**‘Under the same roof: the everyday relational practices of contemporary communal living’ (ES/K006177/1)**

*PI: Professor Sue Heath, University of Manchester; Co-Is: Dr Katherine Davies, University of Sheffield, Dr Gemma Edwards, University of Manchester; Research Associate: Dr Rachael Scicluna, University of Manchester*

The ‘Under the Same Roof’ project explored the everyday relational practices of contemporary communal living in the UK. Our specific focus was on housing co-operatives, cohousing, shared households, and private lodgings, forms of communal living that have all been invoked in recent debates surrounding some of the challenges of current and future UK housing provision. Both the capacity and appropriateness of such living arrangements to rise to these challenges depends on the nature and quality of the relationships within them, yet these are under-researched. Accordingly, we explored the ‘critical associations’ which exist within these distinct contexts through exploring four specific facets of communal living: whether and how co-residents share financial and material resources of various kinds (*the economic facet)*; how private and shared space is allocated and used *(the spatial facet);* orientations towards, and the use of, time (*the temporal facet)*; and the degree to which such arrangements are underpinned by ideological motivations (*the ideological facet)*. Our research considered how these facets variously interact to generate a range of context-specific 'relational practices', some of which facilitate ‘successful’ communal living, others of which hinder its attainment. Our key research questions were:

1. How are the everyday relational practices of communal living affected by:

* the allocation and use of financial and material resources between residents?
* the allocation and use of shared and private space?
* practices linked to the use of ‘everyday’ time, calendar time and narrativised forms of temporality?
* the presence or absence of ideological influences and/or lifestyle considerations?

1. What impact does communal living have upon broader network interactions?
2. What are the policy implications of the limits and possibilities of different forms of communal living?

In exploring these questions, we employed a variety of qualitatively-driven methods:

**Phase 1**: in this first phase we mapped the landscape of communal living in the UK by bringing together existing knowledge on its scale and nature, including but not confined to our four research settings, and we have created a directory of shared communities in the UK. This phase also involved content analysis of websites of housing co-ops, cohousing schemes and other intentional communities in the UK, and of other grey literature. This allowed us to identify key themes in the self-representations of different types of shared living, informing Phases 2 and 3.

**Phase 2:** the main phase of the research consisted of in-depth qualitative interviews with 65 sharers: 15 living in private lodging arrangements (lodgers; resident landlords/ladies), 20 living in shared households (based on equal tenure status, eg shared tenancies in the PRS), 20 living in shared housing co-ops, and 10 living in cohousing (a hybrid form: resident-controlled developments of private dwellings alongside shared facilities in a ‘common house’). All interviews began by eliciting unstructured housing narratives, which generated data on the significance placed on current (and any past) experiences of communal living, illuminating understandings of the place of communal living within a lifecourse perspective. The interviews then adopted a semi-structured format to explore themes such as: perceptions of the pros and cons of communal living; motivations for sharing; the existence and nature of any ‘house rules’, including financial rules; negotiations of the boundaries of privacy and communality; shared identity, values and rituals. Interview transcripts were imported into Nvivo for coding.

**Phase 3:** this final phaseutilised photo elicitation and time-use/network diaries with a sub-group of the main sample. We received twelve sets of photographs and twelve diaries. For the former method, participants were invited to photograph shared spaces and/or specific objects within them and were asked to discuss the significance of the chosen images as a way of exploring negotiations surrounding the use of ‘communal’ v ‘private’ resources, amongst other issues. For the diaries, participants were invited to record their interactions with co-residents over two days (a weekday and a weekend day), focusing on where they were and with whom they spent. The diaries have generated data on personal networks (including the place accorded to co-residents), how living communally might impact upon broader networks, and whether such contacts occur within or outside of the home. In conjunction with interview data, diary data are being analysed with UCINET software.

**Sampling and recruitment**: we used a variety of different strategies to recruit our sample, Cohousers and co-operative members are locatable via publicly available membership directories, so were contacted directly by email and letter, as well as by snowballing from these contacts, whilst sharers in shared households and private lodgings are far more dispersed and were not so easily locatable, except if and when they were advertising for new members. As anticipated, some groups were harder to recruit than others. In particular, we struggled to recruit cohousers, but this small group are currently receiving much attention, including by researchers, and are consequently subject to ‘research fatigue’, so we were pleased to have recruited ten. With regard to those living in lodgings, it proved easier to recruit resident landlords/landladies than lodgers.

As for the sample’s characteristics, our sample consisted of 43 women and 22 men, with the men tending to be younger sharers. We interviewed sharers from across the lifecourse: 21 people aged 20-34, 18 aged 35 to 49, 18 aged 50 to 64, and 8 aged 65 and over (this last group consisted mainly of cohousers and resident landlords/landladies). Interestingly, many of the sharers aged 40-plus had lived in different forms of shared accommodation for all or nearly all of their adult lives. Younger sharers tended to regard their sharing as more lifecourse-specific and did not anticipate sharing in the longer term. In terms of ethnicity, the vast majority of sample members were white British. 15 people lived in lodgings (5 as lodgers, 10 as resident landlords/ladies), 20 in shared households (12 as joint tenants in the private rented sector, 1 as a joint owner and 2 as joint tenants in social housing, and 5 in a house share owned by a religious organisation), 20 lived in shared housing co-ops and 10 in cohousing.