The impact of substandard housing on early child development in high-income countries:
A Systematic Review

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32.3% of children in England are not school ready by the end of the reception year – in the poorest households this increases to **48.5%**

Children have a right to a safe and suitable living environment (article 27 of the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child).

however… **>1 in 10 children in England live in poor quality housing.**

This review:

We searched 5 databases (Medline, Emcare, Web of Science, Scopus, PsycInfo) and Grey Literature in **June-July 2024** .
English language only, no date limits

Records screened: **6,258** → **Full texts screened:** **189**

Screening of articles which cite the initially included studies

Articles included: **22**

Extra articles identified: 2 → **Total articles included: 24** (reporting 25 studies)
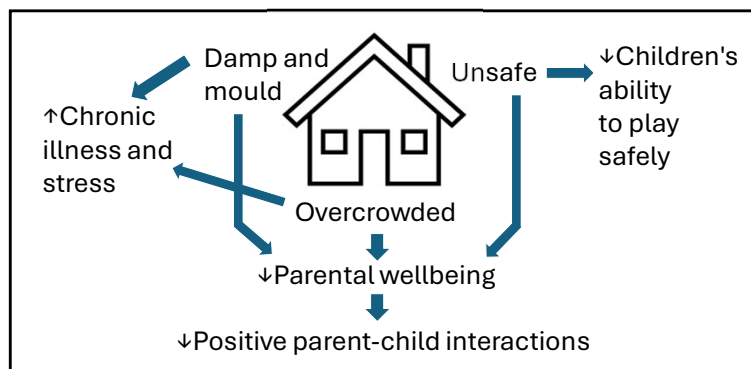
All studies had high/very high risk of bias
Judged via Risk of Bias in Non-Randomised Studies of exposures (ROBINS-E) tool

60% high risk of bias due to confounding
88% high risk of bias due to post-exposure interventions
28% high risk of bias due to missing data
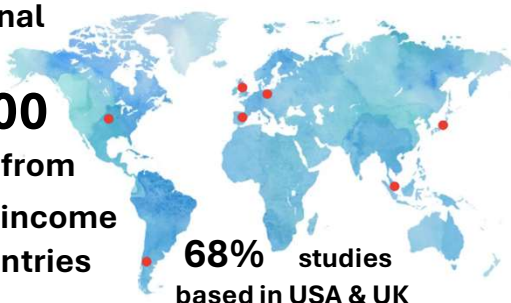
How might housing impact early child development?

Damp and mould → ↑Chronic illness and stress

Unsafe → ↓Children's ability to play safely

Overcrowded

↓Parental wellbeing

↓Positive parent-child interactions

Results:

Observational data on **>229,000** children from **7** high-income countries

68% studies based in USA & UK

Implications:

This review adds: further evidence that housing impacts child health and development

For **Policymakers**:
- Poor quality homes are likely to be causing economic losses due to impaired early development, school readiness and educational attainment.

For **Healthcare Professionals**:
- Sensitively include housing issues as part of conversions with families

For **Researchers**:
- Further studies should occur outside the UK and USA, standardise the use of developmental assessments, and create a rigorous evidence base which can be used to advocate for children.

Damp, mould and condensation: cognition, language, social, emotion

Unclean fuels: cognition and motor

Hygiene and/or safety issues: overall delays

Overcrowding: cognition, language, behaviour

Moderate certainty negative correlation

NO2: cognition

PM2.5: cognition

PM2.5-10: cognition, language

Xylene: gross motor

Low certainty negative correlation

Availability of resources: language

Noise: overall development

+ weak positive correlation: **PM2.5, formaldehyde: motor**

Very low certainty negative correlation

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