

The physical environment of supported housing for people with severe mental illness

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The central role, played by environmental features, on users' mental health, has been acknowledged across different researches and diverse settings (Evans, 2003). Still, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the impact of supported housing for people with severe mental illness (SMI) on the users' well-being. Despite the growing interest for new technology in living and working environments some groups in society appear to be neglected. This is the case for people with SMI and their housing alternatives. In 1995 the "mental health reform" was introduced in Sweden. The reform generated a rapid development of supported housing units, often without consideration of the qualities of the physical environment for this specific user group. A deeper investigation of the physical and social environment of supported housing for people with SMI is crucial for being able to meet the needs of the users. The following study presents a multi-perspective method of analysis and seeks to discover to what extent the approach discriminates between different physical environments of supported housing. Furthermore the aim is to assess the differences in environmental evaluation between users and experts. The present study is part of a larger research project on supported housing and users well-being. The theoretical background of the research is the Human Environment Interaction model (HEI model Küller, 1991). Twenty supported housing units, in Sweden, have been investigated. The physical environment of each unit has been assessed by five environmental psychologists and three users with own experience of living in supported housing. Staff (N= 117) and residents (N=

72) of each unit have assessed the physical characteristics of their surroundings. These measurements have been conducted at four units of environmental analysis; neighborhood, common outdoor, common indoor and private apartment. The instruments adopted were; semantic environmental descriptions (SMB, Küller, 1991), expert check-lists (Johansson, 2008) and walk-through evaluation (de Laval, 1998). A post occupancy evaluation scale (Johansson, 2008) was used to investigate the inhabitants' environmental quality perception. The data are analyzed with multivariate statistical analysis. Comparisons are made concerning supported housing units with different architectural structures and for different units of environmental analysis. The evaluations of experts and users are compared. The final result will be useful in terms of recommendation, design guidelines and technological advance for the future planning of supported housing for people with severe mental illness.

References

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