

CHAPTER 7

Housing quality

Good-quality housing is a key element for ensuring a healthy village. Poor housing can lead to many health problems, and is associated with infectious diseases (such as tuberculosis), stress and depression. Everyone should therefore have access to good-quality housing and a pleasant home environment that makes them happy and content. Specific aspects of housing quality are described in the following sections.

Problems associated with poor housing

- Cramped and crowded conditions give rise to poor hygiene by providing places for vermin to breed and transmit diseases via fleas, ticks and other vectors.
 - Poor household hygiene leads to food and water contamination within the home.
 - Poor indoor air quality leads to respiratory problems and inadequate lighting leads to eyesight problems.
 - Stress is higher for individuals living in poor housing and poverty.
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7.1 Ventilation

Adequate home ventilation is particularly important where wood, charcoal and dung are used for cooking or heating, since these fuels give off smoke that contains harmful chemicals and particulate matter. This can lead to respiratory problems, such as bronchitis and asthma, and make tuberculosis transmission easier. Women and small children are particularly at risk from poor ventilation if they spend long periods within the home or in cooking areas. Where cooking is done indoors, it is essential that smoke and fumes be removed from the house quickly and efficiently. Ventilation may be improved by constructing houses with a sufficient number of windows, particularly in cooking areas. Alternatively, houses can be constructed using bricks with holes drilled through them (“air-bricks”), which allow fresh air to circulate within the house.

Figure 7.1 *House with good ventilation and light*



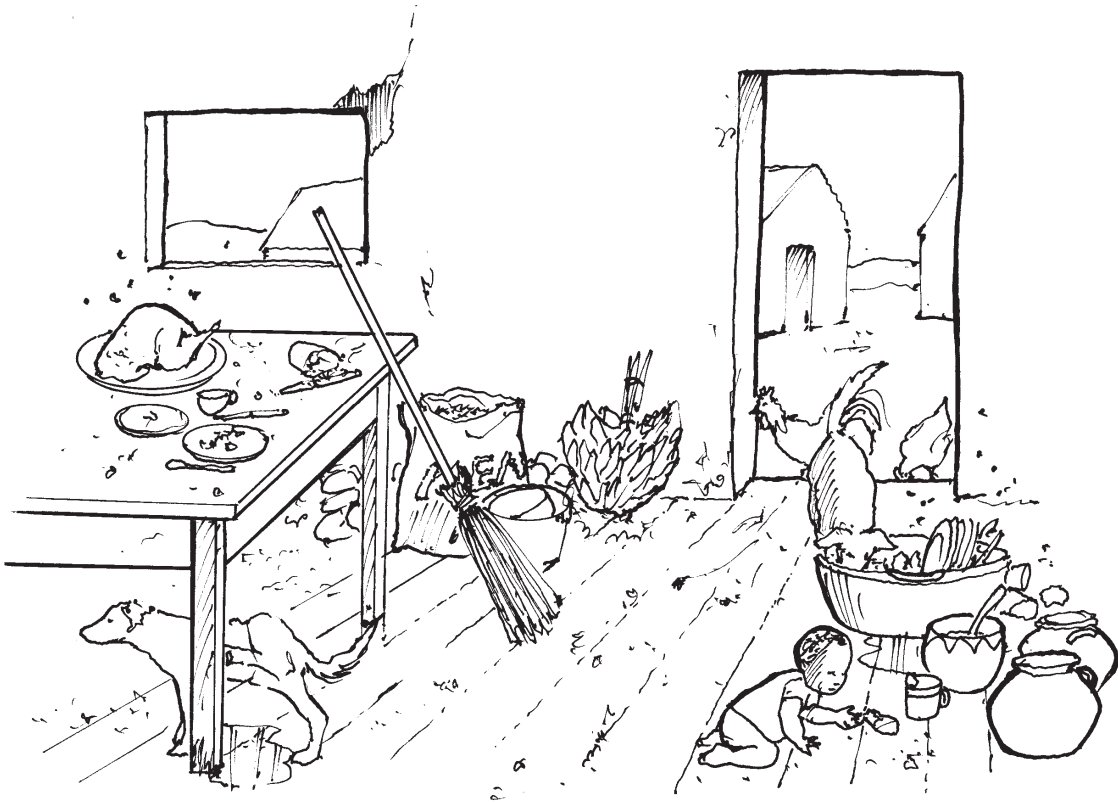
7.2 Lighting

Poor indoor lighting can have many harmful effects on health and well-being. A poorly lit working environment in the home can lead to eyesight problems, for example. This is a particular concern for women working in indoor cooking areas. Poor lighting within the home can also make people feel more depressed. These problems can be remedied by adding windows to the house to increase the amount of natural light, which is much stronger than light from candles or lamps, as shown in Figure 7.1. In communities where it is important that privacy within the home is maintained, windows can be located where it is difficult for people to see into the house, or constructed with a mesh or lattice work which allows light to enter while guarding privacy. Increasing natural light is also important for home cleanliness: if a house is dark, it is more difficult to see dust and dirt and thus more difficult to clean properly.

7.3 Disease vectors in the home

Unless homes are kept clean and steps taken to prevent insects from entering, the homes can become infested with disease vectors. In eastern

Figure 7.2 *Example of a house with unhygienic practices*



Mediterranean areas, for example, sandflies thrive in the dirt inside houses and transmit leishmaniasis; and in Central and South America, triatomid bugs live in the cracks of walls and in thatched roofs and transmit American trypanosomiasis (Chagas disease). Insect disease vectors can be reduced by keeping food covered and properly disposing of waste. If mosquitoes or flies are a problem, windows and doors should be covered with mesh screens and kept shut at night, and mosquito nets placed over beds. Cleanliness within and around home areas significantly reduces the risk of disease transmission. Examples of bad and good household hygiene are shown in Figures 7.2 and 7.3.

7.4 Overcrowding in homes

Overcrowding in homes causes ill-health because it makes disease transmission easier and because the lack of private space causes stress. Overcrowding is related to socioeconomic level, and the poor often have little choice but to live in cramped conditions. In principle, increasing the number of rooms in a house should improve the health of the people who live there, but increasing house size is often difficult. Careful planning of family size can also help to reduce overcrowding. If community members feel that overcrowding is a

Figure 7.3 *Example of a house with hygienic practices*



problem, they can take the initiative and press landlords to provide more space for tenants at affordable prices. This may necessitate working with local government and pressure groups to ensure that the housing laws and tenancy agreements are revised, and that everyone has access to houses adequate for their family size.