

Title: Housing Immigrants and Newcomers in Central Okanagan, BC

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Research Question:

This study examines the housing experiences of new immigrants and the stresses they face in the Central Okanagan Valley (Vernon, Penticton, and Kelowna), as well as the coping strategies of these groups. The key questions in this study are: (1) What barriers/challenges do new immigrants face in securing affordable rental housing? (2) What strategies are immigrants using to cope? and (3) Does ethnic background and race (the colour of one's skin) matter in looking for and locating rental housing in small and mid-sized cities?

Importance:

The successful integration of immigrants into a new society is based on their attainment of several basic needs. One of the most important of these, particularly in the initial stages of settlement, is access to adequate, suitable, and affordable housing. While the Central Okanagan real estate market is one of the most expensive in the country, there is little published data/literature on the housing experiences of immigrants in small and mid-size cities such as Vernon, Penticton and Kelowna.

Research Findings:

The findings suggest that all levels of government must cooperate to help address the affordable housing crisis in Central Okanagan by funding affordable housing construction, regulating and cooperating with developers, facilitating dialogue between landlords and renters, and supporting community organizations. Municipal governments lack both the resources and the constitutional powers to deal with this issue on their own. Although support from the Province of British Columbia has been strong, the contribution of the federal government has been lacking.

Implications:

While the role of immigration as an important engine of economic growth, to say nothing of social change and development, has long been recognized by all levels of government with regard to Canada's major metropolitan centres—Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver—there has been significantly less attention paid to this phenomenon in terms of the country's small and mid-size cities. This exploratory study points out the need for more comparative studies on the housing experiences of immigrants in small and mid-size cities in Canada in order to better understand which groups of immigrants are more successful than others in finding affordable housing—a key factor in successful integration—and why.