

Young Parents' Housing Experiences in Two Communities in British Columbia

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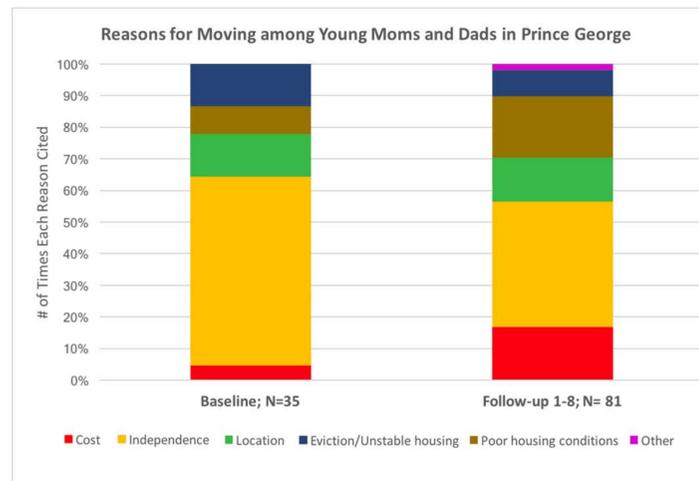
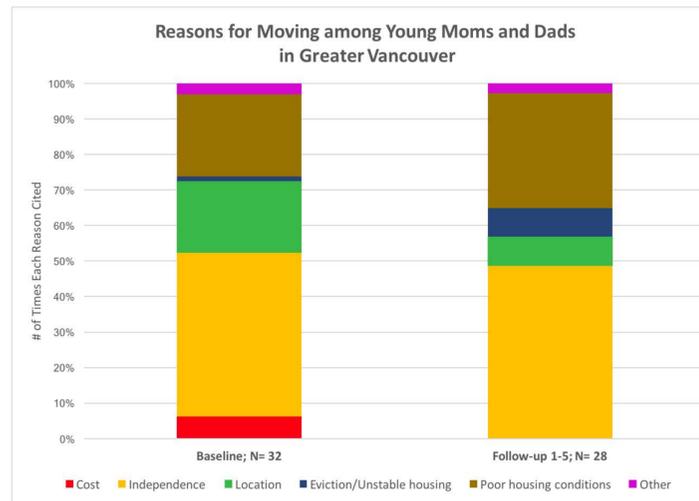
Introduction

Access to safe, healthy, and affordable housing is a key determinant of health and there are special considerations related to housing for the health and well being of young parents and their children. The study characterizes the housing-related experiences of parents (15-24 years) living in British Columbia: Greater Vancouver (GV) and Prince George (PG).

Methods

Data were collected from a longitudinal study of young parents using:

1. Survey questions about whether they had moved in the past 6 months and how long they have lived at their current address; and
 2. In-depth interview questions about their recent housing experiences and their future hopes.
- Interviews were conducted with 113 young parents (n= 51 in GV; n = 62 in PG).



Findings

- A large proportion of young parents in this study reported that they had moved house in the previous 6 months and they reported a variety of reasons for moving:
 - Housing instability (e.g., homelessness, having to move frequently, eviction) and, subsequently, losing custody of children
 - Poor housing conditions (e.g., mold; “renoviction”; demolition)
 - Difficult neighbours or housemates
- Desire for **privacy and independence** in housing: Many young parents in this study lived with their parents or other family members and they desired to head their own households.
- Many couples who wanted to **live together** with their children had difficulty doing so because of government policy that forbids “a spouse in the house”.
- In addition to **high costs of renting**, many other housing-related **costs** affected young parents’ ability to live on their own, including expensive utilities, transportation, and the cost of furnishing apartments.
- Most young parents rely on **transit** and want to live close to transit hubs. Transit hubs are also desirable **locations** for other renters, which drives up prices and limits vacancies.

Conclusions

Despite many challenges, parents in this study expressed optimism about housing in the future. They were keen to assert their autonomy as young parents or to have the opportunity to parent as a couple, rather than as a single parent. They viewed moving to better housing as helping them to pursue better jobs or educational opportunities or social supports elsewhere – or to escape dangerous living conditions. The study findings have implications for municipal, provincial, and federal housing policies. These results also provide evidence to inform the planning and implementation of other health and social services that support the needs of young parents and their children.