

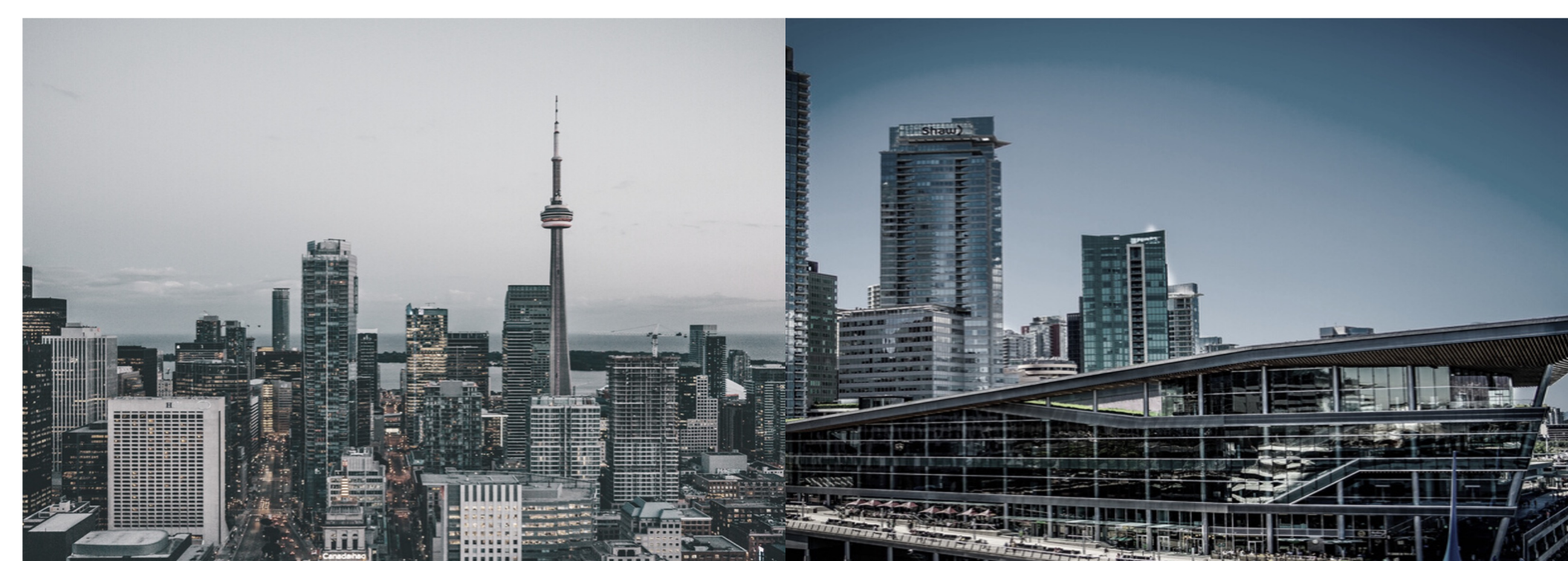
Finding Rooms For Families

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ABSTRACT

This project investigates how the National Occupancy Standards (NOS) influence the housing options of women who have experienced gender-based violence in Vancouver, BC and Toronto, ON. The NOS uses age, gender, and relationships between household members to determine the number of bedrooms they need. Many housing providers in BC use the NOS when allocating housing, whereas providers in Toronto use a two-person per room occupancy limit. We use mixed methods, including qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with women and quantitative analysis of the 2018 Canadian Housing Survey, to understand how occupancy standards impact women's ability to access safe and secure housing after violence. We find that the inflexibility of the NOS creates challenges for families and that women-led households are more likely to be unsuitably housed.



METHODOLOGY

Qualitative

Objective: To explore how the NOS impacts women who are trying to secure safe and affordable housing after fleeing domestic violence.

Data Collection: Purposive sampling to recruit 18 women between 2021-2022. Interviews were conducted via telephone and Zoom.

Data Analysis: Open coding using MAXQDA Qualitative Software.

Participant Demographic	n	%
Age		
20-29	2	11
30-39	8	44
40-49	5	28
50+	3	17
Race		
White	3	17
Visible Minority	15	83
Interview Language		
English	15	83
Spanish	3	17
Number of children		
1	7	39
2	6	33
3	2	11
4+	3	17
Occupancy		
Unsuitably housed as per NOS	10	56
Suitably housed as per NOS	8	44
Type of Housing		
Shelter, Transition, or Second Stage	4	22
Market Rental	8	44
Subsidized	6	33
Metropolitan		
Toronto	3	17
Vancouver	15	83

Quantitative

Objective: To identify determinants of living in unsuitable housing.

Data Collection: 5000 households with dependents (~12,000 individuals) from the 2018 Canadian Housing Survey.

Data Analysis: Logistic regression in conjunction with a gender-based analysis lens.

RESULTS

Qualitative

- Women with adolescent children are more likely to need more space.



Elizabeth, 31, 3 kids

"My only frustration is knowing that we do great if we're all in one room [at the transition house], but when it comes to moving into a home... we're restricted to... 'No, you guys all need a bedroom or your own space.'"

- Subsidized housing waitlists force families to wait for suitable housing.

"I went to apply for a subsidy and there were times when they weren't even accepting applications [because their] waitlist was so full... I was so frustrated because the waitlist is 12 years... what's the point of applying?"



Trisha, 41, 2 kids

- Inflexibility around suitability contributes to the housing precarity of women and children.



Sarah, 34, 1 kid

"[The providers] told me [they] wanted just two people per bedroom, at most... I honestly had to ask my mum to basically leave the place."

Quantitative

Women-led households are **2.54 times** more likely to be unsuitably housed.

People who identify as **non-white** are **more likely** to be unsuitably housed.

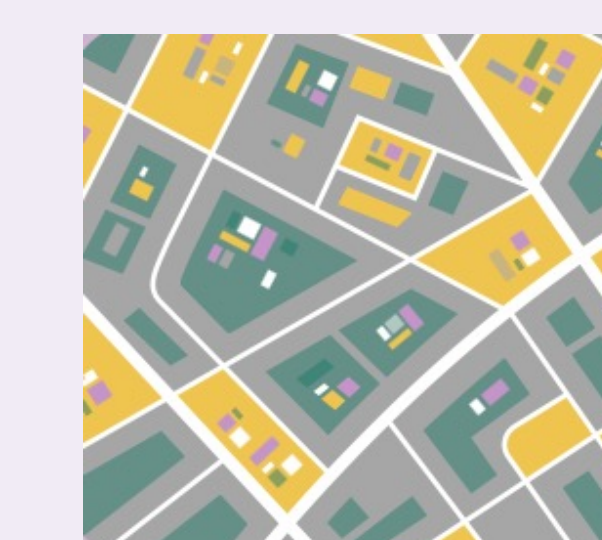
The odds of being unsuitably housed **rise** as **household size** increases.

People living in **social affordable housing** are **less likely** to be unsuitably housed.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Improve housing suitability guidelines to ensure they are rights-based and inclusive of diverse family needs.



Prioritize building 3+ bedroom affordable housing suites in several areas of cities.



Dedicate adequate funding in the anti-violence sector to administer women-centred, violence- and trauma-informed long-term housing.



Educate housing providers and organizations on the need for flexible occupancy standards that recognize the right to housing and prioritize safety and security.

CORE HOUSING NEED

Three measurements are used to determine who is in core housing need:

Affordability Less than 30% of household income is spent on housing.

Adequacy Condition of the home, such as need for major repairs.

Suitability Enough bedrooms for the household as per the NOS.

NATIONAL OCCUPANCY STANDARDS

1 A maximum of 2 persons per bedroom.

2 Couples or partners share a bedroom.

3 Parents in a one-parent family, of any age, have a separate bedroom.

4 Household members aged 18 or over have a separate bedroom — except those living as part of a married or common-law couple.

5 Household members under 18 years old of the same sex may share a bedroom — except lone parents and those living as part of a married or common-law couple.

6 Household members under 5 years old of the opposite sex may share a bedroom if doing so would reduce the number of required bedrooms.

REFERENCES

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