



# HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY

## Summary

### **Housing Affordability and the Well-Being of Children**

Anucha and Jeyapal, York University, 2009

This project looked at the impact of affordable housing on parents' and children's well-being through interviews and surveys. There is a lack of research on how housing affects children's health and well-being, however studies show that housing provides more than shelter; it is the foundation of family life and is important to people's integration into society.

**Who was involved in this study?** Parents and children living in Hastings, Peterborough and Hamilton, Ontario, who were either on a waiting list for social housing or had moved into social housing.

#### **What issues are they facing?**

- Housing can have a huge impact on children through their parents; demands on parents dealing with poor housing can lead to frustration that makes parenting more punitive and controlling.
- Unaffordable housing impacts families and children, resulting in poorer health and higher stress levels for all family members.
- Poorly built/maintained housing and overcrowding are linked with children's physical/mental health and development (i.e., lead exposure from paint and soil can negatively affect brain and central nervous system development).

#### **What happens while on the housing waitlist?**

- Parents felt powerless, as though their life was on hold. Some parents felt they needed to appear strong around the children, which was stressful.
- Children felt unsettled when they had to move often while their family waited for housing, and often had their favourite toys stored while in temporary housing.
- Children felt scared, nervous, and worried about switching schools, among other issues.
- Children went without food or were bored by the same meal choices (courtesy of food banks and dollar stores).
- Children said it was hectic at home and, as a result, they were unprepared for or missed school.

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## **Housing-Related Issues that Parents and Children dealt with in Subsidized Housing or Non-Subsidized Housing<sup>1</sup>**

- When in non-subsidized housing, parents were more likely to feel negatively about staying there over the longer term, to feel that they had little privacy, to worry about their safety, and to have a negative outlook on life as a whole.
- Compared to when they were in subsidized housing, parents in non-subsidized housing were more likely to have had benefits, privileges or services denied to them and were more likely to be ashamed to have friends and family over because of the quality of their housing.
- Children rated their well-being as “poor” and “adequate” more often when not in subsidized housing. However, when they were in subsidized housing, they were about twice as likely to say that their quality of life was “excellent”.
- When not in subsidized housing, children were uncomfortable inviting friends over.

**Parents’ Coping Strategies while on the Waitlist (and in temporary housing):** Cleaning and decorating, often with familiar decorations; Personalizing the children’s rooms; Distracting the children.

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### ***Positive Aspects of Subsidized Housing***

- Greater feeling of safety
  - Sense of community with neighbours
  - Better quality housing than non-subsidized housing; quicker repairs
  - Happier with the superintendents or managers of their building
  - More affordable
  - Less stress
  - Greater privacy
  - Sense of ownership and independence
  - Absence of stigma
  - Children happier
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### ***Negative Aspects of Subsidized Housing***

- Less privacy
- Still too expensive
- Stigma associated with living in subsidized housing
- Neighbourhoods can be “rough”

<sup>1</sup> Non-subsidized housing in this research was living in “doubled up housing”, with relatives or friends or in a temporary shelter.