

Efficacy of Third Sector Telephone Housing Options Service For Older People: A Realist Evaluation

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Background

In order to remain independent in later life it can be common for older people to reassess their home environment. Typical specialist options include Sheltered/Extra care housing, Abbeyfield & Almshouses. However, reassessing the home tends to emotive and knowing what's best can be complex.

Information & advice: FirstStop



Definitions of information emphasize its generic characteristics. On the other hand, advice is bespoke guidance.

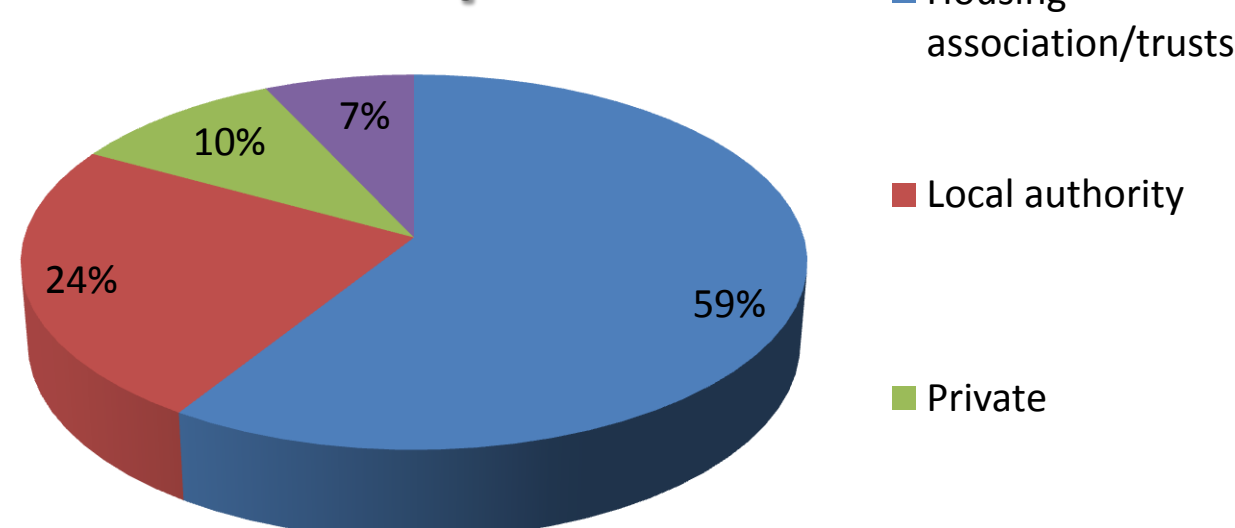
Through the Care Act 2014, local authorities (LA's) are now to provide I&A on welfare, including on housing.

However, provision is diverse Many signpost people to an existing third sector telephone service – FirstStop (FS). FS gained initial funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government, whom set targets (e.g. to impart *personal housing advice* to 22,500 telephone customers). Among other generic information, many information seekers are given an accommodation listing with details of alternative accommodation in a desired locality.

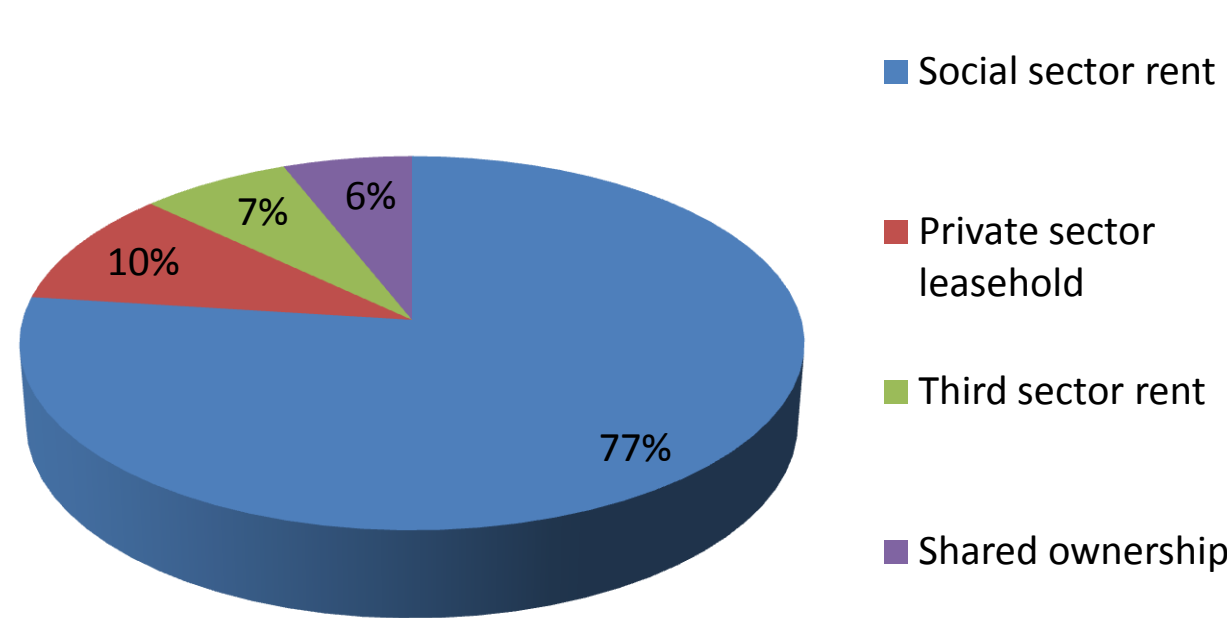
Specialist housing in later life

Most specialist housing is allocated by housing associations and local authorities. Private options are almost all leasehold, and there are some options in the charitable sector (e.g. Abbeyfield/Almshouses).

Specialist housing by provider¹



Specialist housing by tenure²



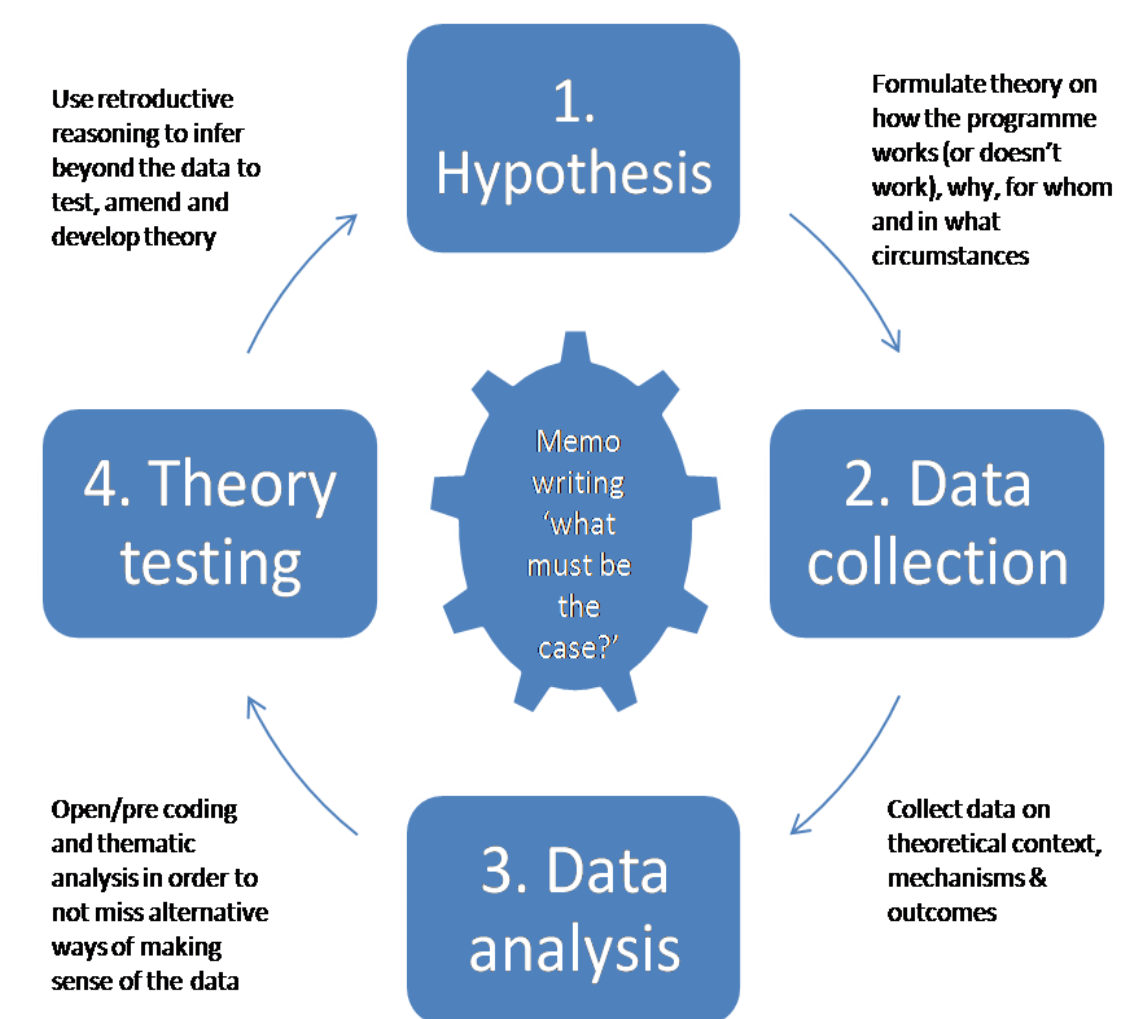
Methodology

Critical realist RE (see Harding et al. 2016 for in depth discussion).

Multiple Methods

- Ethnographic observations of practice.
- Focus group with advisors to form prog theory.
- Data extraction -audio recordings calls to service, referral documents (details of client cases, imparted posted printed information).
- 33 realist interviews with 17 clients:
 - 1 month after contacting FS (n=17)
 - 4 months after contacting FS (n=16)

Analytic Approach

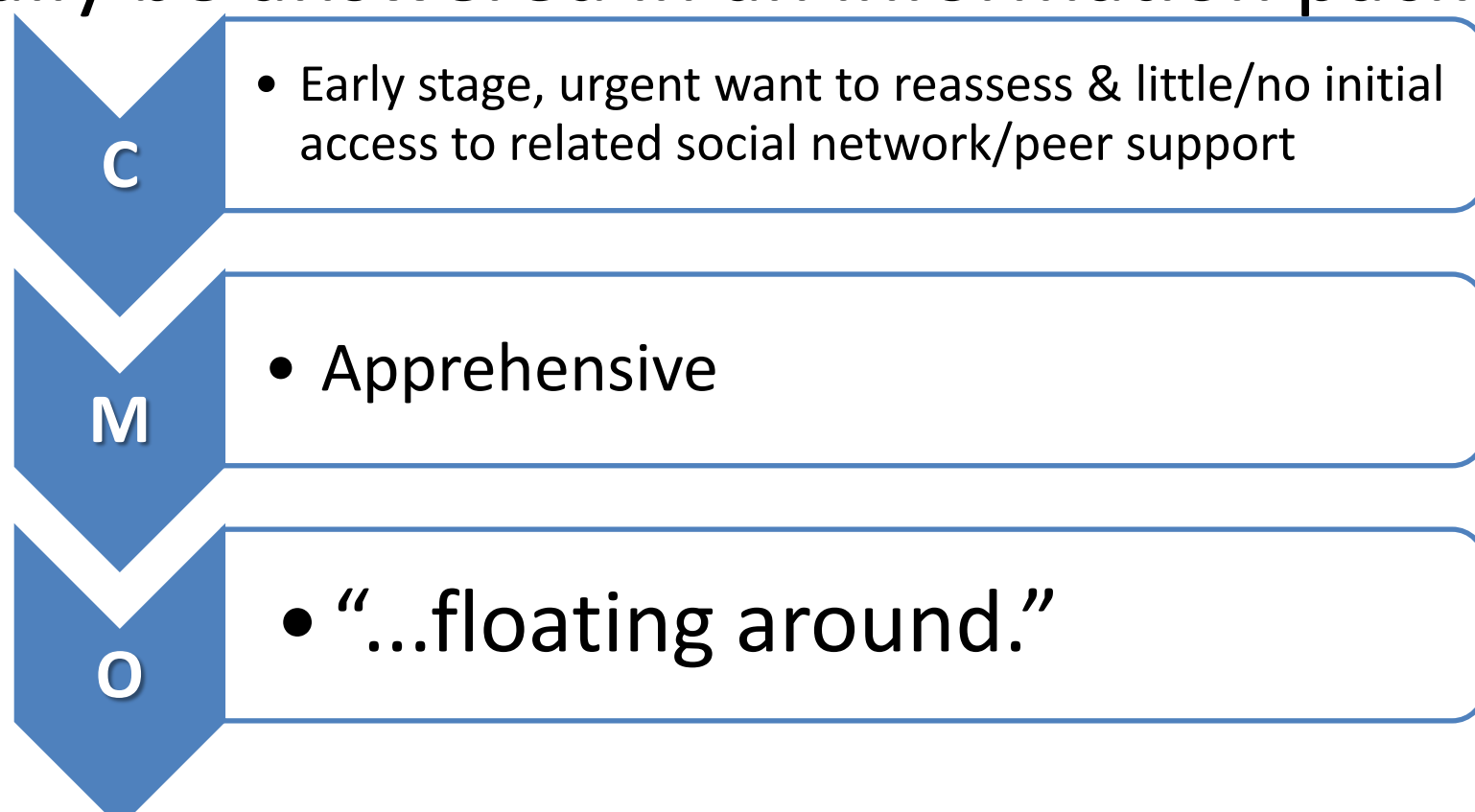


Six CMOc were found...

Two key CMOc

Currently in private mainstream

“Well it’s a difficult problem I’ve got really that can’t really be answered in an information pack.”



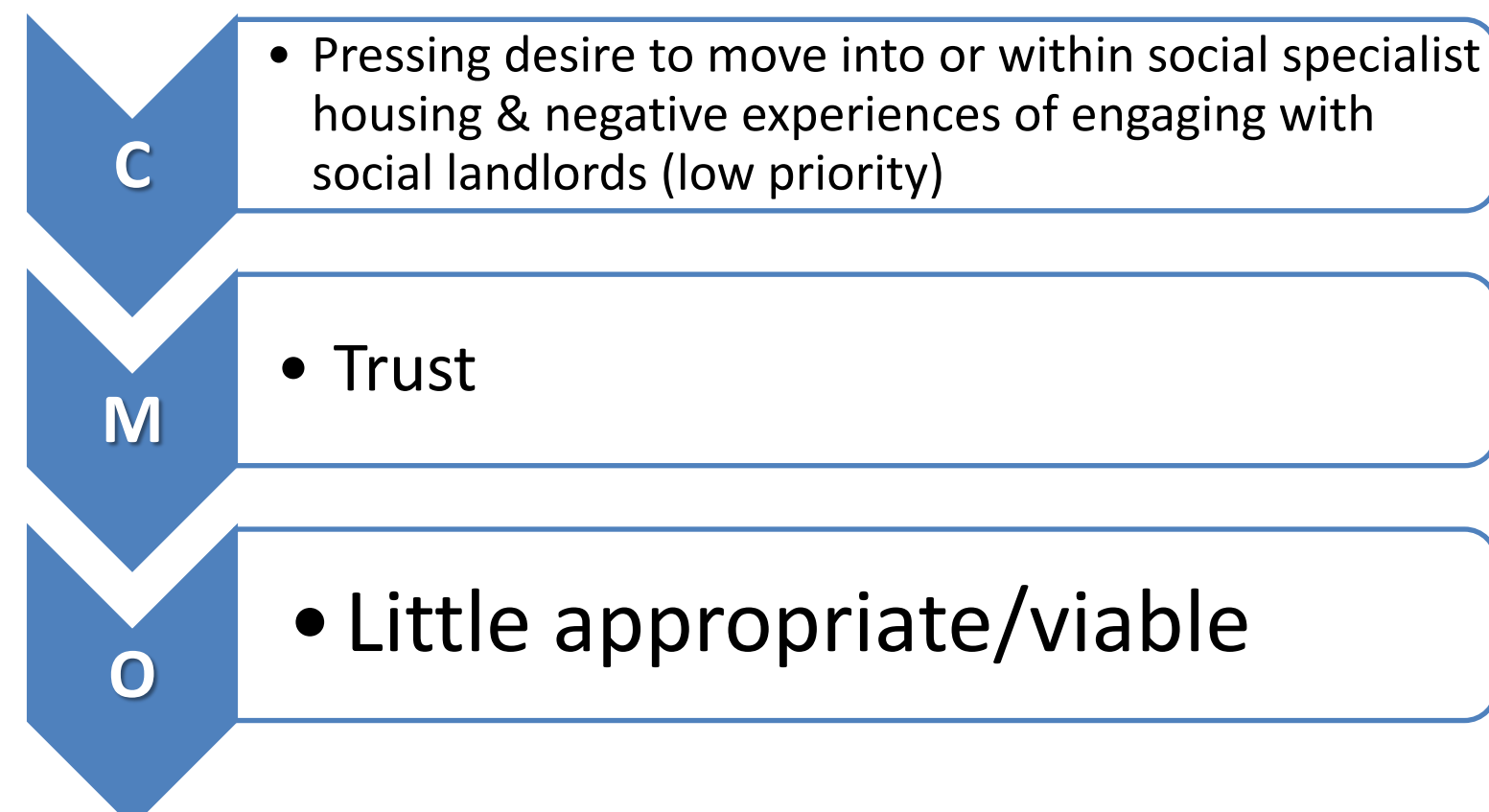
Key implication: More substantial service

Many options that are most viable are undesirable (e.g. Leasehold). Participants desired on-going discussion, deliberation and opportunities to exchange views & did not get this from FS. Some people sought out this type of support after contacting FS, stated it would be desirable & even motivated participation in the interviews.

Key recommendations: i) a more substantial service based around Habermas’s ‘communicative action’ (1992a,b) – using discussion, deliberation & exchange of views as means to enable understanding and agency. ii) more responsive & desirable private options – e.g. Commonhold providing more rights to residents.

Currently in social sector sheltered

“You know, so I’m on what I feel is an everlasting list! You know and not getting anywhere...”



Key implication: I&A unable to alter context

Participants in the social sector contact FS after unsuccessfully pursuing and having negative experiences of social channels. It is widely acknowledged that there is a shortfall in social housing and within this sector specialist housing.

Reasons behind this shortfall, that underpins long waiting lists and many being a low priority, is the wider upheaval in the HA sector:

- End of government capital grants funding and moves to revenue based funding
- Policies that are in turn reducing revenue – i.e. reducing rent levels by 1% per annum in next 4 years (previously increasing CPI+1%) constrains ability to borrow.
- Borrowing from private sources with high interest rates.
- Housing benefit reform reducing personal income and HA income – many current/planned schemes now not viable
- **Key recommendations:** i) Prioritise government grants based funding. ii) reverse reforms negatively impacting on HA raising capital and making schemes financially unviable.

References

HABERMAS, J. (1992a) *The Theory of Communicative Action Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functional Reason*. Boston, MA: Beacon.
 HABERMAS, J. (1992b) *Theory of Communicative Action Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*. Boston, MA: Beacon.
HARDING, A.J.E. et al. (2016) Efficacy of Telephone Information and Advice on Welfare: the Need for Realist Evaluation, *Social Policy and Society*, forthcoming.
^{1,2}PANNELL, J., et al. (2012) *Market Assessment of Housing Options for Older People* New Policy Institute.