramer's V=.142). An interesting finding was that private renters (4.23) on average felt least likely to be discriminated against, whilst social housing tenants (3.80) thought they were the most likely to be discriminated against (Table 5). The average agreement scores, however, were not found to be significantly different for the housing tenure groups (Brown-Forsythe=2.441, df=3,202.964, p=.065, η^2 =.025).



Pride in the neighbourhood by tenure groups

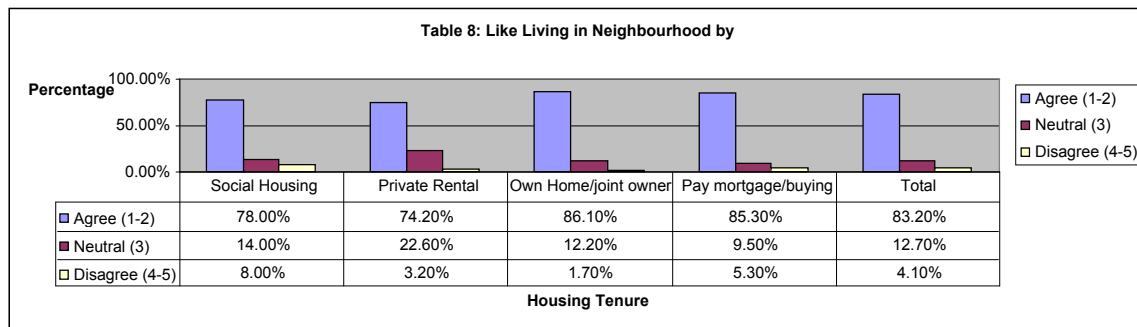
With the exception of private renters the majority of respondents gave favourable ratings when asked if they were proud of their neighbourhood (Table 6). A Chi-square test for independence (with Fisher's Exact Probability test) indicated a significant association between tenure and rating of pride in the neighbourhood (Chi-squared=12.093, n=293, p=.047, Cramer's V=.148). Less private renters than expected agreed that they were proud of their neighbourhood, with more giving neutral responses than for other tenure groups. The means, as shown in Table 7, suggest that homeowners (2.26) were on average the proudest of their neighbourhood, compared with private renters (2.71) that were the least proud. The average agreement scores were significantly different for the tenure groups (F=2,981, df=3,289, p=.032) although the actual difference in mean scores between groups was quite small (eta squared $\eta^2=.030$). Post Hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the main mean differences were between homeowners (2.26) and private renters (2.71) (Table 7).

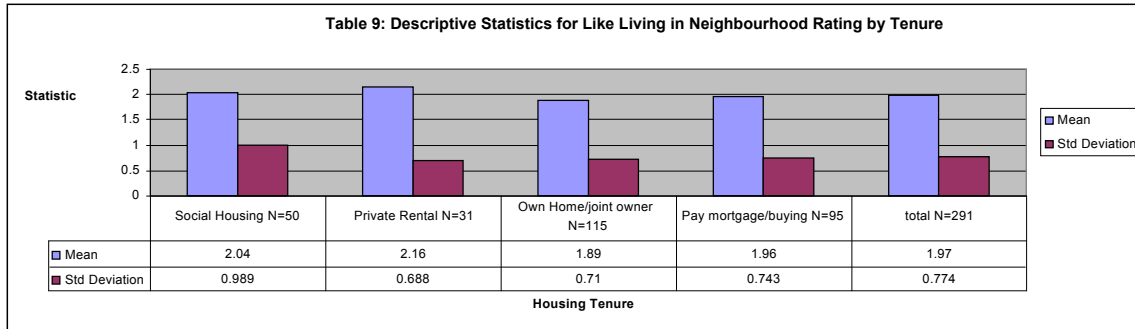
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Like living in neighbourhood and housing tenure

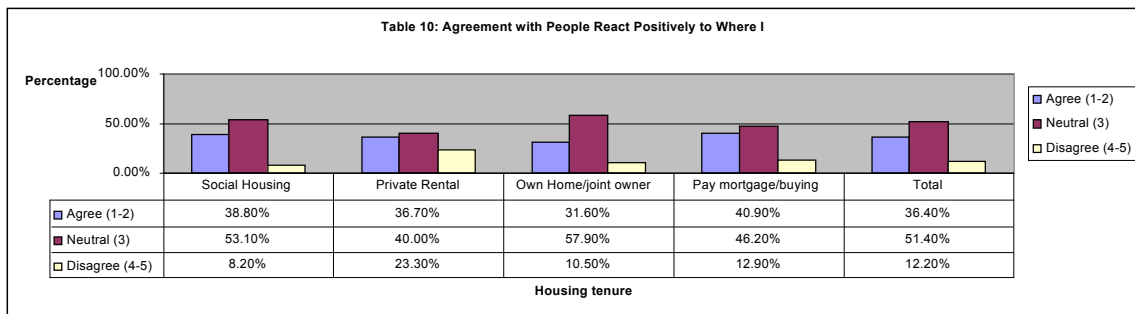
The majority of respondents agreed that they liked living in the neighbourhood (Table 8). A Chi-square test for independence (with Fisher’s Exact Probability test) indicated that there was no significant association between like living in the neighbourhood and tenure (Chi-squared=7.708, n=291, p=.227, Cramer’s V=.115). The means suggested that homeowners (1.89) on average liked living in the neighbourhood the most, and social housing tenants (2.04) liked it the least (Table 9). The average agreement scores were not significantly different across tenure groups (F=1.217, df=3,287, p=.304, $\eta^2=.013$).





Peoples' reactions to where they live

The majority of respondents gave neutral ratings when asked if “people react positively when I tell them where I live” (Table 10). Homeowners out of the four tenure groups were least likely to agree that people react positively when they tell them where they live, and mortgagees were most likely to agree. A Chi-square test for independence indicated that there was no significant association between tenure and agreement with people react positively to where I live (Chi-squared=7.506, df=6, n=286, p=.277, Cramer’s V=.115).



Discussion

In the survey responses the majority of respondents across the tenure groups gave similar favourable ratings of their neighbourhood using the five indicators of ‘neighbourhood reputation’, ‘discrimination because of their type of housing’, ‘pride in the neighbourhood’, ‘liked living in the neighbourhood’, and ‘people respond favourably to where I live’. The one exception to the findings was for private renters where fewer than expected agreed with the statement that they were proud of their neighbourhood, and more gave neutral responses than for the other tenure groups. The main mean significant differences were between homeowners, that were most proud of their neighbourhoods, and private renters that were the least proud although the size of the difference was quite small. The finding that homeowners expressed the greatest level of pride in their neighbourhood, of the four housing tenure groups, is consistent with previous research findings. As homeowners have made a conscious decision to purchase in the particular neighbourhood or have often lived there a long time they are more likely to have a commitment to making the most of living there (Brown et al 2003).

It is less clear why private renters felt less proud of the neighbourhood. What we do know is that due to housing affordability problems more Australians are renting for longer periods of time when previously they would have entered home ownership at earlier stages. In view of this the findings could point to a number of factors. Perhaps it indicates disengagement with the neighbourhood in that private renters while they report that they like living in the neighbourhood perceive their situation as semi-permanent. It may just be somewhere to get affordable rent so they are not really concerned with the neighbourhood or perhaps do not really care, thus explaining the high level of neutral responses compared to the other tenures.

Overall, and bearing in mind that the three neighbourhoods previously had poor reputations it appears at least in relation to the five aspects explored here that the reputation of the neighbourhoods post regeneration and with changes made to social mix are not so much of a problem. The three neighbourhoods had experienced allied strategies to social mix to reimagine the areas including name changes and extensive physical beautification. This finding is not really surprising as other studies have found that socioeconomic mix is a key determinant of neighbourhood reputation whereby homogenous estates are perceived as having a more negative reputation by their residents than when they are socially mixed (Musterd 2008). These findings are consistent with other studies, as post regeneration the physical aspects of the housing within the regenerated neighbourhoods are usually greatly improved at least refurbished and often brand new and the social housing that remains is less identifiable as such. Thus, it is not surprising that residents on the whole are likely to experience pride in the neighbourhood, like living there and not raise the reputation or discrimination due to living in a particular housing tenure as problems.

In order to explore a more nuanced account of these quantitative findings and to see if some more light could be shed especially in relation to private renters expressing less pride in the neighbourhood, the findings of the forty in-depth interviews conducted with residents of the three case study neighbourhoods were examined.

Interview findings

Neighbourhood reputation

The social housing tenants, homeowners and homebuyers that were interviewed commonly expressed the view that the changes to social mix, which had reduced the high concentrations of social housing and increased levels of home ownership, had assisted in reducing the previous poor reputations associated with the neighbourhoods.

I know that Hillcrest had a really, very bad name many years ago because it was all Housing Trust. For some reason or other, Housing Trust people don't seem to have a good name and yet the people that I know here were very nice people (H40 homeowner).

A lot of people have said Mitchell Park is really good now but when I told them I was moving there they raised their eyebrows 'oh that's a wild area or something like that' (MP1 homebuyer).

I know when we first moved here [in 1973] the police told us it was called the Bronx (MP45 homebuyer).

They [SAHT] are all mixed in everywhere but they're not as noticeable now as they used to be. They've blended them in so that you really don't know which ones are the housing trust homes and which are the bought ones. They've done it that way on purpose I think, so they don't stand out. But I know how they stand out. You look for the black numbers on the walls. So you really can't tell until you get to see the pattern as you drive around

and you look and you really pay attention then you get to know which ones are which, but overall they blend in really well (H98 home owner).

At Hillcrest and Northfield the reduced stigma of the neighbourhoods was linked specifically to the influx of homeowners along with the association of the regeneration projects with the marketing and promotion of the adjacent and desirable new private sector housing development of Oakden:

[Oakden] was a very upmarket sort of sales promotion thing and that. They then started Hillcrest advertising when they did the redevelopment right next door to Oakden. They attached it to that. You saw it becoming more pleasurable, more likeable, more upmarket as things progressed (H35 public housing).

If I say I live at Hillcrest they kind of look down their nose, but as soon as I tell them it's on the border of Oakden they go ahh... because it's trendy and new and modern and more expensive. Whereas they think Hillcrest is still old and crusty.... I know most of the houses in my street and in my block are new but people seem to think it's still the old Housing Trust homes and the dilapidated old homes that were here before. Perhaps because they haven't been here for a long time (H7 home purchaser)

In many instances it was also pointed out that the stigma had not completely disappeared. Homeowners in particular highlighted particular streets where social housing is still concentrated as problematic parts of the neighbourhood with poor reputations. These areas were sometimes described as 'danger zones' and 'bad places' where it was felt unsafe to walk at night and were commonly referred to as 'the SAHT part of the neighbourhood'.

One day it was like being in New York. I looked out my window, and I could see these cars and police officers in vests with guns, and swarming around the outside of the house. Then there was this big attack, and they grabbed the girl and dragged her, and she bit someone, and they had an ambulance. And it was like the streets of New York here! (MP9 home owner)

[I] don't like to stereotype or whatever but there are some bad areas, streets I don't like to walk down at night [name of street] being one of them...I have heard of people, there's a lady riding her bike has had things thrown at her as she rides her bike she works at night as she works as a cleaner up at Flinders (MP3 homebuyer).

Pride in the neighbourhood

Similar to the survey findings respondents across the four housing tenure groups generally expressed pride in the neighbourhood. Comments were commonly made that the neighbourhood 'definitely looks nicer', 'certainly has improved', and has 'lots more parks'. Many of the social housing tenants expressed increased feelings of pride due to the changes to tenure mix that included upgrading of the housing and made it 'less visible'. At the same time, however, it was acknowledged that the stigma had probably not completely disappeared especially from the perspective of people living outside of the neighbourhoods:

I know a lot of people would say you wouldn't want to go and live there [Mitchell Park] but er, I think it is just wonderful the development that has happened..... The houses that are obviously privately owned and the trust houses that I would imagine that have

come into private ownership they all seem to be blending in so well together and taking pride (MP2 public housing).

It was interesting to observe that some homeowners and private renters expressed the specific view that despite the changes, they felt that social housing tenants lacked pride in their homes and the neighbourhood:

Cause I can tell you going down my street which ones are the housing trust, which ones are the rentals by the rubbish they are leaving out in the street. Dumping it alongside the road, that sort of attitude, and what it actually does is, actually instead of pulling up those who are in the lower socio-economic group it actually dumbs down, it drags down the neighbourhood (MP7 homeowner).

The problem with it [public housing] is that there are still pockets. Like that street opposite me, it is a pocket of housing trust people and you can tell it. I think they need to be more in between and the houses need to look the same like my house and my neighbour's house. But you know they don't, they look run down, shabby. And so, you get a little group of those types of houses where these people live and they don't look after them because they don't have to. Whereas if they had houses that look the same as everyone else's there might be more incentive to look after them if the people around them were actually homeowners (MP9 home owner).

There are one or two streets that I wouldn't want to live in. That's mainly probably because they are Housing Commission homes and you might find that obviously the people that live in those homes are maybe of a poorer quality of life or something like that but that I suppose is being judgemental. It might be a very nice street to live in but I wouldn't live in it. When you look at the home and the way it has been let go, you wouldn't want to live next to somewhere like that I think (MP118 private rental tenant).

Some residents seemed more concerned about the increased mix of private rental housing in the two neighbourhoods. Issues were raised about the high turnover of tenants in private rental. Reference was also made to investors purchasing newer houses for sale and the older non refurbished social housing without a commitment to upgrading it, but merely to rent on the private rental market, which was detracting from the attractiveness of the neighbourhoods:

Probably we have more trouble with the private rental ones, of the old transportable ones - one down the street here. We've had problems with various people who have been in there (H35 public housing).

We have one next door [private rental] and they don't look after it, he couldn't care less (N161 home owner).

Perhaps these findings shed some understandings on why there were differences in the survey responses with private renters expressing less pride in the neighbourhood than respondents in other housing tenures. Other studies have found that people do not want to be considered part of a minority group in their neighbourhood (Permentier et al 2008: 834). The private renters may have internalised some of the stigma attached to the private rental tenure or merely be more detached from the neighbourhood in seeing it as less permanent move. In some instances private renters are just looking for cheap rent. One private rental tenant that lived in the older area of Hillcrest with social housing knew nothing about the area before he moved there and said in the interview that "it isn't a nice area" (H257 private rental) but he was just looking for cheap rent. With the

escalation in housing affordability issues and related problems of entering homeownership over the past decade many younger people are renting for longer periods of time when in the past they would have gone into homeownership.

Discrimination because of the type of housing

While the survey findings in relation to feeling discriminated against due to the type of housing lived in were not significant, in the interviews it was clear that there was still some stigma attached to the social housing tenure. This stigma was operationalised at the smaller scale of the block or street rather than permeating across the whole neighbourhood. The nub of the issue is that this stigma emanated internally from other residents within the local neighbourhood.

Why is there no housing trust in Mitcham or Burnside? Why does there have to be a mix of SAHT and homeowners in Mitchell Park? (MP1 Home owner).

In the interviews some but not all social housing tenants expressed the potential they felt for being discriminated against by residents in other housing tenures. On the other hand any stigma related to the social housing tenure is likely to be substantially reduced as efforts are made in urban renewal projects to blend in the regenerated or new social housing with private housing. A tenant at Mitchell Park, for instance, reported that one of her neighbours in their group of units did not want others in the neighbourhood to know that the units were public housing and that this was now possible because of the extensive refurbishments:

And he said 'ah I'd never tell anyone this is housing trust', I said 'really why?'. 'Ah no he said'. But there's nothing, no one would know, you know, they'd just think, ah a nice group of units. All the garden out the front was established by the trust and it's all nice and neat and tidy. We've each done our own things in our back yard and I thought that's really sad ...It's a beautiful unit. How lucky are we, how lucky are we! That's his view that's how he feels about it, so I guess it's not really for me to say one way or another whether it's right or wrong but it's a shame because he's not going to add to the area becoming better though (MP2 public housing).

More relevant than any of the foregoing is the fact that people feel it is okay to discriminate against those in social housing as if the tenure is somehow synonymous with an underclass. Some social housing tenants felt that they were discriminated against due to their housing tenure and unfairly so:

I've noticed with the carers they say 'Oh typical housing trust people'. And I think 'oh my parents were housing trust people' and I mean my mother was very house proud and always wore neat things but it's what they could afford (MP266 social housing/association).

I think its good that you not have housing trust people living in one group because then they're segregated and put into one box where everyone's the same like and everybody seems to look down on some people who are in HT like they're just like they're all bums or something, I don't know where they get this idea but that's not so. There are a minority of people who go into trust homes and don't look after them and I think by separating them and splitting them up and putting them in a development area where there's private rental, trust, whatever, is a good idea because then you don't know which is the, a lot of people here don't know which are housing trust homes and which are not. My house certainly does not look like a HT home (H2 social housing tenant).

I think we all get on. I mean I'm renting and nobodies sort of looked down on me. They've treated me like everyone else. Some people think that I'm a homeowner and they're in housing trust. Some of them think you're all homeowners. I say 'I'm in a rented house too don't worry about it' some people do get a stigma about having to rent (MP266 social housing/association).

This is similar to the findings of Reutter et al (2009:300) in their study of low-income neighbourhoods in the Canadian cities of Toronto and Edmonton where respondents talked about 'being labelled', by outsiders and 'looked at and treated differently'. They found that participants living in poverty have a profound sense of stigma consciousness. Their coping strategies included concealing their discreditable status and managing the sense of dislocation between how they thought they were perceived (virtual) and how they feel (actual). In some instances this amounted to disregarding negative views or pejorative comments or engaging in a form of cognitive dissonance such as distancing themselves from other people in the same situation by making a distinction between deserving and undeserving. This latter point was illustrated in the current study by the findings that previous social housing tenants who had become home owners, often through purchase opportunities provided by the regeneration project, were then keen to differentiate themselves from the social housing tenure:

A lot of them are trouble. It puts your [house] value down, I think, if you've got them [social housing tenants] all around. A lot of people don't notice who they are, but I do (H55, home owner, previous social housing tenant).

This point was also highlighted in earlier Australian research conducted in the Hillcrest area that explored residents' acceptance of socioeconomic diversity and the new mix of social and private housing (Biggins & Hassan 1998: 39). The highest approval for the new socioeconomically mixed community came from low-income earners (79.4 per cent). Conversely, middle income approved the least (40 per cent), which was 25 per cent fewer than for residents on high incomes. It seems that where social distance is least, that is, from the point of view of middle-income earners, there is greater disapproval of the new mixed income community. Middle-income residents want to distance themselves from low-income residents in the income strata below them.

People react positively when I tell them where live, and like living in the neighbourhood

Responses indicated that a long history of poor neighbourhood reputation is difficult to change.

I think it's wonderful. I say 'I live at Mitchell Park' and people sort of raise an eyebrow and then suddenly they remember 'ah that's right there's been a huge development going on there hasn't there?' and you say 'yes it's so good, it's like living at Mawson Lakes' with all the fancy houses! (MP2 public housing).

At Hillcrest and Northfield respondents often commented that in addition to the benefits of homeowners coming into their immediate neighbourhoods people from outside were more positive about the neighbourhoods because of the association with the marketing and promotion of the adjacent and desirable new private housing development at Oakden:

[Oakden] was a very upmarket sort of sales promotion thing and that. They then started Hillcrest advertising when they did the redevelopment right next door to Oakden. They attached it to that. You saw it becoming more pleasurable, more likeable, more upmarket as things progressed (H35 public housing).

If I say I live at Hillcrest they kind of look down their nose, but as soon as I tell them it's on the border of Oakden they go ahh... because it's trendy and new and modern and more expensive. Whereas they think Hillcrest is still old and crusty.... I know most of the houses in my street and in my block are new but people seem to think it's still the old Housing Trust homes and the dilapidated old homes that were here before. Perhaps because they haven't been here for a long time (H7 home purchaser).

Conclusions

In general, the findings seem to support those of other studies, which suggest that changing the social mix through introducing homeowners onto social housing estates as part of regeneration initiatives improves the overall reputation of the neighbourhoods (e.g. Beekman et al 2001), at least from the viewpoint of residents. The findings also add to our understandings of residents' perspectives about neighbourhood reputation across individual housing tenure groups, for homeowners, home purchasers, public and private renters. The majority of respondents across housing tenure groups did not perceive their neighbourhoods as having poor reputations, although all of these neighbourhoods were stigmatised prior to regeneration taking place. A limitation of the current study was that it was not possible to conduct a before or after measure of the reputation of the neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, in the in-depth interviews many of the original social housing tenants that had relocated temporarily and then moved back into the neighbourhoods talked about how the stigma previously attached to the neighbourhoods before the urban renewal projects was much improved. Likewise, homebuyers reported that they would not have considered living in the areas before the urban renewal projects were implemented due to the poor reputations.

Nevertheless, as in other international and Australian studies (Arthurson 2010; Atkinson & Kintrea 2001; Beekman, Lyons & Scott 2001) the stigma had not completely disappeared and homeowners raised concerns about anti-social behaviour, which they attributed to social housing tenants. The findings were similar to those of a case study of a Newcastle neighbourhood (New South Wales), which found that social housing tenants and home owners alike identified housing tenure as a factor that separated and distinguished the local geographical community. In this particular instance, social housing comprised only 8 per cent of dwellings, but it was predominately concentrated in three specific parts of the neighbourhood (Ruming et al. 2004). The authors concluded that social housing tenants are not always readily accepted into communities dominated by private owners. Similarly, to these studies in the current investigation stigma was associated with specific clusters of social housing in particular streets and parts of the neighbourhood. The stigma was operationalised at a finite level rather than impacting on the overall image of the neighbourhood, as was the situation before the urban renewal projects commenced. This is not surprising given that individuals entering public housing are increasingly high need and complex tenants. In view of this situation the stigma attached to social housing is likely to increase rather than dissipate.

An unexpected finding was that private renters felt the least proud of their neighbourhood. Homeowners in particular raised issues about the high turnover of tenants in private rental, which disrupts community sustainability. In addition, respondents noted that often the houses were not well maintained, as the function was merely to obtain a rental income for the absentee landlord. The findings suggest that from the viewpoint of many of the residents interviewed, the private rental tenure is increasingly becoming associated with stigma in regenerated neighbourhoods. This finding raises questions as the balance of housing assistance in Australia is moving to favour provision of subsidies for private rental assistance, and affordable rental housing funded through private landlords as opposed to public housing supplied through government.

Overall, the results of the combined studies suggest that in mixed tenure areas stigma might be more related to homeowners associating social housing tenants with social problems and crime. That is, social housing tenants are stigmatised within the local area by their neighbours who are purchasing or own their homes.

Endnotes:

i Commonwealth Rental Assistance is an income support payment for low income households to assist in meeting their housing costs when renting in the private market

ii Mawson Lakes is a new housing development in Adelaide that this respondent, and many other South Australians, consider a desirable place to live

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