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Initial Findings of the Transitional Housing Study: The needs of refugee claimants in transitional housing for PHAs in Ontario

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RESEARCH TEAM

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PARTNERSHIP

- Fife House Foundation
- Bruce House, Ottawa
- John Gordon Home, London
- LOFT Community Services/McEwan Housing and Support Services
- Community Member
- Wilfred Laurier University



RESEARCH FUNDING AND ETHICS



**Canadian Institutes of Health Research
(CIHR)**

Ethics Approval Received From:

- University of Toronto
- Wilfred Laurier University

How is this Study Community-Based?

CBR is a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings.

This study is:

- Community driven
- Relevant to the community
- Developed through partnerships and collaboration
- Aims to build community capacity
- Addresses both the Greater involvement of PHAs (GIPA) and Meaningful involvement of PHAs (MIPA) principles



RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES:

- To develop a longitudinal study on transitional housing and its **impact on housing sustainability and health outcomes for PHAs**.
- To **develop strategic partnerships** among housing providers, LHINs, local and provincial housing decision makers, and researchers.
- To **explore and document the lived experiences of PHAs** in transitional housing in Ontario.



RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES:

- To identify the factors (individual and structural) associated with **'housing readiness' of PHAs** in the transitional housing program.
- To better understand the **practices and services** of transitional housing.
- To explore the experiences and **change in support needs and support structure of PHAs** from intake into transitional housing to being successfully housed.



METHODOLOGY

Multi-Site, Community-Based Qualitative Study

Participant Recruitment: Purposive Sampling Strategy

Three transitional housing agencies for PHAs in Ontario:

- Fife House Foundation (Toronto),
- Bruce House (Ottawa), and
- John Gordon Home (London).

Data Collection

- Time Frame: 9 Months
- 50 in-depth Interviews : Phase-I (Entry)-25
Phase-II (Exit)-25

Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis.



STUDY UPDATE

Training: 4 Peer Research Assistants Trained

Data Collection (November 8, 2012):

	Phase-I (Entry)	Phase-II (Exit)
Toronto	10	3
Ottawa	7	3
London	3	0
Total	20	6

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ontario Sites				
	Toronto (n=10)	Ottawa (n=7)	London (n=3)	Total (N=20)
Avg. Age	44 years	51 years	47 years	47 years
Gender Male / Female / Transgender	8 / 2 / 0	5 / 2 / 0	2 / 1 / 0	15 / 5 / 0

FINDINGS



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Overall Findings

- Participants enter into Transitional Housing Program (THP) with a range of needs though unarticulated by participants.
- Participants come to THP through referrals from hospitals and Community-based agencies/AIDS service organizations.
- Most participants identified assistance with medication adherence as a need.
- Participants also identified nutrition and access to nutritious food as an urgent need.
- Participants are centrally focused on 'getting my own place', 'getting a job', 'getting better' but are unaware of the concrete steps needed to achieve these goals

Refugee Claimants

- Considerable overlap of needs of refugee claimants and other participants with respect to housing, health services, and social services.
- However, refugee claimants expressed higher level of vulnerability due to concerns about disclosure, safety, and isolation.
- These concerns stemmed from previous experiences of violence and trauma.



Isolation and Re-integration

Isolation among refugee claimants was based on dislocation from family in their home country, however difficulties in re-integrating were based on experiences of fear and violence previously experienced, generally based on sexual orientation and/or HIV status:

“I never felt safe or comfortable because of my sexual orientation and due to the trauma that I experienced back home, right, so it was like a little bit, like living in a small Africa, in Canada, which everyday was very difficult because I know I had a big problem that I’m thinking about which is my health and I can share it with nobody...so I was just carrying it alone, so it was very very hard”.



Isolation and Re-integration

Reflecting on how the instability of housing impacted them and impeded their re-integration, a participant said:

“...It feels very, very new to move into a new apartment. What I’m trying to say is that, it feels a little bit of very much uncomfortable to get used to the new community, to the new people and get used to saying, “Ok this is where I live now” right, because even if the shelter was very bad, it was my first home in Canada, so I actually shed tears...”



Safety

Experiences of violence and trauma linked to home country exasperates fear of abuse and harm.

“I’ve been through a lot in my life... based on my sexual orientation from where I was coming from in Africa, I’ve always been hiding and I’ve been molested, I’ve had issues that I’ve kept to myself all my life and dealt with it...”

“...prior to me coming here (referring to THP), I wasn’t sleeping, I couldn’t sleep, cause one of my roommates was into drugs so I’m always like scared, what thing guy will come and do at the middle of the night, I couldn’t sleep”.



Disclosure

Fears of disclosure were also based on past experiences of violence that precipitated their abscondment.

“When I attend workshops and I’ve been given pamphlets or whatever, I can’t take them home because I go everywhere with my documents. I have no place to keep them, I can’t even, even if my doctor asked me to go on medication, I can’t take it home because I was, I was scared that I didn’t want anybody to know anything about me...”



Transitional Housing Program....Expectations

Refugee claimants consider THP a safe place to take stock and re-establish themselves in a new country.

An opportunity to integrate:

“...I know you have a time limit where you can stay and I, I don’t want to stay here too long... because now I’m integrating myself into the society more...”

Safe place:

“And I needed a safe place for myself, a place where I can at least have my own privacy. That was the major, major thing that actually brought me here”.

Peace of mind:

“The moment I came here, I had peace of mind which I believe is my priority, ...you can survive any other thing. I had peace of mind, at least I have my own space. I can sleep...”



Summary

- For refugee claimants, fear of disclosure originating from past experiences of violence and unstable housing impacts adherence to medication, thus, impacting their health.
- THP is seen by refugee residents as a safe place of reprieve, first stable place and a step towards reintegration.
- THP is seen as a segue to deal with trauma and address health concerns.
- Compared to other forms of housing, disclosure is a non-issue within THP, which gives refugee claimants a safe environment.
- The limited time-frame of the program both caused stress and but was also instrumental in faster integration.



For further information:

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