Developing Gendered and Culturally Safe Interventions for Indigenous Families Experiencing Homelessness

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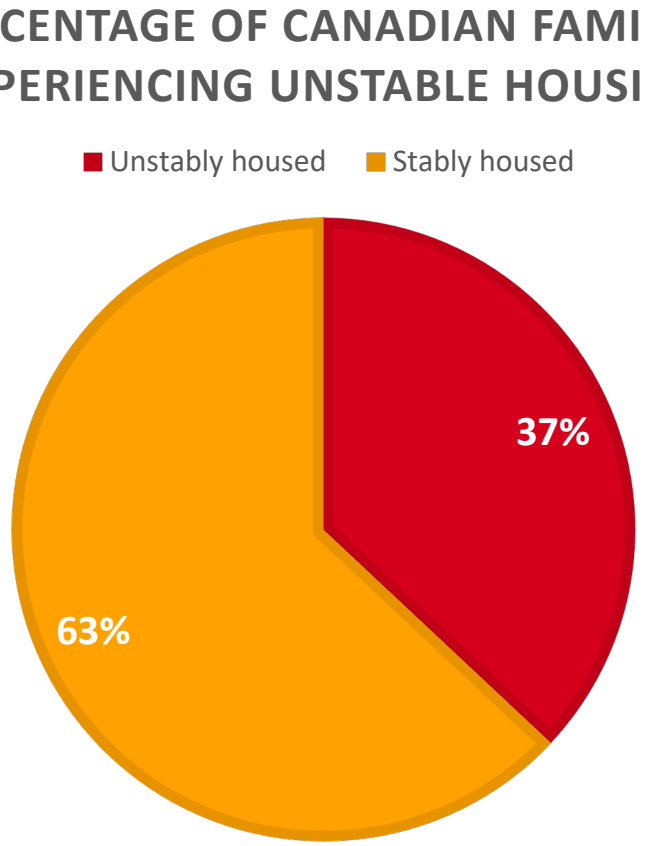
ABORIGINAL STANDING COMMITTEE on housing and homelessness

Background and Rationale

- Families stay in shelter 3x longer than single adults (Segaert, 2012)
- 90% of homeless families are head by woman (Robrecht & Anderson, 2006)
- Women experiencing homelessness have high rates of;
  - post-traumatic stress disorder (Bassuk, Volk, & Oliver, 2010)
  - mental health issues (Bassuk, Volk, & Oliver, 2010)
  - sexual exploitation, violence, and assault (Paradis & Mosher, 2012).



Background and Rationale

- Indigenous people = **3%** of Calgary's population
- Women experiencing homelessness = **34%** Indigenous (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2014)
- Families accessing shelter services = **50%** Indigenous (Inn from the Cold, 2018)
- Housing First housing solution often targeted towards white, single men in their 40's (Goerning, 2014)

Research Aims and Objectives

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Aims:

To better the housing and wrap-around supports to be culturally considerate for Indigenous families experiencing homelessness

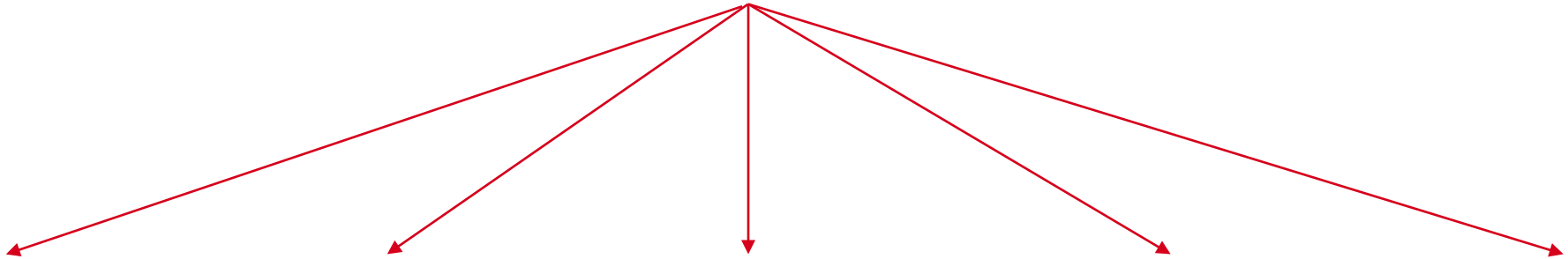
Objectives

1. *To **understand** and **analyze** Indigenous families' experience of homelessness as being rooted in their **gendered** and **cultural trauma**;*
2. *Develop **recommendations** for policy makers on how to best adapt the **Housing First model** to be reflective and inclusive of Indigenous women's experience.*

Methodology

- Relationship building
  - Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness (ASCHH)
  - Elder engagement and leadership
  - Interviews:
  - 12 women, 1-2 hours over a meal
  - Individual and group
  - Elders present
  - Children attended
- Thematic and Policy Analysis

Structural Violence



Safety	Family	Jurisdiction	Racism	Trauma
Interpersonal Violence Unsafe housing	Colonial legacies of violence against Indigenous families	National underfunding for on-reserve housing	Employers Landlords Housing and service access	Limited support for healing from multi-generational trauma

Jurisdiction

"[If] you go to your First Nations band they tell you, 'you're living off the reserve. We can only help people that are living on reserve,' and you go to the people off reserve they say, 'go to your band.'"

- Underfunding nationally for on reserve housing & services
- Frustration with feeling passed off between organizations
- Limited coordination with clients to explain supports

Racism

Interpersonal racism primarily displayed by:

- Landlords
- Employers
- Housing Services

"[The landlord said,] if I go out there, no one's going to help me because I'm native. I've seen it and witnessed it off hand, trying to get my own place here."

"No one would rent to us because of four kids or profiling my sons because they are boys and you know, like gang affiliated and stuff."

Safety

“I hate living there because we have to keep the blinds closed all the time. It feels so dark, cause it’s a basement suite, but I feel like he’s spying on us. Like it’s not just me. I have girls.”

“I feel like I’m just settling again because I want to get out of there.”

- Unsafe in relationships
- Unsafe in homes: Abuse from landlords
  - Physically unsafe
    - Unclean
    - Threat of violence
    - Financial abuse
  - Women ill equipped to fight violations.
    - Not informed on “Tenancies Act” violations
    - Forced to settle.

Family

- Indigenous conceptions of family not considered in housing
- Threat of child apprehension from CPS
  - Grandparents take care of children while already financially insecure

"I need a home for my granddaughter, I'm not gonna lose her. I can't give her up and I can't lose this home [for her]. Nobody can take care of her but her mom … I don't sleep sometimes because I'm so worried about so many things."

Trauma

- Limited trauma informed support for extended family
  - Heavy reliance on women for support
- Retraumatized by system
  - Retelling of story
  - SPDAT

Trauma cont…

- *“Losing my mother really young, I kind of had to grow up and be a parent for my brothers, so I always had that where I felt like I prefer to my brothers succeed rather than me.”*

- *“I have to tell myself, okay […] ‘you can't keep hurting yourself like this anymore, you can't keep letting people treat you like this or you know walk all over you.’ … My mom was like that, and I swore I would never be like my mother. But guess what? Even my husband tells me, that's what killed your mom and it's gonna kill you too!”*

Policy Analysis: Child Protective Services

- **Problem**
  - Family breakdown
- **Assumptions**
  - Biomedical view of "best interest of the child"
- **Context**
  - Colonialism
  - Residential schools
- **Gaps**
  - Trauma from residential schools
  - Trauma from family and cultural separation
- **Effects**
  - Gendered violence
  - Fear of child welfare
  - Disconnects from family and cultural supports
  - Lack of financial support for family members caring for children
- **Replacements**
  - Greater support for families prior to apprehension (ex. Family and cultural reunification)
  - Financial supports for family members temporarily caring for children

Policy Analysis: Housing First

Problem

- Indigenous families are not 'vulnerable enough' for HF
  - SPDAT

Assumptions

- Chronic homelessness=
  - greater need for housing

Context

- At Home/ Chez Soi Study
- Homeless population identified primarily as middle-age, white men

Gaps

- Vulnerability indexes not concerned with relative homelessness (i.e fleeing domestic violence, couch surfing)
- Presence of children not recognized as a 'vulnerability'

Effects

- Long waiting lists for Indigenous families considered
- Families vulnerable to racism/unfair treatment from landlords
- Distrust of housing systems
- Newly homeless families fall into chronic homelessness

Replacements

- Housing as human right: Disrupt scarcity problem that prioritizes most vulnerable people for HF by developing more subsidized housing

Contextualizing stories

- Indigenous women disengaged in Housing First
  - Accessibility issues
- Integrated Knowledge translation

- *Disrupt structural violence* = **Human rights approach to dignified living**

Contextualizing Stories: Ties to Policy

- *Disrupt structural violence* = **Human rights approach to dignified living**

- **United Nations: Human rights approach to dignified living**
  - United families
  - Anti-oppression
  - Equal service access

Contextualizing Stories: Ties to Policy cont…

- **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (March 2008)**

  Article 21

  1. “Indigenous peoples have the right, **without discrimination**, to the **improvement** of their **economic and social conditions**, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, **housing**, sanitation, health and social security.“

  2. “States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to **the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children** and persons with disabilities”

Contextualizing Stories: Ties to Policy cont…

- **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (2015)**
  - Harm of family apprehension
  - Under fund initiatives focused on healing
  - Discoordination between funders
  - Poor housing remains an issue

A Path Forward…

1. Implement ***organizational policy*** in homelessness sector to ***improve client understanding*** of housing system and funding opportunities;

2. Improve ***accountability*** of the ***Tenancies Act;***

3. Improve ***support for families*** prior to child apprehension;

4. Re-evaluate ***vulnerability assessments.***

Thank you for your attention!

Any questions?

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