

Retirement villages extend life expectancy for women

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Credit: Anna Butcher

Analysing 100 years' worth of residents' records from the Whiteley Homes Trust, a retirement village in Surrey which opened in 1917 to provide housing and support for people of limited means, the study suggests that this type of lifestyle in retirement is capable of combating the negative effects on health and social well-being of low economic means and isolation.

In particular, the results are surprising as they show that women can expect to live as long as the wealthiest portion of the population despite coming from the most deprived quintile of the population.

Authored by Professor Les Mayhew, Professor Ben Rickayzen and David Smith, the report concludes that retirement villages, or their

equivalents, could help in the Government's aim to reduce mortality inequalities experienced within lower socio-economic groups.

Professor Les Mayhew, Professor of Statistics at Cass Business School, said:

"It is well established that people classified as having a low socio-economic status tend to have a lower [life](#) expectancy than the average member of the population, but instead we found the opposite at Whiteley. One of our main results is that we show that female residents actually receive a longevity boost from retirement village life, and that life expectancy for males reaches a similar level to that of the general population.

"The undoubted lesson of Whiteley is that it is possible to create a socially stimulating and safe environment in which [older people](#) can enjoy a longer retirement in peace and comfort compared to that experienced by individuals of similar backgrounds in the general population."

In the UK the population over age 65 is projected to increase by more than 40% during the next 17 years to over 16 million. With the population ageing so rapidly, finding ways in which the older population can live their later lives in relative health and comfort has become an increasingly important issue in the UK.

There is considerable interest in creating more retirement villages in the UK to house and care for the increasing numbers of older people who are attracted to this type of retirement living. The benefits of communal living in later life - which include enhanced quality of life, reduced social isolation and greater independence - are of immense significance because of continuously rising cost pressures on health and social care.

Chandra McGowan, Chief Executive of The Whiteley Homes Trust comments:

"For 100 years, Whiteley Village has supported older people to live as independently as possible. Our strength of community is a key driver to the longevity boost identified by Cass Business School. Every day we see our residents helping each other and this inter-dependence is very important to everyone's well-being. People living at Whiteley Village also feel safe and cared for, underpinned by the security of having their "own home". This removes a huge amount of stress compared to their situation before coming to live at Whiteley.

"The Whiteley example provides positive insight into much needed proactive solutions for our ageing society. We are keen to share our learnings and invite collaboration from Government, policy makers, academics and commercial organisations to explore potential solutions for future policy on care, wellbeing, inequality and housing in later life."

The researchers found that there is statistically strong evidence that female residents entering Whiteley Village between ages 65 and 69, the typical female age on entry, receive a substantial boost to their longevity when compared to the wider population. Results showed that Village life significantly improves the probability that a female entrant survives beyond the median age of death in the wider population for a person of similar age. In addition, the Village boasts a disproportionately large representation of centenarians.

The extent of Whiteley's longevity advantage has changed through time reaching a high of 4.9 years in the 1960 cohort based on the median duration to death for a woman aged 67 when compared with women of the same age in the [general population](#) of England and Wales. This was at a time when pensioner poverty was much more common than it is today.

Whiteley's longevity advantage is even greater if the resident population is compared with the shorter life expectancies of the poorest pensioners (i.e. comparing populations with similar socio-economic backgrounds). By conferring a longevity advantage on women from low socio-economic backgrounds, the results show that they can expect to live as long as the wealthiest quintile of the population despite coming from the most deprived.

For men, while the effect was less significant, the majority lived at least as long on average as a male in the wider population. A probable reason why they do not appear to receive the same level of longevity boost, discussed in the research, is that men tend to join the Village at a slightly older age and for some their health may have already been damaged by life style factors such as smoking or their previous occupation which village life cannot ameliorate. As men's general health improves (e.g. as they eschew smoking) this is expected to change.

Professor Ben Rickayzen, a co-author of the report and Head of the Faculty of Actuarial Science and Insurance at Cass Business School, said:

"Our report shows statistically strong evidence that female residents in particular received a substantial boost to their longevity when compared to the wider [population](#), indeed by up to 5 years. We also saw that the majority of male residents of Whiteley have lived at least as long as the average male despite their modest socio-economic background."

Baroness Sally Greengross OBE, Chief Executive, International Longevity Centre – UK said:

"The dramatic increases in average life expectancies witnessed throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries is one of our society's greatest achievements. However, this achievement has too often been

overshadowed by the stark disparity in life expectancy between the highest and lowest socio-economic groups.

"As the residential care sector continues to respond to the needs of our rapidly ageing society, I hope that policymakers and the social care sector can take heart in knowing that, whilst socio-economic inequalities in [life expectancy](#) sadly still exist, the right housing with care community might be able to ameliorate the effects of deprivation and address those inequalities in later life."

Provided by City University London

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