

THINKING ABOUT OUTCOMES FOR RELATIONSHIPS

While outcomes for 'places' or 'people' are relatively straight forward to measure, relationships tend to be complex and difficult to code, count, measure, quantify or value. In addition, there is a lack of data on actual relationships between people. This paper attempts to set out some of the information that hints at the nature of personal and social relationships. This is supplemented by setting out some of the emerging learnings from the Hounslow Together Projects on community resilience and building personal networks.

Recent studies and analysis have shown the importance of relationships are linked to perceptions of wellbeing and resilience. There is also an emerging body of work on 'social capital' which has relationships at its core. It is generally agreed that social capital an important factor for economic growth and a facilitator for individual and community wellbeing. This work is set out in the first section in order to frame the paper within broader thinking. The final section of this paper considers some of the emerging challenges and opportunities that may influence relationships. It makes some tentative suggestions on the potential impact.

BROADER RESEARCH ON SOCIAL CAPITAL, WELLBEING AND RELATIONSHIPS

Quick overview

- Research is increasingly focusing on the importance of relationships for wellbeing
- National projects to measure social capital indicate the complexity of the concept
- There is little evidence on interventions to improve social capital
- Some research indicates how public policies might erode social networks

Empirical studies and analysis of survey data across several countries have found that people who have good social relationships have higher **wellbeing** and better **mental health**. This emerged across relationship variables, including the *number of friends*, how often a person *meets friends socially*, and whether a person is *married*. Similarly the OECD and the World Happiness Report find '*having friends to count on*' is the second strongest predictor of happiness across several countries. The **extent and the quality of social relationships** was also found to be important in this research.

Meta-analysis of several hundred studies have shown that those with strong social relationships **live longer** and are 50% less likely to die prematurely. These relationships contribute to **improved health** across the lifespan and act as a **buffer against stress**. Conversely, low social support is linked to a number of **health consequences**, such as depression, decreased immune function and higher blood pressure.

At a national level, ONS has led a project to understand, measure and monitor **social capital** defined by four domains - personal relationships, social support networks, civic engagement, and trust and cooperative norms. A recent ONS publication found that, nationally, most of the indicators that make up the social capital measure are improving. 68% of people report *stopping and talking to their neighbours* in 2014/15 an increase since 2010. Only 43% of people report they *borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours* (although this has increased since 2010). Even though 97% of adults in the UK have at least one close friend, the proportion of people saying they have *someone to rely*

on a lot in case of a serious problem fell from 86% to 84%. Unfortunately, much of this data does not exist at a local level emphasising the potential importance of the Community Resilience Tool (see below).

The literature about social capital acknowledges that connections, and even the capacity to connect, are assets that can and should be harnessed, appreciated, protected and cultivated. There is, however, currently little knowledge on how to invest in social capital. Equally, there are few practical examples as to where explicit **interventions to build social capital** can be causally linked to better wellbeing and inclusion outcomes. There are, however, some examples of how public policies can harm relationships or social capital. For example, regeneration efforts may disperse established communities, breaking down social capital and harming wellbeing even though the physical fabric has improved.

RELATIONSHIP OUTCOMES IN HOUNSLOW

Quick overview

- There is little evidence on the nature and form of relationships
- Age, poor health status and mental health challenges have been linked to difficulties maintaining personal relationships
- There are some indicators that certain cohorts do not have as much social contact or support as they would like
- Neighbourhood support appear to be affected by high population churn and change
- Interpersonal violence and hate crime indicators act to hint at where relationships are not healthy or prosocial

As indicated above there is little systematically collected data that show us what relationships look like in the borough. This has in some ways been supplemented by the work done on the Community Resilience Project and Cranford Stronger Together.

Personal relationships

Although there is very little data on personal relationships, we know that in Hounslow 15% of the adult population is **divorced, widowed or separated**, this is below the national average but similar to rates for London. 8.1% of households are **lone parent** households. This is above national averages. Both these indicators have an upward trend since 2001.

All that we can reliably measure, in the absence of asking people directly about their close personal relationships, is the data that indicates that a particular group of people may have more difficulties creating or sustaining fulfilling and valuable relationships. For instance: **Age** and **poor health status** has been associated with social isolation; In addition, **mental health** has been shown to have an effect on relationship building and maintenance. Although, there is no conclusive evidence that mental health issues are increasing, it is likely that it will continue to be a challenge for many individuals.

Social support

One of the most relevant indicators for social support and isolation is the percentage of social care users who have as much **social contact** as they would like. In 2016 this was 36.2 %; placing in Hounslow as the third lowest in London and nationally. Although, social isolation should not be confused with loneliness, they are often interrelated and indicate that the frequency of social contact is not sufficient for wellbeing for a certain cohort of the

population. In addition, the AgeUK Loneliness Index which identifies risk factors for loneliness places Hounslow within the top 25% Boroughs in England for loneliness. High risk areas are predicted in Feltham North, Heston West, parts of Syon and Chiswick.

Carers also tend to be at higher risk of isolation, however, in Hounslow there are relatively lower numbers of people who provide over 30 hours unpaid care. This may increase as the population ages and more support is needed to care for elderly relatives. In 2014, only 26.3% of carers respondents indicated that they have as much social contact as they would like, a significant drop since the previous survey and the third lowest level in London.

Other indicators hint at the extent of social support for people in the borough and present a mixed picture. **Membership of a faith group** often provides for communities of activity and association and Hounslow has relatively high rates of people indicating a religious affiliation. Similarly **volunteering** provides an opportunity for social contact and support. However, only 14% of respondents in the 2016 Resident Survey said they have given unpaid help to any groups, this compares to 19% nationally. Hence, there are some indicators that allude to the need to increase levels of social support and promote opportunities to make social contact and build relationships.

Neighbourhood support

While social support might be provided by family or friends in very different locations, when thinking about community resilience, it is important to look at local neighbourhood support offered by residents to each other. This is considered a 'domain' of the Community Resilience Tool (see below).

Perception of local areas are measured by the Resident Survey found that 87% residents agree their **local area is a place where people get on well together** and treat each other with respect (increase of 3% on 2014). This is slightly below national levels. However, only 58% say their local area is a place where people in their area **pull together to improve the local area** which is comparable to the 2014 survey but significantly below national levels (68%). This appears to indicate that even though people might perceive that neighbours get on well together, this it does not always translate into local connections might help initiate social action or mitigate against shocks or stressors.

Population **growth, churn and change** has the potential to affect relationship building in communities. Hounslow is a rapidly growing borough and experiences much population churn (see Paper 1). This affects areas differently but has the potential to reduce feelings of belonging or solidarity within a neighbourhood.

Related to this, Hounslow has seen growth in the numbers of people living in the **private rental sector** which is also associated with higher levels of transience. In Hounslow, almost a third of residents rent from a private landlord or letting agency. Nationally the private rental sector has grown and there is a significant increase in the proportion of lone parents with dependent children renting in this sector.

Interpersonal domestic violence and hate crime

Not all relationships are healthy or promote prosocial behaviour and hence it might be appropriate to consider incidents of violence that may indicate problems with prosocial, healthy relationships.

Since 2015 there has been a 13% increase in **sexual offences** and a 17% increase in **domestic abuse offences**. Furthermore, as mentioned in Paper 2, in 15/16, police recorded 584 **hate crimes** of which most were racially aggravated. This is a 45% increase from previous year. Although the reasons for a hate crime and its linkages with social contact or local relationships is beyond the scope of this report, this is a worrying trend in a very diverse borough as it indicates issues around tolerance and prejudice.

NEW AREAS OF RESEARCH AND LEARNING AREAS

Quick overview

- The Community Resilience Tool hints at the importance of neighbourhood support and relationships at a local level
- The Cranford Stronger Together is building a knowledge base on the different types of relationships and social networks
- Considering relationships and social networks as outcomes in themselves as well as contributing to broader outcomes results shifts the thinking for policy makers

Community Resilience Tool

In 2015, the Hounslow Together Board commissioned Social Life to develop a **predictive mapping and insight tool** to consider community resilience. This tool uses data from the nationwide Understanding Society Survey to predict levels of wellbeing and community resilience made up of the 'domains' of **neighbourhood support, isolation, competence and emotional resilience**. This predictive data is compared with national and local level 'hard data' and visually mapped. This has been tested by comparing the 'hard' and predictive data' and conducting qualitative case studies of small areas.

In thinking about local relationships, we noticed that high levels of inward migration, churn and change appears to impact on levels of **neighbourhood support**. Neighbourhood support, isolation and competence interact in various ways. In one case study it became apparent that higher levels of social support create a feeling of community, however, without the 'competence' and ability to engage with institutional structures and systems, this community was vulnerable to external shocks and pressures.

At the core of this understanding of resilience, is an assumption that relationships help residents to mitigate the impact of local and at times personal shocks. There might be various types of relationships that might be **protective**. These may range from knowing and chatting to your neighbour to being able to borrow money in case of an emergency. These types of relationship are explored in depth in the Cranford Stronger Together Project.

Cranford Stronger Together

This project emerged out of a desire to understand local social networks and the impact on wellbeing and service use. The Proof of Concept project aims to prove that by improving an individual's social networks, wellbeing and resilience might improve, and social isolation and reliance upon services would be reduced

The original network mapping found that various types of different networks exist in a particular local area. Namely:

- **Socially isolated people** who lack any meaningful social contact and which appears to have a dramatic negative effects on their wellbeing;

- **Locally isolated people** despite having important relationships further afield these individuals have little support locally;
- **Socially isolated groups** are local social networks that are isolated and do not maximise their social capital. They lack the novelty and benefits of more diverse connections, and do not efficiently share their assets with other local groups.

In trying to better understand the **types of relationships** that make up an individual's social network, the project has aimed to classify relationships in order to better understand where intervention is both appropriate and effective.

Although this work is still in the initial stages, we have been able to see that:

- Relationships are dynamic systems and change over time and context but remain tied to wellbeing;
- Not all relationships are positive, healthy or contribute to a 'social good' or prosocial behaviour and they may have conflicting impacts or outcomes for individuals;
- Relationships are bi-directional - people with higher levels of wellbeing are more able to engage in relationships and those relationships often contribute towards perceptions of wellbeing;
- The ability to engage in a relationship, start new relationships or maintain relations demands energy, is highly personal and requires a set of skills and behaviours;
- Individuals often identify a spatial component to relationships (such as a school, community centre), activity (sport or arts) or association (faith group).

POTENTIAL CHANGES IMPACTING ON RELATIONSHIPS

Quick overview

- Changing technologies, automation and artificial intelligence may have mixed effects on the contact time between people
- Engaging online may act as both a facilitator and barrier to local relationship building
- The changing nature of work may potentially influence peoples engagement and connections in the work place
- Brexit and the proposals on immigration are having an impact on perceptions and relationships
- The squeeze on the VCSE sector and budget cuts in the public sector has the potential to reduce opportunities for social contact during leisure time and through volunteering

The following subsection provide a broad 'horizon scan' of the potential changes and the impact on relationships, particularly those at a local level.

Automation and robotics have the potential to reduce **contact time** between people and also between people and service providers. For example, people already shop online reducing the need to visit local shops where they may meet their neighbours. GPs might provide services online or through the use of robotics or 'chatbots' or AI might be used as the first contact with someone with an illness or health complaint.

However, as **automation, innovation and artificial intelligence** replace some jobs, there may be shift to focus on those jobs that cannot be automated or delivered through technology such as face-to-face engagements that demand empathy, engagement and human interaction and in this way the change the emphasis to relationship-building jobs.

Related to this, **social media** and virtual engagement has changed and will probably continue to change the nature of socialising. Social media acts as both a facilitator and a barrier to local relationships. It may facilitate engagement such as the use of a local area Facebook group. On the other hand, the use of social media for social engagement may reduce the use of the public, physical realm for social activities, thereby reducing contact between neighbours which may be a risk factor for local community resilience. It also risks people only connecting to people with similar views or beliefs reducing opportunities to explore and understand diversity.

The **nature of work** and workplaces are also changing due to new technologies. The ability to work remotely may mean local people might find themselves working from home. With reduced commuting times, this might allow for more local contact and engagement strengthening local bonds, perhaps at the expense of contact in the workplace. However, this changing work pattern may only exist in certain sectors or areas having an unknown effect on the borough as a whole, yet it is worth considering as we think about relationships.

It is unclear the impact of **Brexit** on feelings of belonging and social connection. Brexit has been closely associated with debates on immigration and has influenced feelings and perceptions on the issue. In a diverse borough with relatively high levels of migration, this may have a mixed impact. In addition, concerns around governance, the economy and global security appears to influence levels of anxiety, data from ONS indicates that levels of anxiety have increased across the country. Hounslow scores 3.2 out of 10 on the ONS scale which is above the average of 2.9 indicating that these concerns may impact the borough significantly.

One of the key sectors involved in providing the opportunities and enabling relationship building is often the **VCSE sector**. However, this sector is under increasing budgetary pressures which may result in less opportunities to engage, volunteer or become involved in service activities. At the same time, these organisations are relying more on volunteers to sustain their activities.

Budget cuts have resulted in reductions in spending on non-statutory services that might help foster relationship-building such as arts, culture or sport activities. This is significant if the focus shifts to social contact and addressing social isolation. Also, changing demands and calls for personalisation, independence and individualisation in may work against models that promote relationship-building. For instance personalised budgets or care at home might reduce opportunities for social contact.

CONCLUSION

This paper aims to set out some of the data, evidence and emerging thinking on relationship outcomes for Hounslow. It has placed relationships as the 'subject' rather than 'people' or 'place'. It has tried to set out some of the existing information that tells us about the nature of relationships in Hounslow with a particular focus on relationships within communities or local areas that may support community resilience. Key issues on the horizon that may affect relationship building, maintenance or dissolution have been discussed in order to spark thinking about what a focus on building relationships might mean for partnership action, measurement or reporting.