Loneliness and housing

Extracare housing schemes do not always protect against loneliness

New research from the Swansea University has investigated the relationship between marital status, social resources and loneliness for older people in Wales in three different types of housing: residential care, extracare sheltered housing, and in their own homes in the community.

Their **findings published in 2013** show that there was no significant difference in levels of loneliness in the three different home settings. However, whilst there were more opportunities for socialising in extracare schemes, and residents were more likely to have more contact with neighbours, extracare residents did not necessarily make intimate new friendships. Interviews with extracare residents showed that many considered their real friends to be people they knew from outside the sheltered housing scheme.

This has a number of **implications for practice**. Families and care providers should support older people to maintain existing meaningful and long-term friendships during and after the transition to sheltered housing.

The researchers also suggest that whilst extracare housing providers should provide social activities for residents, they should also consider ways to help residents maintain long-term friendships outside the scheme, e.g. assisting with transport, Skype or email.

This research differs from an earlier report from International Longevity Centre (ILC UK) and Housing LIN which argues that the design of extracare housing schemes should promote social contact and communal activities.

You can download the full research paper here.

If you would like to research the extracare and loneliness study, the reference is:

Burholt, V., Nash, P. and Philips, J. 2013. The impact of supported living environments on social resources and the experience of loneliness for older widows living in Wales: An exploratory mediation analysis Family Science 4(1): 121-132 doi: 10.1080/19424620.2013.870811