

Fact Sheet # 9

Understanding the Racialization of Poverty in Ontario In Housing & Homelessness in 2007

How does racialized poverty affect housing and homelessness ?

Between 1980 and 2000 in Toronto, poverty among racialized families rose by 361%.

According to a health report, poverty and “minority race” are key factors that can lead to being homeless.

Immigrants and refugees in Ontario are at risk for homelessness due to poverty, discrimination, cuts to social programs, lack of housing services, and lack of information about their rights.

Racialized groups in Toronto have higher levels of homelessness and poor housing than non-racialized groups. The city is facing a major shortage in affordable housing.

Of the growing number of families using shelters, 24% are refugees.

In Toronto in 2001, over 43% of recent immigrants had “core housing needs,” which means their housing is too expensive, too crowded or in need of major repairs.

People who rent their homes are more likely to have housing needs, and to pay more than they can afford.

Poor housing standards and homelessness are strongly linked to poor health.

Quick Notes

- * Ontario’s growing racialized communities face a disproportionate, ongoing, & increasing risk of being poor.
- * **Racialized** persons refers to people of colour who are Canadian-born & to newcomer communities of colour.
- * By **racism**, we mean both the individual attitudes and behaviours as well as the built-in ways in which social policies and societal institutions discriminate.
- * Households that fall below Canada’s **low income cut -off (LICO)** measure, spend a much larger percent of their income on basic necessities like food and shelter than the average family.
- * Racialized families are from 2 to 4 times more likely than white families to fall below the LICO.
- * Individual and systemic racism have clear & negative impacts on life chances for people of colour in Ontario.

In 1981, the rates of home ownership among immigrants were higher than those for Canadian born people. By 2001, the rates were lower for immigrants.

About 80% of recent immigrants depend on rental housing.

Newcomers and racialized groups are much more likely to live in areas with high rates of poverty.

Many immigrants and refugees live in unsafe housing conditions, some of which are not covered by tenant protection laws.

In one study, almost 80% of newcomers to Toronto reported that their housing conditions were poor. The most common problems were: rats, roaches, poor ventilation, not enough hot water, and overcrowding.

Some landlords discriminate by refusing to rent to racialized tenants, or simply making conditions too hard for people to meet, for example:

- asking for large deposits that people won't get back
- asking for too many documents (social insurance numbers, work permits, or pay stubs)
- threatening eviction based on negative views about cleanliness or cooking odours
- refusing people based on the age or number of children, family size, legal status, or gender.

In Toronto, about 71,000 households are on the waiting list for social housing.

People without status often cannot get housing assistance or social housing. This has the most impact on women and families with young children.

In a study of homeless Caribbean youth in Toronto, large numbers of both males and females said they had suffered abuse, violence or discrimination at the hands of the police.

Among homeless youth, immigrants and refugees are over-represented; this is especially true for young women of Caribbean and African backgrounds in Ottawa and Toronto.

Poor and racialized neighbourhoods are often stereotyped as “bad areas.” People who are already criminalized are at risk of eviction, especially from social housing; even family members of someone who is charged with an offence can be evicted.

Racialized groups largely born in Canada or living in Canada for many years still experience neighbourhood segregation, even when their shared economic situation improves.

What can be done, and examples of who is doing it ?

Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) promotes human rights in housing and works to remove the barriers to suitable housing for marginalized individuals and families.

Contact : www.equalityrights.org/cera/ or Phone (Toronto) - 416-944-0087 or 1-800-263-1139 and (Ottawa) - 613-233-8618

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) is developing a strategy to create affordable housing in all cities, in locations near services, good food markets, and work opportunities, seeks education for newcomers about housing services & tenant rights & tries to make sure that housing strategies and services address needs of racialized groups, immigrants, refugees & people without status.

Contact : www.ocasi.org or Phone - 416-322-4950

Sistering - guided by principles of anti-racism & anti-oppression works to change social conditions & inequalities which endanger homeless, under-housed & low-income women's welfare.

Contact - www.sistering.org or phone - 416-926-9762

Everyday Lives

“[b]eing on welfare, or being homeless basically, you have no references, and most landlords don't like that... I don't have [first and last months' rent]... and secondly, it's my colour, some landlord don't like that. I went to this lady and she said she has a problem with Black people.”

“I have found in a lot of the female households with refugees... the husbands have basically been lost in the war and they [come] with children and sisters, and the discrimination is so profound that... if there isn't a male led household some landlords won't even accept them as tenants.”

“The number of newcomers going to shelters is just growing in leaps & bounds... a population that was less than one percent is now at least 50 percent...”

“Not having a place for me was mostly about income and problems with landlords... as soon as they see what you look like, the place is rented.”

For Further Information, Action Ideas & Advocacy Tools see –

The Colour of Poverty Campaign –

www.colourofpoverty.ca

For source document references for all ten (10) fact sheets see – www.colourofpoverty.ca