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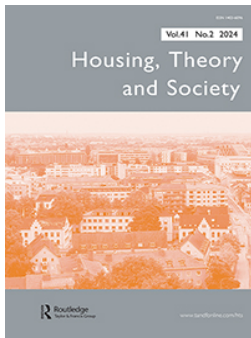
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“It Feels Like Temporary accommodation”: The Impact of Antisocial Behaviour Interventions on Alleged Perpetrators’ Feelings of Ontological Security in Social Housing

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“It Feels Like Temporary accommodation”: The Impact of Antisocial Behaviour Interventions on Alleged Perpetrators’ Feelings of Ontological Security in Social Housing

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ABSTRACT

ASB interventions have been framed as a necessity to allow residents to feel safe and secure within their own homes by intervening with those who act in a way that causes nuisance or annoyance, however, little research has been conducted into how the ontological security of alleged perpetrators of ASB is impacted by ASB interventions. This research situates ontological security within the theoretical framework of vulnerability, suggesting that a lack of ontological security can heighten vulnerability among arguably already vulnerable ASB perpetrators living within social housing. Reporting from a wider, qualitative longitudinal research project conducted with alleged perpetrators of ASB, this article explores how ASB interventions impact ontological security, finding negative impacts on tenants’ feelings of safety and being “at home”, feelings of insecurity, feelings of being watched and ability to be themselves.

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Introduction

Antisocial behaviour (ASB) interventions in England and Wales’ social housing provision were ostensibly introduced in response to a variety of behaviours that could increase levels of fear amongst citizens, with New Labour reporting residents on certain (disadvantaged) estates faced sustained harassment, abuse and intimidation that was not being dealt with effectively (Burney 2005; Carr 2010). Managing ASB, ambiguously defined as behaviour that has the potential to cause nuisance, annoyance, alarm and/or distress, has been framed as a method of retaining ontological security for citizens, with the right to feel safe in one’s own home argued to be a right for all (Carr 2010; Johnstone 2016). However, little is said about the impact of ASB interventions on the ontological security and feeling of safety for alleged perpetrators, despite ASB interventions providing social housing providers the ability to evict their tenants based on allegations of ASB and to prevent future access to social housing based on historic reports of ASB (Burney 2005; Dwyer 2016; B. Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). Nevertheless, fear of losing one’s home or being unable to access one at all, are seen as strong deterrents for ASB, with ASB-led

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evictions generally justified based on the impact challenging behaviour has (or could potentially have) on complainants and other residents living in the area (Carr and Cowan 2006; B. Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). However, not all reports of ASB lead to evictions and the impact of early ASB interventions has been little explored. By focusing on very early stage ASB interventions, as opposed to legal injunctions, evictions and/or family intervention projects (the focus of the majority of previous research into ASB interventions and their impact), this paper offers important insight into an under-researched area of ASB practice. Using data from a qualitative longitudinal research project with alleged perpetrators of ASB living within social housing, this article conceptualizes the relationship between ontological security and vulnerability in order to answer to what extent ASB interventions impact alleged perpetrators' feelings of ontological security? Previous research has consistently found that both the victims and the alleged perpetrators of ASB could be classed as vulnerable (although how to define vulnerability is contested, an issue which will be returned to below), and additionally, that many households may fall into the category of both victim and perpetrator, adding an additional layer of complexity to the management of ASB (K. J. Brown 2013; Flint 2018; Hunter, Nixon, and Shayer 2000; Jones et al. 2006; Nixon and Parr 2006). Whilst this article does focus on the views of alleged perpetrators (classified as such by the categorizations of their social housing providers), many of these same alleged perpetrators also reported experiencing ASB or crime as victims. Exploring feelings of ontological security and how these were impacted by ASB interventions can broaden our understanding of the experiences of alleged perpetrators of ASB in more detail and, this article proposes, can help us to understand how ASB interventions could be argued to heighten the vulnerability of already vulnerable households (K. J. Brown 2013; Hunter, Nixon, and Shayer 2000; Jones et al. 2006). This article will now situate ASB practice within the broader policy and practice framework of conditionality within social housing provision.

Background: ASB and Conditionality in Social Housing

Across UK welfare provisions we have seen an increase in welfare conditionality, meaning access to social rights is increasingly conditional on meeting certain required responsibilities or behaviours (Dwyer 2004). The management of ASB within social housing could be argued to be part of these broader moves towards increased conditionality as social housing retainment can be conditional on adhering to set conditions of behaviour, although social housing provision has arguably always had some element of conditionality through the use of tenancy agreements (Flint 2018; McNeill 2014). Tenants agree to pay rent, look after the property and to avoid behaviours that cause nuisance and/or annoyance to their neighbours (B. Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). Typically, social housing tenancy agreements in England and Wales include specific clauses to ban ASB within the locality of the property (Campbell et al. 2016).

The first interventions into ASB were introduced under the Housing Act 1996 which introduced new grounds for possession of a social housing property for ASB, speeded up possession proceedings and initiated introductory council tenancies. Since then, a range of legal and non-legal interventions have been introduced to manage ASB in social housing. Legal measures have included introductory tenancies for registered social landlords (as well as council housing providers), demotion of secure (or assured) tenancies into

less secure starter tenancies, Injunctions to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance and broadened powers of eviction for ASB within social housing. These more formal measures are used alongside a range of pre-legal methods which could include warning letters, housing cautions, mediation, support referrals and/or provision and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (Burney 2005; Flint 2018; Hunter, Nixon, and Shayer 2000; Mackenzie et al. 2010). Additionally, former reports of ASB may affect future housing provision; social tenants who have previously been evicted from social housing can be excluded from future social housing waiting lists, highlighting how access to social housing here is not based (solely) on need but on additionally meeting behavioural requirements (Dwyer 2016).

Theoretical Conceptualisation: Exploring the Relationships Between Ontological Security, Housing Insecurity and Vulnerability

In ASB policy and practice, as well as welfare services more generally, the term vulnerability has become increasingly important; however, there are multiple possible understandings and interpretations of the term. Whilst in Western society, vulnerability is generally seen as an individual deficiency to be overcome, potentially leading to labels of vulnerability carrying a stigma or feelings of disempowerment, it is possible to instead interpret vulnerability in a more nuanced and careful way which could provide the opportunity for more progressive approaches to understanding vulnerability in policy and practice (K. Brown 2014, 2015; Carr 2013; Gilson 2016). Considering the broad range of approaches possible, vulnerability could be viewed as related to innate physical or personal factors generally associated with different parts of the life course such as childhood, old age or ill-health (K. Brown 2014, 2015). Additionally, social and structural disadvantage may be considered an element of vulnerability, as well as how this disadvantage may structure experiences (Emmel and Hughes 2010; M. J. Watts and Bohle 1993). Watts and Bohle (1993) argued vulnerability could be seen as the increased potential to be exposed to crisis alongside inadequate resources to manage crises or their aftermath as a result. Building upon this argument, Emmel and Hughes (2010) suggested vulnerability (in relation to poverty and disadvantage) could be represented by material shortages and limited resources for basic needs, uncertain reliance upon welfare services to meet their needs, especially when a crisis occurs, and a lack of ability to meet or plan for future needs. Fear of future crises is here viewed as a key part of vulnerability, an aspect which is highly relevant when considering the threat of future homelessness presented by ASB interventions (Dwyer 2016; Emmel and Hughes 2010; B. Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018).

Alternatively, vulnerability may be viewed simply as a characteristic of existence, acknowledging the possibility that every individual can be at risk of illness, injury, crisis or harm, including institutional and/or social harms (Fineman 2013). With this understanding, welfare institutions have the ability to (and, proponents of this view argue, should aim to) protect all citizens from crisis and build the resilience, skills, resources and capabilities required to protect against increased vulnerability (Carr 2013; Fineman 2013). Welfare institutions are seen as having the ability to both increase vulnerability by preventing access to resources or services or, alternately, ameliorate vulnerability by supporting individuals and groups, providing resources and compensating for

vulnerability. Whilst not removing vulnerability completely, skills and coping mechanisms could be provided to those who could be classed as relatively more vulnerable (Fineman 2013). Whilst Fineman's (2013) view of universal vulnerability has been criticized for placing vulnerability and autonomy as oppositional and potentially, therefore, opening the door for increased paternalistic policies that could disempower citizens further, it could be argued that empowerment and vulnerability do not have to be seen as oppositional. Services can recognize and support those who could be seen as vulnerable whilst also promoting autonomy to empower citizens to engage in democratic society (Butler 2016; Mackenzie 2013). For ASB perpetrators, this could, for example, take the form of supporting tenants to remain in their social housing homes by helping them to avoid further ASB interventions which threaten their security of tenure (and, as this article will argue, their ontological security).

The concept of universal vulnerability has been further criticized for ignoring the overlapping disadvantages and inequalities in society that can structure experiences of vulnerability (Kuran et al. 2020). Using the multiple understandings of vulnerability referred to above (and as endorsed by K. Brown 2019), we can instead build a more nuanced understanding of vulnerability as a combination of individual, structural and situational vulnerabilities, with individual lived experiences of vulnerability shaped by structural inequalities, institutional forces and individuals' own understanding and choices as social actors. Drawing on the ideas of intersectional theorists such as Crenshaw (1991) and Hill Collins and Bilge (2016), this approach to understanding vulnerability challenges more normative understandings of vulnerability seen more generally in policy and practice and could be used to better understand diverse experiences. This could ultimately lead to more nuanced and appropriate support for people who could be classed as vulnerable (Cameron 2024; Kuran et al. 2020). This conceptualization is helpful for understanding experiences of alleged perpetrators of ASB in particular, who have been found by multiple studies to generally experience overlapping layers of disadvantage and vulnerability (K. J. Brown 2013; Cameron 2024; Hunter, Nixon, and Shayer 2000; Jones et al. 2006) but can also be helpful in understanding housing-related insecurities (Carr 2013). Housing and vulnerability have been argued to be intrinsically linked, with access to secure housing a mechanism for reducing vulnerability and insecure housing able to significantly increase vulnerability (Carr 2013). Access to secure housing, whether secure tenancies or affordable home ownership, can temper the risks of economic recessions and increase security for citizens, therefore reducing vulnerability (Carr 2013).

Ontological security could be usefully understood as one element of vulnerability. Ontological security can be defined as a feeling of confidence in the social order and in one's own place in society, as well as the right to be one's own self (Hiscock et al. 2001; Stonehouse, Threlkeld, and Theobald 2021). It can be seen as made up of both material and non-material dimensions, including self-identity, emotional and psychological security and relational security, meaning trusting and secure relationships and attachments with others (Stonehouse, Threlkeld, and Theobald 2021). Applying the arguments of Giddens (1991), Stonehouse et al. (2021) argue that negative experiences may impact ontological security and lead to feelings of insecurity, which is exacerbated by previous negative experiences, suggesting ontological security is impacted by (as well as able to impact) ongoing and previous experiences. The concept of ontological security has been

repeatedly, and convincingly, linked to housing and the concept of the home, where individuals feel in control of their environment, feel free to be themselves and construct their own identities and are free from surveillance (Hiscock et al. 2001; Saunders 1990; Stonehouse et al. 2021). Of course, the term “home” is, itself, not neutral but rather, is intensely personal (Fox O’Mahoney 2007; Meers 2021). Whilst the home is often linked to positive connotations of ontological security and safety, it may also have negative connotations for some; the home is not always a safe space for some citizens. However, even for those (often women) for whom the home is a space of repression rather than freedom, a more positive version of “home” may still be an aspiration for the future or a memory from the past, meaning it is more than the physical space that someone lives in (Carr, Edgeworth, and Hunter 2018; Krecizer-Levy 2014). Living in a home where surveillance is enacted (or perceived to be enacted), can reduce feelings of ontological security and reduce the sense of “home” (Bollo 2022; Rosenberg et al. 2021). Surveillance could be static and visible, such as through the use of cameras or physical presence of authorities conducting visits but could also be the less tangible feeling of being watched by neighbours and/or family members, all of which can lead to a sense of impermanence and that the home is not one’s own space (Rosenberg et al. 2021). With recognition to the existing theoretical framings of ontological security above, here, ontological security and feeling “at home” is understood to be a combination of a numerous psychosocial elements, including feeling safe, feeling secure and in control, feeling free from surveillance and the ability to be one’s self (Hiscock et al. 2001; Saunders 1990; Stonehouse et al. 2020).

Individuals are argued to develop a framework of ontological security through which they navigate the social world. If feelings of ontological security are negatively impacted through disorder or insecurity, there can be an internal crisis of the self, impacting how the self, other people and objects are perceived (Giddens 1991). However, the impact of housing insecurity is not the same for everyone and can depend on economic and social capital; higher economic and social capital can lead to a reduced impact of housing insecurity on ontological security, whereas lower economic and social capital can increase the negative effects of housing insecurity (Morris, Hulse, and Pawson 2017), suggesting higher levels of vulnerability may lead to a larger, cumulative impact of housing insecurity on ontological security. When applied to home ownership, but also to long-term, ontological security, housing and feeling at home (in the more positive understanding of the concept) has been linked to positive physical and mental health outcomes, suggesting it is important for individual wellbeing (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2014, Hiscock et al., 2001; Woodhall-Melnik et al. 2016). This means that housing (and social housing) represents more than just shelter, but also a place within which to build stability and a feeling of personal safety (Madden and Marcuse 2016), which could be considered an important aspect of how vulnerability is experienced in the context of ASB perpetrators in social housing. If we understand housing insecurity as one element of an intersectional conceptualization of vulnerability, we can start to unpick a two-way relationship between ontological security and vulnerability, where ontological insecurity may heighten vulnerability, whilst heightened vulnerability may likewise reduce feelings of ontological security.

Whilst the majority of research applying the concept of ontological security has considered home ownership, research in Australia has considered low-income renters

and ontological insecurity, linked to housing insecurity and a reduced ability to plan for the future, an issue also seen as an element of vulnerability (Emmel and Hughes 2010; E. Power 2023). For families in temporary or fixed-term accommodation, the search for permanent homes, perceived as long-term social housing tenancies, has been found to be a key aspiration for those seeking stability and improved ontological security (Plage et al. 2023). The fixed-term element of supported housing can be a barrier to improving ontological security by reducing the possibility of long-term planning, increasing uncertainty and negatively impacting relationships with support workers (Plage et al. 2023). However, the social housing tenancy offered to individuals and families in England and Wales has also become less secure, with social housing providers given the ability to offer fixed-term tenancies and with increased rights of social housing providers to evict tenants for ASB (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2014; Robinson and Walshaw 2014).

The relatively secure tenancy (in comparison to private rented tenancies) formerly offered to social tenants in England and Wales, and leading to higher levels of ontological security, is argued to be highly valued by tenants, sought after by those seeking social housing and can be seen to protect vulnerable people from the risks of the private housing market (Carr 2013; Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2014; Robinson and Walshaw 2014). However, as ASB policy and practice became accepted features of social housing, Carr (2013) states there was an easy acceptance of the idea that apparently antisocial tenants had too many housing-related protections. This criticism led to an examination of the security of the social housing tenure in general, with security of tenure criticized for protecting some from the market risks others face. Carr (2013), applying Fineman's (2013) understanding of universal vulnerability, argues that secure, open-ended tenancies could instead be reconfigured as an asset of multiple dimensions, offering security to vulnerable tenants where there is a lack of other available housing assets. ASB interventions, often framed as being introduced to protect the right for all citizens to enjoy a strong sense of ontological security in their homes, appears to prioritize the ontological security of citizens complaining about ASB over the potentially reduced security of tenure and ontological security of those alleged to be perpetrating ASB (Carr 2010). However, how alleged perpetrators themselves experience this potentially reduced ontological security whilst still in their social housing tenancies has not been explored in previous research, particularly through the framework of ontological (in)security as an element of housing vulnerability.

Methods

This project used a combination of literature review and qualitative longitudinal methods to explore the experiences of alleged perpetrators of ASB living within social housing. This paper presents the findings related to ontological security developed from the wider research project on the experiences of ASB perpetrators of ASB intervention within social housing. The research took a bottom-up approach to gathering knowledge, with broadly interpretivist assumptions, foregrounding subjective and different interpretations of the social world and with a focus on meaning, context and understanding (Braun and Clarke 2013; Ormston et al. 2014). A broadly constructivist ontology reinforced the idea that social phenomena are interpreted and re-interpreted by individuals, including both the researcher and the participants, meaning a reflexive approach was required (Braun and

Clarke 2013; Mason 2002; Ormston et al. 2014). Participant interpretations of experiences and events were accepted and viewed as important and rather than attempting to locate a complete “truth”, experiences and perspectives of tenant participants were accepted as offering a valuable insight into experiences of ASB intervention alongside existing research from alternate perspectives (Braun and Clarke 2013).

Qualitative longitudinal interviews were conducted with 15 social housing tenants from 14 households living within the Yorkshire and Humber region in England and who were currently subject to ASB interventions from their social housing provider. Up to two interviews were conducted with these tenants between 6 and 9 months apart, allowing time for ASB cases to progress and further interventions to be used or for intervention to cease. Overall, 13 participants took part in two interviews and two participants engaged with one interview. Access to tenants was gained through the use of four stakeholder organizations, including three Housing Associations and one Local Authority, who advertised the study with all tenants about whom they currently held an open ASB case where the tenant was logged as a perpetrator. This involved sending appropriate tenants a cover letter and research information leaflet from the researcher and allowing tenants to choose whether they wished to be involved in the study, providing the researcher’s contact details should they want further information. In addition to tenant interviews, single qualitative interviews were also undertaken with five Key Informants (KIs) from across the four stakeholder organizations, including ASB managers and housing managers who had responsibility for designing and implementing ASB policy in their respective organizations. Whilst tenant voices were prioritized, KIs offered contextual insight into how the individual organizations interpreted and managed ASB.

Interviews were recorded and then transcribed and analysed using NVivo software and the names of both tenants and KIs were pseudonymised. Participants largely chose their own pseudonyms, although some chose to have ones allocated to them. Longitudinal thematic analysis was used for tenant interviews, using the process outlined by Neale (2019), comprising of multiple readings and multiple techniques of analysis, including case, thematic and integrative analysis. Then, a broader conceptual and temporal analysis was used to compare cross-case data. Finally, a full-scale, integrative analysis was conducted to explore changes and similarities across cases and time (Neale 2019; Saldaña 2003). The data from the two participants who took part in one interview (rather than two) was still subjected to thematic analysis and the data included within the first wave case analysis. Whilst it was less possible to explore change over time from the solo interviews, participants discussed their experiences of ASB interventions dating back from before the first interview and offered important insight into the impact ASB interventions had on them and their experiences of feeling “at home”. Thematic analysis was also conducted on KI interviews, although as these were single interviews, this process did not include the longitudinal element of the analysis required for tenant interviews (Lewis 2007; Neale 2019).

The tenants who participated in this study represent a hard-to-reach group and, considering individual, structural and situational interpretations of vulnerability (K. Brown 2019), could all be classed as vulnerable, with twelve out of fifteen reporting multiple vulnerabilities. The sample included 10 women and five men, across which three individuals were over 65 years of age and five were single parents, specifically mothers. Eleven tenants reported a physical or mental health condition that impacted

their daily lives, three reported suicidal thoughts or attempts, four reported domestic abuse, five reported financial hardship or debt and five reported family illness, bereavement and/or adult care responsibilities. Given the significant vulnerability of the sample, ethical issues were, of course, of especial importance. Ethical approval was granted by the Social Policy and Social Work Ethics Committee at the University of York and focused on informed consent, voluntary participation, transparency and safety for all parties. Attempts were made to limit the power imbalance of interviews by giving participants opportunities to ask questions and to move the interview towards and away from topics as they preferred (Atkinson and Silverman 1997; Mason 2002; Oakley 1981). Interview questions remained relevant to the topic and non-judgemental, and tenants were given the choice of viewing their interview transcript prior to it being analysed. From this, or at any time in the interview, tenants could ask for anything they had said to be removed from the research data (Mason 2002; Oakley 1981). Additionally, tenants were reassured more than once that engagement or non-engagement in the research would not affect any services they received and that they could withdraw at any time. Tenants were reimbursed for their time with £20 vouchers at the start of each interview. As tenants often discussed sensitive and distressing topics, the researcher provided a leaflet with a variety of support services to give to participants where appropriate, including domestic abuse advice services, drug and alcohol support services, social services and others available in the tenant's local area.

There are a number of limitations to be acknowledged for the study. Firstly, there may be an element of selection bias, as tenant participants who felt they had been unfairly treated, or that they were innocent of the alleged ASB, may have been more likely to respond to a call for participants, although some tenants did accept the allegations of ASB against them were (at least partially) true. There were also a wide range of types of ASB reported in the study (discussed further below) and this could lead to different responses to ASB which might have differing impacts on feelings of ontological security. However, as the ASB cases were explored at the very early stages of intervention, the initial responses were largely similar, including the use of home visits and warning letters. Nevertheless, some cases were escalated to intended or actual attempted legal action and these are acknowledged where referred to in the findings section. Additionally, whilst four different social housing providers were included within the sample, these were all located within the Yorkshire and Humber region in England, meaning the same study conducted with different providers in a different region may provide different results. That being said, many social housing organizations who respond to and manage reports of ASB receive training and guidance from the same national source, RESOLVE, so many of the processes of different social housing providers may be similar (Resolve 2023). Furthermore, emphasis was placed on the experiences of alleged perpetrators of ASB, subject to national policy applied by local providers. These providers largely access the same types of ASB interventions and, therefore, alleged perpetrators of ASB are likely to have at least some similar experiences across the country and providers. This suggests that, whilst the study is limited in terms of numbers, geographic area and housing provider, lessons can still be learnt from this study, both nationally and internationally where other countries (for example, Australia), have nuisance behaviour laws and practices which can be used in conjunction with social housing provision (Cheshire and Buglar 2015; Martin et al. 2019).

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings related to the impact of ASB interventions on the ontological security of alleged perpetrators living within social housing. The tenants involved in this study were alleged to have engaged in a number of behaviours reported to be antisocial, including noise nuisance, drug dealing, fly tipping, neighbour dispute, untidy property or garden, behaviour related to alcohol use and/or owning CCTV without permission. It is worth noting here that whilst some tenants accepted the allegations of ASB, a number disputed the claims against them, two successfully appealed against legal action taken against them and a number reported that the ASB allegation misrepresented them, for example, the two tenants who were accused of drug dealing were receiving multiple visits a day from carers to help them meet their daily needs. These multiple visits were misconstrued as drug dealing. Whilst this is extremely concerning, it is not the purpose of this article to consider the reasonableness of the reports of ASB, but instead, to focus on the impact of the ASB interventions, although the perceived fairness of the interventions often entered into discussions with tenants. ASB interventions used were, for the majority of tenants, non-legal, early interventions such as home visits and/or warning letters. Two tenants were served eviction notices (one successfully appealed against the eviction, the other was still waiting for their court hearing by the end of the research period) and one tenant successfully appealed against a legal ASB injunction. As discussed above, ontological security and feeling “at home” can be made up of a number of elements, including feeling safe, feeling secure and in control, feeling free from surveillance and the right to be one’s self (Hiscock et al. 2001; Saunders 1990, Stonehouse et al. 2020; Woodhall-Melnik et al. 2016). The findings from this research suggested a negative impact of ASB interventions on alleged perpetrators in each of these areas, which will be discussed in turn.

Feelings Unsafe and Not at Home

The feeling of being “at home”, whilst admittedly very personal, is often linked to feelings of safety and contentment (Fox O’Mahoney 2007; Meers 2021). Whilst many tenants reported initially feeling “at home” in the property, the majority of tenants stated they no longer felt at home following allegations of ASB and the start of ASB intervention. Tenants, like Charlie (quoted below) reported previously feeling a sense of ontological security and stability in their home (at least “to an extent”, Charlie, Wave B) as they had lived there for a relatively long time; however, the start of ASB interventions could shake this feeling of ontological security.

I don’t feel at home here anymore, absolutely not. Not since the first complaints went in, it were just like, it were just like stupid and I were trying to sort it out with them [the neighbour], like, come round and set that [stereo volume] up, because I don’t know what’s annoying you (Charlie, Wave B)

Whilst tenants reported that ASB interventions had made them feel less “at home”, it is also worth noting that Charlie also showed his frustration with not understanding the report of ASB and reported trying to appease his neighbour by agreeing a setting for his stereo volume, suggesting a lack of understanding and/or poor neighbour relations

resulting from reports or experiences of ASB may have contributed to this reduced feeling of being at home. Ten out of fifteen tenants reported wishing to move property, or feeling they had no choice but to move, which they reported as either being a direct result of ASB interventions or as an attempt to prevent further ASB interventions.

I'd prefer not to live here now ... it's hard to explain, isn't it? ... I don't sleep properly anymore (Kerry, Wave A)

What can I do? Do I move? Do I give up my job? What do I actually do? Because you can't really feel that there's much of a way out, if you get what I mean" (Mel, Wave A)

Some tenants had made steps to moving property, such as requesting to be placed on the waiting list for another social housing home, looking at private rented accommodation or applying for a mutual exchange (where tenants essentially swap properties with another social housing tenant).

Yeah, this isn't home. I had such excitement when I moved in here, and it was such an unusual building and all the rest of it. But no, but now ... I've actually put the thing [application in] for, you know, like a mutual exchange (Amelia, Wave B)

However, allegations of ASB can hinder access to alternate housing, disqualifying tenants from social housing waiting lists or leading to poor tenancy references which could essentially disqualify them from a high number of both private and social tenancies (Dwyer 2016; E. R. Power and Gillon 2020). Similarly, allegations of ASB can lead to an application for a mutual exchange being rejected if eviction proceedings have started (Shelter 2019).

For some, the home had become a site of discomfort and containment, for example, when asked whether she felt "at home" in the property, Caroline (Wave A) stated:

It doesn't [feel like home]. It's like a prison. Honestly, I say back to my prison. That's what I'm like if my friend rings me [and asks], "Oh, what you up to?" [I say], "Ah, I'm just on my way home, back to the prison" and that's how I see it as.

Comparing her home to a prison is a far cry from the home as a site of ontological security and safety. Other tenants reported feeling unsafe and nervous when they were in their property:

I did feel really nervous at home on my own (Daisy, Wave A)

I can feel quite nervous about being in the house (Mel, Wave B)

This feeling of being unsafe led to a number of negative impacts on tenants, including not wanting to return home, as Caroline (Wave A and B) reported, but also feeling unable to leave the house or, as in the case of Rangers (quoted below), unable to leave the bedroom following a Notice of Seeking Possession (the first step towards eviction proceedings).

"It's like being in prison, to be honest with you. I sit in this bedroom, I don't even go into my living room. I'm in this bedroom twenty-four hours a day (Rangers, Wave B)

Seven tenants shared that they experienced mental ill-health or had a diagnosed mental health condition prior to ASB interventions and nine tenants reported how feeling unsafe contributed to a negative impact on their mental health (including needing to start or re-start, taking depression or anxiety tablets, suicidal thoughts or one attempted suicide)

highlighting the link found in the previous research between ontological security and mental health and wellbeing and suggesting a reduction in feelings of ontological security can negatively impact mental health and subsequently heighten vulnerability (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2014, Hiscock et al. 2001; Woodhall-Melnik et al. 2016). For vulnerable tenants who were already experiencing mental ill-health, ASB interventions could act as a trigger for worsening mental health and, for some, led to increasingly dangerous behaviours such as suicidal thoughts and/or actions, or as one tenant reported, the combination of her own mental health condition and the ASB interventions combined to influence a return to problematic alcohol use (and subsequent arrest for behaviour whilst under the influence of alcohol). Whilst fear of losing one's home could lead to a negative impact on many people's wellbeing (Campbell et al. 2016; Morris, Hulse, and Pawson 2017), the impact on already vulnerable people could be especially concerning.

Feeling Insecure and Not in Control

Social housing provision has previously been linked to a relatively positive ontological security (in comparison to private rented accommodation) due, in part, to generally more secure and longer term tenancies (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2014; Robinson and Walshaw 2014) although, as discussed above, this security of tenure has reduced over time (Carr 2013; B. Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). For the alleged perpetrators, the social housing tenancy they held no longer felt as secure as they had previously perceived. As Jenny stated:

I thought it were better going with a housing association (Jenny, Wave A)

However, when ASB interventions were introduced, the feeling of security tenants may have previously felt was eroded. Jenny no longer felt that it was "better" to be with a housing association in comparison to private rental accommodation, referring to the increased rights of social housing providers to use so-called starter tenancies or evict tenants for ASB (Hunter 2006; B. Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018).

It feels like temporary accommodation (Caroline, Wave A)

Even tenants whose ASB case was closed by their landlord with no further action following an ASB interview reported negative impacts on their feelings of ontological security. Jason (Wave A), who received an allegation of drug dealing when visits from carers were misconstrued reported initially feeling very worried when he received an ASB warning letter and a request for a home visit. When asked if he felt less concerned about his security of tenure when he had been told there would be no further action from his landlord, he said:

Well, I don't know. Sometimes things take a long time to process, so I don't know (Jason, Wave A)

The sense that allegations of ASB were unreasonable also impacted tenants' feelings of insecurity, with the belief that almost any complaint could be made which could lead to being evicted from the property. Charlie, who successfully appealed against an ASB injunction related to noise nuisance by proving he was in hospital at the time of the noise allegations, said:

You're under threat of getting it [the property] took off you all the time, aren't you? For nothing. For absolutely nothing you can – it's just on somebody's whim. Anybody can ring up and say he's doing this and get you kicked out (Charlie, Wave A)

The feeling of insecurity and fear that someone may make a further allegation of ASB led to tenants deciding not to invest in their homes, similar to the findings of Fitzpatrick and Watts (2017) who, researching the impact of fixed-term tenancies on social housing tenants, found that when tenants do not feel secure in their property they may be less likely to invest in it.

[ASB interventions caused] just constant worry. It doesn't even feel like properly home anymore, like I wanna decorate and stuff but I don't wanna start decorating if I'm just gonna get chucked out. I don't know if I'm safe to stay there (Jenny, Wave A)

Other tenants felt they were unable to use their property in the way they previously had done. Charlie (Wave B) said he had to talk in a whisper in his home for fear of future complaints. One example, provided by Amelia below, included receiving an ASB warning letter for having a soft drink can in her bedroom window, which her neighbour had initially thought was a CCTV camera.

I actually got really upset that I was even entertaining a phone call to do with a Coke can in my bedroom window. And I said I'll remove it now and she actually thanked me for removing the can and I thought, hang on a minute, this is my home. I put the Coke can there so when I'm sat up in bed, I can actually reach that, because I can't fit a bedside table in because my bed's so big. And I thought, am I not even allowed now to have a Coke can in my window? I was like, this is ridiculous, because the neighbour might think I've got a camera. And it was just a case of like, wow! Am I going to have to get to the level where I phone up asking if I've got permission to change a lightbulb now? That's how it felt (Amelia, Wave B)

Amelia's example illustrates the feeling of not being in control of your own environment, where she was not able to put down a drink's can in her own bedroom in a place she could reach it. This also led to a feeling of being under surveillance, where even small movements within one's own home would be monitored. It is to the feeling of being watched that this discussion now turns to.

Being Watched

The feeling of being free from surveillance has been argued by multiple commentators to be a key element of ontological security and feeling at home (Bollo 2022, Hiscock et al. 2001; Rosenberg et al. 2021; Saunders 1990; Stonehouse et al. 2021). Where individuals feel they are being watched or their behaviour is being monitored, they may have increased ontological insecurity (Bollo 2022; Rosenberg et al. 2021). Tenants reported feeling like they were being watched or under surveillance by their neighbours or their housing providers. This feeling was heightened when tenants were unsure who had made an allegation of ASB about them, making them feel unsure of who they could trust or who might be watching their movements.

I'm even scared to go get my mail in case I see any of the neighbours (Rangers, Wave A)

It took a lot of the joy from living where I live away from me. I felt a little bit paranoid and very victimised, and I did ... I can't underestimate how bad that really did make me feel (Pauline, Wave B)

This feeling of being watched contributed to feeling unsafe in the property, as discussed above, and impacted how tenants used their homes.

I didn't like it, it was quite, I don't know, on edge, sort of thing. Erm ... constantly checking out of the bedroom window when you go to bed, just to make sure nobody's around and stuff (Daisy, Wave B)

One tenant, Rosie, reported CCTV cameras facing Rosie's front door being placed on her neighbours' property by her social landlord.

Even grandparents and everyone who visits my house can be caught on it. It's like you know, being in the Big Brother house, you know, with cameras facing my door (Rosie, Wave B)

When Rosie asked her housing provider if this was legal and told them the CCTV was impacting her mental health, her landlord informed her that if she was not doing anything antisocial, she had nothing to worry about.

I think that one part of me thinks yes, get them down, but then about twenty percent of me thinks well no, actually they are there, you know, and it is proving her wrong. But [sighs] it's just like I said before, it's just that feeling that I'm getting watched (Rosie, Wave B)

Whilst potentially the footage from the CCTV camera could support Rosie's denial of the ASB allegations made against her, this was not a particularly sympathetic response to Rosie's reports of worsened mental health. One KI stated:

It's a core business thing to have quality homes where people feel safe and where people feel they are able to just get on with their lives and stuff (ASB Manager, Large Housing Association)

However, alleged perpetrators overwhelmingly reported not feeling able to "just get on with their lives" for fear of future ASB interventions or continued surveillance, heightening vulnerability by making them feel unsafe in the home and surrounding areas.

An Inability to Be One's Self

The feeling of being able to be one's self and to be able to construct one's own identity is seen as a key element of ontological security and feeling at home (Hiscock et al. 2001; Saunders 1990, Stonehouse et al. 2021; Woodhall-Melnik et al. 2016). Whilst not phrased in this exact way, tenants reported a negative impact of ASB interventions on their feelings of self-worth and concern over how they were perceived by others.

It's made me doubt my own self (Caroline, Wave A)

It just starts to undermine your confidence again. It just feeds on your paranoia again. Wondering what people are thinking about you (Pauline, Wave A)

One tenant, Amelia, felt she was being made to feel less of a person because she lived in social housing. She believed that if she had lived in another tenure (such as private

rental or homeownership) she would have been more likely to be believed when she denied reports of ASB or when she reported being victim to ASB and crime from her neighbours.

“They need to be looking at that situation of being a social tenant does not make me any less of a person because that’s how they’ve made me feel (Amelia, Wave A)

Two tenants reported being made to question themselves, wondering if they had previously not understood their own identities. Both tenants reported thinking they were a “good tenant” overall until ASB interventions were used against them.

It’s just, it’s quite damning and detrimental to yourself, because it makes you question are you that bad. Am I that bad? (Mel, Wave A)

It’s not a nice feeling having all these complaints and stuff. Makes you feel like, am I that bad? (Rosie, Wave A)

The fear that the alleged perpetrators were “bad” people or “bad” tenants contributed to tenants’ reduced feelings of self-worth and mental ill-health, with both Mel and Rosie reporting starting to take medication for depression and/or anxiety following ASB interventions. Overall, the ability of alleged perpetrators to construct their own identities or feel like themselves was significantly hindered by ASB interventions which tenants felt seemed to assume they were in the wrong or bad people. It is perhaps worth reiterating here that the ASB interventions used were, for the most part, very early interventions of warning letters and home visits which would not necessarily have led to any further tenancy action; however, they still had a significantly detrimental impact on tenants’ ontological security.

Existing Vulnerability and Ontological Security

As previously acknowledged, the tenants involved in this study could already be classed as vulnerable prior to ASB interventions reportedly impacting their feelings of ontological security. Existing research has acknowledged that whilst housing insecurity may lead to a deterioration of individual wellbeing and mental health, some people may have existing capabilities that may ameliorate some of the negative impact of housing insecurity (Morris, Hulse, and Pawson 2017). For the tenants in this study, who were already navigating complex lives with intersecting vulnerabilities such as experiences of domestic abuse (which can have a significantly detrimental and long-term impact on feeling “at home”, see, for example, Woodhall-Melnik et al. 2016), physical and mental ill health, debt, poverty and more, it could be understood that the negative impact of potential housing insecurity may be increased. That being said, existing research into specific ASB interventions, such as Family Intervention Projects (intensive ASB interventions which combine tailored support whilst also challenging behaviour through more punitive measures, see Crossley 2018) has highlighted that whilst ASB interventions may be perceived as punitive, they may also trigger vital support opportunities (Bond-Taylor 2016; Hoggett and Frost 2018). In the case of this research however, tenants reported not receiving any support from their housing provider, either

directly or through referrals, even when they themselves asked for support (with the exception of one tenant who reported receiving a food bank voucher and another who was offered a support referral months after the initial complaint and after she had accessed a therapeutic service directly).

They don't come out. They just – it's like in my and my partner's eyes, it's just they're more interested in just one thing and that's the rent (Michael, Wave B)

Whilst KIs did talk about the importance of offering support to alleged perpetrators of ASB, this was tempered with what they saw as the organization's responsibility to change the behaviour or tenants or their household members, as the quote below indicates.

We want people to feel, tenants to feel supported but we do want people to behave in our properties and to have – have that balance of communities and stuff so we are trying" (ASB Manager, Local Authority)

Overall, whilst the vulnerabilities experienced by tenants may have already contributed to reduced ontological security, the lack of support offered to these tenants could have contributed to ASB interventions having more of an impact on already vulnerable tenants feelings of ontological security than if they had been tempered with a more supportive element such as direct support provision or referral to tailored support services.

Conclusion

Whilst ASB interventions have been argued to protect the ontological security of complainants of ASB (Carr 2010), little has been said about what impact these interventions have on alleged perpetrators own feelings of ontological security, other than the fear of losing one's home being seen as a strong deterrent from ASB (Carr and Cowan 2006; B. Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). Whilst not all ASB interventions lead to eviction, even very early interventions mention the risk of losing one's home. As previous research has often largely focused later interventions such as eviction or family intervention projects, this paper's focus on early stage intervention is a key contribution to knowledge in this under-researched area. Ontological security is commonly connected to housing and the concept of home, with a stable and secure home providing opportunity for residents to feel safe, secure, free to be themselves and free from surveillance and, this article has argued, can usefully be seen as an element of housing vulnerability, with vulnerability impacting ontological security and ontological insecurity heightening vulnerability (Carr 2013; Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2014, Hiscock et al. 2001; Woodhall-Melnik et al. 2016). Residents of social housing in general, and alleged perpetrators of ASB in particular, can generally be argued to be vulnerable (K. J. Brown 2013; Carr 2013; Hunter, Nixon, and Shayer 2000; Jones et al. 2006) and the sample included in this research supported this generalization. Reduced ontological security then, for this group, can exacerbate already heightened vulnerability. This article conceptualized the relationship between ontological security and vulnerability in order to understand the extent of which ASB interventions impact alleged perpetrators' feelings of ontological security. Conceptualizing housing insecurity as one element of an intersectional framing of vulnerability can help us to unpick a two-way relationship

between ontological security and vulnerability, where ontological insecurity may heighten vulnerability, whilst heightened vulnerability may likewise reduce feelings of ontological security. Applying this theoretical framework to the experiences of vulnerable tenants accused of ASB can offer deeper insight into how feelings of being “at home”, “watched” or “able to be oneself” are impacted by ASB interventions and how this, in turn, impacts vulnerability. More use of this nuanced understanding of both ontological security and vulnerability could help to provide further insight into wider experiences of housing insecurity and vulnerability more broadly.

The findings of this research suggest ASB interventions had a significantly detrimental impact on alleged perpetrators feelings of ontological security, leading to feelings of being unsafe and not feeling at home, feelings of insecurity and not being in control, feeling under surveillance and feeling unable to be one’s self. For the most part, tenants had been subject to very early, non-legal interventions such as warning letters and/or a home visit however, the impact on all the tenants was significant, something that has been largely missed by existing research which focuses on later ASB interventions. On the whole, tenants no longer felt “at home” in the property and many felt unsafe, leading to either not wanting to return home or being fearful of leaving the house. This was exacerbated by feelings of being watched by neighbours or CCTV and contributed to negative impacts on tenants’ mental health. Alleged perpetrators also often felt insecure in their properties, with tenants referring to feeling as though they were living in temporary accommodation, despite the relatively more secure social tenancy they held. Fear of future complaints from neighbours contributed to feelings of insecurity, particularly for tenants who viewed the complaints against them as unreasonable. Additionally, tenants reported reduced feelings of self-worth and concerns about how they are perceived as others which negatively impacted their mental health as they questioned whether they were “bad” people. All of this suggests that whilst the right to feeling safe and secure at home is ostensibly seen as a right for all citizens, alleged perpetrators of ASB are unable to access this right after ASB interventions are introduced, even where allegations of ASB are later found to be unfounded or where no further action is taken after an initial complaint. Whilst existing research has identified ASB intervention as an opportunity to offer support to vulnerable people (Bond-Taylor 2016; Hoggett and Frost 2018), the tenants who engaged in this research were not offered appropriate and/or timely support alongside intervention, an issue which makes these early interventions seem especially problematic. Whilst some intervention may be justified to respond to challenging behaviour or victimization of neighbours, the lack of support provided alongside or as part of these early interventions is arguably a missed opportunity which could contribute to the negative impact of ASB interventions on tenant vulnerability. Whilst fear of losing their home is recognized as a strong deterrent for ASB, little thought has been given to the wider effects this can have on alleged perpetrators and whether this is a fair and proportionate response to reportedly nuisance behaviour, an issue this paper has only started to touch upon. This is not to say that no behaviour causes a nuisance, and it is not the intention here to diminish the very real impacts ASB can have for victims; however, it is important that the wider impacts of ASB interventions are understood. The findings from this paper prompt calls for further research into the impact of different variations of ASB interventions across the UK, but also internationally where reports of nuisance behaviour can lead to threats of eviction and potential homelessness. Without further exploring the

impacts of ASB interventions and ontological security on vulnerable households, we risk allowing the continuation of harms that may otherwise remain under-researched and little talked about.

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