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THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS
OF
PUBLIC HOUSING
IN
METROPOLITAN TORONTO

The Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority

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CHAPTER VIII - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Basic Premise

The conclusions of this study which deal with the attitudes towards public housing of families who have moved out are affected by the move-out rate which exists in the projects under the administration of the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority. If it is considered that these move-out rates are greater than might ordinarily exist in the private rental market, then the data takes on more significance. Conversely, if the move-out rates are considered to be less than the normal private experience, then the data takes on lesser significance. It should be clearly understood that the findings of this study are based essentially on interviews held with those families who have left public housing communities in Metropolitan Toronto.

2. Physical Accommodation and Environment

It would appear, based on the evidence supplied by former tenants, that the public housing communities are essentially satisfactory places to live, at least as far as the majority of tenant families are concerned. It would also appear that the housing projects provide a reasonably satisfactory environment for the majority of the families.

The major satisfaction which tends to keep the family in the public housing project centres around the physical accommodation. As families are given housing to meet their requirements physical overcrowding seldom occurs. The larger units provide accommodation which literally cannot be found anywhere else in the Metropolitan Toronto area. The housing unit, particularly the house type, provides the families with their greatest single satisfaction.

3. Facilities for Children at Projects

This study indicates little dissatisfaction with the facilities provided for children in the housing projects. What was indicated, however, was the projects which are densely child populated produce an irritation with the children in the project. The tenant apparently feels that he is unable to get away from the children. This probably accounts for the action taken on the part of the Tenants' Association in both projects to get community centres with child oriented programmes.

This unconscious reaction to the large number of children seems a clear indication that projects in the future should not attempt to congregate large numbers of large units in one site as in South Regent Park. A larger proportion of houses to apartments seems necessary.

4. Attitude Towards Management

Perhaps it will be surprising, at least to those who administer public housing, that there is a very positive feeling towards the public housing experience of those families who have moved out. Only a very small percentage of this group felt that no housing should be supplied for other families in similar circumstances. More than 90% of the families interviewed felt that some programme of public housing is necessary. The majority of families felt that they had been helped, at least financially, by their public housing experience.

The Housing Authority has for a long time felt that perhaps it interfered too much in the lives of its tenants. This study does not bear out this feeling at all, in fact, there was little expressed dissatisfaction with the control

exerted by the Housing Authority. On the contrary, these families indicated that there was too little control exercised over other families in the community. This group felt that the behaviour of the neighbours should be more strictly supervised. In this latter reaction, however, the expression was by a minority of former residents.

5. Mobility of Public Housing Families

The annual move-out rate for a family in projects under administration is approximately 14%. Such rates are found to be less than that which obtains generally in the private rental market in Canada. More significantly probably is that such rates are less than the move-out rates in public housing in the United States which went as high as 28% in 1954.

While satisfaction with public housing living is possibly the major reason why families stay, it is also likely that the mobility is somewhat restricted by the lack of an alternative choice. The private housing market has been unable to provide this alternative. In order to assess the importance of this lack of an alternative, the satisfactions and dissatisfactions of families remaining in public housing might be studied to determine why they remain in public housing. This might possibly be the next study carried out by the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority.

6. Social Welfare Considerations

One rather disconcerting fact appears in this study which seems to suggest further action by the Housing Authority. This is the fact that the evicted families are substantially the kind of families who should be helped by the public housing programme. They are large families with low incomes containing

both parents. For some reason they have not been able to adjust to living in their new environment. Because these families are probably "troubled" or "problem" families, although they represent a very small percentage of the public housing population, it is possible that they require more time and attention than has been given to them up to the present. It would also suggest that greater efforts to rehabilitate these families are necessary. Co-operation with all essential Welfare Agencies should be established so that greater support and assistance can be provided.

7. Rental Scale

In theory the fact that rent is geared to ability to pay should provide a source of satisfaction. The fact that the monthly rent fits the family's income as that income fluctuates has been thought by many experts to provide the families with an excellent form of social and economic security which other families do not have. In theory, therefore, this should be a major source of satisfaction. In practice this expectation is not realized. Generally speaking there was dissatisfaction expressed on the part of the move-out families with the rental scale. This might have been expected in the upper income ranges where the penalty rent charged in public housing applies. However, many families with very low incomes felt that the rents were too high. This feeling is brought about largely from the establishment of minimum rents, which means that many families are paying too high a proportion of their income in rent.

The real dissatisfaction with the rental scale shows up in those families who refused public housing. They felt that the rents asked by the Authority were not low rental. In fact, when the other move-in charges were added to the first month's rent many families could not afford to move into public housing.

This stated dissatisfaction on the part of move-out families and refusal families indicates that the rental scale does not wholly perform its function certainly as it affects the families on very low incomes. Indications are that the establishment of a new scale, updated to family expenditures of the present time, is an absolute necessity. Such a scale if devised should be based upon a dynamic situation and changed on review periodically rather than haphazardly.

8. High-Rise Buildings

This study does not produce damaging evidence against high-rise apartments within itself. The fact of dissatisfaction with living in elevator buildings is not expressed to any great extent. The move-out rate from the walk-up apartments in Lawrence Heights is greater than in South Regent Park. This can be accounted for by the fact that 1 and 2-bedroom families in Lawrence Heights find it easier to move out than the 3-bedroom families in South Regent Park. Although high-rise buildings seem to provide greater management and maintenance costs to the administration, the excellent physical layout of the actual dwelling unit appears to outweigh all problems in the minds of the tenants. It should be noted that this evidence is based on families who have moved out and not families who continue to live in the projects.

9. Social Stigma

In general, while there was some dissatisfaction expressed with a variety of social factors these did not seem as great as might be expressed by families who voluntarily moved out of public housing. The social factors do not seem to affect the move-out rate to the same degree as the rent and lack of adequate shopping and transportation facilities. Although there was a slight feeling

of stigma attached to public housing it did not seem to manifest itself in many families. In fact, it is probable that the social reactions expressed by these families are no greater than those that might apply in any neighbourhood.

10. Reasons for Refusal

In descending of importance families in apparent need of housing refused for the following reasons:-

- (1) Rent too high
- (2) Lack of transportation and other facilities
- (3) Feeling of social stigma.
- (4) Wrong type of dwelling i.e. apartment instead of house
- (5) Rules and regulations
- (6) Personal and family reasons
- (7) Condition of unit offered

It is interesting to note that the first two reasons were far and away the most important accounting for nearly 60% of all reasons given.