

Fostering security for newcomers with housing insecurity in Calgary

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Research Team

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Background

- Affordable housing vital to settlement (Danso & Grant, 2000)
- Immigrants have inequitable access to housing (Skiften Andersen et al., 2013)
- Accessing housing information for newcomers can be stressful (Kim & Boyd, 2009)
- Immigrants face racism and discrimination (Scott, Winland, & Gatez, 2015)

Research Objective

To identify the nature of housing and homelessness among new-immigrants in Calgary in order to inform the development of recommendations to improve co-ordination and service-delivery among immigrant serving organizations and housing support providers.

Methods

- Mixed methods approach
 - literature review,
 - policy analysis,
 - focus groups with service providers, and
 - participatory action research (PAR) with newcomers with housing insecurity using Photovoice

Methods: Lived Experience Component

- The lived experience group included 14 adults from 10 households.
- They were recruited through ethno-cultural groups, immigrant-specific service providers, and snowball sampling.
- Although the intent was to focus on immigrants within the first five years of arrival in Canada, two foreign-born individuals with longer stays, who expressed a strong interest in the project, were also included.
- We held five, three-hour workshops over six weeks,
- Co-researchers shared experiences of housing access, mobility, and outcomes.
- Following a PAR approach, co-researchers participated in:
 - identifying the research question & methodology;
 - determining how to represent their perspectives of housing insecurity and migration;
 - data analysis and interpretation; and
 - dissemination of the findings.

Photovoice

- Photovoice is a participatory research method which combines images and text to create grassroots action for marginalized populations (Wang & Burris, 1997).
- Through community consultation, Photovoice aims to bring the perspectives and expertise of those who are marginalized into the policy-making process (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

Findings

Major Themes

1. Discrimination
2. Exploitation: Lack of Knowledge of Housing Rights
3. Lack of Adequate Affordable Housing
4. Lack of Informal and Formal Support Systems
5. It's Not Just Housing
6. Hope/Resilience

1. Discrimination

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Family Size
- Language



Children- “Where I come from children are a blessing —you shouldn’t be denied anything because you have children.”

2. Exploitation: Lack of Knowledge Regarding Tenant Rights



Empty Wallet- “Landlords require us to pay rent for 6 months. That means that we need to use all of our savings to pay, and do not have money to invest in anything else”



Broken Chair- “Many landlords believe that because we are immigrants we do not know the law, and that we are not allowed to have proper housing.”

3. Lack of Adequate Housing



The City of Calgary 2012 Calgary Affordable Needs Assessment points to four key population trends that impact the affordable housing supply:

1. The increasing number of seniors;
2. An increasing number of children;
3. Growth in the young Aboriginal population; &
4. Growth in the population of international & interprovincial migrants.

These trends have a significant impact on the types of housing required, increasing the need for housing that is affordable, physically accessible, and with more than two bedrooms (Noble & Selinger, 2012).

U-Haul Truck- “For two months, this was our first home in Calgary.”

4. Limited Informal and Formal Support



Family-“Where we come from, the word family includes everyone, not just the three of us! In Canada, we are a representation of our family, and our success means that our extended family has succeeded as well”



Translator- “A gift from a co-worker and friend who was living here, and our connection when we arrived. It represents the immigrant community connection. We need connections when we first arrived.”

4. It's more than Housing: Transition Challenges



Passport- “Settlement services focus too much on what should be done, and not necessarily on how it should be done.”



Melting Sugar Cube—“We lost our studies and experience; [even] if you had enough in Canada [it doesn't mean anything]. So, you lost everything and restart again.”

“If she had a home she could focus on searching for a job—that is the step.”

5. Hope & Resilience



“Even if it is so difficult to get settled and integrated initially, we must persevere with the strong will to succeed and overcome these challenges because we have a lot more people counting on us.”

“The experience of migrating and finding a place to live in Canada has been a learning experience that led us to see every day as a new beginning, a discovery, so we never lose our faith that soon we will find stability in our new home”

“I think it was a miracle. I found a landlord that believed in me, without a job and gave me the house.”

Conclusions

1. The inability to access stable and acceptable housing impacts settlement, which has implications for long-term integration success and a sense of belonging.
2. Housing stress and instability increases newcomers' risk of homelessness and negatively impacts their health and settlement trajectories.

Recommendations:

1. Include landlords and property managers as key partners to remove housing access challenges facing newcomers.
2. Disseminate information about tenant rights and responsibilities to newcomers early in their settlement process.
3. Work towards making primary prevention of poor housing outcomes both a strategic and practical component of the housing system of care in Calgary.
4. Inform and work with key government departments (municipal, provincial, and federal) to bring awareness to the importance of housing to settlement and the challenges of the local Calgary environment.

Recommendations

5. Work across levels of government and sectors to create subsidies, guarantor programs, and eviction prevention programs that are able to support newcomers to secure and maintain healthy living arrangements during the settlement process.
6. Shift reliance on informal support networks.
7. Identify an organization or group willing to take on the role of advocating for equitable access to housing systemically and advocate for access on behalf of newcomer families arriving in Calgary.
8. Develop and maintain connections with other groups working more broadly on housing issues.

Selected References

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