Poverty, housing and homelessness in northern and rural communities

Pauvreté, logement et sans-abrisme dans les communautés nordiques

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Introduction

• Shelter is a basic human need.
• Research has shown links between homelessness or poor housing and health outcomes.
• The Ontario Medical Association recently made a strong statement recognizing housing as a key determinant of health.
On a per capita basis, poverty, housing need and homelessness are as acute in northern communities as in the southern regions of Ontario and Canada.

Persistent problems through times of economic boom and bust.

Yet little published research on housing circumstances of poor and homeless people in northern Ontario communities.

Notably lacking is information about Francophones and Cree First Nations.
Migration

- Migration, a complex and dynamic social process.
- Physical, psychological, social, economic, racial and political contributing factors.
- ‘Having to migrate’ contributes to lower post-migration health outcomes.
- Need better knowledge of its links to homelessness, especially for Indigenous people in the north.
It is helpful to use varied research methods revealing living circumstances

- This presentation includes photographs taken by photovoice participants
- Some excerpts from participant narratives.
- Demonstrates homelessness and housing issues in northern communities.
Sleeping rough: an Indigenous participant’s narrative

It’s like you almost have to be half human to survive out there. Well, you have to be half human. Half animal.
Northern Ontario CURA: Poverty, Homelessness and Migration (PHM)

• A 5-year research project of the Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy at Laurentian University.

• Working with 11 communities in northeastern Ontario, from Sudbury and North Bay up to the James Bay.

• Partner communities include 3 northern cities, 4 towns and 4 First Nations.

• PHM is bilingual and tri-cultural: works with Anglophone, Francophone and First Nations communities in northeastern Ontario.
Key funders and partners of PHM

• Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).
• Homelessness Partnering Secretariat, HRSDC.
• Local service providers and community partners in 11 communities and First Nations in northeastern Ontario.
• Cochrane District and District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Boards.
• Northern Ontario Heritage Fund.
• Arts Council of Ontario.
• Laurentian University | 5 Ontario universities.

We thank homeless people and those at risk of homelessness for their help with this project.
Poverty, Homelessness and Migration (PHM)—a 5 to 6 year project

The five-year project to create a Northern Community-University Research Alliance was awarded $1,000,000 by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

It is a project of the Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy (CRSJP) at Laurentian University. The project title is Community-based Responses to Poverty, Homelessness and Migration in Northern Ontario.
Poverty, Homelessness and Migration

Pauvrete sans-abrisme et migration

Ontario

RESEARCH PROJECT
A northern Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) in ten communities.
Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

PROJET DE RECHERCHE
Alliances de recherche universités-communautés dans le nord (ARUCN) dans dix communautés.
Subventionné par le Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH).

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DEUXIÈME CONFÉRENCE ANNUELLE 20-22 FÉVRIER 2012
SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE FEBRUARY 20-22, 2012
CREE VILLAGE ECOLODGE moose factory, ontario
Main goals of PHM CURA

• To explore interconnections between social, economic, health, political, historical and environmental forces.
  • How these forces relate to northern people’s experiences of homelessness/housing need.
  • How they impact on movements between northern rural, remote communities and urban centres in the near-north.
• Raise awareness of research findings.
• Explore possibilities for change.
Methods

- PHM employs both traditional and innovative research methods including:
  - survey methods, such as period prevalence counts of homeless people
  - policy and documentary analysis
  - qualitative interviewing
  - focus groups/workshops
  - oral history
  - digital methods (photography, video)
  - field research
  - art-based methods.
LIVING ON THE OUTSIDE
a photo exhibit exploring the realities of home
Research activities conducted to date

- Two housing workshops in Sudbury and a design charrette.
- Period prevalence surveys of homelessness in Timmins and North Bay.
- Door-to-door surveys & PPCs in Hearst, Moosonee and Cochrane.
- Photovoice projects conducted in 4 communities.
- Interviews and focus groups in Sudbury, Hearst, North Bay and Moosonee.
- A comprehensive study of family homelessness in Timmins.
- Policy research.
- Documentary film-making with a formerly homeless Cree man.
PHM

Documentary film:

The Will to Live: George Stephen On and Off the Street
Research activities (cont’d)

- Panel study of homeless and formerly homeless persons with experience of mental illness: Sudbury, North Bay, and Timmins.
- Digital storytelling in Sudbury and Moosonee.
- Research and evaluation of the *Iroquois Falls Seniors Apartment Corporation*, an affordable, supported housing project for older adults.
- Narrative study of men with military service.
- Policy studies of housing models.
- Discussion of future plans with community partners.
When you’ve got no place to go, that’s where you go. SHAUNA
“So it’s pretty sad, eh? In a country this rich, you know, this prosperous, to have people really living like that.”
## Community surveys

Do you think poverty and homelessness are problems in your community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% indicating YES</th>
<th>Hearst</th>
<th>Cochrane</th>
<th>Moosonee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOUSING NEED

Dwelling: something more than having a roof over our head and a certain number of square meters at our disposal.
Lack of housing & couch surfing: FN
Poor construction/maintenance:
Fort Albany FN
## Themes in photos and narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sudbury</th>
<th>Cree FNs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping rough</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsanitary conditions</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darkness</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Space</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of housing</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor construction/maintenance</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health impacts</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall findings from our photovoice project:

- Same housing issues/problems evident in Sudbury and Cree communities.
Loss of housing: Sudbury
Definitions of homelessness: High risk & absolute homelessness

- High risk/near homeless/provisionally accommodated:
  - Those who are at substantial risk of being in the street in the immediate future.
  - Those in non-standard, overcrowded or temporary housing.

- Absolute homelessness:
  - Those who are absolutely, periodically, or temporarily without shelter.
  - No place to call home.
  - Staying in a shelter/in makeshift shelters/on the streets.
Poor construction/maintenance: spaces not designed for human habitation
Community surveys and Period prevalence counts (PPC)

• Studies provide information about poverty, housing and the number of homeless people:
  • include absolutely homeless and provisionally accommodated/at-risk.
• Assistance from local agencies in conducting PPCs:
  • shelters, health services, social services, and other services supporting poor and homeless persons.
  • door-to-door community surveys in Hearst, Moosonee, and Cochrane.
PHM methodology for PPCs

• Period prevalence studies provide estimates of the number of homeless people, including those absolutely homeless and at high risk.

• In each study, the same methodology is used to enable comparisons.

• Local agencies conduct a count or census of the homeless population using food services, emergency shelters, social service agencies, and other services supporting this population.
Methodology for PPCs (cont’d)

• A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data from people using each service.
• Each study was conducted for 7 consecutive days.
• Differentiated between absolute and near homelessness.
• Study design allows for the exclusion of duplicate cases.
PHM surveys and PPCs

- Database development began in May 2000:
  - Nine surveys in Sudbury.
  - Timmins, 2011.
  - North Bay, 2011.
  - Hearst, 2011.
  - Cochrane, 2013
- Action research—to provide local knowledge to promote change.
Comparing PPC results on homelessness in northern Ontario

- Unduplicated cases (including children):
  - Sudbury 2002-2009 (urban centre):
    - 2009 — 462
    - 2003 — 608
  - Timmins (pop. 43,165) 2011: 720
  - North Bay (pop. 53,650) 2011: 513
  - Hearst (pop. 5,090), 2011: 71
  - Moosonee (pop. 1,725) 2012: 362
  - Cochrane (pop. 5,295) 2013: 333
PPC Findings from North Bay and Timmins

- Including adults, dependent children/adolescents (n=1233):
  - 30% absolutely homeless
  - 70% at-risk

- 37% - children or adolescents under age 18
- 55% - women

**Key finding**
- A majority of homeless people were women or children/youth
PPC Findings from Hearst, Cochrane and Moosonee

- Including adults, dependent children/adolescents (n=693):
- 13% absolutely homeless
- 87% at-risk

- 47% - children or adolescents under age 18
- 32% - women

**Key finding**
- A majority of homeless people were women or children/youth
Security: Constance Lake FN
Cultural groups and Aboriginal heritage (total homeless sample): cities and towns

Among adults:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Towns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglophones of European heritage</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francophones of European heritage</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal heritage</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Key finding: most homeless people in northern cities have European backgrounds but most homeless people in the northern towns studied are Aboriginal.
### Homeless individuals and families in northern Ontario

**PPC database: Sudbury, Timmins, North Bay and Hearst**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homeless persons</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total sample</strong></td>
<td>3628</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons with children</td>
<td>1062</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons with custody of children</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons with accompanying children</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selected results from our study

**Timmins Family Homelessness**

- Women a majority (81%) of homeless parents/guardians.
- Age range of homeless parents/guardians: 16 to 83 years, average age - 37 years.
- Over a third of homeless families in Timmins were of Indigenous origins (36%).
- A quarter of parents/guardians were single and over a quarter were separated, divorced or widowed.
- Most common family size: 2 children.
- Main sources of income for homeless families:
  - ODSP - 28%
  - employment - 29%
  - other: OW, EI, WSIB
Reasons and factors: family homelessness in Timmins

Homeless parents

*Problems with:*
1. Problems with work
2. Social assistance
3. Family issues (e.g. violence)
4. Housing

Service providers

*Problems with:*
1. Housing
2. Substance use
3. Mental illness
4. Domestic violence
Survey of service providers in Timmins

Major barriers:

• Lack of appropriate, affordable housing.
• Capacity issues in the current service delivery system:
  • Funding issues
  • Need for more staff
  • Restrictive eligibility criteria
  • Large geographic area served.
Solutions proposed by service providers in Timmins

Create, improve or expand:

• Specific services/shelters for homeless families.
• Affordable, decent and subsidized housing.
• Social assistance rates.
• Mental health services.
• Services for addictions issues.
• Culturally sensitive services (for Indigenous people and Francophones).
• Links to services and between services.
Questions or comments?
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