



Housing...A Human Right and Path to Well-Being and Empowerment

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Having access to housing that meets one's needs is a fundamental right. Health inequalities, the differences in health outcomes between people in one society, are caused by an unfair distribution of resources, such as housing. Public housing programs are part of the social safety net created to reduce this unequal access to resources.

Reducing health inequalities on a societal level is related to positive outcomes for all, regardless of socioeconomic status. Everyone can benefit from improving public housing tenants' well-being.

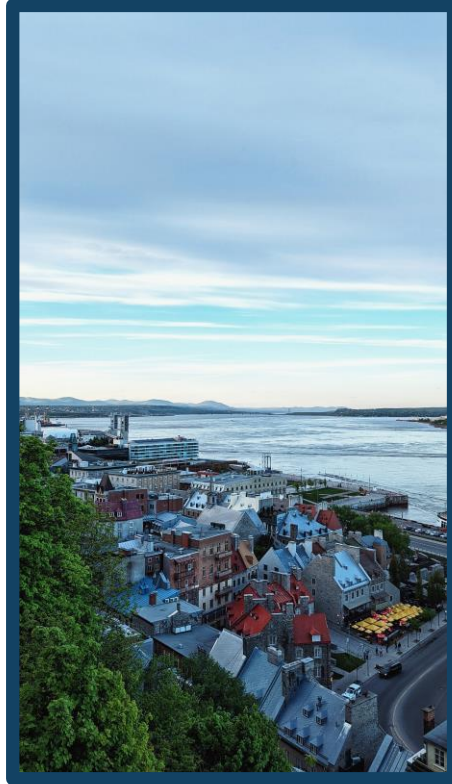


Figure 1 Photograph by Mohammed Abubakr: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/aerial-view-of-city-buildings-near-body-of-water-12267965/> CCO.

“Using a multicase photovoice design is a promising avenue to uncover similar issues across settings managed under the same program while also leaving space for local relevance and action.”

We conducted a photovoice study in six public housing sites in Québec, Canada. The 59 tenant-researchers took pictures of their residential environment (apartment, building, and neighborhood) to share what positively or negatively influenced their well-being.

Highlights

Shortcomings in public housing should be addressed to promote social participation and well-being.

Findings from six different housing sites underline the importance of investing in better building materials, increased maintenance, and community organization to support public housing tenants' participation.

We identified key themes that increased our understanding of the public housing program by comparing findings from six different sites. Tenant-researchers described many aspects of their residential environment that positively influenced their well-being, such as access to green spaces and community resources. The aspects that negatively influenced their well-being were mainly related to life in public housing, such as strict regulations or poor maintenance. This suggests that improvements to the public housing program that would increase tenants' control over their environment could improve their individual and collective well-being.

Methods

In each site, a group of 6 to 13 tenant-researchers took pictures of their residential environment and collectively discussed the pictures during meetings facilitated by the research team. Tenant-researchers also wrote captions to best describe the message they wanted to share about their picture. A research team member analyzed the 303 captioned pictures to identify the key themes about what aspects positively or negatively influenced tenants' well-being.

Results

- Tenant-researchers perceived their residential environment as mostly positive, including good relations among tenants, opportunities for participation, and aspects of their home, such as interior decoration and the right to have pets.
- The negative aspects identified by tenant-researchers focused on life in public housing, including strict regulations, lack of respect for tenants' needs, lack of intimacy, lack of proper maintenance, and conflicts between tenants.
- There are two issues with the public housing program in Québec that should be addressed to improve tenants' well-being: problematic maintenance and limited opportunities for tenants' empowerment.
- When there are significant opportunities to get involved in their residential environment, public housing tenants can contribute important knowledge.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

As researchers in the field of Community Psychology, we conduct studies aligned with our values of equity and social justice. This means we try to reduce the power differentials between the people who participate and those who do the research. Using participatory methods, such as photovoice, allows us to better share the decision-making power in our studies.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: Using an ecological perspective, this study provided information on the relation between public housing tenants' residential environment and their well-being. It also contributes to fill a gap in the literature concerning the public housing program in Québec, Canada.

Practice: The rich and nuanced knowledge gathered by tenant-researchers showed the importance of involving them in decisions about their residential environment. Increasing their control over their environment would also contribute to improving their individual and collective well-being.

Social Action: The negative aspects identified by tenant-researchers concerned mostly the particularities of living in public housing. Changes are needed to ensure that Québec's public housing program achieves its objectives of providing decent housing while promoting tenant participation.

Similar Settings: Researchers should consider using participatory methods that allow people from the community involved in the research to have input. This leads to a better understanding of the issues under study, which can then inform practices, so they are better adapted to the community's needs and aspirations.

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