

# Adult tenant wellbeing: Benefits of public housing

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# Public housing & urban regeneration: Maximising wellbeing

- Worked with 7 social housing providers & tenants
  - Included an adult tenant survey (2022)
- **Three research questions related to adult wellbeing:**
  - (RQ1) Does public housing improve renters' wellbeing - relative to private rental and/or owner-occupation?
  - (RQ2) Do effects differ by tenant characteristics ?
  - (RQ3) Which aspects of the house and neighbourhood affect wellbeing?

# Background

**Eligibility** for public/social housing in NZ (through Social Allocation System) depends on:

- **Adequacy** (e.g. in emergency housing)
- **Suitability** (e.g. family violence)
- **Affordability** (e.g. low income)
- **Accessibility** (e.g. discrimination)
- **Sustainability** (e.g. social functioning, social skills)

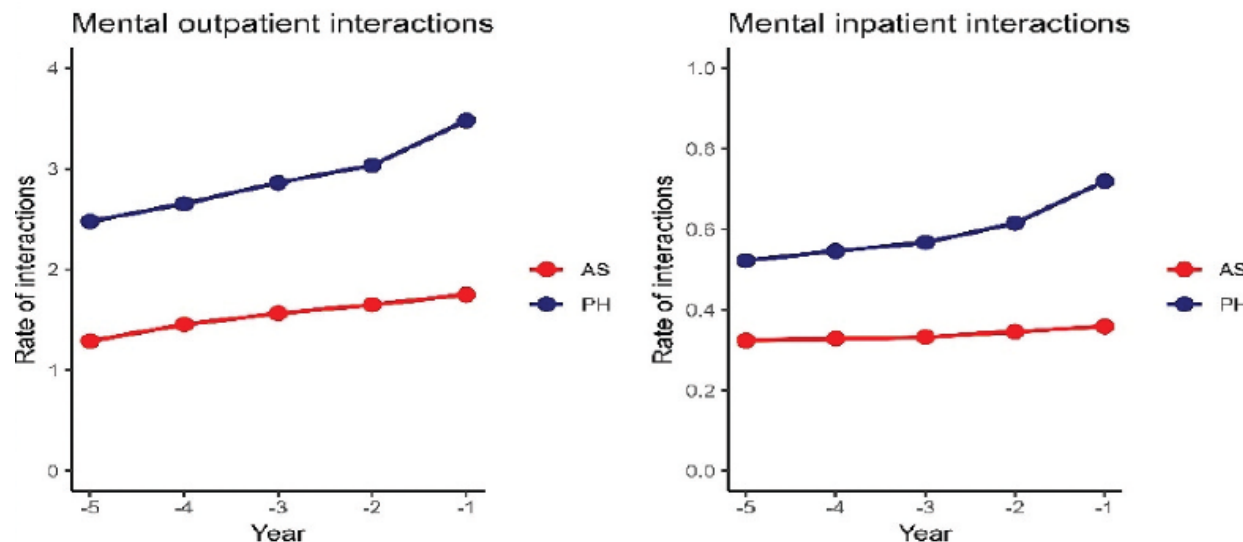
*Some of these factors are observed; others are **unobservable**, implying **selection issues** (especially in a cross-section survey) that will bias against finding positive wellbeing effects of public housing*

# Public housing: Related studies

- Smith and Davies (2020; GSS + KO data):
  - *life satisfaction negatively associated with poor house condition, mould and cold*
- Anastasiadis et al. (SIA, 2018; GSS data shortly **before** vs shortly **after** public housing placement):
  - *significant reduction in mouldy, crowded and poor condition housing*
  - *life satisfaction improved (though felt more unsafe when walking at night)*
- Fasoro et al. (2025; IDI data): New public housing (PH) tenants differ substantially from new accommodation supplement (AS) beneficiaries (e.g. health, judicial, social welfare, single parent, ...)

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Source: Fasoro et al., (*Housing and Society*, 2025)

# Adult tenant survey included questions on:

- Housing provider
- House condition, heating, cold, damp, etc
- House suitability

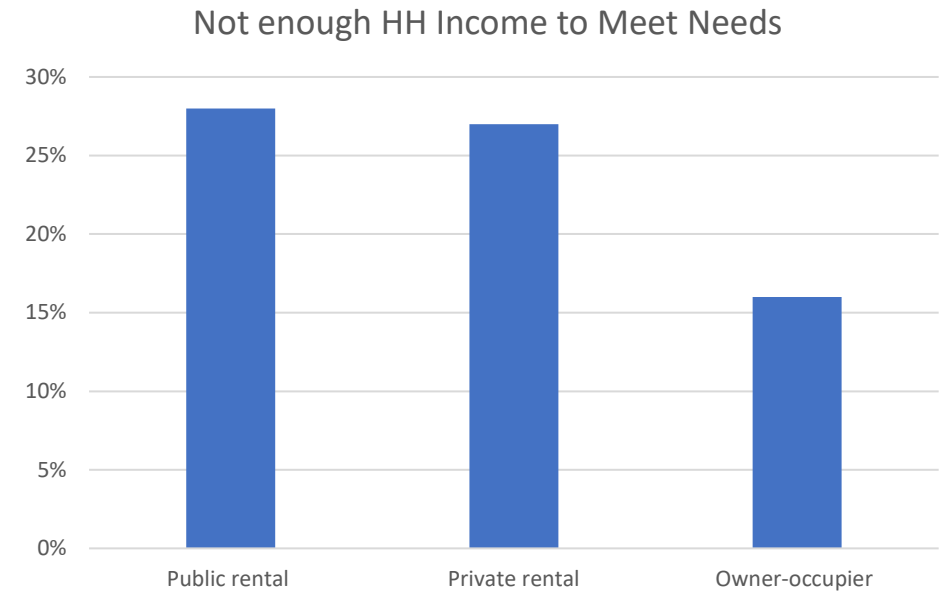
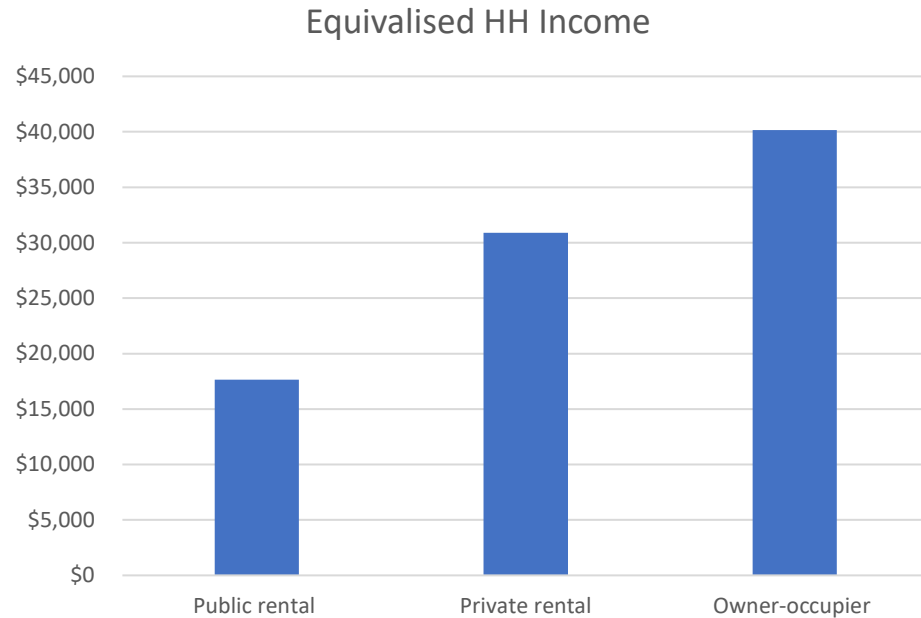
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- Neighbourhood & social capital
  - Public transport

- 
- Demographic variables
  - Culture & spirituality
  - Material wellbeing
  - Subjective wellbeing



# Adult tenant survey sample

- Social housing tenants + private renters & owner-occupiers in **same area** as social housing
- Analysis concentrates on Wellington region



# Wellbeing metrics

- **Life satisfaction (11-point scale)**

*First of all, we would like to ask a very general question about **your life as a whole** these days. This includes all areas of your life. On a scale of 0 - 10, where 0 is completely dissatisfied, and 10 is completely satisfied, how do you feel about your life as a whole?*

- **WHO-5: Each question on a 6-point (0-5) scale, summed and converted to 125-point scale**

*Please indicate for each of the five statements which is closest to how you have been feeling over the last two weeks.*

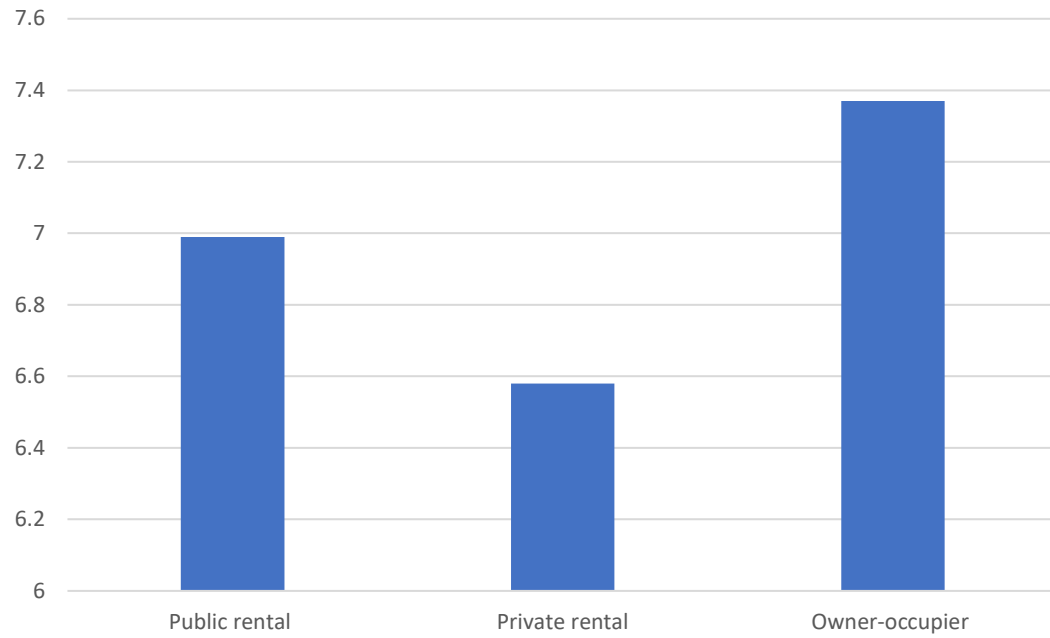
*Over the last two weeks...*

- I have felt *cheerful and in good spirits*
- I have felt *calm and relaxed*
- I have felt *active and vigorous*
- I woke up feeling *fresh and rested*
- My daily life has been *filled with things that interest me*

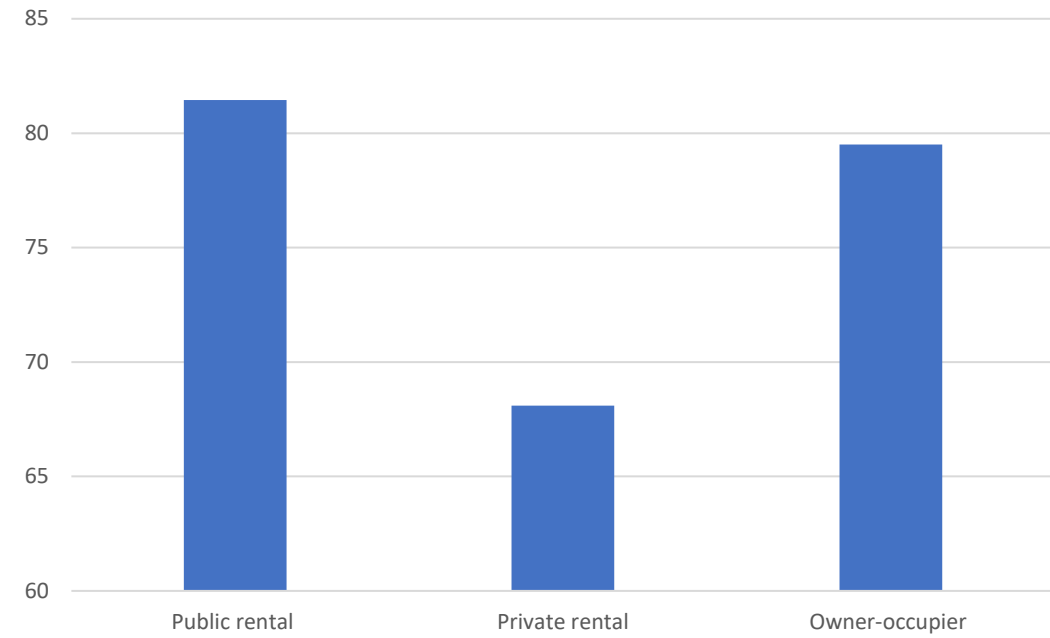


# Wellbeing metrics

Life Satisfaction (0-10 scale)



WHO-5 Mental Wellbeing (0-125 scale)



# Methods:

Statistical models (OLS, probit, ordered logit – each with ‘controls’) to test if tenancy status is associated with:

- Life satisfaction
- WHO-5

**And whether these relationships are affected by tenant characteristics**

***NB:** We can control for ‘observable’ characteristics but NOT for ‘unobservables’ so tests biased against public housing*

Which factors are most associated with:

- Suitability of the house
- Suitability of the neighbourhood

**And whether these relationships are affected by tenant characteristics**

# Wellbeing findings:

## **For life satisfaction (longer-term wellbeing):**

- Public tenants have similar or slightly higher wellbeing than private tenants
- Public tenants have similar or slightly lower wellbeing than owner-occupiers

## **For WHO-5 (shorter-term wellbeing):**

- Public tenants have significantly higher wellbeing than private tenants
- Public tenants have approximately equal wellbeing as owner-occupiers

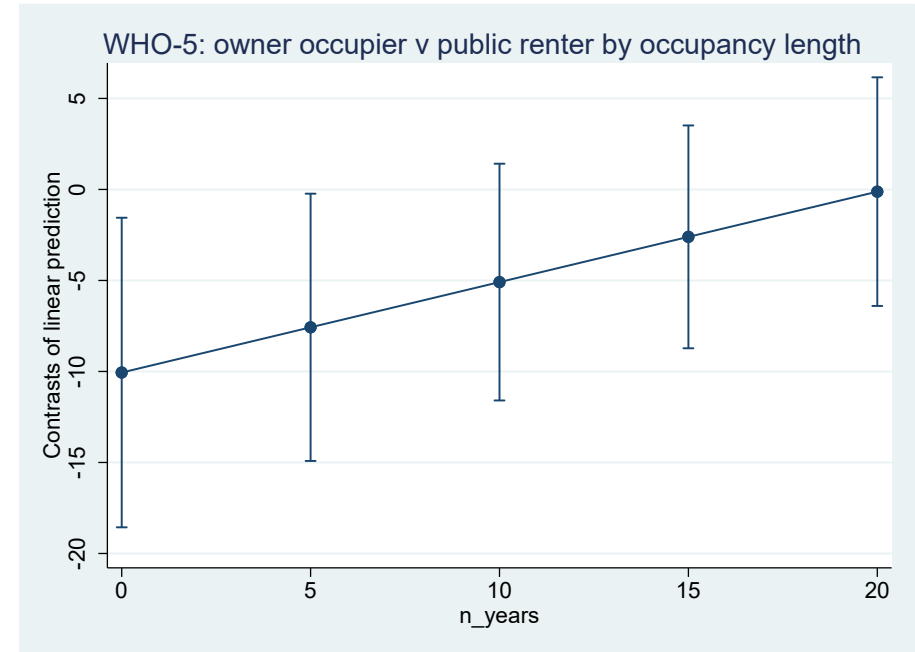
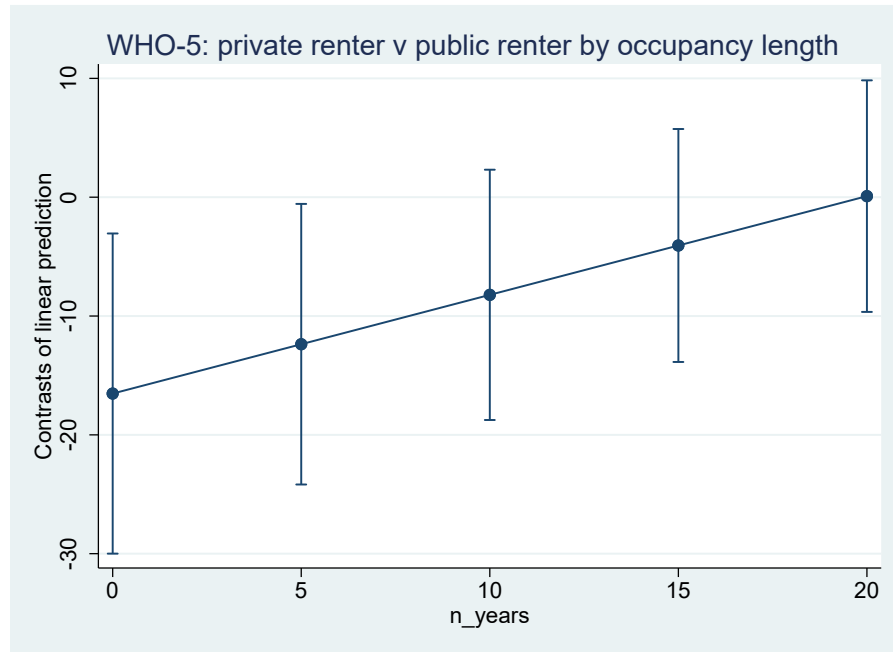
## **Length of tenancy significantly affects each relationship**

- Consistent with *security of tenure* being an important factor in affecting wellbeing

## RQ2: Do WHO-5 associations differ by tenant characteristics?

- only material interaction is length of occupancy (n\_years) of current dwelling (similar for life satisfaction)

⇒ key channel for higher WB in public housing (cf private rental) is stable tenancy

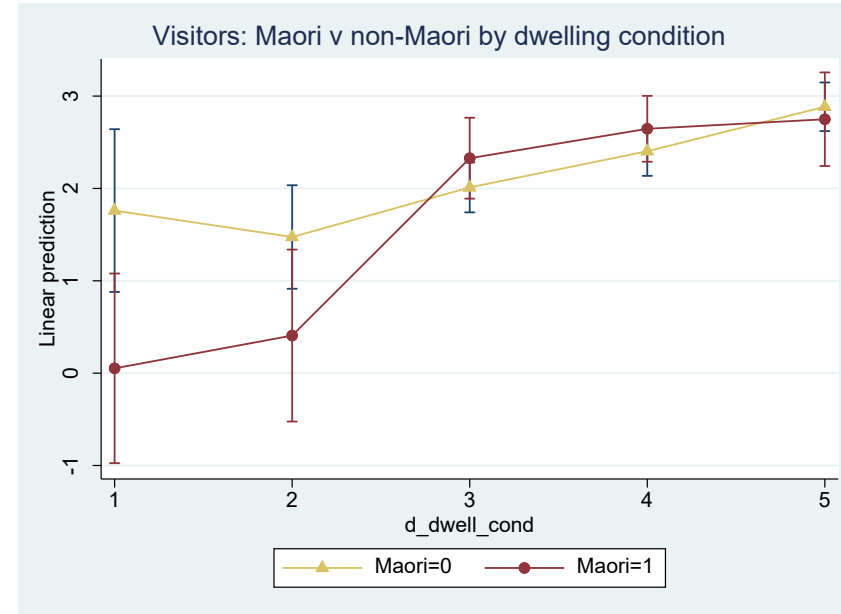


# House characteristics associated with house suitability

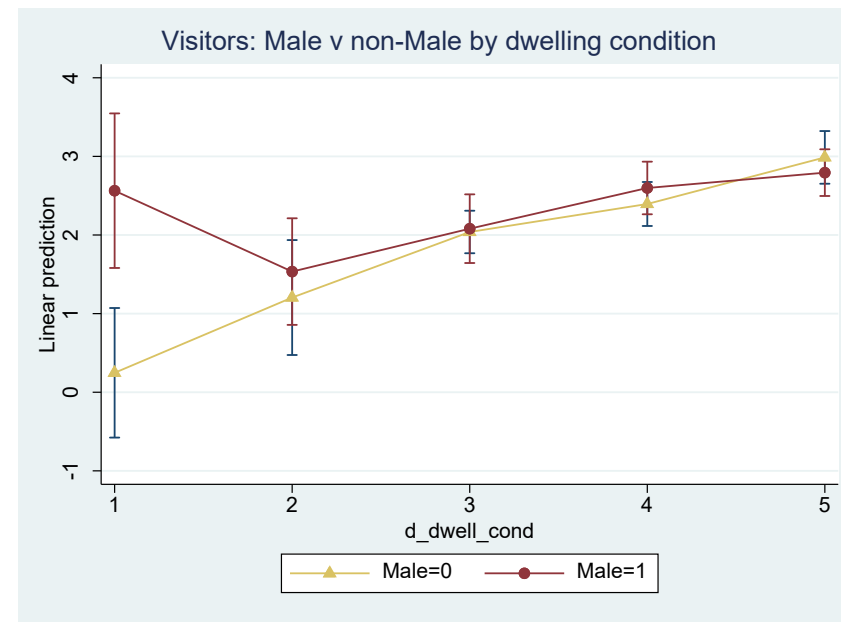
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- Cold
- Too warm in summer
- Public transport availability
- Dwelling condition, **mediated by:**
  - ethnicity
  - gender

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- Cold
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- Public transport availability
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  - ethnicity
  - gender



Maori are less comfortable welcoming visitors if they have poor house condition



Males don't seem to care!

# Neighbourhood characteristics associated with neighbourhood suitability

- Local social capital
- Safety of neighbourhood at night

**No material differences by ethnicity or gender**

# Summary

1. House viewed favourably if: (i) good condition, (ii) warm, (iii) dry
  - Recall Anastasiadis: move from private to public rental → reduced *mouldy, crowded, poor condition housing*
2. Neighbourhood viewed more favourably if: (i) has high social capital, (ii) is safe
3. Public tenants are much poorer, on average, than private tenants & owner-occupiers
4. Public tenants have higher wellbeing (especially WHO-5) than private tenants
5. Public tenants have similar wellbeing (especially WHO-5) to owner-occupiers
6. Private tenants with long tenure do as well as public tenants (**stable tenure counts!**)