



Halifax Happiest Home Report



*Prepared by
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*On behalf of
Halifax General Insurance
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Summary

The most popular definitions of a happy home are:

- 'a place where you feel safe and secure' (69%)
- 'a place where you can relax' (64%)
- 'a place where you can be yourself' (57%).

The happiest types of home in Britain are bungalows, which are rated by their occupants on average 8.15 out of 10 on a 'happiness' scale.

Happiness increases in line with the number of bedrooms. The happiest homes have a ratio of more than 1.5 bedrooms per occupant.

The majority of respondents rate their homes as happy – 80% of the sample awarded their home a score of 7 or more out of 10 on the 'happiness' scale.

Home happiness is directly linked to the age of the occupants. The over 50s have significantly happier homes than their younger counterparts.

The happiness of a home is independent of socio-economic group.

Residents of Scotland and London are the most likely to rate their home as perfectly happy, but in terms of average scores, Londoners are the least happy.

The amount of space is the single most important physical factor influencing happiness, followed closely by how safe and secure the property is.

The presentation of the home is more likely to influence the happiness of the youngest age group, the 18-29yr olds.

In the context of happiness, 'sense of community' and 'relationships with immediate neighbours' become more important with age.

Different socio-economic groups have different priorities. The most important contributors to happiness are 'the amount of space' and the 'garden' to the ABC1s compared to 'security and safety' and 'relationship with immediate neighbours' favoured by the C2DEs.

The three most important amenities that influence happiness are shops, health services and parks / countryside.



Introduction

We all have special relationships with the homes in which we live – they are far more than just the sum total of bricks and mortar. They provide not only shelter but a sense of place and identity – essential elements of what we take to be ‘human’.

It is little wonder, then, that buying a first home, or moving from one home to another, are among the most important events in our lives – as full of emotional charge, excitement and trepidation as marriage or the birth of our children. It’s also clear we have strong views about the places in which we live – the things we love and perhaps the things we hate – the extent to which our homes are happy places that we are so glad to return to each night.

When the Social Issues Research Centre was asked by Halifax General Insurance to look more closely at what makes a ‘happy home’ we naturally started with our own personal perceptions of the places in which we live – the location, the number and size of the rooms, the style and décor, the garden, the ability to relax, etc. – all of the things that we ordinarily take for granted. But to what extent would our own, perhaps idiosyncratic, views be shared by others around the country? What would be the most common defining elements of a happy home for a representative cross section of the UK population? What questions should we be asking?

The research started with tried-and-tested focus groups involving a wide cross-section of home-owners – different types of people, different types of dwelling. Some of the insightful comments made by the participants are included in this report.

On the basis of a careful study of transcripts from the focus groups, questions for a national poll were designed and administered by YouGov to a representative sample of 2,004 people across the country. Of these, 1,307 were home-owners and it is their responses that have been analysed in this report. With their help and with the detailed contributions of our focus group participants we now know, probably for the first time, what really makes a happy home.

Defining the 'happy home'

Relaxation, safety or just a good 'vibe'

Discussions in the focus groups revealed that there were a number of key, tangible requirements that contributed to the happiness of the home.

"The rooms were quite big – separate sitting room and like a massive dining room, which is quite good when you have a young family"

"The location we chose was a bit out of our price range, but the neighbours and surroundings were very important."

"It was ideal – it had everything we were looking for, but I think the light was most important"

"It's an estate but in a cul-de-sac so we don't get through traffic."

It was clear, however, that when exploring the meaning of a home, broader and more abstract concepts also came into play.

"We did fall in love with it at first sight because it fitted so many things that just seemed right. The area was perfect for us"

"Home' is a very powerful word because it means so much to you – it means you're safe, you're secure – you know – you can be yourself ... From my point of view it's more somewhere that you can yourself."

"I think walking out of a place to feel at home is as important as walking in, because you don't want to walk out somewhere and not feel very comfortable in your environment...so just being able to step out the door and feel comfortable is a big factor."

Poll questions were devised to test some of these concepts. The greatest consensus from the poll was that the home was 'a place where you feel safe and secure' (69%), followed closely by 'a place where you can relax' (64%) and 'a place where you can be yourself' (57%) (see Figure 1 below). Defining the home as 'a place where you feel safe and secure' was most strongly felt in the Midlands and Wales (77%) and least cited in Scotland, where the most popular definition was 'a place where you can relax' (73%).

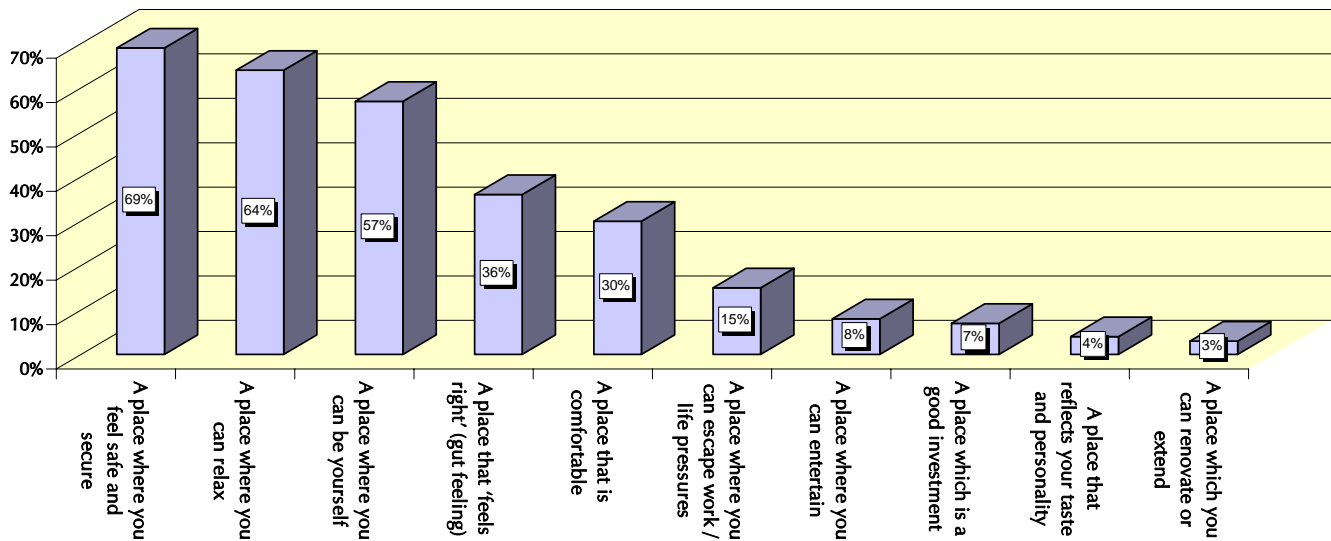
Throughout the focus groups constant references were also made to happiness being dependent on the 'feel' of a house. The participants of the focus groups frequently commented that 'gut instinct' was an important determining factor in their choice of home.

"It's like meeting your partner. You just know. It just feels like a place where you'll be happy living."

This was not reflected quite so strongly in the survey, with only 36% concurring with the definition of a happy home as being 'a place that feels right'. Women were slightly more likely to agree with this sentiment (38%) than the men (34%).

Figure 1.

Responses to: “Which one of the following best defines what you think a happy home should be?”

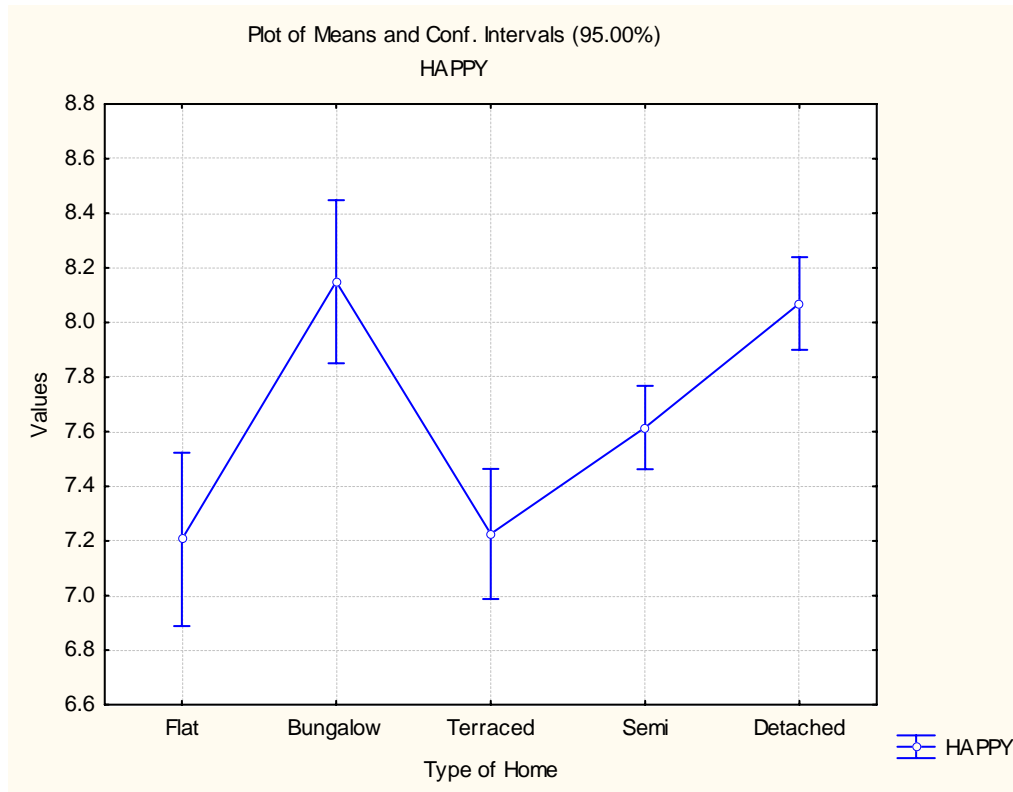


Type of house

A number of physical attributes of a house were felt to contribute significantly to the happiness of a home – space, safety, light, garden and privacy – all of which are intrinsically linked with the type of house. Would detached homes, by their very nature more private and spacious, be the ‘happiest’ or would terraced houses prevail, relying on neighbourly relations and a sense of community to override their spatial limitations? Figure 2 overleaf shows the average happiness rating for each type of house.

Figure 2.

Type of house plotted against average happiness rating



From the sample it would appear that Britain's happiest homes are, in fact, bungalows, scoring an average happiness rating of 8.15/10. These were closely followed by detached homes (8.07/10). There was a significant drop between the first two most popular and the average popularity of the semis (7.62/10), terraced houses (7.23/10) and flats/apartments (7.22/10). These results are statistically very significant, $F= 12.69$, $p<0.00001$.¹

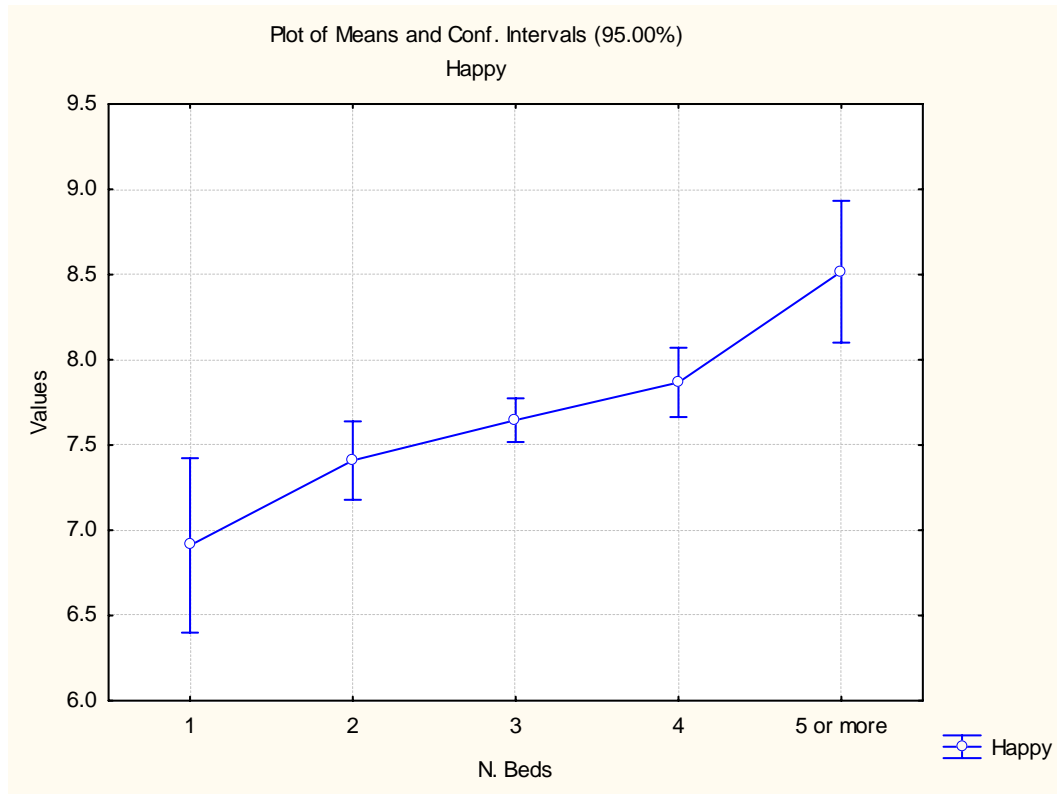
Size of house

The average happiness rating increased in line with the number of bedrooms, as one might expect given that 'amount of space' was reported as such an important indicator of happiness ($F= 8.1$, $p<0.00001$).

¹ Standard Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) has been used to test for significant differences between means throughout this report.

Figure 3

Average happiness rating plotted against the number of bedrooms.



Given, however, that only 5% of the sample had 5 bedrooms or more, a more useful indicator in determining the significance of space in contributing to happiness may be to assess the occupancy to bedroom ratio.

Figure 4, overleaf, demonstrates that the relationship between occupancy and happiness is non-linear. What we can ascertain from the data is that the lowest rates of happiness correlate with the highest ratio of people per bedroom – happiness rating of 1/10 equating to an occupancy of 1.04 people / bedroom. At the other end of the scale the ‘top’ happiness scores demonstrate a correlation between happiness and occupancy. Homes that score a perfect happiness rating require over 1.5 bedrooms / person.

Figure 4.

Average bedrooms per person plotted against happiness rating



How happy are people’s homes?

The large majority of householders were happy with their homes – the most popular rating was 8 out of 10 on a ‘happiness’ scale. 95% rated the happiness of their home as 5 or more and 80% gave it a rating of 7 or over. A greater proportion of females (15%) ranked their home as a ‘10 – couldn’t be happier’ compared to the males (9%).

Figure 5

Illustrates the overall happiness ratings.

Responses to the question: “Thinking about physical aspects only (the location, the size of your home, space, light, etc.), the neighbourhood it is in and local amenities, services, etc. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is totally miserable and 10 is couldn’t be happier, how happy are you with your home?”

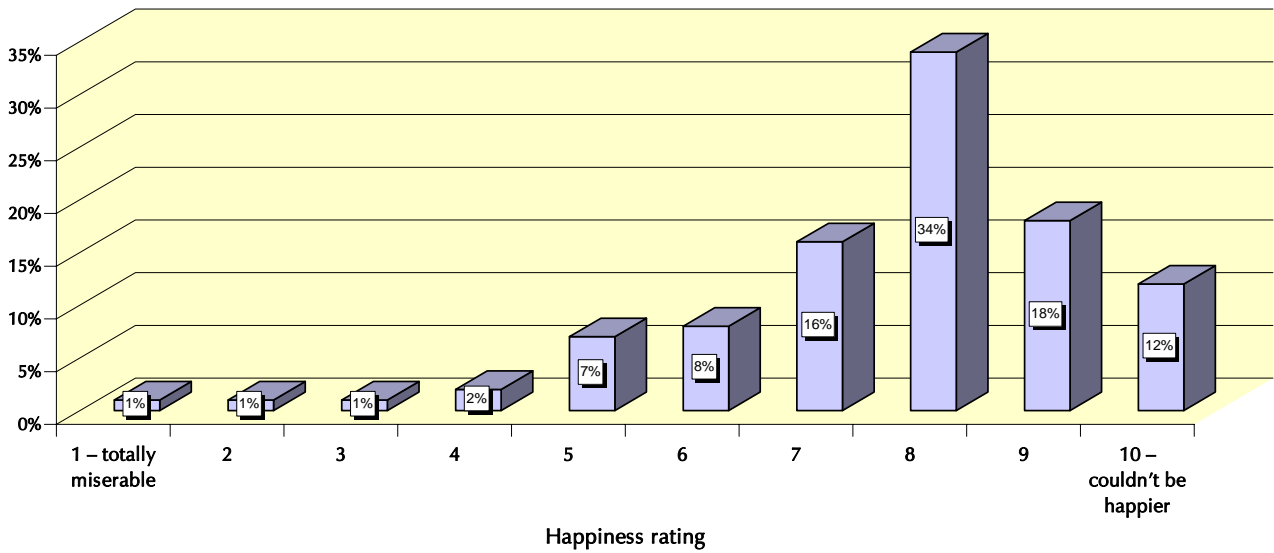
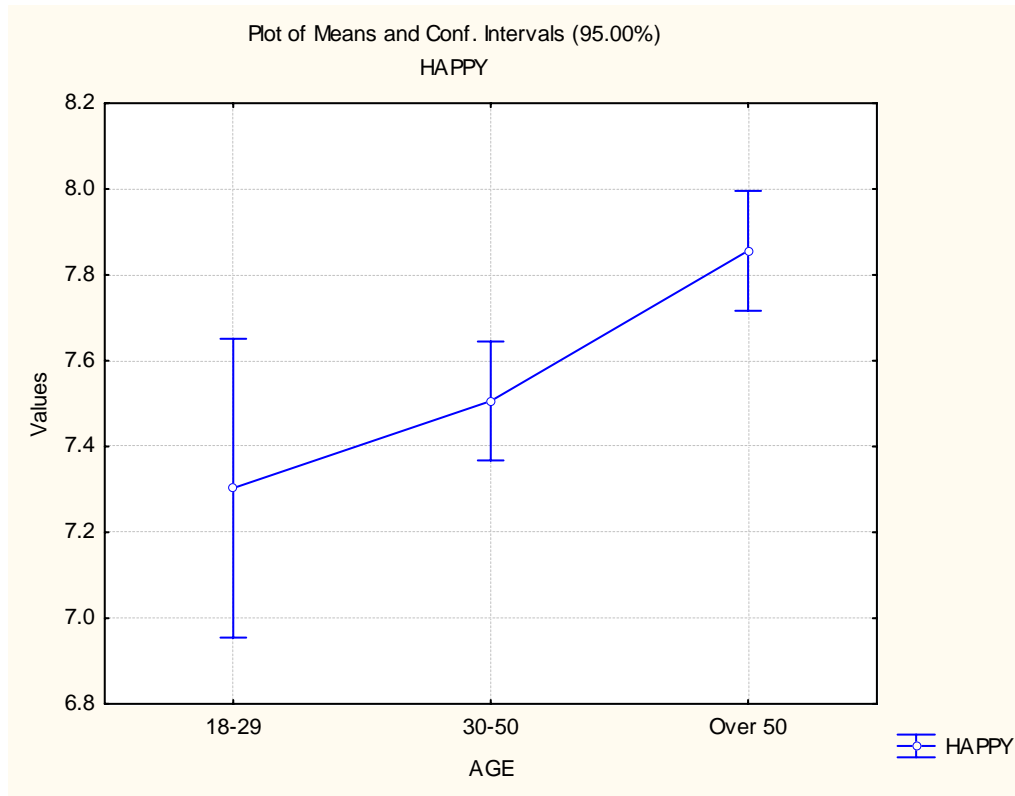


Figure 6.

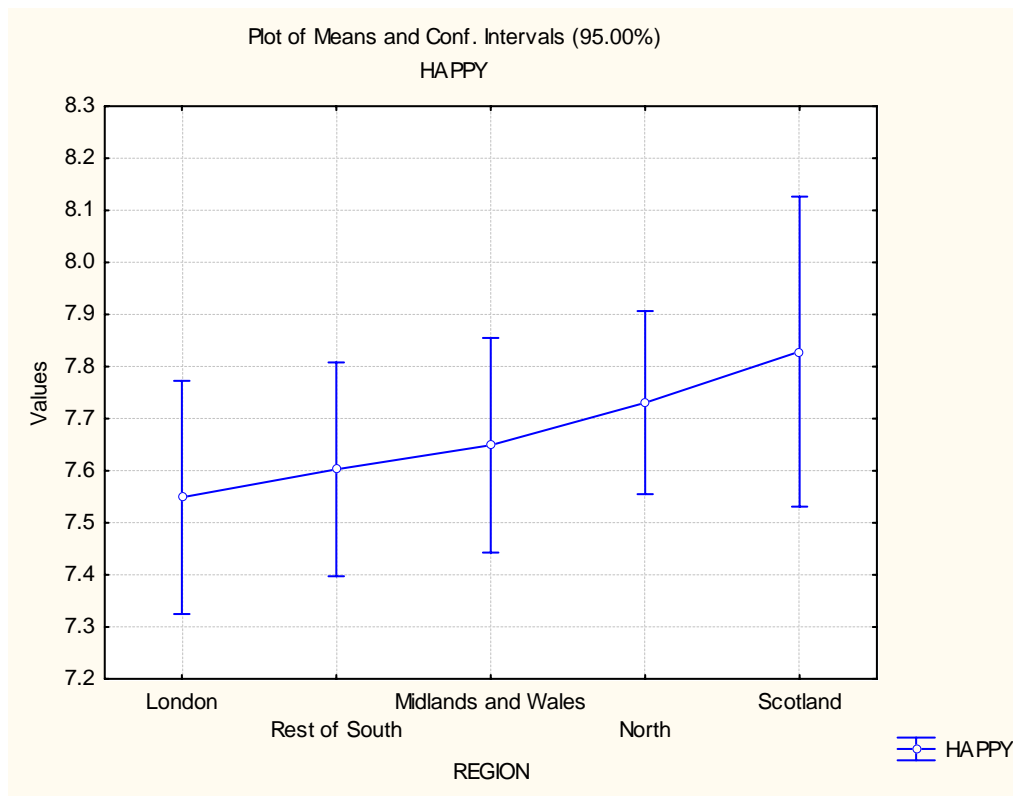
Means and variances for age groups



Interestingly, there were no significant differences between the socioeconomic groups, as shown in Figure 7 over the page. It would seem that the happiness of homes is relatively independent of social class.

Figure 7.

Mean scores and variances for regional groups.



Factors contributing to a happy home

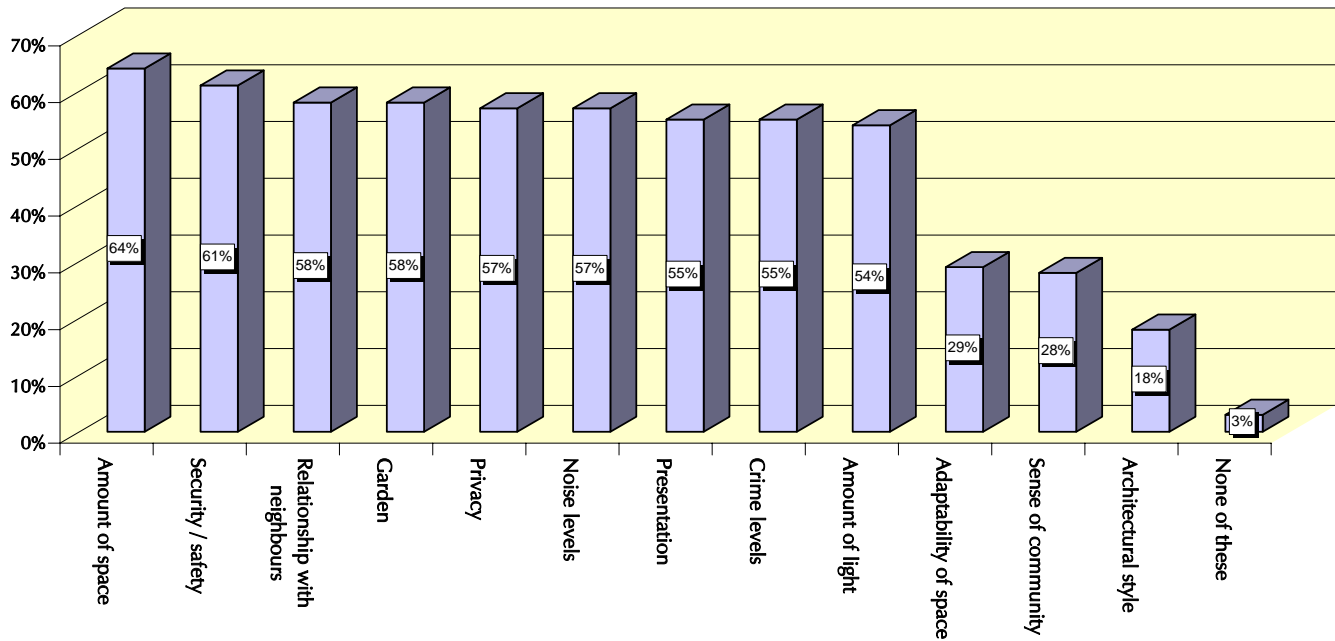
The respondents were asked to consider a number of factors that contributed to the happiness of their home. These were confined to the physical attributes of the house itself and the surrounding environment. The results are shown in Figure 9 below.

From Figure 9 it is clear that the respondents overall had a distinct 'top nine' factors that were felt to be significantly more important than 'adaptability of space', 'sense of community in the area' and the 'architectural style'.

Respondents in general ranked the 'amount of space' as the single most important factor (64%) that contributed to the happiness of their home, but there was little differentiation between this and the other eight factors listed. What the poll demonstrated was that security, privacy and the crime rate of an area were paramount. The happiness of a home, it would appear, was influenced greatly by how safe its occupants felt.

Figure 8.

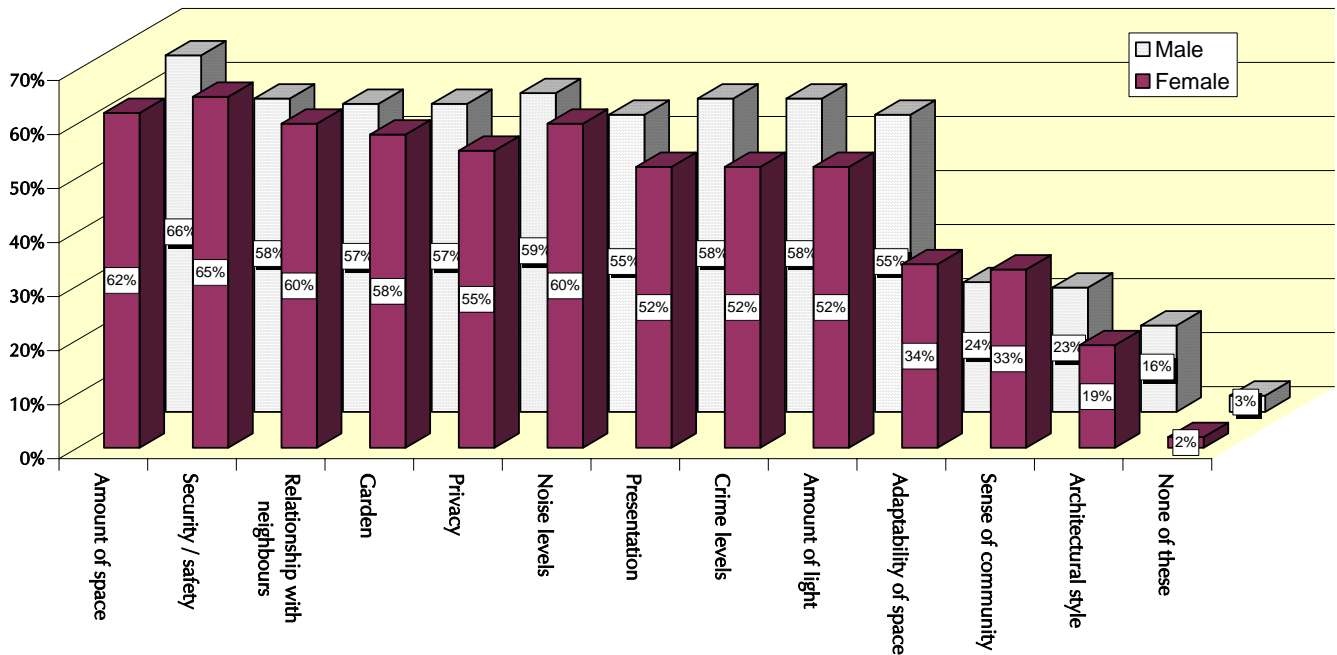
Responses to the question: “Thinking about your home, please look at the following list and select those factors that contribute to your happiness with your home.”



While there were no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents there were some slight variations between the sexes (see Figure 10 overleaf). Women appeared more concerned with issues of ‘security and safety’ (Female 65%-Male 58%), the ‘functionality and adaptability of the space’ (Female 34%-Male 24%) and the ‘sense of community in their area’ (Female 33%-Male 23%). Men, on the other hand were more mindful of the ‘amount of space’ (Male 66%-Female 62%), ‘the presentation’ of the home (Male 58%-Female 52%) and the ‘amount of light’ (Male 55%-Female 52%).

Figure 9.

Responses to: “Thinking about your home, please look at the following list and select those factors that contribute to your happiness with your home.”

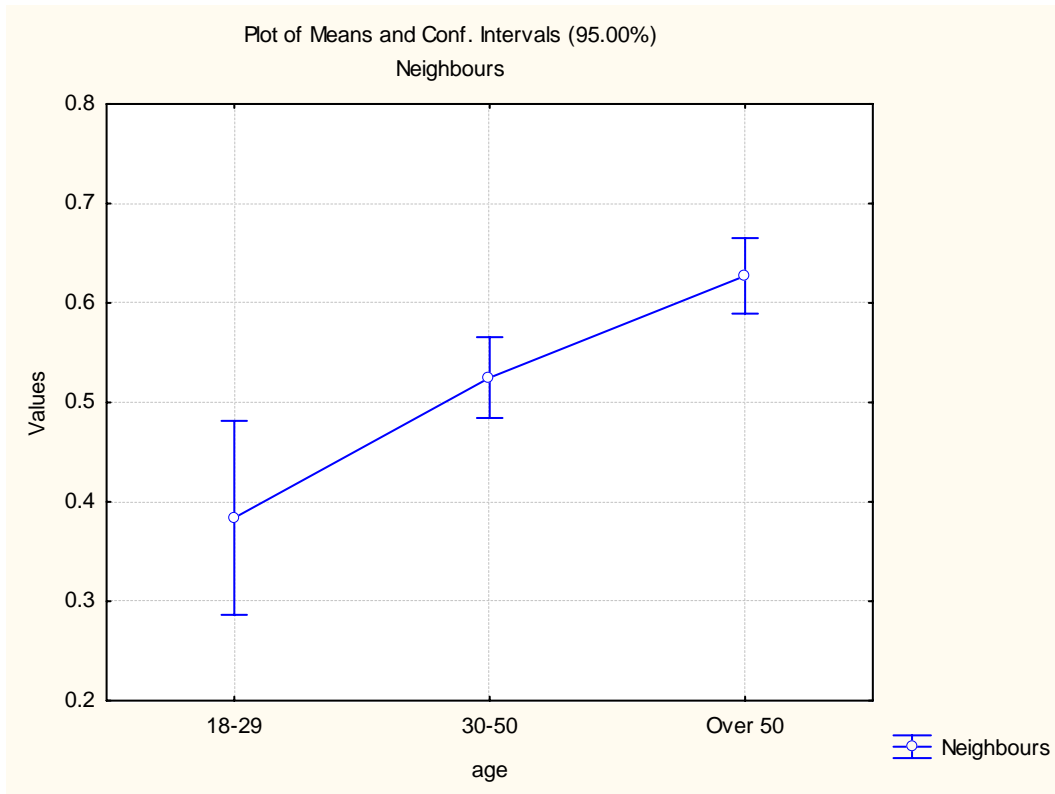


Examining the results by age highlighted some interesting differences. One statistically significant example of these was the weight that young people assigned to the ‘presentation / decorative’ state of repair of their home ($F=3.16, p<0.05$). For the 18-29yr olds, this, along with the ‘amount of space’, was the most important factor that contributed to the happiness of their home (69%). The 30-50yr olds and the over 50s were less concerned by the presentation (54%). To the over 50s, the primary concern was ‘the amount of space’ (64%) while the happiness of the 30-50yr olds was most influenced by issues of ‘safety and security’ (63%).

The importance of the ‘relationship with immediate neighbours’ in the area increased in line with age – as shown in Figure 11 below. The differences between the age groups are highly significant – $F=13.67, P<0.000001$.

Figure 10.

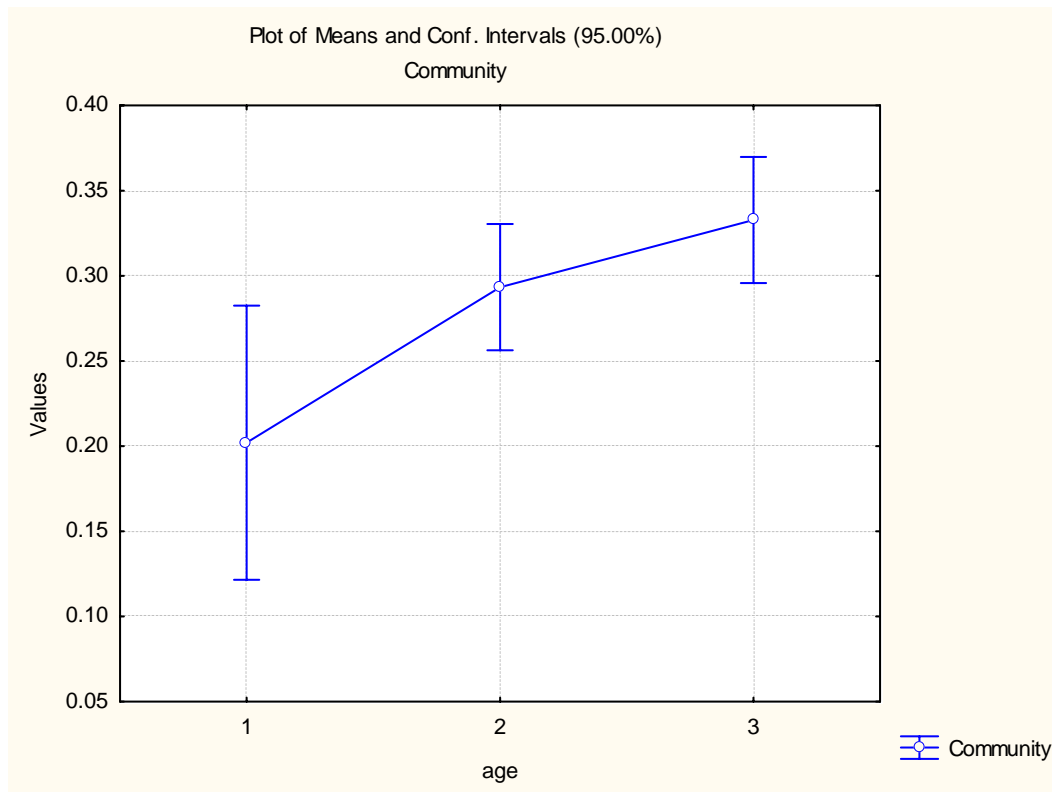
Means and variance for importance of 'immediate neighbours' for age groups.



A similar trend across the age groups regarding the importance of a 'sense of community' was also evident, as shown in Figure 12 overleaf.

Figure 11

Means and variance for importance of a 'sense of community' for age groups.



The priorities expressed by the different socio-economic groups differed quite markedly. To the ABC1s, the 'amount of space' (69%) and 'the garden' (61%) were the two factors that most contributed to the happiness of their homes. This was in sharp contrast to the C2DE group which ranked the same considerations as less important (57% and 54%) respectively. For this group, the 'security and safety' of the home (64%) and the 'relationship with the immediate neighbours' (62%) were the primary concerns.

Residents of Scotland and the North ranked the 'amount of space' as their top contributing factor to happiness (71% and 68% respectively), for residents of the Rest of the South and the Midlands and Wales it was 'the garden' (63%) and for Londoners it was 'safety and security' (67%).

The most significant difference between the responses made by the home-owners with a mortgage and those without was the extent to which they valued the 'relationship with their immediate neighbours' (53% and 67% respectively).

Amenities

It was clear from discussions with the participants of the focus groups that local amenities significantly impacted on the happiness of people's homes.

"I obviously wanted my son to go the same primary school as I did, and I'm close to my mum."

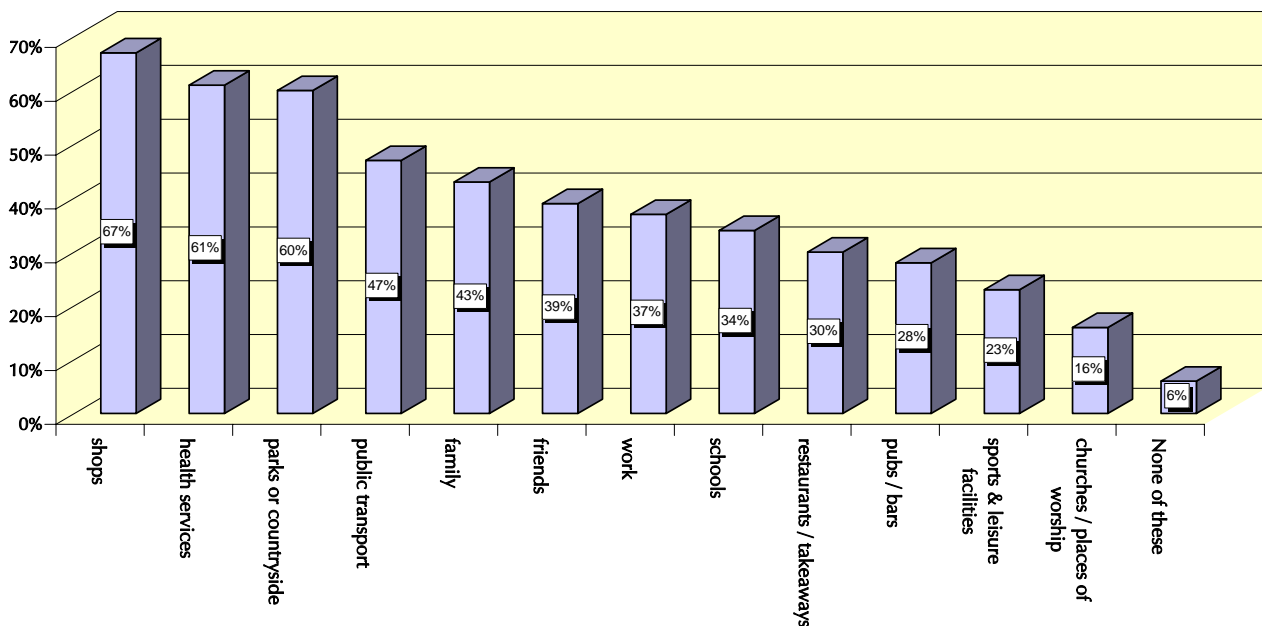
"The convenience of living close to shops. That's essential."

Respondents of the national poll were asked to assess the importance of the proximity and ease of access to a number of amenities and services (see Figure 13).

The three most popular responses – 'the proximity to shops' (67%), 'the proximity to health services' (61%) and 'the proximity to parks or countryside' (60%) – had a significantly greater impact on the happiness of the home than the remaining factors listed. From the fourth most popular criteria, 'the proximity to public transport' (47%), the perceived importance declined steadily. For the respondents, 'proximity to churches' or places of worship contributed least to the happiness of their home (16%), but this may simply demonstrate that regular church-goers represented only a minority of the sample.

Figure 12.

Responses to the question: “The happiness of your home can depend on ease of access to amenities, services, family and friends. Still thinking about your home, please look at the following list and again select the factors that contribute to your happiness with your home.”



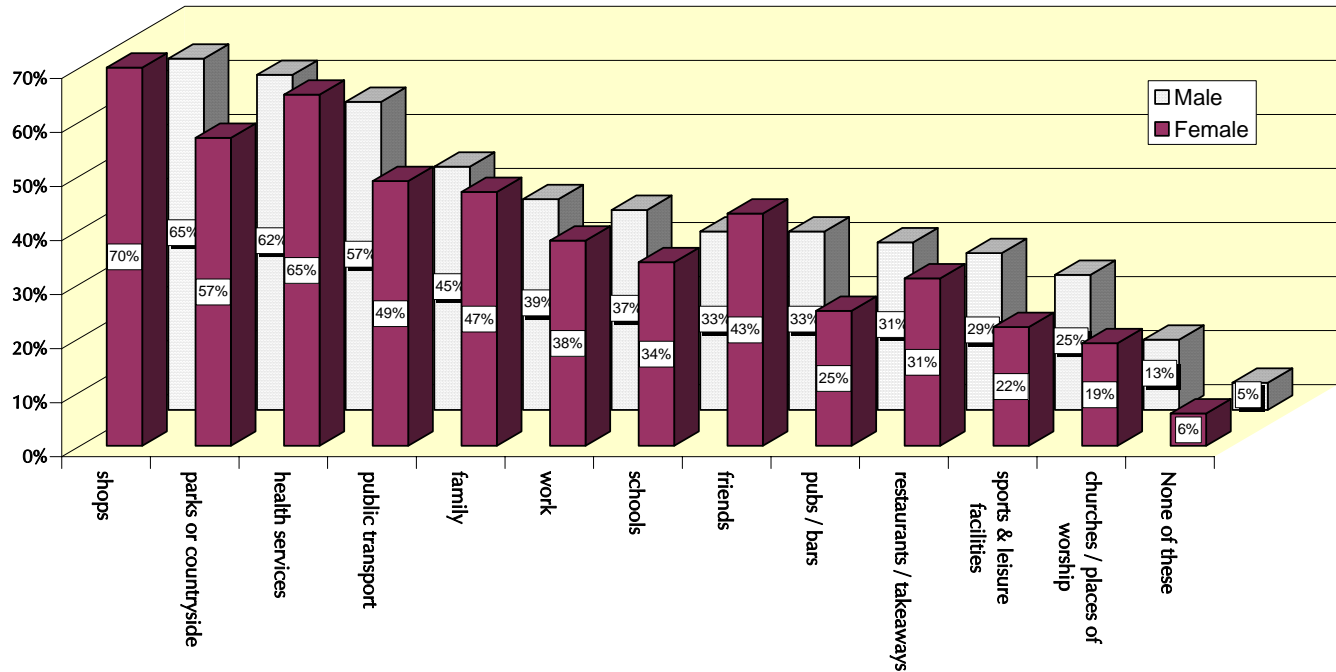
Examining the differences between the sexes (see Figure 14), only three amenities were deemed more important by men compared with women – ‘proximity to parks or countryside’ (Male 62%-Female 57%), ‘proximity to pubs and bars’ (Male 31%-Female 25%) and ‘proximity to sports and leisure facilities’ (Male 25%-Female 22%). These differences, however, were both statistically insignificant

Of the remaining amenities, the most significant sex differences were between the weight assigned to the ‘proximity to friends’ (Female 43%-Male 33%), ‘proximity to family’ (Female 47%-Male 39%) and ‘proximity to health services’ (Female 65%-Male 57%).

Across all three age categories and all five geographical locations, access to shops was felt to be the most important contributing factor to happiness. The 18-29yr olds and over 50s shared ‘proximity to health services’ as a secondary concern, while the 30-50yr olds favoured access to parks and countryside.

Figure 13.

Responses to: “The happiness of your home can depend on ease of access to amenities, services, family and friends. Still thinking about your home, please look at the following list and again select the factors that contribute to your happiness with your home.”



Conclusion

From the discussions with home-owners and from the results of the national poll it is apparent that the happiness of a home is influenced by a quite complex interaction of physical factors, proximity to amenities as well as personal and emotional factors. These vary from the tangible notions of light and space, on the one hand, to the more abstract concepts of 'gut feeling' on the other. The purpose of this study was to examine how these variables interact, and in what proportion they should be present, to create the truly happy home.

Arguably the most surprising finding to those of us that live in flats or homes with more than one storey is that the happiest homes are bungalows. Across all types of dwelling, however, the consensus is that they should be safe, secure, spacious, light, mortgage free, located in an area with a low crime rate and have good neighbours. A happy home is a place in which we can relax, be ourselves and feel safe. Shops and health services need to be easily accessible and it would appear that proximity to countryside and parks help to cheer us up.

An estate agent might describe it like this:

"Light and roomy three bed detached bungalow with two bathrooms in an area with excellent community spirit and a low crime rate. The house is in a good state of decorative repair with a small but well maintained garden. The property offers privacy but also has the convenience of local amenities."