Community-led housing and how it can contribute to tackling loneliness

Kath Scanlon, LSE London
Jim Hudson, University of Bristol
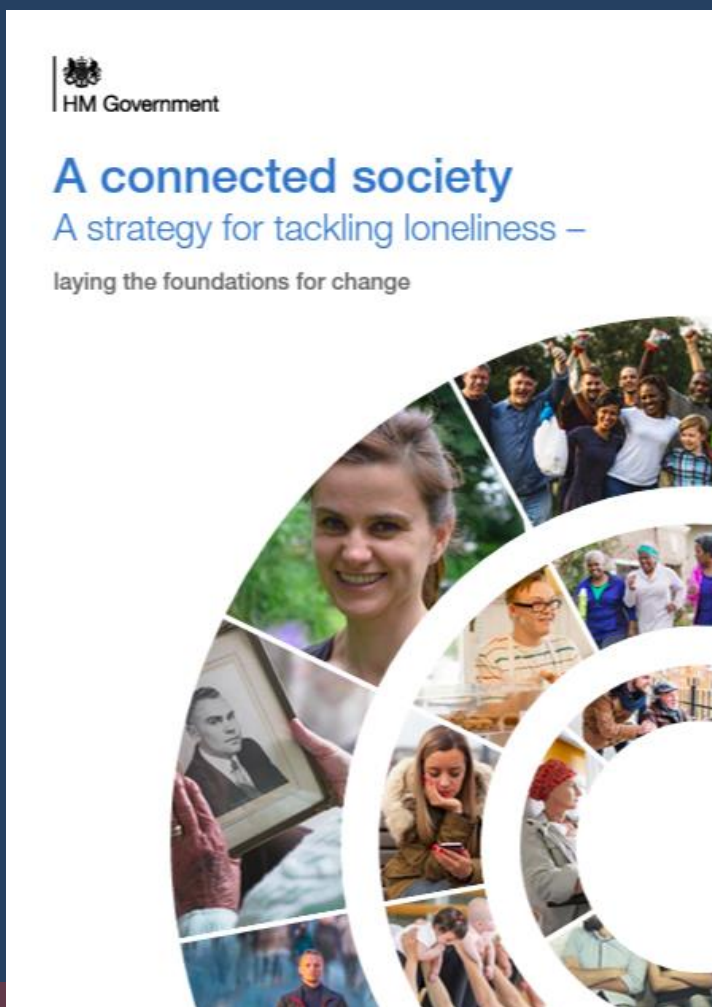**Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia**, Lancaster University
Mara Ferreri, Northumbria University
Karen West, University of Bristol
Chihiro Udagawa, LSE London

Community-led housing and loneliness: context

Importance of community-led housing recognised through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)'s *Community Housing Fund* (2016 - £60m)

2018: Government publishes *A strategy for tackling loneliness*

2019: MHCLG commissions a study on the potential of community-led housing in tackling loneliness.

Research questions

'Those little connections':
Community-led housing and loneliness

Report for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

November 2021

by Kath Scanlon, Jim Hudson, Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia, Mara Ferreri and Karen West, with Chihiro Udagawa

Does CLH (and cohousing in particular) have an impact on loneliness? Does it mitigate against loneliness and support wellbeing?

Is this impact achieved through design/community consultation process or subsequent occupancy models and shared space (or both)?

Is there a broader impact for the residents, for example in participation (volunteering), health or service use?

Is this impact broader than the immediate resident group?

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Defining loneliness

Social isolation and loneliness are **persistent social and public health problems,** recently made more visible by COVID lockdowns. Occurs in different ways across the life course, and is a *subjective* state of wellbeing. Literature identifies three dimensions of loneliness:

Social loneliness - social isolation or a deficit of social connections, sometimes explained as dissatisfaction with the quality or quantity of a person's social network.

Emotional loneliness - a perceived absence of meaningful relationships or lack of sense of belonging, for instance to a social group, family or loved one.

Existential loneliness - when a person feels completely separate and isolated from others, felt most commonly by those experiencing isolating trauma.

Defining 'community-led housing'

Housing projects with significant resident participation / self-organisation, e.g. cohousing, CLTs and housing co-operatives. Emphasis on:
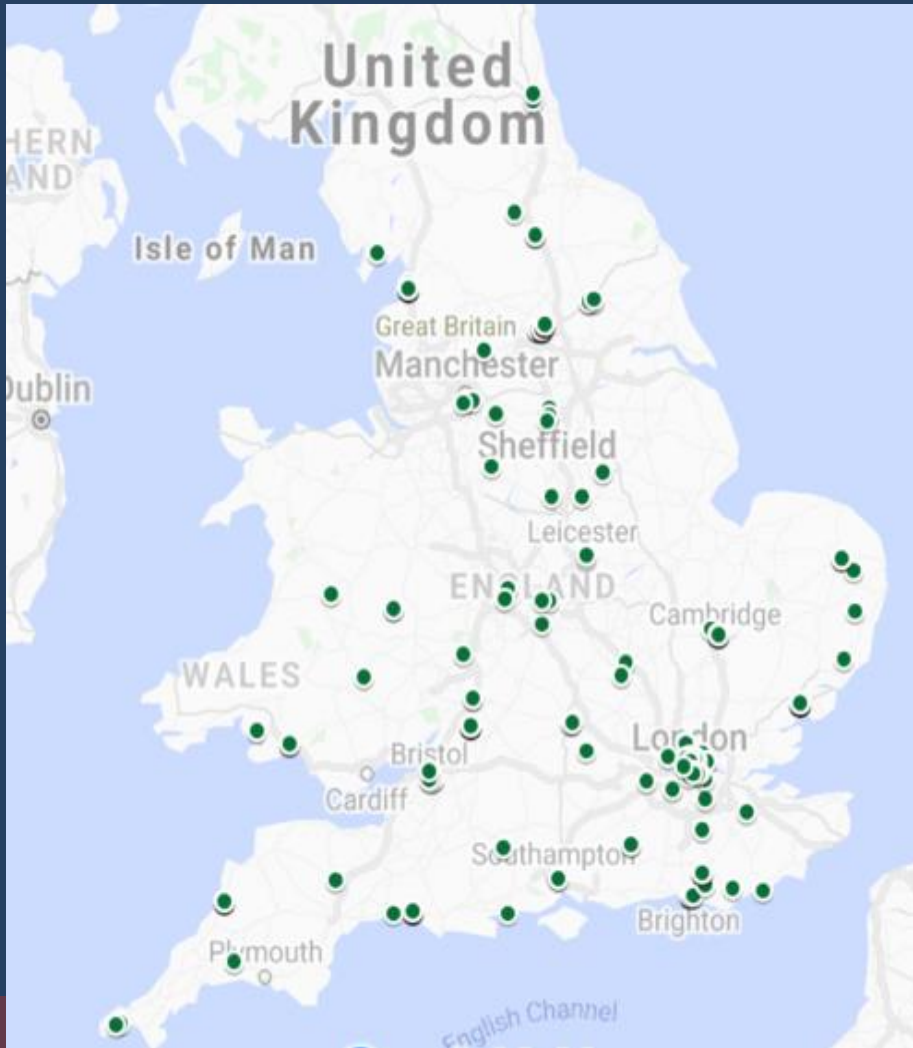
Physical design and arrangement of the housing

Social design, i.e. the extent to which the residents explicitly set out to be a community

Process, i.e. the extent to which legal or financial structures require residents to work together, and/or the process of developing the housing together

Online survey and findings

Online survey sent to all identifiable CLH groups: 221 responses from 93 different collab housing communities.

54% of respondents were currently living in a CLH community; the rest were group members or supporters.

Respondents were most commonly involved in cohousing communities, co-ops and/or community land trusts (some CLH communities fit into more than one category).

Cohousing accounted for the largest proportion by far, with 61% of respondents.

Survey findings - impacts of loneliness

CLH participants:

- 83% - **decision making i**n community or group 'very participative' or 'participative'. **High levels of participation** in almost all types of group activity listed

- **More likely to report low levels of loneliness, less likely to report high levels.**

- **Overwhelmingly, felt lonely 'none or almost none' of time in preceding week.**

CLH participants vs wider population:

- CLH participants significantly **less likely to feel lonely than <u>comparable</u> members of the general public**

- CLH residents' perceptions of their own communities were significantly more positive than those of the control group (beyond the CLH).

- CLH residents **felt strong belonging and trust in their communities** …and average levels of belonging to their wider neighbourhoods

- In critical matters, residents trusted their CLH communities most

- CLH members interacted regularly with fellow members; less with other friends/family

Qualitative findings (1) – case studies

In-depth studies with five communities to understand how these benefits *how* these benefits were achieved.

Clockwise from top left:

Lancaster Cohousing (Halton, Lancashire); OWCH (Barnet, London); Tangram Co-op (Leeds); 325 Fishponds Road, Bristol Community Land Trust; The Yard self-build (Bristol).

Qualitative findings (2) – impacts of loneliness

Impact achieved through design/community consultation processes or subsequently living together and sharing space?

Social loneliness impacts through:

- *Joint activities – including responsibility for management*
- *Shared indoor and outdoor spaces for proximity*
- *Design for social interaction*
- *Possibility of privacy*
- *Supportive relations within groups*
- *Formal ways of negotiating conflict*

Emotional loneliness impacts :
- *Knowing others are around*
- *Shared purpose and values*
- *Looking out for other members*

Existential loneliness impacts :
- *Support received or given to others during particularly challenging times*

Qualitative findings (3)

Is there a broader/wider impact for the residents? Is there an impact beyond the residents of the CLH project?

Volunteering and engagement by individual members confers benefits in both directions: counters social loneliness, and positive wider impact. Often, CLH communities also provide facilities for wider neighbourhood use.

Could more people benefit from joining CLH?

- Yes! Potential benefits beyond "just" older people
- And including marginalised groups e.g. LGBTQ+ who are ill-served by existing retirement options

Finally: it can be intense, maybe not for everyone?

Key recommendations to govt:

1) Adapt CLH features for existing housing, and non-CLH new-build schemes
2) Support resident control over management and decision-making
3) Promote the design of spaces for social interaction
4) Help CLH communities that want to provide facilities for neighbourhood use
5) Support efforts to improve the data nationally on CLH
6) Promote inclusivity
7) Encourage and support tenure security
8) Reinvigorate targeted funding streams to make CLH options more widely available

Links and more

'Those little connections':
Community-led housing and loneliness

Report for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

November 2021

by Kath Scanlon, Jim Hudson, Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia, Mara Ferreri and Karen West, with Chihiro Udagawa

Blog and full report at:
https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lselondon/those-little-connections-community-led-housing-and-loneliness/

Academic paper available at:
https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/20/11323

Housing LIN piece (2020) What collaborative housing offers in a pandemic: Evidence from 18 communities in England and Wales

Our current project:
CHIC – collaborative housing and innovation in social care:
https://collabhousingcare.blogs.bristol.ac.uk

Get in touch for knowledge exchange:
jim.hudson@bristol.ac.uk