

Environmental health and housing: issues for public health, by Jill Stewart and Zenalynch, Routledge, 2018, 272px pp., £93.48 (hbk) ISBN-13: 978-1138090125

The quality and characteristics of housing have a strong and directly measureable impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of its inhabitants (Ige et al., 2018). *Environmental Health and Housing: Issues for Public Health* presents a holistic view of the relationship between housing and public health. The authors draw on an extensive range of research illustrating the cost of poor housing and the life-course impact of housing on health. They clearly advocate for more emphasis to be placed on building homes that make people feel a sense of belonging, regardless of the type of house or housing tenure. This argument emphasises the importance of ensuring that the home caters for the needs of children, adults and older adults. This means having parks and green space for children to play, providing opportunities for social interaction among adults and older adults, and enabling older adults and people with disabilities to perform basic activities of daily living amongst others.

The book provides an interesting historical overview of housing condition and housing tenure in the UK. The authors remind us of the imbalance between the demand for housing and its supply experienced during the industrial revolution, and the contribution of this imbalance to the shift in the focus of housing policies in the UK from quality of housing to quantity of housing. Maintaining a good balance between short-term and long-term housing investment decisions is critical to the sustainability of business models (Olesinski et al., 2014) and the impact of tampering with quality to maximize returns is still evident in recent housing mishaps such as the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017. This book also extensively discusses the growth of the private rented sector and its contribution to 21st century housing and health related issues including fuel poverty and homelessness. Addressing poor housing conditions in the private rented sector requires strategies to enforce standards, empower tenants, and protect their rights against retaliatory evictions. One of the critical issues this book brings to light is the impact of austerity on the ability of local authorities to address the increasing problem of homelessness and to respond to home adaptation requests in a timely manner. The authors critically analyse the historical and current policies in the UK developed to tackle these and other complex challenges in the housing and health nexus.

This book provides a detailed appraisal of the process of gathering evidence for legal process and the regulations underpinning evidence gathering. The authors also provide a critical examination of legislation aimed at improving the quality and safety of housing. The book clearly articulates the measures and metrics used to assess quality and safety of housing and in doing so provides an important contribution to efforts to provide credible evidence to inform policy and practice in housing provision and management. The book also provides a critical examination of the effectiveness of mandatory and discretionary licencing schemes along with the practical challenges environmental officers face and ways of addressing them.

The authors' review of evidence informed principles for developing sustainable local housing and health strategy highlights the important role of public and environmental health officers in decision making. Unsurprisingly, they report that the lack of representation by senior public and environmental health champions in strategic level decision making is a major drawback in efforts to initiate and promote sustainable urban development projects.

This book is particularly useful for environmental health students and practitioners as well as those with experience of, and an interest in, working within the built environment and public health nexus. It is clearly written, accessible and informative and provides a good balance between academic rigour and relevance to practice.

The uniqueness of this book comes from the case-studies that showcase the work that environmental health professionals have undertaken to address some of the challenges raised. These case-studies not only highlight the complexities involved in addressing housing and health related issues, but also provide examples of good practice and innovative approaches adopted by local authorities to identify and tackle practical challenges, including dealing with houses of multiple occupation and extreme cases of hoarding.

References

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