Everyday life in a purpose-built retirement village

Jennifer Liddle
Research Institute for Social Sciences, Keele University
j.liddle@ilcs.keele.ac.uk

The UK has experienced a growth in the number of purpose-built retirement communities in recent years. This study explores how aspects of everyday life such as health and well-being, daily routines, leisure activities and social relationships are connected with the environment at a purpose-built retirement village in Buckinghamshire. Denham Garden Village (DGV) incorporates 326 mixed-tenure properties and a range of facilities including a gym, swimming pool, café bar and GP surgery.

Twenty in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with residents who had been living in DGV for at least 3.5 years. A broad interpretation of ‘environment’ was used within a ‘facets of life’ approach (see Figure 1). Interviews were structured around categories such as ‘physical environment’ and ‘leisure activities’ with an overarching focus on residents’ expectations and experiences, and the extent to which these were specific to life in DGV.

**Introduction**

**Methods and data**

Residents did not always feel that they had formed many strong friendships with other residents in the village:

“I wouldn’t say I’ve made lots of friends. I know lots of people, but probably my real, real friendships are down to about a dozen people, and all the rest are just nodding acquaintances.” (Judy Mills)

“Well, I’ve got acquaintances. I can go and have a cup of tea with any of these ladies along here, but not like true friends, like I’ve got outside [the village].” (Marjory Newman)

Concerns were expressed about how well the village would suit residents in the future, particularly if they experienced changes in their health:

“As we all get older, are they going to be able to keep up with the number of carers that are needed for us all? Do you go to a residential nursing home?” (Gladys Ashton)

“I only think that the village is good for people that have got sixty per cent of their normal health… Once it drops below that… I don’t think the village is where you should be…they haven’t got the facilities for it.” (Ed Heath)

**Finding: Friendship**

**Finding: Future needs**

Some residents felt that living in the village was having a positive impact on their health by encouraging them to become more active:

“Because of the lifestyle, I’m more active… Where we were before, because there was nothing going on you tend to sit down and watch the telly or read the paper, do the crossword... But now, because there’s something going on all the time…I’m a lot healthier through being here.” (George Hughes)

“Finding: Impact on health”

**Conclusion**

There is a relatively small body of research on everyday life in UK retirement villages. Using a broad interpretation of ‘environment’ to examine everyday life in this context gives a more complete picture of how, and to what extent, residents’ lives are connected with the environment at DGV.

**Acknowledgements**

This study is linked with LARC (Longitudinal study of Ageing in a Retirement Community) and was financially supported by Anchor Trust. I am grateful to the residents at Denham Garden Village who took part in the research.