

Topic briefing: Housing

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Introduction

Housing has always been an important issue in the UK. However since the financial crisis it has dominated the headlines and continues to do so. *Understanding Society* is the only representative annual longitudinal survey which asks respondents about various aspects of their housing situation, alongside other aspects of their lives – income, wealth, partnership, fertility, education, employment, and health. Most questions are asked every year of the same set of persons which enables research into the causes and



consequences of changes in their lives. In other words the study provides a unique source of data and evidence in trying to understand how housing can affect people’s lives. There are significant differences in the make-up of housing and communities across UK nations and regions. *Understanding Society’s* large sample size and geo-coded data facilitates place-based analysis.

In this topic briefing we explore the content available to analyse in *Understanding Society*, highlight the types of research questions which could be explored and what research has already been carried out using the study. Finally we provide information about how easy it is to access the data and begin carrying out analysis yourself.

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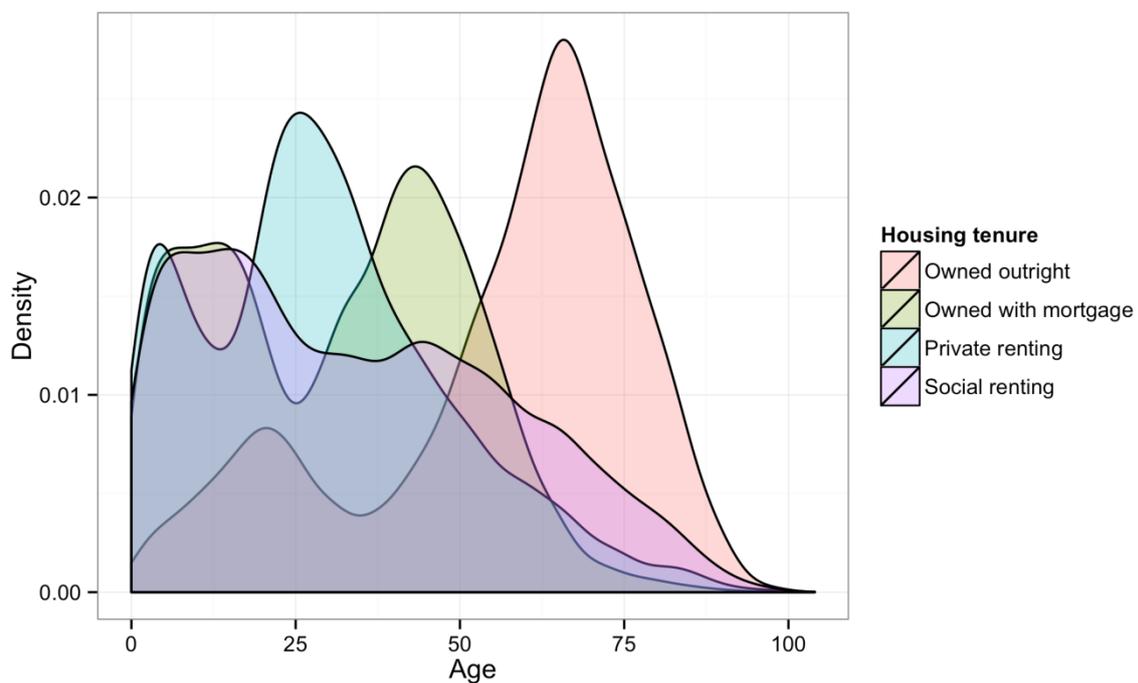
Housing content in Understanding Society

Description of questions	Waves	Source of information (file name)
House tenure: whether owned or rented, who owns or rents the house, type of landlord, furnished or unfurnished rental property, estimated market value of the house	All	household questionnaire (hhresp)
Structural characteristics of house and utilities: number of bedrooms, number of rooms, types of domestic fuel and fuel expenditure, whether accommodation has central heating, Council Tax band, internet and broadband access	All	household questionnaire (hhresp)
Physical characteristics of house from survey interviewer: number of floors, whether have locked gates, security keeper or entry phone, is the garden unkempt	All	Sampling information on household (hhsamp)
Household size and composition: number of residents, children, absent members e.g. at university or in hospital	All	household questionnaire (hhresp)
Over-crowding – whether children aged 10 or over of different sex have own room	1, 2 and 4	household questionnaire (hhresp)
Details of house purchase: when house was bought, original purchase price, year mortgage began, mortgage amount, type of mortgage, last monthly mortgage payment	1 st interview in this house	household questionnaire (hhresp)
Expenditure on housing costs: amount of last monthly mortgage instalment, amount of last rent payment and period covered, whether receive Housing Benefit	All	household questionnaire (hhresp)
Reasons for moving house: e.g. wanted somewhere bigger, to form own household, moved to start a new job, to be nearer work	1 st wave after move	Adult individual interview (indresp)
Use of renewable energy: whether have installed or considered installing or using solar panels, wind turbines, Green Tariffs	1 and 4	household questionnaire (hhresp)

Descriptive statistics from select housing questions

Note: these are weighted to be representative of the UK, and therefore can be used as population estimates.

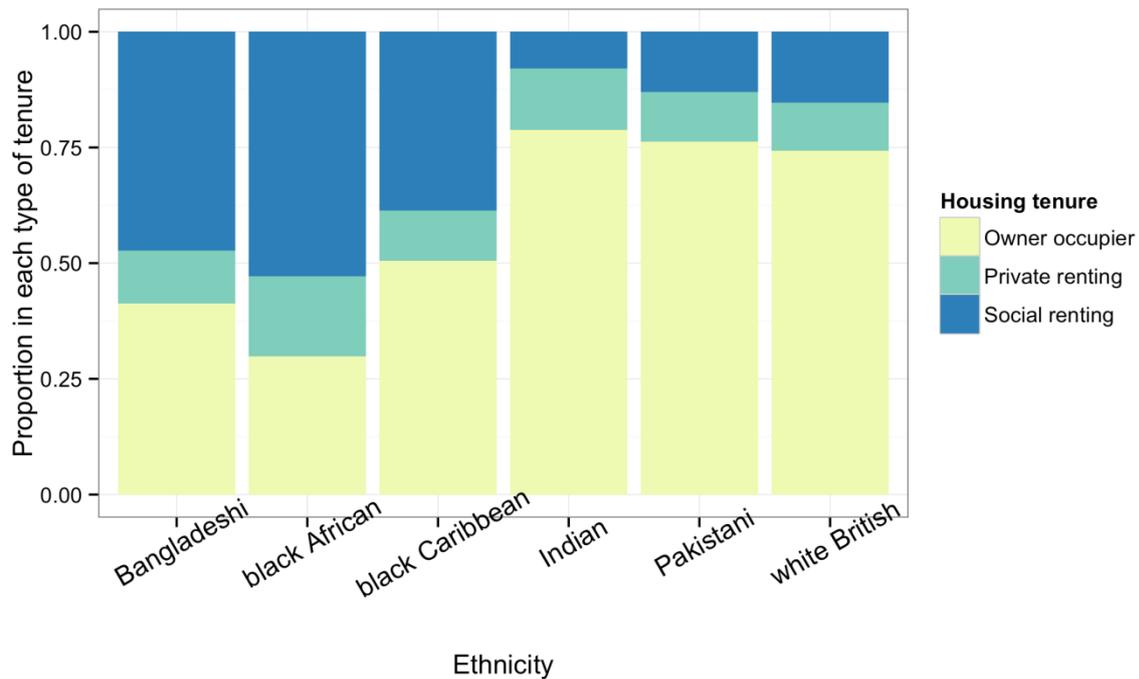
This density plot shows different patterns of housing tenure by age – people who live in their own home tend to be older (or children living in their parents’ home), and within that people who have paid their mortgage are older still.



Understanding Society tracks households, so we have around 3,500 adults at each wave who have moved house since the last time we interviewed them. Cumulatively this is 10,885 moves up to and including wave 4. This table summarises their reasons.

Reason for move	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4
Family	23%	22%	23%
Education	6%	8%	9%
Employment	6%	7%	8%
Housing	36%	35%	36%
Area	11%	10%	10%
Other	18%	18%	16%
N	3,539	3,689	3,657

Different ethnic groups have different patterns of housing tenure, as shown in the graph below. *Understanding Society* permits this kind of analysis due to the large sample size and ethnic minority boost sample.



Potential research ideas only possible with longitudinal data

- The key drivers affecting housing affordability and how these are changing over time
- Changes in labour market status (e.g. experiencing unemployment) and how this affects individuals household finances (being behind with utility bills, mortgage, subjective financial situation)
- Housing tenure/transitions post marital separation and the implications this has on income, employment, health and wellbeing
- The extent of downsizing at older ages
- Importance of perceived risk and crime in determining how happy individuals are with their neighbourhood over time
- Changes to the social capital of people who move house to a different area.

Recent publications

The *Understanding Society* website includes up to date information on all publications from the study, with a search facility to identify specific topics. Below is a list of selected research papers that have used the study to answer interesting and policy relevant research questions in housing:

- Ann Berrington, Peter Tammes and Steven Roberts. (2014). 'Economic precariousness and living in the parental home in the UK'. ESRC Centre for Population Change Working Paper 55.
- Darja Reuschke and Donald Houston (2013). 'Does Owner-Occupation Increase or Decrease Self-Employment in Britain?'. Conference paper presented at the European Network for Housing Research.
- Gavin Wood, Susan J. Smith, Rachel Ong and Melek Cigdem (2013). 'The edges of home ownership'. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, AHURI Final Report 216.
- Andrew Aitken (2013). 'Do housing wealth shocks affect voting behaviour? Evidence from the UK.' Conference paper presented at European Association of Labour Economists.
- Paul Sissons and Donald Houston (2012): The Changing Geography of Privately Rented Housing in England and Wales. Featured in *Insights 2015*
- Darren Baxter (2015): Through the keyhole of involuntary home moves. Featured in *Insights 2015*
- Sarah Brown (2015). 'Household repayment behaviour and neighbourhood effects'. *Urban Studies*, 52(6). Featured in *Insights 2015*

Data access and support

Management of the study is carried by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) based at the University of the Essex.

Data Access

The data are released through the [UK Data Service](#) (UKDS) in SPSS, Stata and tab-delimited formats. For the standard file it is a matter of registering with the UKDS, selecting the data files and a few clicks to download them.

Different versions of the data are released; the standard End User Licence (EUL) data is suitable for most types of analysis. However special licence or secure data versions of the data contain sensitive information, in particular small area geographic identifiers, and require additional vetting before access is granted.

User Support

Understanding Society has a wealth of information online at:
www.understandingsociety.ac.uk

The website provides a highly comprehensive online source of information regarding individual variables, methodology, survey design and implementation. It is also an up to date source of training courses, resources, publications and other relevant news regarding longitudinal research.

A comprehensive [user guide](#) is published online, and updated each year. In addition we have developed specific guides about major content areas such as biomarkers, cognitive measures, and ethnicity. The main user guide provides information on how to select the appropriate weights for analysis.

www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/mainstage

Help and support for using *Understanding Society* can be found in [the Online User Forum](#). After a short registration users can read past issues, FAQ's and experiences or report any issues or queries of their own.

www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/support/projects/support

The team at *Understanding Society* also offers [online training courses](#) which provide plenty of worked examples of how to prepare and analyse *Understanding Society* data. Presently courses are available in Stata, SAS and SPSS.

www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/training/online

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