

Women & Housing: Identifying Themes

A literature review

INTRODUCTION

This literature review explores the issues that impact women across the housing continuum—from shelters, through transitional and supportive housing, to safe, affordable housing—and pulls out key themes.

Developed by Status of Women Canada, in collaboration with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, this literature review supports the consideration of gender and intersecting factors in housing policy. It was prepared for the Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing Symposium, which took place in September 2017.

FINDINGS

A gender-based analysis that considers and includes the multi-faceted needs of women in Canada is important to effectively understand and remedy women's housing concerns.

- Women's precarious housing and homelessness occurs in a context of continuing economic inequality and gender-based violence. Both these overarching factors argue for specialized transitional housing and nuanced design of second-stage housing for women.
- Additional challenges in accessing housing are felt by women in at-risk populations such as Indigenous, immigrant and senior populations, those in northern and rural areas, trans persons, and single parents.
- A bibliography of 40 recent publications on these topics is provided.

Studies have identified an association between experiences of intimate partner violence and subsequent housing instability.

- Separation from an abusive partner may result in significant loss of income and savings, particularly for women who were financially dependent on their partner.
- Fear of further victimization may motivate women to relocate frequently and move great distances in an effort to keep themselves and their children safe.
- Women who have experienced violence need housing that satisfies psychological needs, including safety, community, and comfort, as well as material housing needs.

Low income may inhibit women's likelihood of being able to access adequate housing for themselves and their children.

- There is a significant gender pay gap between women's and men's earnings for work of equal value (\$26.11 versus \$29.86 per hour).
- Women are over-represented in part-time and precarious work arrangements (e.g. temporary or casual employment). Almost three quarters of part-time workers are women.
- In addition, women tend to be clustered in occupations that are associated with low pay.

Sub-groups of women, such as those with children, Indigenous women, newcomers and seniors, disproportionately experience housing instability and homelessness.

- The likelihood of Indigenous women becoming or remaining homeless has been linked to both individual issues (family violence, mental illness, substance misuse, pregnancy, involvement in the criminal justice system) and systemic issues (colonialism and intergenerational trauma).
- In rural and remote areas, a shortage of both emergency shelters and transitional housing results in overcrowding at every stage in the housing continuum (see figure 1).
- Trans persons are over-represented among the homeless, and those who are able to access appropriate housing services and shelters are often vulnerable to negative treatment.
- Immigrant women may be unfamiliar with the local housing system, or be working in precarious and low-paid employment. Some are forced to continue living with their sponsor (e.g. partner or family member) in order to maintain their immigration status.
- Senior women can be troubled with economic insecurity, which stems from limited pension benefits, little or no retirement savings, or widowhood.
- One third (34%) of women-headed lone-parent families are classified as low income. To pay rent, they may employ coping strategies such as choosing overcrowded or sub-standard housing, or diverting funds from other necessities (food, medicine).

An underlying assumption of gender-based analysis is that some needs are related to gender because women, men and other gender identities experience circumstances differently. This literature review briefly outlines the contextual factors that affect women in their search for safe, adequate, suitable, and affordable housing.

Figure 1: The housing continuum



FURTHER READING

Full report – *Women and Housing: Identifying Themes*
https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/research_2/women_and_housing.pdf

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