

wonderful teaching example for community organization. They exist because a group of people came together, organized themselves, and secured enough money from the state to build housing, as a direct benefit to themselves and a legacy to their community.

It is clear that housing problems will not disappear as long as 97% of provision is left to the market. It is also clear that co-operative housing is not a panacea nor does it contain more than the seeds to transform housing from a commodity to a right. In the short-term, however, it offers a powerful countervailing force to the market, if not in numbers, by example.

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey G. Reitz, "Ethnic Concentration and Ethnic Inequality," in *The Social Incorporation of Ethnic Groups: A Comparative Study in Toronto*, ed. R. Breton *et al.*, 1989, pp. 229, 281.

<sup>2</sup> Working Group on Employment Equity, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, unpublished data, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Council on Social Development, *Social Policies for the Eighties* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1981), pp. 76-77.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> L.S. Bourne estimates that 3 per cent of housing is in the non-private sector. "Recent Housing Issues in Canada: A Retreat from Social Housing," in *Housing Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, April 1986, pp. 122-126; Sources: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Co-operative Housing Foundation, Ontario Ministry of Housing, Community Services and Housing Committee of Metro Toronto, "Final Report of the Task Force on Housing for Low Income People"; for an overview of housing affordability, *social infopac*, Vol. 6, No. 3, July 1987 (Toronto: Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto).

<sup>6</sup> Michael E. Stone, "The Housing Problem in the United States: Origins and Prospects," in *Socialist Review* Vol. 10, No. 4, (Oakland: New Fronts Publishing Co., 1980), p. 67; Bourne, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> Stone, *op.cit.*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Berry, "Housing Provision and Class Relations Under Capitalism: Some Implications of Recent Marxist Class Analysis," in *Housing Studies*, *op.cit.*, pp. 109-121; Stone, *op.cit.*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Fabricant, "The Political Economy of Homelessness," in *Catalyst*, No. 21, 1987, pp. 15-20; Berry, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>12</sup> Berry, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>13</sup> Stone, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Digby, *Co-operative Housing: Occasional Paper No. 42*, (n.p.: The Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies, 1978), pp. 1-8.

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# Women and Housing

## *A Research Agenda*

BY GERDA R. WEKERLE

**W**omen have become the most vulnerable and desperate group in today's housing market due to their poverty, their reliance on tight rental markets, their responsibility for children, and the discrimination against women with children and women of colour. These critical problems point to a broad research and policy agenda, linking housing to wider social problems, including employment and education policies, availability of childcare and levels of social assistance, systemic discrimination against women, and violence against women and children.

In this brief article, I focus specifically on five priorities for research. Research on women and housing in Canada is fragmentary, often focussing on the situation of one group, such as single parents or the elderly, or on local conditions in one neighbourhood or city. *Women and Housing*, by Jan McClain and Cassie Doyle, published in 1984, is the only profile of women's housing conditions across Canada. While the issues are

still all too current, the 1976 census data on which the book is based, are outdated. Many of the existing studies rely on data collected by others — often Statistics Canada, but also planning or housing agencies.

"Women" is not a unitary category, yet data collected by housing agencies or the census frequently give us only male-female comparisons. The category "women" should be disaggregated to provide more detailed information of the housing needs of single parents, elderly women, women of colour and aboriginal women. It is also important to have these data disaggregated by province as women's experiences differ from province to province and from rural to urban areas.

The first priority then is reliable, accurate, consistent national data on women's housing, which could serve as a baseline for lobbying and policy making at the national and provincial levels. Without a national data base, it is hard to argue that certain provinces are not doing their share or are providing a living envi-

ronment for women that is far below a national standard. A regular updating of census data along the lines of the analysis presented in the McClain and Doyle book is necessary. This would focus on women as housing consumers, and would emphasize the individual rather than the household as a unit of study. It would document the role that housing plays as one of the roots of inequality for women.

McClain and Doyle argue that we need data on women renters, the impact of price levels on women housing consumers, the need for housing assistance, women's use of government programs, intra-family distribution of income, women as principal wage earners in two-parent families, and women using their homes as a workplace. Data on women homeowners, especially data on women's access to mortgage credit, are sketchy. To date, the recommendations made by McClain and Doyle to improve data collection and analysis of data on women and housing have not been taken up by Statistics Canada.

The data collected by Statistics Canada are seldom analyzed to shed light on women's housing experience. The special housing reports published by Statistics Canada use households and not individuals as the unit of analysis, although data on the housing situation of individuals are collected by the census. This more detailed information is only available as special computer runs at a very high cost, inaccessible to women's groups and individuals.

Second, violence against women is behind much of women's homelessness and a contributing factor to women's difficulties in finding affordable shelter. When I was doing research on women's housing projects across the country (*Women's Housing Projects in Eight Canadian Cities*, CMHC, 1988) I asked staff of battered women's shelters where women went after they left the shelter. Few shelters had this information; all said they would like to do follow-up but are hampered by lack of funding, lack of staff

and lack of research skills.

A well-planned study, with a large enough sample to include a range of shelters in different provinces, in rural and urban locations, would be useful to the shelter movement and to public policy makers trying to deal with the interface between violence against women, housing and service structures.

A third priority might be to focus on one region where women's housing problems



have been particularly acute for research on housing discrimination and sexual harassment in housing. Such research would give backup to local women's groups like MUMS (Mothers United for Metro Shelter) in Halifax which raised public consciousness around this issue. It would also provide comparative data, paralleling a current study undertaken by the Ontario Women's Directorate (see "Sexual Harassment of Women Tenants" in this issue) and highlight the common problems faced by women across Canada.

Fourth, the housing plight of aboriginal women both on and off the reserve has perhaps received the least research attention. In the few existing Canadian studies on women and housing, aboriginal women's experiences are missing, although we know from reports of social agencies that this group is doubly disadvantaged in the housing market.

Fifth, a project that publicizes women's housing activities and successes is critical. Over the last ten years, Canadian women's organizations have developed

about 50 housing projects targeted at specific groups of women in need: women coming out of battered women's shelters, single parents, elderly women, aboriginal women. Many groups are isolated, especially those in smaller centres, and new groups in the process of developing housing projects are not able to tap into an existing network of women's housing projects.

A small conference bringing together women who have built or are building housing and organizations active in lobbying for women's housing to share experiences, to network, to talk about successes and strategies, would build on the work of the last decade and move it forward.

Research on women and housing has been conducted on a shoestring. All too frequently, limited funding constrains the questions asked and the research undertaken. Comparative studies, and especially national studies, are expensive.

It is important that agencies within government, such as the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, lobby other government agencies with research budgets and a mandate to conduct research on housing to fund research on women's housing at adequate levels. Statistics Canada, for example, should be providing housing reports on women's housing experience. The agency should consult with existing agencies on the status of women and with women's groups in developing its research methodology. Only when we work more collaboratively and make our research more encompassing can we hope to fill the enormous gaps in our knowledge of women and housing in Canada.

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