

THE SELF-HELP POTENTIAL OF  
SINGLE PARENT PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS

by  
Catherine M. Auld

A Thesis

submitted to the Faculty of Graduate  
Studies in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree  
of Master of City Planning

Department of City Planning  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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## ABSTRACT

Families headed by one parent are a major component in the changing picture of households in Canada. This thesis arises out of a specific concern for the stresses affecting families headed by women. Research and services must address the circumstances of these family units, but not to the exclusion of other groups in society.

This study focuses on the self-help potential of a particular group of female single parents who live in government subsidized housing in Winnipeg. Their identification of their particular strengths and requirements is particularly useful as a starting point for planning in the context of the non-traditional family unit.

The research conducted for this thesis draws heavily on the experiences of twenty-five single parents who were interviewed during the course of the project investigation. The inquiry was designed to obtain an intimate look at the lives of mother-led families from their own viewpoints. Methodology has been well developed to obtain information from specific groups in society using a variety of interviewing techniques. Guidelines are scarce, however, for the conduct and phrasing of inquiry that has the following characteristics: information of a highly experiential kind; reluctance on the part of over-studied groups in society; and difficulties in involving the participants when they see little or no value in it for themselves. The various techniques described in this thesis (e.g. making contact with people, setting up the interview format and schedule, etc.) contribute to guidelines for further inquiry. The research approach used clearly has much to offer in terms of new understanding of the values and perspectives of people who planners will eventually be involved with in planning.

The recommendations that come out of this inquiry relate to the areas of income, discrimination, community support, and

housing. The author has accepted as authentic the statements of the parents that their proven capacity to change their own circumstances can be extended to their useful involvement in spelling out the policies and programs that might serve them best.

A number of areas have been identified as deserving of further inquiry. As a follow-up to this research endeavour, continued work with the twenty-five women whose experiences provided the core of this thesis is currently underway.

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# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

The composition of Canadian households is changing. The conventional family unit, consisting of two parents and children, still comprises the majority of family households. Yet certain non-conventional types of family lifestyles are emerging, often as a result of family dissolution or family reformation.

The post-war suburbs assumed one set of family conditions for child-rearing, and the physical environment incorporated these assumptions. The prototype suburban family - father in the labour force, mother at home full-time, ownership of a ground level home with private open space, two - four children, homogenous neighbours - is no longer the dominant reality of suburban life ... What do we have instead? The post-war suburbs always included families and individuals whose life situations did not correspond to the prototype perceptions. But they were seen as exceptions to the general trend. Public frameworks of response which developed in suburban municipalities in the post-war period, were not particularly sensitive to the special needs of dependent social minorities. The exceptions to the prototype image started to increase ... The traditional suburban neighbourhood may remain physically intact, but it is no longer the same social environment as in earlier days. Within it, around it, at the periphery, in local schools, in neighbourhoods nearby, are the visible signs of social transformation ... There reaches a stage when the scale of the exceptions can no longer be ignored for they have in fact become an integral part of the community (Metro's Suburbs in Transition, 1979: 236).

Families headed by one parent are a major component in the changing picture of households in Canada. Their situation will be examined in detail in this thesis. Research and services must address the circumstances of these family units, but not to the exclusion of other groups in society.

The proliferation of one-parent families in Canada has been the subject of a number of recent Statistics Canada reports. (Canada's Families, 1979; Children in Canadian Families, 1979 and Single Parent Families in Canada, 1979). Statistics reveal that this group increased by almost 82,000 between 1971 and 1976, consists largely of female-headed units (83%), and that more and more often the circumstances leading to the formation of these households are those involving a divorce. Unfortunately no one has gone beyond mere accounting of the growing numbers of lone parents. There is a lack of research addressing issues such as: the economic impact on community services; housing market demand; effects on children; psychological and social stresses; etc. In short, this group can no longer be viewed as exceptional, for whom a new approach to planning is necessary. Single parent families cannot be considered adequately in isolation from others.

Official demographic statistics do not permit in-depth examination of some important characteristics of this group, whose vulnerability must be seen in light of social and economic stresses. These stresses have been aptly demonstrated by various studies. (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1971; The Disadvantaged Woman, 1975; National Council of Welfare, 1979), and have been highlighted in reports of national Commissions on the status of women and poverty.

This thesis arises out of a specific concern for the stresses affecting families headed by women. Both economic and social burdens of this group have been well documented and will be described fully in Chapter Two. Nevertheless, there is little public awareness as to how the collective burdens of this group might be more equitably shared by the rest of society. Many of the social conditions and problems which are most significant to one-parent families do not affect them

alone, but are shared by other Canadians, including working women, particularly mothers, other Canadian families with young children and Canadian families who have relatively low incomes. Policies to assist the one-parent family should not be developed therefore, in isolation when categories of social need overlap. (McArton, 1975). The aim of social policy should be justice for all.

Having outlined the premises of this research, a few specifics are in order. This study focuses on the self-help potential of a particular group of female single parents who live in government subsidized housing in Winnipeg. As a low income group, they are subject to labels which are applied to those in society who are without sufficient resources to cope unaided on the private housing market. The factor that defines them as "poor" is a lack of adequate income in relation to their needs.

This research challenges some of the assumptions which have been directed to this group in the past, and which have tended to further isolate them as a segment of the population. For example, the case has been made that where shelter is concerned, single parent families have special problems and special needs which are not met by the design, location and environment of much of the urban housing stock. (C.M.H.C. memo, Dec. 20, 1976). This line of reasoning lends itself to ghetto-izing single parents in particular housing sites rather than changing the standards for adequate housing and housing related programs for family housing.

The research conducted for this thesis draws heavily on the experience of twenty-five single parents who were interviewed during the course of the project investigation. Their identification of their particular strengths and requirements is particularly useful as a starting point for planning for the non-traditional family unit. It is

hoped that consideration of many of the major social problems facing one-parent families - for example, inadequate income, discrimination and a lack of child care arrangements - will lead to recognition that policies and practices significantly affecting them also affect other major groups in our society.

The next chapter of this thesis focuses on single parents as a phenomenon in Canadian society. A socio-economic profile of the group is presented, on a national scale, and also with particular facts pertinent to the Winnipeg situation.

Chapter Two is an extensive literature review of studies on single parents. The materials have been drawn from a number of different areas, and have never been drawn together before. This is because the one-parent family phenomenon has rarely been taken as a focus of research in and of itself. This effort indicates both how much and how little is known about the subject. Chapter Two ends with a discussion of major conclusions and recommendations outlined in the literature. These are examined in light of the present research objectives and gaps are identified for future consideration.

The research design forms the basis for Chapter Three. The site and respondent selection processes will be explained, as well as the interview format, in terms of its applicability and its limitations.

Chapter Four presents the interview findings. The data are then analyzed for applicability to support systems geared to single parents.

A number of directed recommendations are outlined in Chapter Five. These recommendations are linked as closely as possible to agencies which have some potential for dealing with the one-parent family, since the problem of jurisdictions is a factor which complicates the implementation of relevant services and facilities for any target

population. This final chapter outlines some considerations for change with respect to this group. These should not be considered as conclusions, but rather as the beginning for concerted efforts at further work in this area.

Throughout this report the terms "one-parent family", "lone-parent family", "single parent family", and "sole parent" will be used interchangeably to refer to the household situation of primarily a mother and her children living alone. A one-parent family may also refer to a male-headed family, but this research is principally concerned with the households headed by women alone. The focus of this study is to look at the social and economic stresses to which this group is subject. As the next chapter explains, women sole parents run a high risk of poverty. The possible effects on children of being reared in a fatherless home relate to this lowered income potential, and to the social stresses which accompany the full burden of one parent dealing with child care, decision-making, etc.

It is also important to establish at the outset that there are varied circumstances which create one-parent families. People who are divorced, separated, widowed, or who have never married, and their dependent children all are grouped under the same category. As the next chapter will show, of these internal variances, numbers of divorced, separated, and never married heads are increasing in proportion to the widowed population.

**Chapter One:**  
**BACKGROUND TO THE INQUIRY**

## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE INQUIRY

This chapter provides a statistical framework of Canadian one-parent families. Changes in their internal composition over time are highlighted. References to male as opposed to female heads of one-parent families are used for purposes of comparison only, and should not be interpreted as the primary research interest. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this thesis focuses on the situation of families led by women.

"The sole-support family is a permanent, well-defined feature of the Canadian society" (Menzies, 1976:1). Recent interest focused on this group<sup>1</sup> might lead to the conclusion that they represent a new phenomenon but this is not the case. Rather, families headed by one parent have existed throughout history, in one form or another. During the Second World War, for example, the proportion of one-parent led families relative to husband-wife families was higher than exists today. These families were likely the result of the absence or even death of a spouse involved in the War. The higher death rate of earlier periods due to disease also account for the incidence of one-parent families in Canada.

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1. Refer to sample advertisement, Appendix A.



### Family Composition

In 1941 the proportions of husband-wife and lone-parent families were 87.8% and 12.2% respectively. After the Second World War the incidence of husband-wife families increased, both in numbers and as a proportion of all family types. This trend continued until about 1966. Even though the proportion of husband-wife families has declined somewhat since then, their numbers have continued to increase, and they still form about 90% of all families in Canada. (See Table 1).

One-parent families have increased consistently since 1961. By 1971 they constituted 9.4% of all families, and in 1976, the last year for which figures are available, they represented almost 10% of all families in Canada. Although this may appear to be a small proportion of total families, it is important to note that this group has been growing in recent years. (See Table 2.).

In 1976 there were 5 3/4 million families in Canada. Of that number, 1/2 million were one-parent families, an increase of about 80,000 since the 1971 census. This represents a percentage increase of approximately 17%. In the same period of time, husband-wife families increased by only 13%. (1976 Census of Canada Cat. 93-822, Table 6).

### Women as Heads

A fundamental fact about one-parent families is that in 83% of them, the parent is a woman. During the period from 1971 to 1976, the number of female-headed families increased by 23.1% whereas the percentage of male parents actually dropped by 5.4%. There are several reasons why the majority of these parents are women. First, there is the matter of widowhood. The difference in death rates between men and women are seen in the fact that over a third of all

**Table 1 :**  
**Husband / Wife and One Parent Families in Canada ,**  
**1941 -1976.**

Family Structure		1941	1951	1956	
Total family heads	#	2,509,664	3,287,384	3,711,500	
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Husband and wife both at home	#	2,202,707	2,961,685	3,393,061	
	%	87.8	90.1	91.4	
One parent only at home (including one- parent "married" heads)	#	306,957	325,699	318,439	
	%	12.1	9.9	8.6	
		1961	1966	1971	1976
Total family heads	#	4,147,444	4,526,266	5,070,680	5,727,895
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Husband and wife both at home	#	3,800,026	4,154,381	4,591,940	5,168,560
	%	91.6	91.8	90.6	90.2
One parent only at home (including one- parent "married" heads)	#	347,418	371,885	478,740	559,335
	%	8.4	8.2	9.4	9.8

Source: Children in Canadian Families, 1979: Table 12, p. 80.

**Table 2 :**  
**Single Parent Families in Canada by Sex of Head**  
**1951 -1976**

	Female head		Male head	
	Number	Per cent of all families	Number	Per cent of all families
1951	250,942	7.6	74,757	2.3
1956	243,465	6.6	74,975	2.0
1961	272,215	6.6	75,203	1.8
1966	300,383	6.6	71,502	1.6
1971	378,065	7.5	100,675 (1)	2.0(1)
1976	464,345	8.1	94,990	1.7

(1) This is an apparent overestimation in the 1971 census data. Contributing factors could have been: the change from enumeration by census representatives to self-enumeration, a change in reporting by respondents, certain data processing procedures, etc.

Source: Statistics Canada Consumer Income and Expenditure Division  
Single parent families in Canada, 1977; Table 1, page 8.

sole parents (34.5%) are widows. Another important reason is that women often obtain custody of dependent children when marriages end. Therefore separated and divorced women and their children form a high percentage of all one-parent households (39.2%). In the case of children born to unwed couples parenthood is most often assumed by mothers. This too adds to the high overall proportion of female as opposed to male sole parents.

### Changing Composition

"The largest contributions to the growing numbers of lone-parent families have been made by separated, divorced and never-married mothers who are increasingly in the younger ages, and who have dependent children still living at home" (Statistics Canada, Children in Canadian Families, 1979:37). Thus it can be seen that along with the general increase in the number of one-parent families in recent years, certain characteristics in the composition of the group are changing. Clearly the marital status of female heads has shifted away from widows to divorcees. (Table 3.). Peters (1976) points to a number of social factors that have contributed to the current divorce rate in Canada and that suggest its continued increase.

Nonetheless, recent rates of separation and divorce among the young especially mean that there are currently high numbers of young mothers who are responsible for supporting their children alone. There have been dramatic increases in the number of never-married parents, primarily mothers of children born out of wedlock in the past twenty years as well. The number of never-married family heads grew more than four-fold between 1961 and 1976. Once again this growth can be linked to social factors. As a recent report describes: "... a real growth in such families can be attributed to the sexual and marital status revolutions of the 1960's. In the latter decade

**Table 3 :**  
**Single Parent Families Family Heads in Canada**  
**by Sex and Marital Status , 1966 , 1971 and 1976**

	1966		1971		1976	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Females:						
Married, spouse not present:						
(a) Separated			104,190	27.6	121,845	26.2
(b) Other	87,540	29.1	18,255	4.8	17,415	3.8
Widowed	186,807	62.2	184,555	48.8	193,055	41.6
Divorced	18,621	6.2	46,615	12.3	97,245	20.9
Never Married	7,415	2.5	24,445	6.5	34,790	7.5
<u>Total</u>	300,383	100.0	378,060	100.0	464,350	100.0
Males:						
Married, spouse not present:						
(a) Separated			25,510	25.3	24,185	25.5
(b) Other	24,511	34.3	13,335	13.2	12,175	12.8
Widowed	40,143	56.1	38,070	37.8	36,470	38.4
Divorced	3,494	4.9	11,260	11.2	17,355	18.3
Never Married	3,354	4.7	12,500	12.4	4,805	5.1
<u>Total</u>	71,502	100.0	100,675(1)	100.0	94,990	100.0

(1) See footnote in Table 2.

Source: 1B1D Table 11 page 9.

births defined as "illegitimate" in the Canadian vital statistics rose despite drastic declines in marital and in over-all fertility in Canada. There was an observable trend towards the parenting and rearing of such "illegitimate" children, mostly by unwed mothers, and an unprecedented acceptance of such families by society at large" (Statistics Canada, Children in Canadian Families, 1979:39).

### Family Characteristics

Single parents are becoming more concentrated in the younger age groups, (See Table 4), yet only a minority of children in these households are under six years of age. (15.4% in 1976). This is consistent with the lowered birth rate in all family types mentioned above. The implications of having fewer children in the very dependent age category are important when considering women's potential participation in the labour force. This will be discussed in greater detail later in this study.

In terms of family size, both husband-wife families and one-parent families have experienced similar changes in the past decade. In both family types there was an increase in one-child families in the period from 1971 to 1976, but the proportion of one-parent families with one child at home is still much higher than in the two-parent household (i.e. 50.8% versus 30.6%). According to the Canadian vital statistics, the highest proportion of divorces involving dependent children (i.e. defined as those under 16 years of age and/or those who are incapacitated and totally dependent on their parents) have been those involving one child. (Statistics Canada, Children in Canadian Families, 1979:42). In both family types the number of families with three or more children has declined, pointing toward the gradual eclipse of the "traditional" large family stereotype.

**Table 4 :**  
**Percentage Distribution of Single Parent Families**  
**by Age , Sex of Head , 1966 , 1971 and 1976**

	Male head			Female head		
	1966	1971	1976	1966	1971	1976
Age of head:						
Under 25 years	3.4	4.3	3.4	4.2	6.6	7.1
25-34 years	7.8	17.1	12.9	12.1	17.6	21.2
35-44 years	17.0	22.3	22.7	19.8	20.6	21.6
45-54 years	22.3	22.2	26.0	22.8	22.6	21.4
55-64 years	18.6	15.8	16.9	16.8	15.7	14.2
65 and over	30.9	18.3	18.0	24.3	16.7	14.6
<u>Total</u>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: 1966 Census of Canada, Vol. 11, Table 79.  
 1971 Census of Canada, Vol. 11, Tables 76 and 77  
 (revised).  
 1976 Census of Canada, Vol. 4, Table 25.

### The Economic Situation

The picture of one-parent families in Canada, as described in the previous section, is incomplete. While it is important to recognize the various demographic trends (for example: the shift in numbers of young female heads and their marital status) which come into focus in this discussion, it is also necessary to examine the implications of these trends for the lives of one-parent families themselves. Just what are the economic resources available to lone parents and their children? A number of recent Canadian studies focus on the differences in income of families with two parents or with only one parent present, and also according to their age, sex, marital status and other characteristics (MacLeod, 1977; Boyd, 1977; Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1978; National Council of Welfare, 1979; Economic Council of Canada, 1979). One major analytical work (Podoluk, 1968) essentially pioneered the use of census data on income for this type of research. It has been followed up by studies which utilize more recent data. These studies will be described fully in Chapter 2.

Using an economic family definition<sup>1</sup> as opposed to a census family definition<sup>2</sup> is generally the accepted method for income analysis. The principle is to group all related individuals, not only parents and children, living in the same dwelling into one group and call it a family. Past research shows that this more broadly based

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1. A group of individuals sharing a common dwelling unit and related by blood, marriage or adoption.

2. A married couple with or without never-married children living in the same dwelling, or a lone-parent living with one or more never-married children.



definition accounts for the pooling of income which usually accompanies living with relatives. (Single Parent Families in Canada, 1979:15). It is those remaining as single parent families when an economic family definition is applied which are discussed in this section. By separating out those who have access to other shared financial resources, no matter how limited, it emphasizes the lot of those who are truly on their own.

### Income and Employment

The average income for all families throughout Canada was \$20,101 in 1977. For male headed one-parent families, the corresponding figure was \$17,846, somewhat below that of all families. But for female headed one-parent families the figure was only \$10,961, about 55% of what all families had in that year (Statistics Canada Cat. 13-207, 1977: Table 2). A quarter (25.8%) of all families headed by women had incomes of less than \$5,000 in 1977. Only 7.7% of one-parent families headed by men were in this income category, and as might be expected even fewer households with more than one potential income earner (6.2%) fell in this range. (See Table 5.).

Income adequacy is obviously very much geared to income earning potential. A household with more than one wage earner stands a better chance of having more earned income. This does not explain why male and female one-parent families have vastly different average incomes, however. The fact remains that one-parent families headed by women occupy a higher proportion of lower income groups than their male counterparts. Statistics on labour force participation provide some important information on this.

Fewer women (46.8%) than men (73.5%) who were heads of one-parent families in 1976 were in the labour force. A major

**Table 5 : Percentage Distribution of Single Parent Families  
by Sex of Family Head and All Families by Income  
Size Groups , Selected Years ( Economic Family Defn. )**

Family income size group Tranches de revenu des familles	Single parent families Familles monoparentales								All families Ensemble des familles			
	Female head Chef féminin				Male head Chef masculin							
	1967	1973	1975	1977	1967	1973	1975	1977	1967	1973	1975	1977
	Under \$1,000 - Moins de \$1,000	8.3	11.2	6.5	7.3	2.3	3.8	2.3	1.0	1.9	2.3	1.6
\$ 1,000 - \$ 1,999	11.7				10.3				3.9			
2,000 - 2,999	15.1	9.9	4.9	2.6	6.8	3.3	2.5	2.3	7.4	2.7	1.2	0.8
3,000 - 3,999	13.9	12.5	9.7	5.4	9.1	4.2	3.3	3.1	7.7	3.9	2.4	1.6
4,000 - 4,999	10.9	11.9	11.9	10.5	12.0	4.6	3.0	1.3	8.8	4.9	3.2	2.3
5,000 - 5,999	11.3	8.8	10.0	9.1	13.3	4.4	2.6	1.6	10.9	4.6	4.0	2.9
6,000 - 6,999	10.0	6.5	7.6	6.4	11.4	2.0	5.5	2.9	11.1	4.6	3.7	2.8
7,000 - 7,999	5.4	6.8	6.7	5.7	6.8	5.6	4.5	2.4	10.3	5.3	3.3	3.0
8,000 - 8,999		6.3	5.3	4.9		6.6	3.6	3.2		5.9	3.6	2.6
9,000 - 9,999	6.8	5.0	5.6	3.9	10.6	9.9	7.6	2.7	15.5	6.0	3.5	2.5
10,000 - 10,999		5.0	5.1	5.0		8.2	5.8	4.3		6.5	4.2	2.9
11,000 - 11,999		3.1	4.5	3.6		5.8	3.5	4.4		6.0	4.7	2.9
12,000 - 12,999	4.1	3.2	3.0	3.9	12.4	9.1	2.7	4.8	16.6	6.2	4.9	3.2
13,000 - 13,999		1.5	3.4	4.1		4.2	3.3	2.6		5.3	4.8	3.7
14,000 - 14,999		1.5	3.5	3.4		7.9	5.2	4.3		5.2	4.9	3.5
15,000 - 16,999		1.7	3.2	5.1		5.6	10.3	11.5		8.3	9.3	7.7
17,000 - 19,999	2.3	2.0	4.0	6.1	5.2	6.1	8.2	12.1	6.0	9.0	11.8	11.5
20,000 - 24,999		2.1	3.1	6.6		3.0	11.9	15.4		7.3	14.1	16.0
25,000 and over - et plus		1.0	2.0	6.6		5.5	14.4	20.0		5.9	15.0	28.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Estimated numbers - Nombre estimatif (000's)	236	342	372	427	40	58	66	75	4,517	5,229	5,610	5,866
Average family income - Revenu familial moyen \$	4,723	6,841	8,577	10,961	6,700	12,102	15,287	17,846	7,602	12,716	16,604	20,101
Median family income - Revenu familial médian \$	4,088	5,511	7,096	8,612	5,707	10,678	13,991	16,548	6,839	11,533	15,058	18,591
Sample size - Taille de l'échantillon	913	1,295	1,327	1,840	164	205	240	343	18,143	20,496	20,458	27,975

Sources: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 13-207 (1973, 1975 and 1977).

Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Catalogue 13-534 (1967).

Sources: Publication n° 13-207 au catalogue de Statistique Canada (1973, 1975 et 1977).

Publication n° 13-534 au catalogue du Bureau fédérale de la statistique.

deterrent to a woman entering the labour force is the presence of young children. Almost a third (31.6%) of female one-parent families have at least one child aged under 15. The decision by these women to work only part-time, or to stay at home with their children and rely on social assistance results in lowered earning power relative to their male counterparts. This is not to suggest that it is necessarily a matter of choice as compared to necessity involved in a woman's decision to seek employment. A recent study (Boyd, 1977) shows that, not surprisingly, divorced and separated women are increasingly in the labour force as breadwinners. Boyd's data indicates that labour force participation rates were much higher for separated and divorced women than those for married women, even when small children were present. Income from employment, according to the study, was the major source of income for many separated and divorced women. Unfortunately, though, that income is exceedingly low. Separated and divorced women respectively earn between 44% and 55% of income earned by married males, and 55% and 65% of the income of separated and divorced men (Boyd, 1977).

"The biggest single and continuing problem of the sole-support mother is a basic financial insecurity and a subsistence level of living which she has no real hope of improving" (Menziés, 1976:2). The importance of these facts is understandable when the expenditures required in families with only one parent in the labour force are taken into account. "The study of family income based on economic family statistics demonstrates conclusively that although the incidence of female-headed families in poverty has changed very little from 1967-1975, and may even have declined from 1975-1977. Their position seems to have worsened, when compared with the improvements for other families over the period 1967-1977" (Children in Canadian Families, 1979:49-50). Families "in poverty" are families with income below the "low income cut-offs". (See Appendix B). Approximately 187,000

or 43.7% of single parent families with female heads and 9,000 or 11.7% of single parent families with male heads had in 1977 incomes below "the poverty line". This compares, quite unfavourably in the case of women supporting their families, to an estimated overall incidence of 11.2% for all families that same year (Single parent families in Canada, 1977: 24).

### The One-Parent Family in Winnipeg

The statistics presented and interpreted thus far have concentrated on national trends relevant to the continuing evolution of one-parent families. It is imperative that the local situation also be monitored in order to identify possible discrepancies or inconsistencies for the total picture of family life in Canada. One of the specific objectives of this research is to describe the incidence and some of the characteristics of one-parent families. With this in mind, a detailed profile of the one-parent family in Winnipeg is laid out in this section.

In order to put together an accurate picture of household composition in Winnipeg it was necessary to obtain special tabulations of 1971 and 1976 Census data.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this lies in the City of Winnipeg Act. In July 1971 a new form of civic government was created for Winnipeg, which included 11 previously designated municipalities in addition to the old city of Winnipeg. These legal boundary changes have essentially made June 1971 census data (i.e. pre-Uncity) inappropriate for comparison with 1976 data (i.e. post-Uncity).

Figures on the incidence of one-parent family households in Winnipeg for the years 1971 and 1976 are shown in Table 6. A

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1. These were provided to the author by H. Stevens, Senior Researcher, Winnipeg Social Planning Council, September 1979.

**Table 6 : The Incidence of One-Parent Family Households in Winnipeg for 1971 and 1976 by Selected Characteristics of the Household Head**

All	No. /		No. /		Change 1971-1976
	No.	%	1000	%	
-Single	1,120	08.7	1,495	10.6	+ 1.9
-Sep/Div	5,840	44.8	7,970	56.3	+11.5
-Widowed	6,265	48.1	5,780	40.9	- 7.2
-Married	117,025	898.4	126,215	892.2	-6.2
Total	130,260	1000.0	141,460	1000.0	-0.62

Source: Special tabulations of 1971 and 1976 census data

**Table 7 : The Incidence of One-Parent Family Households  
in Winnipeg for 1971 and 1976 by Sex of Head**

All	No. /			All	No. /			Change	
	No.	1000	%		No.	1000	%	1971-1976	
-Single	340	2.6	0.26	-Single	195	1.4	0.14	- 1.2	-0.12
-Sep/Div	1,010	7.7	0.77	-Sep/Div	1,045	7.4	0.74	- 7.2	-0.72
-Widowed	1,010	7.7	0.77	-Widowed	860	6.1	0.61	- 6.2	-0.62
Total	2,360	18.0	1.8	Total	2,100	14.9	1.49	-3.1	-0.31

Females	No. /			Females	No. /				
	No.	1000	%		No.	1000	%		
-Single	790	6.1	0.61	-Single	1,300	9.2	0.92	+ 3.1	+0.31
-Sep/Div	4,830	37.1	3.71	-Sep/Div	6,930	49.0	4.90	+11.9	+1.19
-Widowed	5,255	40.3	4.03	-Widowed	4,925	34.8	3.48	- 5.5	-0.55
Total	10,875	83.5	8.35	Total	13,155	93.0	9.3	+ 9.5	+0.95

Source: Special tabulations of 1971 and 1976 census data.

reading of this table reveals an overall increase in the number of one-parent families from 13,225 to 15,245. As a percentage of all family households this indicates a rise from 10.2% in 1971 to 10.8% in 1976. The corresponding national percentages, as stated earlier in this chapter, were 9.4 in 1971 and 9.8 in 1976.

Even though the number of widowed family households dropped from 48.1 per thousand to 40.9, there was still a net increase in the number of one-parent headed families due to the increased numbers of those classified as divorced or separated. (See Table 7). This once again is consistent with national trends. Separated/divorced one-parent households grew by 32% from 1971 to 1976. In that same five year period, by comparison, the number of single/never-married households exhibited the fastest rate of increase. They experienced a 51% increase, but currently still maintain a low proportion of all one-parent families.

There were fewer male-headed one-parent families in Winnipeg in 1976. (See Table 7). Accordingly, the proportion of female-headed households rose to 86.2% of all one-parent family households in 1976, an increase over their 82.3% share in 1971.

Among the female-headed households, those with children under 13 years of age primarily are increasing in number. (See Table 8). Of particular interest is that the incidence of very young female heads aged 15 to 24, shows the highest increase. (56% increase 1971-1976). This reinforces the national trend of younger one-parent family heads. The largest number of these heads still fall in the 24 to 44 age group however (65%). (See Table 9).

#### Employment and Income in Winnipeg

Critical to the well-being of any household is the employment status of its head and the level of income it enjoys as a result of that employment status. According to the 1976 census, 70% of male

**Table 8 : One-Parent Family Households  
by Presence of Children 0-12 and Sex of Head**

Household Type	1971			1976			Change	
	No.	No./1000	%	No.	No.1000	%	1971-1976	
<u>No Children</u> <u>0-12</u>								
<u>Males</u>								
-Single	90	0.7	0.07	55	0.4	0.04	-0.3	-0.03
-Sep/Div.	430	3.3	0.33	515	3.6	0.36	+0.3	+0.03
-Widowed	<u>795</u>	<u>6.1</u>	<u>0.61</u>	<u>685</u>	<u>4.8</u>	<u>0.48</u>	<u>-1.3</u>	<u>-0.13</u>
Total	1,315	10.1	1.01	1,255	8.8	0.88	-1.3	-0.13
<u>Females</u>								
-Single	150	1.1	0.11	150	1.1	0.11	0.0	0.0
-Sep/Div.	1,605	12.3	1.23	2,275	16.1	1.61	+3.8	+0.38
-Widowed	<u>4,110</u>	<u>31.5</u>	<u>3.15</u>	<u>4,040</u>	<u>28.6</u>	<u>2.86</u>	<u>-2.9</u>	<u>-0.29</u>
Total	5,865	44.9	4.49	6,465	45.8	4.50	+0.9	+0.09
<u>1+ Children</u> <u>0-12</u>								
<u>Males</u>								
-Single	245	1.9	0.19	145	1.0	0.10	-0.9	-0.09
-Sep/Div.	580	4.4	0.44	530	3.7	0.37	-0.7	-0.07
-Widowed	<u>225</u>	<u>1.7</u>	<u>0.17</u>	<u>175</u>	<u>1.2</u>	<u>0.12</u>	<u>-0.5</u>	<u>-0.05</u>
Total	1,050	8.0	0.8	850	5.9	0.59	-2.1	-0.21
<u>Females</u>								
-Single	640	4.9	0.49	1,150	8.1	0.81	+3.2	+0.32
-Sep/Div.	3,230	24.8	2.48	4,660	32.9	3.29	+8.1	+0.81
-Widowed	<u>1,145</u>	<u>8.8</u>	<u>0.88</u>	<u>875</u>	<u>6.2</u>	<u>0.62</u>	<u>-2.6</u>	<u>-0.26</u>
Total	5,015	38.5	3.85	6,685	47.2	4.72	+8.7	+0.87

Source: Special Tabulations of 1971 and 1976 Census Data.



**Table 9 : Female - Headed One-Parent Households  
with Children 0-12 by Age of Head**

Household Type	1971			1976			Change	
	No.	No./1000	%	No.	No./1000	%	1971-1976	
<u>Females /</u>								
<u>1+ Children 0-12</u>								
<u>15-24 Years</u>								
-Single	260	2.0	0.20	530	3.7	0.37	+1.7	+0.17
-Sep/Div.	355	2.7	0.27	520	3.7	0.37	+1.0	+0.10
-Widowed	<u>15</u>	<u>0.1</u>	<u>0.01</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>0.1</u>	<u>0.01</u>	<u>0.0</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Total	630	4.8	0.48	1,070	7.5	0.75	+2.7	+0.27
<u>25-44 Years</u>								
-Single	350	2.7	0.27	575	4.1	0.41	+1.4	+0.14
-Sep/Div.	2,430	18.6	1.86	3,620	25.6	2.56	+7.0	-0.70
-Widowed	<u>495</u>	<u>3.8</u>	<u>0.38</u>	<u>380</u>	<u>2.7</u>	<u>0.27</u>	<u>-1.1</u>	<u>-0.11</u>
Total	3,275	25.1	2.51	4,575	32.4	3.24	+7.3	+0.73
<u>45-64 Years</u>								
-Single	30	0.2	0.02	35	0.2	0.02	0.0	0.00
-Sep/Div.	440	3.4	0.34	505	3.6	0.36	+0.2	+0.02
-Widowed	<u>505</u>	<u>3.9</u>	<u>0.39</u>	<u>405</u>	<u>2.9</u>	<u>0.29</u>	<u>-1.0</u>	<u>-0.10</u>
Total	975	7.5	0.75	945	6.7	0.67	-0.8	-0.08
<u>65+ Years</u>								
-Single	5	0.04	0.004	0	0.00	0.00	-0.04	-0.004
-Sep/Div.	10	0.08	0.008	5	0.03	0.003	-0.05	-0.005
-Widowed	<u>120</u>	<u>0.90</u>	<u>0.09</u>	<u>85</u>	<u>0.60</u>	<u>0.060</u>	<u>-0.30</u>	<u>-0.030</u>
Total	135	1.02	0.102	90	0.63	0.063	-0.39	-0.039

heads of one-parent families in Winnipeg were in the labour force. Only 50% of women heading one-parent families participated in the work force in that same year. The 1976 figures can be further broken down for the female group. Thirty-seven percent of the widowed household heads were in the labour force, compared with 60% of the divorced/separated heads. Of the single/never married heads, 43% were in the labour force.

In 1977 the average total household income in Winnipeg was \$15,595. The two-parent household received an average of \$19,133, and the one-parent family's average income was \$10,000.

The estimates supplied by the Winnipeg Social Planning Council reveal that there are significant differences in the incomes of employed women as opposed to men who head one-parent families. Women earned, on average, \$12,210 (or 2 times the poverty line: see Appendix B) as compared to \$21,653 for employed male heads (over 3 times the poverty line).

#### A Summary

This brief analysis of the position of the one-parent family in Canada as a whole, and in Winnipeg specifically, is not exhaustive but illustrates forcefully the low income situation that many of the group face.

The next chapter relates to the broad study objectives of expanding people's understanding of the situation of the one-parent family, as presented in the literature. Chapter Two ends with a brief discussion of the research method used in this thesis.

**Chapter Two :**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the one-parent family can best be described as "broadly based but uneven". During the past decade a multitude of documents published by the Federal government, various advisory councils, committees, etc. have focused, to varying degrees, on the one-parent family. (Guyatt, 1971; Report of the Commission on the Status of Women, 1970; Report of the special Senate Committee on Poverty, 1971; the Finer Report, 1974; City of Edmonton, 1975; National Council of Welfare, 1970; Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1976; National Council of Welfare, 1979; Rowley and Henderson, 1979; National Capital Commission, 1975).

Some of the early studies (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1971; Guyatt, 1971; Finer, 1974) were necessarily broad, reflecting the "state of the art" at the time. There was a lot of ground to cover simply because of the fact that the existence of the one-parent family had been largely ignored to that point. Two of the most comprehensive Canadian studies were released in 1971 (Guyatt: C. C. S. D.)

The Guyatt study (1971) identified the following as the major needs of Canadian one-parent families:

- adequate financial support;
- subsidized housing for those with lower incomes;
- low-priced, good, convenient child care services (e.g. day nurseries, nursery schools, school lunch programs, after school care, baby sitting and homemaker services);
- income tax exemption for the cost of child care and homemaker services and increased tax exemptions for children;

- relief from the burden of constant parental responsibility;
- job training and retraining plus financial and emotional support during the training period;
- information centres and professional advice, quickly available;
- low cost legal services;
- family counselling and assistance in parenting (the provision of a male model for fatherless children and a female model for motherless ones);
- recreational services, community-based and at a price low income families can afford;
- opportunity for group experiences with other single parents;
- and the assistance of relatives, friends and the community in maintaining an active role in adult society, to offset the loneliness of their single condition.

Many of the same issues were echoed in the Canadian Council on Social Development's study, The One-Parent Family (C.C.S.D., 1971, pp v-xii). Of special note in this latter report is the interest in the children of one-parent families, a concern which was not developed further to any great extent in the literature<sup>1</sup>. until the rash of reports geared to "International Year of the Child" in 1979 (e.g. Children in Canadian Families, 1979; Key Considerations in Family Housing to meet the needs of Children, 1979).

As identified in the literature, there are basically four issues associated with the situation of families headed by one parent. These are: income, discrimination, community services and housing. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis, and it will be useful therefore to discuss each area separately, and to look for potential linkages.

#### Income

As the previous chapter has demonstrated statistically, the most marked trend involving the poor in Canada over the past several

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1. One notable exception is the National Council of Welfare's 1975 publication Poor Kids

years has been the increasing proportion of poor who live in families headed by women.

No discussions of poverty or sexual disparities in Canada would be complete without due recognition of the special status of female-headed family units. These units are a major element affecting the incidence of low incomes and its evolution through recent years (Rowley and Henderson, 1979:1).

Podoluk (Incomes of Canadians, 1968) concluded that the low income status characterizing families headed by women may be chronic. As was mentioned in Chapter One, this study was based on 1961 census data, and demonstrated strongly the discrepancy between the average incomes of male and female heads.

A more recent study by Podoluk (1979) describes female-headed families as "... a low income group whose relative position has not improved ..." (Podoluk, 1979:29).

As in other countries, Canadian data show that despite the overall improvements in the income distribution, the proportion of female-headed families who fall below the low income lines has changed little over time. In 1961 some 42.6 percent of families headed by women fell below the low income lines, while in 1976 the ratio was almost identical, 42.8 percent. The majority of such families below the low income lines consist of women with dependent children and the number of such families has been growing over time because of factors such as rising divorce rates. Not only do a substantial proportion of these families persistently fall below the low income lines but the absolute numbers are growing at a significant rate. Between 1971 and 1976, for example, the number of families headed by women under 55 increased by 29 per cent. These are the families still likely to contain young children (Podoluk, 1979:29).

Podoluk states also that families headed by women "present persistent problems for the alleviation of poverty" and that "they seem to constitute the hard core of the poverty problem, despite the improvements in our social security programs in recent years" (Podoluk, 1979:34).

In 1970 the Royal Commission on the Status of Women reported the extent of poverty among women "was an unexpectedly significant finding in our investigation" (Report, 1970:331).

The women of this country are particularly vulnerable to the hazards of being poor. The relationship between women and poverty is apparent in the average earnings of those who are employed, and is even more obvious when one considers the women who are not in a position to earn incomes of any sort (Ibid:309).

Existing research on the labour market handicaps with which women workers must contend strongly suggests that it is the kinds of jobs at which women work that are the major cause of their relatively low income (Finer, 1974; Ross and Sawhill, 1975; National Council of Welfare, 1975; Labour Canada, 1976; Dulude, 1978; Connelly, 1978). Occupations in which women traditionally work pay much lower wages than occupations in which men traditionally work. As the Finer Report (1974) notes:

Women form the hard core of low-paid workers compressed into a narrow range of predominantly women's occupations, and we have shown how these general disadvantages bear particularly upon lone mothers (Finer, 1974: 357).

Considering the cost of working, namely, transportation, clothing expenses, day care, as well as low female wages, women who are supporting a family alone simply cannot afford to work outside the home (McArton, 1975; Connelly, 1978). On this point, the literature reveals a general consensus that a woman should be free to choose to care for her own children at home with social assistance, or to work to become more economically independent (Working Paper on Social Security in Canada, 1973; A.C.S.W., 1974; Finer, 1974; McArton, 1975). There are a number of prerequisites to "economic independence" which will be discussed under the heading of "Community Support" later in this Chapter.

In summarizing the economic situation of women as heads of one-parent families:

The main issue is income. The questions relating to employment and social services flow from the income area. The jobs most needed are the jobs that pay the most; the services most needed are the ones that make it possible for single mothers to take these jobs (A.C.S.W. Preliminary Report on Single Parent Families, 1974: 9).

#### Discrimination

To evaluate objectively the kinds, magnitude, and implications of the changes which have been taking place in the Canadian family . . . . it is necessary to distinguish carefully between the changes in the traditional family structure as we know it, and the changes in the attitudes and actions of Canadians in respect of the norms and values that have supported and maintained this traditional family structure (Children in Canadian Families, 1979:63).

As Chapter One showed, the numbers and proportion of one-parent families in Canada are growing. As such, the context of Canadian family types is changing. Unfortunately myths and stereotypes still persist.

One of the most dangerous yet pervasive labels attached to one-parent families is that they are a problem group. "Most of the available literature has treated single-parenthood primarily as a social problem" (Li, 1978: 1). There are examples of potentially sympathetic authors who go out of their way to be diplomatic:

. . . . it should be stressed at the outset that we are not suggesting that all one-parent families have serious problems or that this group of families should be viewed as a "problem". Indeed, it would be contrary to the intentions of this book if we should seem to endorse any notion that the one-parent family is an oddity, a special group per se, or a group to be looked down on (Schlesinger, 1978: 1).

Yet on the very next page in that particular publication in which the definitions used in the report are outlined, the author goes on to say:



It should be noted that the family with both husband and wife present is given the name of "normal family". The families with only one parent present are called "broken families". They include families whose heads are widowed, divorced, separated for any reason, or single (Schlesinger, 1978: 2).

Perhaps the use of the term "normal" might be excused on a purely statistical basis; the one-parent family still represents a minority household structure, and as such can be viewed as a deviation from the statistical norm. However, the word does conjure up images of the excluded group of families as somehow deviant or pathological. The term "broken families" also generates a value judgment on the godliness of "intact" husband/wife families. This implied view of the one-parent family has undoubtedly led to this kind of comment:

.... there are some families which remain legally intact and continue to share the same household in which the limitations, stresses and problems of the parents are so great that all in the family have an unfortunate, indeed miserable, life. There are many others in which the contribution of one parent is so minimal or so negative, perhaps because of a chronic or recurring mental illness, severe alcoholism, or extremely immaturity or character defect, that they are in effect "one-parent families" (McArton, 1975: 28).

As the author goes on to suggest:

There are others in which the abilities and efforts of the single parent are well above average, so that in total the lives of the children are more fortunate than most children of two-parent households (McArton, 1975: 28).

In commenting on society's slowly changing attitude toward the one-parent family, Lillian Thomson says:

A kind of fear of broken homes developed. It seemed a radical and slightly subversive idea when increasingly sophisticated investigators produced tentative evidence that unhappy unbroken homes embodied greater risks for the young than the one-parent home which achieved a degree of stability. Although some of the old fears and generalizations doubtless remain, the public mind today recognizes that serious disturbances in child life and youth have many and complex causes and that

family structure in itself is not inevitably a significant factor . . . . The one-parent family is a family that encounters special kinds of problems, some of which are different from those that might be encountered by two-parent families (The One-Parent Family, Anglican Church of Canada, 1969: 2).

A recent report speculates that: "One of the biggest problems of one-parent families is that people expect them to be problems" (C.C.S.D., 1971: 1). This line of thought is consistent with William Ryan's opinion on "blaming the victim". Ryan puts forth the theory that it is convenient to look sympathetically at a group who have a particular problem, and to separate them out and define them in some way as a special group, a group that is different from the population in general.

All of this happens so smoothly that it seems downright rational. First, identify a social problem. Second, study those affected by the problem and discover in what ways they are different from the rest of us as a consequence of deprivation and injustice. Third, define the differences as the cause of the social problem itself. Finally, of course, assign a government bureaucrat to invent a humanitarian action program to correct the differences (Ryan, 1976: 8-9).

It becomes apparent through a review of relevant literature that the one-parent family suffers under being labelled as "that group". As a federal government statement suggests:

that a guaranteed income should be available to people whose incomes are insufficient because they are unable or are not expected to work, namely the retired or disabled, single parent families . . . . (Working Paper on Social Security in Canada, 1973: 32).

A recent publication on the design of family housing states:

Family lifestyles should be considered when selecting the types of opportunities for play that are needed. One should take into account design influences such as if both parents work, if there is a significant percentage of single parent families . . . (C.M.H.C., 1979: 2).

As the previous discussion has set out to show, the one-parent family has been to a great extent misunderstood as a group. The problem orientation focused on them emphasizes their lot as a "fringe"

group in society. This perspective artificially separates them from others in similar circumstances (e.g. other low-income families, families with two parents employed full-time, etc.).

Some critics might consider valid their "problem perspective" because this is often the only forum in which the one-parent family is seen. Problem-focused interventions (e.g. benefits, counselling, services geared to the individual or client) reinforce the image of the one-parent family as a problem group. Those who are coping are never seen. The ability of people to resolve problematic situations on their own is hence underestimated, or at worst, ignored.

The effect of stigma on the one-parent family is addressed in the literature. According to One in a World of Two's, one-parent families have their existing levels of isolation and frustration intensified by their stigmatization in society (National Council of Welfare, 1976). Bequaert (1976) also notes that:

The issue of stigmatization, of feeling branded as someone deviant, incompetent, a somehow discredited member of one's community, is a subtle one. It invades a person's self-image, eats away at her ... Pressured by pervasive images of the "ideal family", the single woman daily confronts her singleness as it is seen by her relatives and close friends, her children's teachers and babysitters, by the social arrangements and organizations of her community which make her feel like an outsider (Bequaert, 1976: 80).

Of special significance to women heading families on social assistance is Armitage's statement that:

All social welfare programmes have a tendency to stigmatize their recipients, principally as a result of the fact that to receive welfare support continues to be viewed as an admission of failure on the part of the beneficiary (Armitage, 1975:29).

Armitage identifies two principle effects of stigma, the social control effect:

The principle effect of stigma upon the recipient is to label him a second class citizen. As such, he learns to expect that a variety of social conditions usually enjoyed by others, e.g. a reasonably adequate income, will be

denied him. The existence of the stigma thus provides justification for the inequalities of the society. Such a justification has important "social control" effects. The recipient comes to view his social situation as one that is deserved, if not by him, at least by other members of his class. Thus it is typically found that stigmatized populations hold very negative stereotypes of one another. This, in turn, makes it difficult for them to work together politically to obtain change in the society around them (Armitage, 1975: 30).

and the public support effect:

The welfare transfer is an institutionalized form of gift. Thus, who gives, and why he gives, is a central question for social policy. The most positive and, for welfare ideals most supportive, answers to these questions are based in the consciousness of sharing a common fate with one's fellow citizens . . . . The paradox of welfare transfers is that they, in and of themselves, tend to destroy this sense of common cause. The effects of stigma upon public support is to divide the universe of citizens into two separate social classes, the "givers" and the "receivers" (Armitage, 1975:31).

It is evident from the foregoing that community attitudes hold a great deal of weight as to the acceptability of the one-parent family in society as a new household structure, or its identification as a problem group. More detailed discussion follows.

### Community Support

It is generally recognized that the one-parent family is highly dependent on community resources and services.

The parenting experience involves a process of disengagement and re-engagement, more so for mothers living alone. The time demands of parenting place significant limits on the opportunities for social activity and experiences associated with previous living patterns. Because the needs of young children are closely related to the physical and social resources of the residential environment, the social experiences of parenting are highly dependent upon the quality of community support in the neighbourhood or district. This is true when both parents are raising their children together. When adults raise their children alone,

dependence on community support increases considerably (Social Planning Council of Metro. Toronto, 1979:222).

There is some concern, however, in instances where that dependence becomes potentially defeating. This is true particularly in cases where the family is involved with many service agencies. In one case reported in Winnipeg, for example, the family is involved with 22 social agencies and the comment was made that if the parent were even quite normal to begin with, she is surely schizophrenic now (Winnipeg Tribune, March 23, 1977).

Another defeating situation arises when the needs of the one-parent family are not being met.

Since we expect the woman alone with dependent children to perform adequately the roles of both father and mother we must make it possible for her to do so. The woman alone must be given an opportunity to achieve economic independence. With this end in view we must formulate policies and encourage attitudes that enable her to do so. She must receive the support and co-operation of the community through retraining programs and enhanced employment opportunities, through supporting services such as day-care centres, latch-key programs, mother's help when necessary, employment opportunities that are geared to fit into her family responsibilities. Adequate counselling, adequate legal advice and a greater public awareness of her social and economic position are all necessary (The Working Group on the One-Parent Family, 1967: 16).

It is acknowledged that the single parent household does not receive the quality of community support it requires to meet the demands of raising children. (Gurstein and Hood, 1975: A.C.W.S. 1976; Y.W.C.A. of Winnipeg, 1977; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 1979).

... there is less recognition in the suburbs for the support needs of solitary parents with young children. In part this may be the result of lumping solitary parents in with the "public housing problem". It may also reflect limited frameworks for parenting support

in general, particularly for pre-school children. This arises from continued assumptions about the self-sufficiency of the suburban family (Social Planning Council of Metro, Toronto, 1979: 229).

What, then are the features of a community support system for the one-parent family, as identified in the literature?

Public health nurses, child welfare workers, treatment centres, and voluntary agencies offer important forms of individual support and group programming ... a telephone support service for parents. Recreation departments offer a range of specialized leisure activities.

Statutory services, public health, child welfare, are distributed throughout the suburbs. Municipal-wide voluntary agencies offer local programs; these vary relative to local conditions and available resources ... There are special programs ... which focus in on the employment needs of women, including mothers. These are non-statutory services; the extent and continuity of their funding, their availability where needed ... are subject to government's discretion. Recent reductions in federal financing of employment support services for women are evidence of how tenuous the future of these programs are (Social Planning Council of Metro, Toronto, 1979: 229).

Almost everyone interviewed voiced a need for community services as part of their housing requirements. Child care centres were the most often cited need. Other services included after school programs, playgrounds and social and recreational space for adults (Gurstein and Hood, 1975: 58).

Mothers by themselves raising young children are not in a position to earn their own living unless there are available day care services or other arrangements to look after their children while they work. Many of these mothers could and would prefer to support themselves and their families. But to do so, they must have access to training in order to up-grade and up-date their skills and to an appropriate range of social services, notably day care, homemaker, and counselling services (National Health and Welfare, 1970: 5).

Social and personal pressures on one-parent families create a high proportionate need among them for a variety of types of social services which are also needed by many others in our society. These frequently represent services of a nature previously provided within the extended family or small, close-knit community, but which now, particularly in large urban centres, require planned organization and provision. Of particular immediate urgency are organized and supervised child care services, and an adequate supply of housing for low and middle income groups, sometimes including facilities such as day care and shared meals, needed by many one-parent families and others (McArton, 1975: 132).

Thus community support is seen to be made up of a number of related dimensions. Housing is viewed to be part of a network of support which the family relies on (Gurstein and Hood, 1975; McArton, 1975).

### Housing

The issue of housing, in terms of how it relates to one-parent families, can be separated into two distinct but related areas, namely affordability and suitability.

The severe financial situation faced by many single parent families has obvious repercussions on their housing expenditures. A major British study on one-parent families stated that:

housing problems closely rival money problems as a cause of hardship and stress to one-parent families (Finer, 1974: 357).

The Report goes on to say:

The majority of one parent families are not able to effectively participate in the housing game. This is largely due to insufficient income. The single parent attempts to secure accommodation with income provided by one wage earner whereas increasingly the two parent family is able to draw on two incomes (Finer, 1974: 408).

The identification of affordable housing as an issue for the one-parent family is well documented. (Poulos, 1969; Guyatt, 1971;

C.C.S.D. 1971; International Social Security Review, 1975; Gurstein and Hood, 1975; N.C.W. 1976; Rose, 1977; Winnipeg Y.W.C.A. 1977; Manitoba Dept. of Education, 1977; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 1979).

The bad news is that some groups are extremely disadvantaged in terms of the housing conditions they face. The hardest pressed of them is the young, single parent renter household with pre-school children. A significant proportion of the elderly also face an affordability problem. However, they generally live in much better quality housing and do not face the overcrowding which these single parent households experience. Given that the priority of current housing programs seems to be the delivery of new, expensive housing or the subsidization of the elderly renter, the findings of this study suggest that a shift in emphasis is desperately required for the single parent household (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, Feb. 1979: 11).

For many, the problem is to find anywhere to live. A recent survey found that the difficulties that single parents experienced in renting accommodation were most often related to: the rent being too high for adequate housing; no children wanted; discrimination against single mothers; and discrimination against welfare recipients. (Y.W.C.A. of Winnipeg, 1977).

It is generally accepted that one-parent families are currently weak competitors in the private housing market.

Housing poverty is partly a function of low incomes. It is also a result (as are the low incomes themselves) of having the status of a poor person. Societal attitudes ensure that the rewards go to the producers, to those who make the economy grow. Those who cannot produce, or can no longer produce, the elderly, handicapped, single parent families, rural families get the residue after the producers have been rewarded (Dennis and Fish, 1972: 5).

From the perspective of the real estate investor, the rent-paying ability of poor families simply does not promise a rate of return sufficient to justify large



expenditures on upkeep and services, not to mention major renovations and improvements. Rent defaults, vandalism and other debilitating social factors compound the economic uncertainties inherent in the low-income housing market (Solomon, 1974: 5).

A significant proportion of mother led families live in public housing. In a discussion on the changing social patterns reflected in housing demand Rose (1977) comments:

Fewer and fewer intact families consisting of two parents and one or more dependent children presented themselves as candidates for public housing accommodation. By the mid-1970's, in Ontario at least, applications from one-parent families headed by a woman constituted from one-half to two-thirds of all applications received by public housing registries in the medium-sized and larger urban centres. In 1971, 80% of all single-parent families were headed by a woman; in the crucial area of publicity provided accommodation for low-income families, the proportion of applicants from one-parent families included fewer than five families per hundred headed by a male. These facts, together with the point-rating systems which had been developed to evaluate the needs of applicants for housing accommodation, would have led directly to a form of social segregation which the community could not countenance, even if there were not strong tendencies towards discrimination at work (Rose, 1977:98).

The criticism has been made concerning public housing that it creates all-female communities and tends to isolate the single parent from other families (International Social Security Review, 1975; Gurstein and Hood, 1975). A Vancouver study identifies this as the "isolation or integration" question:

Currently professionals concerned with housing people argue against isolating or grouping together any particular segment of the population. What do single parents themselves want? As single parents themselves are a diverse group, so are their needs. A single mother with an infant and little parenting experience may desire co-operative or communal housing with others in similar circumstances. Others want to live in a small single parent housing complex

where daycare, after school and summer programs are available for children on the premises. Others want to live independently in the community perhaps aided by a housing subsidy. People with this latter preference may or may not choose to participate in groups designed to assist the single parent family. The parents, principally women, who want to live in some kind of housing for one parent families indicate they want to do so for varying periods of time. Desired length of stay ranges from "until I finish my training and can afford a place of my own" to "when my children are ready to leave home" (Gurstein and Hood, 1975: 11-12).

The study recommends that "a wide variety of accommodation, provided by the public and private sectors, be made available to one parent families." (Ibid.:12).

A Winnipeg study also addresses this issue:

The question regarding choice between a single parent community and a mixed community met with varied reactions. 72.2% of the interviewees were in favour of a community including two parent families; only 15.4% expressed a preference for a single parent community. 11.8% expressed no preference, usually because other factors were of more immediate concern: "Having a lot of single parents in one grouped area would create numerous problems." And a different point of view from someone who was interested in a single parent community: "They would get along better: it's good therapy. You get lonely and other single parents would be good companionship. Married people try to be helpful, but don't know how you feel and your problems".

We had speculated that single parents who were relatively new to their status would be more likely to be in need of this kind of supportive atmosphere. Length of time alone as a single parent made no great difference to the proportion who desired this type of community (Y. W. C. A. of Winnipeg, 1977:6).

The Winnipeg Y. W. C. A. listed several items that single parents would like to have in a housing environment. These were:

- adequate space for their families, clean and easy-to-look after quarters, and a quiet neighborhood.
- compatible neighbours who are accepting of one parent families.

- convenience to schools, shopping facilities, and transportation.
- adequate play area for their children: parks and open fields, not just playground equipment.
- adequate day care close to their homes.
- a familiar area if possible, with proximity to their families and friends. (Y.W.C.A. of Winnipeg 1977: 15).

A consumer satisfaction study conducted in 1972 in the Greater Vancouver area focused on 19 housing projects which were considered representative of housing available to those with annual incomes of \$10,000 or less. These housing projects included different types of tenure including limited dividend, condominium, co-operative, non-profit rental, private rental, and public housing. The study found that:

Dwelling satisfaction is higher for single parents with teenage children than for single parents with young children, while development satisfaction is slightly lower. As children become older, the focus of their activities shifts from the dwelling to the development, placing greater demands upon a project. As a whole single parents appear to rely more heavily upon their housing development, in such areas as recreation facilities and enforcement of rules (United Way of Greater Vancouver, 1974: 17-18).

This once again points to the dependence of one-parent families on their residential community for support.

#### Summary Statement

The early (Guyatt, 1971) list of housing needs of the one-parent family has been confirmed by a review of the more recent literature. The list was divided into four broad areas: income, discrimination, community support, and housing. These categories, as presented in this chapter are not mutually exclusive. Discrimination affects housing and community services; low incomes affect housing, etc.



The literature portrays the overall situation of the one-parent family in almost wholly negative terms. The literature is problem oriented. Little attention is directed to the great diversity among lone parent families.

In the face of all the negative comments in the literature, (e.g. low income, discrimination against single parents, inappropriate housing environment, lack of services, etc.), the opportunity for a unique research approach was evident. Chapter Three will present the research method and design of the study.

**Chapter Three :**  
**DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

## CHAPTER THREE

### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

#### Introductory Statement

As a means to test the validity of the assertions set out in the literature, it was decided to interview a group of female single parents living in subsidized housing. The objective of the research was to determine whether their perception of their particular needs and problems related to those identified in the literature, and whether other factors might be involved in their ability to cope with their situation.

The research sought to investigate the strengths of a particular group of low income women. A number of assumptions were inherent in this approach: It was assumed that:

1. The group would offer a certain degree of diversity due to the internal differences in its composition (i.e. widowed, never-married, divorced, separated, with young family, etc.)
2. This diversity might lead to varied strengths and perceptions of needs and problems
3. The security of tenure offered by subsidized housing might lead to a more positive view of public housing than was credited in the literature
4. Their views were valid as a starting point for planning in the context of non-traditional family households.

Methodology has been well developed to obtain information from specific groups in society using a variety of interviewing techniques.

Most notably the type of theory that has developed is the grounded theory approach (for example: B.G. Glaser and A.L. Strauss The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, 1967).

Guidelines are scarce for the conduct and phasing of inquiry that has the following characteristics: information of a highly experiential kind; reluctance on the part of over-studied groups in society; and difficulties in involving the participants when they see little or no value in it for themselves.

The various techniques described later in this chapter - making contact with people, setting up the interview format and schedule, etc. - used in this study contribute to guidelines for further inquiry.

This type of inquiry is totally unlike formal survey work or experimental research. Therefore the analysis is qualitative rather than quantitative.

It should be noted that the research approach used clearly has much to offer in terms of new understanding of the values and perspectives of people who planners will eventually be involved with in planning. However, the techniques in such an inquiry place some demands on the researcher not found in the formal work or experimental inquiry alluded to earlier. The inter-personal skills of the researcher are important. In order to ensure the participation of groups that have been over-studied, the ability of the researcher to instill trust is an absolute necessity. The researcher must also be capable of sifting through relatively large amounts of qualitative information, organizing this information around certain topics pertinent to the inquiry. A certain level of open-mindedness is required to deal with this information.

### The Study Area

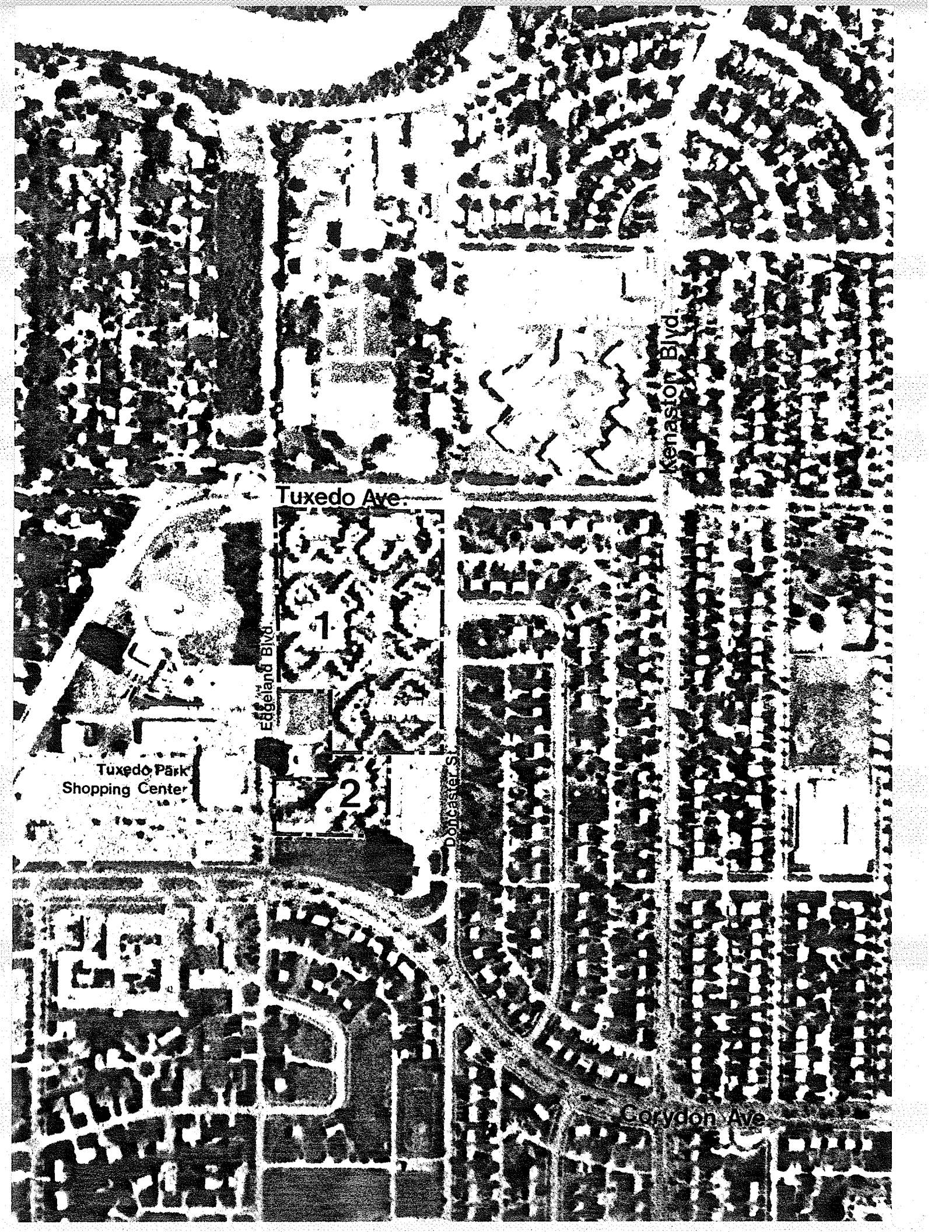
The study area is located in south-west Winnipeg. (See Map 1, overleaf). Two subsidized family housing developments are located close to each other and both are managed by the Winnipeg Regional Housing Authority (W.R.H.A.). They were built at different times.

The first of these is the "Tuxedo" development which is bordered by Corydon Avenue to the south, Doncaster Street to the east, Tuxedo Avenue to the north, and Edgeland Boulevard to the west. (See Map 1). It consists of 125 townhouse units which were offered for occupancy in June 1972. These units are arranged in clusters of approximately 20 around a central courtyard.

The second development, at 261 Edgeland Avenue, did not open until late 1977. (See Map 1). It was part of a unique project in which public housing tenants participated in the design of their own new housing. The initiative for the experiment, which was carried out in Winnipeg and in Brandon, Manitoba (some 193 km. west of Winnipeg), came from Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (C.M.H.C.), and was co-sponsored by the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (M.H.R.C.). During the two year period from 1974 to 1976 forty-five families in Winnipeg, and seventeen Brandon households who were already living in public housing, were involved in planning and designing a housing project. It was felt that people who had some personal experience as tenants in public housing would be able to make a strong contribution to the design project, and they were offered the option of moving to a house of their choice in the completed development as reward for contributing to the project design (Barker, 1978).

Two Sixty-one Edgeland, with a total of 22 townhouse units, occupies a much smaller area than the Tuxedo development. The units are attached in groups of two to five around a central street area. As of March 1980, 10 out of the original 22 households who





Kenaston Blvd

Tuxedo Ave

Eggeland Blvd

Doncaster St

Corydon Ave

Tuxedo Park Shopping Center

1

2

participated in the experimental design project, and subsequently moved into the development, were still living there. The Tuxedo development's current turnover rate, by way of contrast, is about 30% per year. Each development has its own tenants' association, with a membership potential of 22 households for Edgeland, and 125 households for Tuxedo. As mentioned earlier, Winnipeg Regional Housing Authority manages both projects and is responsible for tenant placement, rent collection, and property maintenance. Rents are charged according to a graduated scale geared to income, that is, up to 25% of the household's gross income.

#### Selection of Site

The study area was selected for several reasons. First, it offered the opportunity to examine two essentially distinct subsidized housing developments in the same local area. Although both housing locations can be labelled as "social housing programs", the philosophies underlying their design are quite different.

The Edgeland development, on the one hand, was based on a firm commitment to tenant involvement in housing design. The fact that these tenants would later occupy the very units which they had planned is in marked contrast to the Tuxedo development, which not only drew its tenants from a much larger population, but had no formal tenant involvement in its design phase. In terms of actual community design, Tuxedo, like most public housing projects of its era, packs a large number of townhouses on a reasonably large site. The Edgeland development, however, is much smaller in scale. It was suspected that these features might have some effect on the overall satisfaction that tenants felt in their respective development.

Another issue which was identified in selecting an appropriate study area was that of its relationship with the greater community. "Public housing is certainly as much a social issue as it is a

physical problem. Public housing tenants still face a stigma and opposition from those who do not consider them as legitimate members of a community". (Barker, 1978:55). Both the Tuxedo and Edgeland developments are situated in an existing built-up community, which is a financially well-off one at that. It was speculated that there might have been some initial resistance to tenants getting involved in the older, more established area when the subsidized units were first constructed, and that perhaps this was still a factor in terms of people feeling "at home" in the district.

A third reason for choosing these townhouses in the Tuxedo area of Winnipeg was that the tenants living there represent, on a low-income continuum, those at the upper level. It was felt that these tenants might have a stronger ability to cope, based not only on their relatively solvent financial position, but also through other kinds of support derived through their work, the tenants' association, school involvement, etc.

A final reason for deciding on the Tuxedo area as a suitable site for the interviews was the present proportion of households headed by women. In the Tuxedo development 83 out of 125 families (66%)<sup>1</sup> are female one-parent families. Twelve of the 22 households (55%)<sup>1</sup> living at 261 Edgeland are headed by one parent. This proportion of one-parent families is consistent with other public housing developments in Winnipeg<sup>2</sup>, and once again emphasizes the over-representation of this group in subsidized housing. This attests to their financial vulnerability. The fact that one-parent families form only 10% of the general population, their inability to afford housing on the private market serves to further segregate them from other groups, by concentrating them in public housing.

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1. As at December 31, 1979

2. Discussions with the General Manager of W.R.H.A. revealed this to be the case.

### Selection of Respondents

Based on the replies to a letter (See Appendix C) sent in December 1979 to all single parents living in government subsidized housing in the Tuxedo area of Winnipeg, a list of possible participants in this study was obtained. The author was provided with a list of names of the 95 single parents living in the Tuxedo development by staff of the W.R.H.A. Of these 95 tenants, 26 asked that their names be removed from the list because they did not wish to take part in the study. These 26 women were not approached by the author for interviews. An attempt was made to contact the remaining 69 respondents by telephone, in order to arrange a convenient time to meet, but this proved to be difficult. Many of the tenants had unlisted telephone numbers, or were not at home when repeated attempts to contact them were made. A new strategy was tried. A mimeographed letter, addressed to each tenant individually, was hand delivered to the 69 households identified above. (See Appendix D). Asking these women to get in touch with the author proved effective in arranging the interviews. In a one week period, 26 women replied, and 23 interviews were set up. Under the initial telephone method of approach, only 4 potential participants were reached in a two week period, and only 2 interviews were actually carried out.

### Interview Format

The interviews eventually involved meetings with 25 women. With the exception of two neighbours who chose to meet and talk with the author together, all interviews were held on a one-to-one basis. The individual tenant's home was used for the meeting in all but one case, because it was felt to be the most convenient location for the respondent. The one exception chose a location close to her place of work because she was about to go on shift soon after the interview was

held. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

A very strong attempt was made to put the participant as much at ease as possible. Critical to this were a number of different measures. The choice of the home for the interview, as mentioned above, was intended to provide a more relaxing territory than other possible locations. The fact that the participant had the choice of a convenient time for the meeting ensured that a relatively free time could be set. Another very deliberate move was not to record the sessions with a tape recorder. It was felt that the use of any mechanical device might intimidate the individual into not speaking, or otherwise interrupt the discussion, jeopardising the purpose of a frank, open interchange. As an alternative way of recording what was said, the author jotted down key words and phrases which later provided the basis for recreating the substance of the interview in detail. Eye contact was maintained throughout this exercise, to lessen the respondents' awareness that notes were being taken. The issue of confidentiality was directly confronted by the author's assurance that any information given would not be made available to outside individuals or agencies.

The interviews themselves were semi-structured in the sense that certain topics were discussed with each participant. The topics were developed in advance, after a thorough examination of the literature (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1971; Poulos, 1969; Vancouver Y. W. C. A. 1975; Bequaert, 1976; Winnipeg Y. W. C. A. 1977). The questions directed at the tenants attempted to determine how they perceived their situation. The topics are reproduced in Appendix E. It is important to re-emphasize, though, the assumption that the participants would be more responsive to less highly structured techniques than, for example, a formal questionnaire. The women were encouraged to express freely their own views, and it was felt that "yes"/"no" questions would not encourage this, nor would the administration of a formal questionnaire be in keeping with the

substance of the discussion.

The findings of the 25 interviews are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

**Chapter Four :**  
**THE INTERVIEW FINDINGS**

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE INTERVIEW FINDINGS

In this chapter some of the findings from the interviews with the 25 single parents, carried out in January 1980, are presented and discussed.

Just as the literature was divided into four broad categories in Chapter Two, so have the interviews been categorized. In addition, a final section deals with the attitudes which those interviewed have toward problem solving.



Income

In terms of their current needs, the item most frequently mentioned by the parents interviewed was money.

I've had to write cheques that I knew I didn't have the money to cover just to buy groceries ... that's illegal, you know...

Dental bills... what do you do? Cut back on groceries?

A few mentioned that they could use some budgeting advice.

I have to either repair my old wringer washer or buy a new machine ... I don't know what is best to do.

I can't seem to save anything from my monthly cheques.

I don't know how they expect you to live on welfare. Like the clothing allowance ... if my youngest didn't get some money to cover that from her father I don't know what I'd do.

Discrimination

A range of problems were identified as areas where it was "tough to be a woman alone", trying to look after herself and the needs of her family.

One woman repeatedly faced discrimination in trying to find affordable rental accommodation.

They would look at me and my young kids and ask where my husband was. It doesn't look good to be a single mother ... some places didn't have heat... I paid \$220 a month for an unheated shack in Uranium City in 1970 ... you'd wake up in the morning and the blankets would be frozen to the wall ... finally I couldn't take it ... the kids were always sick ... I found another place with heat ... told the man my husband was dead which was a lie ... I got it for \$200 a month.

Discrimination emerged in other areas besides housing. One woman was trying to go back to university on a full time basis. The man interviewing her told her she should be at home with her children, and that if she had wanted to pursue her education, she should have done so before having any children.

I told him that he didn't have to tell me my responsibilities. I know my situation. I'm not going to get anywhere without going back to school ... he ended up apologising in the end.

As one woman saw her situation:

I don't know whether it's being a woman or a single parent ... they really try to screw you ... when I first moved into this area an insurance agent came to try to sell me a policy ... said I owed it to my kids to provide for them ... I wouldn't sign anything ... a couple of days later a policy and an invoice arrived ... I told him to take me to court.

There were also other more subtle perceptions of discrimination, not related to any particular incident. One mother felt discrimination being on social assistance.

It doesn't encourage you to get ahead.

This was echoed by another woman.

You can get very degraded about it.

Others felt that they were discriminated against by being "single in a married society".

There is no room for us ... we don't fit in a married society ... women think we are trying to steal their husbands ...

### Community Support

There were a number of different resources in the community which were identified as useful for single parents, or on the other hand, not as accessible for people reaching out.

The church, traditionally viewed as an institution which offers support to people, was not seen in this way by those who mentioned it specifically.

The church is still geared to couples ... after my divorce I felt like a fifth wheel.

My priest urged me to stay in a marriage he knew was unhappy ... I quit going after I left my husband.

The city welfare department was seen alternately as a supportive or frustrating agency to deal with, based on the experiences that women had as clients with their case worker.

My case worker is terrific, he's helping me to go back to school in the fall ...

I've had rough times with them ... when you have a problem they say they don't have the time or they don't have the file.

I had to keep bugging them to be put on work incentive.

I was told to go to all the second-hand stores in town to get the best price on a used pole lamp for my living room ... I have a 14 month old child at home and I don't have a car ... what am I supposed to do ... track one down and then be told that ten bucks is too much? I don't like begging ... they want to see you grovel ...

Other community resources deemed as helpful to the group were:

- the Big Brothers and Big Sisters organization;
- the Y.W.C.A. resource centre and used clothing depot;
- psychiatric services at the Health Sciences Centre;
- manpower counselling services;
- Parents Without Partners, Inc;
- the local school's social worker;
- the Children's Aid Society;

- Boy scouts, Girl guides, cubs, organizations;
- the local community club.

A woman who had been on her own for 16 years felt that there were more resources available today than when she was starting out on her own as a divorcee. Another said that seeking out these resources was:

Up to the individual ... you have to go looking for them if you want help ... no one can tell you what's there ...

In terms of employment experiences many of these women faced problems in trying to find work. The lack of flexibility in scheduling was a major factor.

I was trying to get something just part time ... when they found out that I had kids at home they asked me what I'd do if they were sick ... I told them I might have to book off to stay home and look after them ... I didn't get the job.

"They think you're unreliable ... a bad risk". Of the 25 single parents interviewed, 13 were working full time and 4 were working part time.

One had a specific complaint about her eligibility to have a homemaker. It seemed that because her shift changed weekly she was not able to have one. As a result her child care costs are quite high because she has to use a private sitter.

### Housing

Living in public housing was seen in a positive way by the women interviewed in Tuxedo. No one mentioned that they were anxious to leave because it was not a good place to live.

The security of tenure was a major factor in this regard. As one woman expressed it:

Public housing is the only answer for people like us ... you can cope with an ended marriage, you can cope with life generally without worrying about whether there's going to be a roof over your head next month.

This same respondent went on to say that:

It's a big financial burden taken care of all right but it doesn't really look at people's needs beyond that ... you're on your own.

If there was one phrase which was made time and time again in the interviews it was:

I just live my own life.

This phrase sums up the feelings of the women interviewed in subsidized housing. Tenant after tenant remarked that they did not mix with their neighbours; that the development was not a "neighbourhood" or a "community"; and that they did not get involved in any development-sponsored social activities, or the tenants' association.

I don't have anything in common with the people who live here, except maybe that our problems are connected to a lack of money.

Those who were actively involved in the tenants' association said that:

It's the same people who do things all the time, and the same people who complain about it but don't help out.

A tenant who had been part of the Project Design Group said that she couldn't blame people for being apathetic.

Complaints don't always get dealt with. Somebody comes to the association with a problem... we tell the Housing Authority ... and what if nothing happens? The tenant who complained thinks we didn't pass it on ... Sometimes problems are just due to personality clashes. You get that anywhere.

Those tenants who are active in the tenants' organizations are very active, some holding more than one office on the executive, and for more than one year at a time. To an outsider it might appear as if a small clique deliberately ran everything. However this is not the case. Meetings are well publicized and everyone is encouraged to attend. In spite of these efforts turnout is low. In January 1980 the executive of the Tuxedo Tenants' Association voted themselves back in because no new people came out to the nominating meeting.

One tenant who was well versed in tenant organization said that:

The era for tenants' associations is over, at least in their current state. I think people are too busy doing things outside the community to be bothered. It's probably a good sign in a way. They come home from work and relax ... nobody likes meetings all the time.

Three of the women interviewed were part of the Project Design Group experiment. All three were living in the units which they had chosen, and all were quite satisfied.

I think that all of this type of housing should be carried out the way we did. We all learned a lot. There are some changes I'd make if I had the chance though. You think you've covered everything and then once it gets built you think now why didn't I think of that before?

She was partly referring to the fact that there is only one housing unit in the Edgeland development which can house a handicapped member of a household.

One woman who lives in the Tuxedo development has a makeshift bedroom as part of her living room, in order for a family member who is confined to a wheelchair to be on the ground floor. There are no layouts with both a bedroom and a bathroom on the main level among the Tuxedo townhouses.

As the woman explained:

(Winnipeg Regional) Housing offered me an apartment which was designed for a handicapped person but it did not have enough bedrooms for the rest of the family. Besides, could you imagine an apartment full of teenagers? I like the townhouse a lot better.

The complaints that people had about their housing were mostly related to their own unit, rather than to the development as a whole.

For example, the monthly cost of heating the townhouses in winter is high. Some would like to see their units routinely painted every few years.

Other individual complaints were:

- the construction methods and materials used
- drafts from windows and doors
- windows frosting up
- poor quality floor tiles (hard to maintain)
- paint finish on walls susceptible to marking
- rubber baseboards needing replacement
- bathroom sinks falling off the wall
- cold second floor
- substandard electrical installation (outlets not functioning, shorting of outlets, shocks, etc.)

Criticism of the development as a whole was based primarily on the activities of children living there. For example, noise, fights, and vandalism were repeatedly mentioned.

It was felt that the caretaker who lives on-site does a good job of "policing" the area.

If kids are thinking of getting into trouble, they'll think twice because they know they're being watched.

One of the women living in the Edgeland development felt that it was preferable to live there because it was so much smaller

than the Tuxedo development. Tuxedo respondents did not mention this however.

Another issue that did not surface during the course of the interviews was that of a strained relationship with the rest of the community. On the contrary, people felt that they lived in a good location for access to community facilities. They did not feel self conscious about being in a low income housing development in the midst of an affluent area, as might well have been the case if there was hostility surrounding their presence.

My kids have friends who live in this area, both in "housing" and outside ... nobody seems to mind.

### Problem Solving

When asked to identify personal characteristics which they felt helped them to cope, a number of varied responses were generated.

One woman said in no uncertain terms: "My security is me. Nobody's going to take that away from me. I'm really a fighter ...". Another spoke of her divorce from her husband after many unhappy years for her. "I don't understand why people are sorry when they hear I'm divorced. It's one of the most satisfying things I did in my life ... I can only see it as a positive step for one who takes it ... I've never looked back, only forward".

For one woman her car was an important outlet. "My car ... that's my independence ... I love going fishing in the summer". She paused at that point and continued "but then people like us shouldn't have cars ... that's the category they put you in ...". She said her anger at the labels people put on single parents often kept her fighting. "I don't think we want sympathy ... we want moral support".

Another of those interviewed said she felt her life was much easier after "I learned to say no ... I let people know where I'm at ...



you have to show that you care about yourself and your situation to fight back ...".

Looking around at others less fortunate than herself was a source of strength for one woman. "My mother always taught me to look at others' situation ... I realize I'm pretty well off ... I never feel sorry for myself".

As one woman sees it: "other people make us what we are ... I'm not envious of others but I won't let anybody call me down".

Several women thought that their work was a source of strength to them. "When you get out in the world and see others in the same situation ... you feel better".

"You have to reach out for yourself ... I waited at home for months thinking that the barriers would break down by themselves. Now that I'm doing volunteer work I have a lot more confidence in my situation ...".

The important feature to note here is that all the perceived strengths were very tightly linked to the individual herself. There was no sense of group strength.

One woman commented on this:

I am not political. I see no point in trying to fight for something on a group basis ... you just have to keep your personal strength up. I fight most of my private battles in my head. I'm not the type to listen to other's problems ... you can't achieve anything, it just brings you down.

The powerful descriptions set out in the preceding pages of this chapter shed some light on the life circumstances of these women.

An analysis of the findings of these interviews is presented in Chapter Five. The recommendations that stem from this inquiry are based on the conviction that target groups are capable of spelling out the policies and programs that might serve them best.

**Chapter Five :**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RECOMMENDATIONS and CONCLUSIONS

#### Analysis of Findings

This inquiry was designed to obtain an intimate look at the lives of mother-led families from their own viewpoints. Specifically, how do they define their own lives in terms of income, discrimination, community services, and housing? Chapter Four has shown conclusively that these mothers see themselves quite differently from the way in which agencies and authorities of all types choose to see them. The factual and often poignant statements presented earlier constitute a forceful plea that they be seen first as capable human beings, eager to help themselves wherever possible, and to be seen only secondarily as individuals needing special services. This particular group of respondents at present sees little value in going the organizational route to better their overall circumstances, a point which will be discussed later in this chapter.

#### Income

Despite the fact that the mothers interviewed are comparatively well off on the continuum of persons in Canada with low incomes, many find themselves under considerable pressure financially. Even to those who are employed, and the majority in this inquiry worked part time or full time (4 worked part time; 13 worked full time), money is a constant worry, not for luxury items but for daily necessities for their families.

### Discrimination

The women interviewed in this inquiry identified several areas in which they perceived themselves as having been discriminated against. The strongest complaint that emerged in the discussion was that people have preconceived ideas about single parents as a group, which serve to ignore any differences that they have as individuals. This labelling was seen to exacerbate the hurdles that many of these women faced (e.g. difficulty in renting housing on the private market as a single mother, being single in married groups, etc.).

### Community Services

The interviews revealed the conviction on the part of the mothers that they did not require special services which catered to them as a group. Certain services were identified, which were perceived to be of benefit to all mothers, whether in two parent or one parent households (e.g. day care, occasional babysitting care, car-pooling for picking up large grocery orders, lunch and after-school supervision of children on a shared basis, etc.). Anything that could be described as a time-saver was identified as worthwhile by this group, and sympathetic to their situation.

### Housing

Seen as a whole, subsidized housing was described in a positive way by those interviewed in this inquiry. The provision of adequate housing at an affordable cost was seen to reinforce security and stability.

The security that these women identified came from having their own independent housing situation and was not seen to be related to "group" or "community" support. In fact many of those interviewed said in no uncertain terms that they did not want to

identify closely with neighbours. There was no evidence of a mutual support network in operation.

The fact that many of the telephone numbers were unlisted seems to indicate a desire for privacy or alternately a defence against earlier confrontations. Several women mentioned that they were often fearful of involvement with strangers.

Subsidized housing, with rent related to income, provides some budget stability for low income families. In this particular housing development, however, the high cost of heating the units in winter was identified as a threat to the tenants' economic stability. Heating costs (gas heat - individually metered) must be paid in addition to the rent, and in some cases these extra costs were seen to be very high, especially for those in the lower income category. Rent is related to income but heating costs are the same, regardless of income.

The recommendations that follow are based not only on the findings from this specific inquiry. As stated at the outset, it is the author's conviction that policy stemming from single line inquiries results in narrow policy guidelines and in programs that ill fit the true life circumstances of the human beings that become the target groups for these policies and programs. These recommendations utilize the results of this specific inquiry, therefore, but are formed also on the basis of a critical analysis of the author's relevant findings from the literature. The author has accepted as authentic the statements of the parents that their proven capacity to manage their own circumstances can be extended to their useful involvement in spelling out the policies and programs that might serve them best.

It is appropriate to discuss briefly one of the surprising facets of the findings. It had been assumed for a number of reasons that this group would be convinced of the merits of organizational techniques as a way of bettering their lives. This assumption seemed

applicable particularly to the group that had been involved in the design process for the Edgeland project. The mothers stated repeatedly however that past efforts to organize had failed, that their energies were taken up with their daily lives, and that even the Tenants' Organization was very fragile because only a small core group would be involved.

The self-help movement has become a movement in this country, as numerous examples show. Planners are familiar, for example, with the power of Ratepayers' Associations in various locations to force implementation of existing bylaws. Another example is the success of various environmentally concerned groups. It is worth noting, however, that these successful efforts count amongst their leadership and in their ranks members of society who are financially secure, well educated, and generally able to devote time to these efforts. Mother-led families, however, appear to have such high pressures on them to fulfill their very basic responsibilities - earning income, caring for their families, coping with loneliness and other personal pressures - that they have little energy for 'fighting the system'. This seems particularly true when they have previously invested their energies in such ventures and have had little or no payoff. This is a topic worthy of more detailed inquiry.

#### Recommendations

From interviews with low income women in public housing, and from a review of recent literature and research studies on the one-parent family, some common problems and service needs come to light. There are a number of observations which relate to housing satisfaction which deserve explicit policy formulation, not only for single parent family households in particular, but for the enrichment of all low income family housing.

For the mothers who were interviewed in this inquiry, their particular housing situation was perceived to be highly satisfying. All of these women had access to the same level of housing and to the same housing related services. In their particular location many experienced on-going difficulties in paying heating bills, which disturbed their budgeting system. As a matter of policy, subsidies should be granted by the city welfare department to those who live in individually metered public housing units. The city need not pay the entire bill in question but should provide some level of subsidy appropriate to the user's needs and available resources. It would seem unreasonable that at a time when the federal government is making grants available to cover the costs of increased insulation for private homeowners, steps cannot be taken to alleviate the situation of those in public housing.

In view of the poor quality of construction in public housing units, the Winnipeg Regional Housing Authority should be urged to invest more heavily in upgrading these units - not only for energy conservation (prevention of heat loss) - but through regular maintenance of them. Second-rate housing cannot be accepted because of the danger in labelling its clients as second class citizens.

Winnipeg Regional Housing Authority must also monitor the reasons why people move out of public housing. High turnover rates (30%) beg the question as to who is moving out, as well as their reasons (e.g. better deal on the private market through A.H.O.P. type funding, two wage earners - therefore more disposable income, etc.). The Winnipeg Regional Housing Authority should also endeavour to monitor satisfaction levels in all its present housing so that when decisions are made to add to the present housing supply, such decisions will be based on known performance standards.

It must be assumed that the composition of public housing did not emerge overnight. There is therefore some measure of public responsibility to ensure that subsidized housing is sensitive

to the needs of its client groups. For low income groups the inadequacies of public transportation are a serious concern. While the residents of the Tuxedo housing developments are relatively well served by public transit, long waits and poor connections during evenings and week ends are common. Grocery shopping in this particular area is convenient, with a major store virtually on-site. For other suburban public housing developments, grocery shopping often requires the use of taxis, an additional expense for those on low and hence fixed incomes. There are few grocery stores in suburban areas which offer delivery services. With these facts in mind, transportation planners must realize that efficient transportation systems benefit all the residents of an area, not just mother-led families. In recent years para-transit services have been introduced on an experimental basis into some Canadian communities. These services are important initiatives in recognizing the need for supplementary transportation services. However they are also costly initiatives. A better approach would be for those involved in the planning of public housing to recognize at the outset the supplementary transportation needs of parents who have young children and who are without cars. The high per capita cost of operating a para-transit system could be offset in terms of energy costs. An efficient system, consisting of small vehicles in the place of the presently used large buses, would ensure that empty buses would not run through the area. A para-transit strategy for special needs, such as transportation to health services, to recreation facilities, or to day care, has potential for organizing groups, and should be investigated by local housing authorities.

One of the strongest statements made regarding housing stability in the Tuxedo location was its relationship with good quality education for children. Suburban schools can attract good teachers. It must be recognized that local school stability goes hand in hand with housing stability. Planning teams, in seeking locations for subsidized



housing, whether traditional large-scale projects or a smaller number of units in an existing area, should consider the proximity and continuing operation of good schools.

As has been noted in this inquiry, economic need is in fact demonstrably higher among female-headed families. Very much related to the housing needs of mother-led families is the question of income. There are various kinds of subsidies available to groups in need. Housing subsidies, such as the rent geared to income scale operative in public housing, are but one example. Planners have traditionally identified themselves with the provision of physical infrastructure including space-related services such as the provision of recreational facilities, while social planning has been considered historically as the domain of "social service planners", and has been considered to include income maintenance, mental and physical health, day care, etc.

Allocation planning has been considered to relate to land use planning. Yet the allocation of finances has received second billing. However, planners who wish to continue claiming that planning is a dynamic and evolving profession must consider the results of their actions in relation to multi-dimensional social change. In other words, all planning is political and all planning is social. Because income was seen by the respondents in this inquiry as a major problem in their lives, it is considered a valid area for formulating recommendations.

Under the present system of social assistance, those who work are punished because they lose certain benefits entitled to them if they chose instead to stay at home with their children. The majority of the parents in the Tuxedo developments were employed either full time or part time. The child care costs and other expenses associated with holding a job appeared to some to be so high as to make it more attractive to live on social assistance. A system of incentives, which would provide certain benefits to

supplement income derived through participation in the labour force, is desirable for this group.

Retraining programs were not mentioned specifically by those interviewed, yet there was mention of the need for flexible work scheduling to address the family responsibilities of this group particularly. A policy which offers women the opportunity to attend training programs on a supported basis is a key factor in their full participation in the labour force.

It must be recognized that a guaranteed annual income, or its equivalent will not replace the need for community support. The practical burdens of single parenthood, such as providing for a family, earning an income, etc., are increased considerably by negative social attitudes. These attitudes, often guided by misunderstanding, can be dealt with through an advocacy role on the part of planners. They must understand the situations of those involved in the planning process. Research itself can play an advocacy role when it helps to generate new understanding for groups in society.

In the area of community services, there is potential for planners to make communities work for their residents. Communal day care and recreation facilities offer much needed services for all residents, not just those living in developments like the ones discussed in this inquiry. Zoning which allows for communal living also offers the opportunity for choice in living accommodation for emerging household types. The issue of choice is one which deserves more research.

As stated earlier one of the notable findings of the interviews outlined in this inquiry was the lack of faith that the group had in self-help, as a way of providing mutual support. Clearly society cannot provide everything, but certain mechanisms can be established which encourage self-help.

The self-help literature shows that once a group has had the

opportunity to get involved in some success situations, the lack of energy and time which presently inhibits them from organizing themselves is overcome. It is much more likely that political involvement will emerge as a tool they can use. With this in mind, it is recommended that local housing authorities hire a community worker whose role as a facilitator for groups like one-parent families will help them play their full part in community life.

The concrete services outlined in the recommendations offer clearly visible benefits to this group. While these benefits are definitely achievable, other more subtle benefits are only possible through the evolution of self-help as a working principle.

#### Summary of Recommendations

- subsidies be granted by the city welfare department for payment of heating bills in individually metered public housing units
- the local housing authority (W.R.H.A.) establish an upgrading program for its housing stock, consisting of both energy conservation strategies and regular maintenance
- monitoring and analysis of turnover rates in public housing on a regular basis by the local housing authority
- on-going study of tenants' satisfaction levels in various housing developments subsidized by the government (e.g. between projects with pre-construction design input by tenants and those without user input)
- planning teams recognize the needs of families in the design and placement of public housing environments by examining the adequacy of: public transit, local retail services, schools, recreational facilities, outdoor/indoor play centres, full/occasional day care, after-hours health care, homemakers, hostels, organized leisure programs such as films, classes, sports, and established community support services

- priority analysis of the adequacy of employment and educational opportunities for those living in subsidized housing by the provincial department of labour
- hiring of community workers by local housing authority to promote group interaction
- recognition of the importance of networking and coalitional structures (e.g. self-help groups as well as other social action groups working toward the improvement of societal conditions) by planners

#### Follow-up to this Inquiry

The research method which was applied in this thesis, as an example of qualitative research methodology, is both credible and useful. A number of areas have been identified as deserving of further inquiry. These include: housing satisfaction levels and the monitoring of turnover levels in public housing, the relative uses of housing versus income maintenance subsidies for target populations, and isolation or integration of single parent families in housing environments.

As an epilogue to this research endeavour, a meeting with the 25 women whose interviews provided the core of this thesis is planned. Discussion will focus on the recommendations that have come out of this study. This will not only test the validity of these findings, but can be seen as a modest but positive step to ensure the opportunity to share the findings of this research with the group. The communication of these results must be recognized as a fundamental part of the inquiry. Only then can research correctly claim to act as an advocate.

# APPENDICES

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Homes** 

Appendix B

## LOW INCOME CUT-OFFS OR POVERTY LINES

In Canada, there are no official poverty lines. The first Canadian data describing the extent of low income in Canada came from an analysis of 1961 Census data. The income levels determined to delineate low income families from the rest of the population were differentiated by family size.

The original cut-offs were chosen so that families of a given size below that point spent on the average 70% or more of their income on food, clothing and shelter. The average Canadian family spent about 50% of its income on those items. The lines have been updated by the Consumer Price Index and thus allow only for price change over time and not for the general improvement in the levels of living experienced by the rest of the population. If poverty is considered to be a relative phenomenon, then this is a serious criticism of using the updated cut-offs over long periods of time.

When new national data on family expenditure become available, a revision of the low income lines was undertaken. As the overall ratio of expenditure on food, clothing and shelter had dropped from 50% in 1959 to 42% in 1969, it was decided to use a 62% criterion (instead of 70%). The resulting revised cut-offs were somewhat higher than the old updated lines and the revision introduced a differentiation by size of area of residence in recognition of the different expenditure patterns in large cities compared to other urban or rural areas.

Appendix C-1

410-352 Donald Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 2H8  
Telephone (204) 943-0861

Dear Tenant:

We have been approached by a university student doing her thesis for a masters degree in City Planning. Part of her thesis will be an examination and analysis of the problems faced by a single parent in relation to the community, working, child care, discrimination, etc.

To carry out her work she has requested permission to interview about twenty single parents in your community.

If for any reason you do not wish to take part in this study, please return the enclosed form with your name and address. We will automatically take your name off the list of possible participants in the study.

If you do not return the request not to be included by December 14th we will assume that we may leave your name on the list of possible study participants.

The interview involved would probably take two or three hours of your time and would be arranged at your convenience.

Thank you for your consideration of this, and please remember if you do not wish to be a participant, return the enclosed form right away.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

Garry Charles,  
General Manager.

GC/ts  
encl.



Appendix C-2

Please take my name off the list of possible study participants.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

Return to: Mr. Garry Charles,  
General Manager,  
410 - 352 Donald Street,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba.  
R3B 2H8

or phone: Mrs. Marian Sutherland  
at

Appendix D

Tuesday, January 22, 1980

Dear

Some time ago you were sent in the mail a letter which told you about some interviews which would be done on the problems that single parents sometimes face. With your permission, I would like to talk to you about your community, working, child care, discrimination, etc.

I realize that your days are probably very busy, which makes your evenings and weekends even more precious. I would, however, very much like to talk to you. I find it hard to reach you by telephone because I don't know when is a good time to find you at home.

Could you please get in touch with me to set up a time which is convenient for you? (for example, after supper on weekday evenings; on Sunday afternoon, etc.)

I plan to be at home:

Tuesday, Jan. 22nd (today) 5 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 23rd. All during day and 5 - 9 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 24th. All during day (not the evening).

Sunday, Jan. 27th. All during day.

My phone number is \_\_\_\_\_ - or you can leave a message at  
during weekdays.

I am looking forward to talking with you. Thank you very much.

Appendix EThe Topic Sheet for the Interviews

1. The Problems they have encountered as single parents
2. Their Current Needs
3. Their Goals for Themselves
4. Their Goals for their Children
5. Their Experiences in:
  - The Use of Community Resources
  - Employment
  - Child Rearing
  - Public Housing
6. Their Perceived Strengths
7. Views on Needed Changes in the Area of Community Support

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