

# [What factors are associated with the quality of neighbour relations?](https://assignbuster.com/what-factors-are-associated-with-the-quality-of-neighbour-relations/)

A neighbourhood is a social community, geographically localised within a city, town, suburb or rural area (Simandan, 2016). Neighbour relations are very important as high levels of support from neighbours results in optimal levels of welfare and wellbeing (Greenfield & Reyes, 2014). This is due to neighbours providing one another with practical and emotional support, through acts such as: lending items, keeping an eye on one another’s homes, assisting each other and sometimes relying upon one another in the case of emergency (Lau, Machizawa, & Doi, 2012; Thomése, Tilburg, & Knipscheer, 2003; Walker & Hiller, 2007). However, neighbours can also be a source of nuisance and conflict (Cheshire & Fitzgerald, 2015). This essay will discuss what factors are associated with the quality of these neighbour relations, and what factors may cause conflicts within neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood attachment is the emotional tie which people create with their geographical context; it is discussed interchangeably as ‘ place attachment’ (Hernández, Carmen Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, & Hess, 2007), ‘ sense of place’, ‘ rootedness’ or ‘ place identity’ (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Casakin, Hernández, & Ruiz, 2015). Neighbourhood attachment is related to various social phenomena including: participation in the community, low levels of incivility and social trust (Brown, Perkins, & Brown, 2003; Lewicka, 2005). Méndez and Otero (2018) found that the effects of inequality when experiencing neighbourhood disputes can be diminished through developing emotional ties between individuals and their neighbourhood i. e. through neighbourhood attachment. However, establishing causality is generally difficult in studies on place attachment (Lewicka, 2011), due to the correlational nature of the data.

In order to maintain a good neighbourly relationship, neighbours engage with each other ‘ on the front’, ‘ in the garden’, or ‘ at the door’ (Stokoe, 2006). Yet, despite the relationships between neighbours, they usually get to know information concerning one another such as: marital status, sexual orientation and family set-up (Stokoe, 2006). However, Crow, Allan and Summers (2002) warn that ‘ good’ neighbouring is depicted by a balance between friendliness and privacy, as too much interaction and support can lead to ‘ over-neighbouring’ (Harris & Gale, 2004).

Cattell (2004) suggested that neighbourhood conditions and characteristics are what either encourages or discourages cooperation. Residential and environmental aspects of neighbourhoods have been significantly associated with positive mental wellbeing, and therefore, resulting in neighbourhood attachment – being satisfied with the house and landlord, having a good internal reputation within the neighbourhood and feeling that the neighbourhood has a good sense of community (Bond et al., 2012).

Research has found more significant neighbour relationships among older adults than in younger populations (Suanet, van Tilburg, & Broese van Groenou, 2013). Thus, research has shown that the combination of old age and residence in a deprived neighbourhood, lacking this attachment, increases the risk of loneliness, feeling unsafe and feeling dissatisfied (Scharf, Phillipson & Smith, 2005; van der Meer, 2006; Scharf & Gierveld, 2008). However, Hülür et al. (2016) found cohort differences over 20 years which showed that current older adults are actually less lonely and less dependent on external circumstances – clearly social developments have occurred over the last decades. In addition, Toruńczyk‐Ruiz and Lewicka (2016) found that the effect of perceived age diversity was dependent upon neighbourhood ties; those with fewer ties had less neighbourhood attachment with neighbours of different ages. Likewise, neighbours are also seen as a great source of contact for single individuals, as they are more likely to require assistance than those in a relationship (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016). This study, however, only controls for proximity to parents and siblings in relation to the neighbourhood effects of married and single individuals, and no measures of proximity to friends were made, which may be responsible for some of the differences.

Socioeconomic status (SES) has been associated with the quality of neighbour relations; Méndez and Otero (2018) found that the presence of neighbourhood conflict is linked to socio-spatial inequality, suggesting that individuals of medium and low SES backgrounds are more likely to encounter neighbourhood conflict. Similarly, Toruńczyk‐Ruiz and Lewicka (2016) found that perceived income diversity was negatively related to neighbourhood attachment. However, Nieuwenhuis, Volker and Flap (2013) found no association between income diversity and neighbourhood relationship quality.  However, the generalisability of these studies either providing evidence or disputing this association is limited; with Méndez and Otero (2018) using data from only Santiago, Toruńczyk‐Ruiz and Lewicka (2016) using data from only Poland and Nieuwenhuis et al. (2013) using only Dutch data.

Cheshire and Fitzgerald (2015) suggested that neighbours are actually more likely to be a source of conflict than support, which is consistent with the study by Michaux, Groenen and Uzieblo (2017) who found that 76% of residents in their study have been confronted with some sort of problematic behaviour from their neighbours.

Nieuwenhuis et al. (2013) established two types of problems encountered by neighbours: private nuisance and anti-social/criminal behaviour. Private nuisance involves neighbour disputes around issues concerning noise, odours, air pollution and garden issues. Noise is one of the main factors causing disputes in neighbourhoods and is reported as the most frequent source of neighbour nuisance (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2013; Michaux et al., 2017). Thus, reporting physical and psychological effects such as: hearing loss, stress, sleep disruption, poor physical and mental well-being, cognitive deficits and annoyance (Bronzaft, 2002; World Health Organisation, 2011). Yet significantly, Stokoe and Hepburn (2005) observed that noise is treated as though it has a straightforward meaning when actually, noise perception and noise annoyance are both psychological and subjective phenomena (Koprowska, Łaszkiewicz, Kronenberg, & Marcińczak, 2018). Some types of noise are more tolerable, such as a baby crying, yet others, such as loud music, may be interpreted as antisocial (Stokoe, 2006); ‘ anti-social’ complaints are often seen from older occupier’s, frowning upon the conduct of their younger neighbours, viewing them as noisy and disruptive (Buys & Miller, 2012; Baker, 2013). Cheshire, Fitzgerald and Liu (2018) found that 11% of neighbourhoods were characterised as low complaint areas, 53% of neighbourhoods fall into a subgroup characterised by high chances of noise complaints and 36% into a subgroup whereby noise forms part of the problem alongside building, parking and pet issues.

Although pets can bring neighbours together, they can also create tension within the neighbourhood (Power, 2018). Dogs, in particular, have been described as a ‘ cared for nuisance’ (Fielding, 2007), with their barking being the prime irritant (Fielding, 2006). Fielding (2008) conducted a study and found that 38. 5% of participants lived in dog-keeping households. In addition, out of the 29 nuisances listed, dogs barking at night was reported as the most common one and the most frequently occurring (at least once a week). Dogs roaming on property were reported as the second most common nuisance and also as the second most frequently occurring nuisance. Although all these findings were gained from the Bahamas, a study in Dominica supports these results, as the inability to sterilise female dogs, due to lack of resources in these locations, lead to the vast population of dogs roaming on property (Alie, Davis, Fielding, & Moldonado, 2007). However, although this is seen as a nuisance, previous studies have indicated that most dogs are kept “ for protection” with barking considered almost as important as “ guarding” (Fielding & Plumridge, 2005). Yet others keep dogs as a companion (Ruiz-Izaguirre & Eilers, 2012). Therefore, unless laws address the issue of dogs barking or there is a shift in dog keeping patterns; this longstanding neighbourhood nuisance will persist to cause conflict in society (Fielding, 2008).

What counts as private and public is often another cause of neighbourhood disputes – for example, gardens are seen as a space for interaction with neighbours, but they are made private through fences and walls. And depending on the activity taking place (changing clothes in the window or looking into a neighbour’s window), private spaces can be constructed as public spaces, and neighbours can take offence (Stokoe, 2006).

Anti-social and criminal behaviour highlight more serious issues within a neighbourhood, involving damage to property, physical abuse, threats and intimidation (Jacobs & Arthurson, 2004). This can also relate to unwanted pursuit behaviour, encapsulating behaviours ranging from serious, criminalised, and clearly unacceptable behaviours (e. g. threatening) to moderate or mild behaviours which are acceptable in some social contexts (e. g. giving flowers) (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). These unwanted pursuit behaviours are generally perceived as annoying, upsetting, threatening, and privacy-violating (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000). However, it should be noted that the nature of the study by Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. (2000) relies on reports given by one individual, in which their current affective state may have impacted their retrospective report, so another less subjective method may have changed the nature of the results.

Ethnicity has also been associated with the strength of neighbourhood relations; some research associated increased diversity with poorer relations among neighbours, in particular, trustworthiness (Alesina & Ferrara, 2002; Delhey & Newton, 2005; Dinesen & Sønderskov, 2015). Likewise, Schneider (2008) proposed that a higher proportion of immigrants increases prejudice in the majority, however, this could be due to the ‘ clash of lifestyles’ between residents and the diversity of neighbourhoods (Ufkes, Otten, van der Zee, & Giebels, 2012). On the other hand, Wang, Zhang and Wu (2017) discovered that residents in neighbourhoods with a higher presence of migrants are more trustful towards out-group members. In support of this, Hanson (2017) found that prejudice reduces due to positive intergroup contact.  Controversially, Toruńczyk‐Ruiz and Lewicka (2016) reported that perceived ethnic diversity was positively related to neighbourhood attachment, stating that it is not the actual level of diversity that matters but how people perceive it, so ethnic diversity can result in a positive social outcome.

Furthermore, religious conflict is deemed a geographical conflicting issue (Kong, 2006). Lancee and Dronkers (2011) found that religious diversity negatively affects the quality of contact with neighbours and trust in the neighbourhood. However, others have found that ethnicity and religion have an insignificant effect, as relations are mediated by other factors such as disadvantage (Taylor, Twigg & Mohan, 2010; Laurence, 2011; Nieuwenhuis et al., 2013). Yet it should be noted that religion is more than ‘ an object of empirical study’ (Korf, 2006), and when studying religion, effort needs to be put into clarifying what religion is and the extremity of the religious beliefs. Also, it is possible that an underlying factor such as lifestyle differences can cause this conflict and it may not be the cause of religion at all.

In several Western Countries, mediation services are in place to tackle problems with neighbours by supporting face-to-face coping strategies; these interventions are needed according to the elevated number of police interventions in neighbour disputes, residents are often unsuccessful in coping with their disputes constructively (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2013; Michaux et al., 2017). These studies are limited due to their use of Dutch data; however, their methods vary. Michaux et al. (2017) used questionnaires for 365 participants, yet the study by Nieuwenhuis et al. (2013) utilises the Survey on the Social Networks of the Dutch, first conducted in 1999, so together, these methods give a broader perspective. Some rely on legality to deal with neighbour disputes, which can be problematic; evictions fail to solve the underlying causes of the issues and displace problematic tenants onto other locations (Hunter & Dixon, 2001). Habibis et al. (2007) argued that strategies to solve neighbourhood disputes should include addressing the cause of neighbour problems, such as the appropriate construction of social housing, to minimise the disputes concerning noise and conflict over shared space. Nevertheless, the efficacy of the different coping strategies remains understudied (Dutton & Winstead, 2011; Geistman, Smith, Lambert & Cluse-Tolar, 2013).

In conclusion, the factors affecting the quality of neighbour relations include: age, relationship status, socioeconomic status, private nuisance, pets, private/public spaces, anti-social/criminality issues, ethnicity and religious diversity. Although these factors often have some sort of effect on neighbourhoods, either positive or negative, not all of these factors are always prominent. Due to some of these factors causing disputes in neighbourhoods, measures are put in place to attempt to tackle them, however, the success of these efforts are questioned.

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