SLEEPING ON THE MARGINS:
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE HOUSING PATTERNS OF REFUGEE
CLAIMANTS IN THE GREATER VANCOUVER REGIONAL DISTRICT

by:

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Abstract

Immigrants, especially those who are visible minorities, are at a socio-economic disadvantage upon arrival relative to their Canadian-born counterparts. Refugee claimants face additional barriers upon arrival owing to their specific mode of entry. These compounded obstacles hamper the search for safe and affordable housing for claimants, and places them at a high risk of relative homelessness. This thesis examines the housing patterns of refugee claimants in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) by analyzing the residential trajectories of thirty-six refugee claimants. I, furthermore, analyze the recent literature that focuses on the settlement patterns of claimants in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver in order to facilitate a wider discussion on the settlement needs of this particular group. In so doing, I explore various themes, such as affordability, adequacy and safety, which are consistent issues for claimants across Canada. This thesis argues that for many claimants, hidden homelessness is an inevitable part of their settlement. This study moves forward to question why, given their socio-economic disadvantage over the average Canadian-born and other immigrants, are claimants not finding themselves in absolute homelessness –living on the streets or in shelter system? In order to assess this, I examine theories of social capital and networks as potential resources used by recent claimants in order to offset barriers related to their immigration status and escape the worst forms of homelessness.
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<td>CIC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation</td>
<td>CMHC</td>
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<td>Greater Vancouver Regional District</td>
<td>GVRD</td>
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<td>Immigration and Refugee Board</td>
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<td>Immigrant Service Society</td>
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<td>Mennonite Central Committee</td>
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<td>Multilingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities</td>
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...it's all about the people.
Chapter 1: Introduction

We are beginning to see the development of literature on the settlement patterns of refugee claimants, which is a new departure within the wider research on housing and immigration. These new studies show that refugee claimants are at a socio-economic disadvantage owing to their mode of arrival. In an effort to add to this emerging work, this thesis examines the housing patterns of claimants in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) (see figure 1.1) and explores theories of social capital and networks as potential resources used by recent claimants in order to offset barriers related to their immigration status.

According to Renaud, Piche, and Godin (2003), there have been two approaches to the economic integration of refugees. The first approach suggests that refugees, like immigrants, have had limited economic mobility owing to a disadvantage in the labour market mainly because of institutional barriers. The second school of research stipulates that from the outset, certain groups such as refugees, are at an economic disadvantage as result of their immigration class (Renaud et al., 2003). This thesis seeks to advance this second approach. In addition to Renaud, Piche and Godin's argument, I concentrate on both the financial and social livelihood of refugees, showing that they are both affected by their specific mode of entry to Canada.

A second focus of this thesis is on the housing patterns of refugee claimants in the GVRD. For many newcomers, finding appropriate and adequate housing marks the first basic step towards settlement. Chambon, Hulchanski, Murdie, and Teixeira (1997), have argued that Canadians do not have equal access to adequate accommodation. Even similar groups of people in similar circumstances vary in their access to housing.
Figure 1.1: The Greater Vancouver Regional District
The importance of examining the housing trajectories of newcomers is succinctly stated by Rose and Ray (2001) who write that “[a]lthough far from the only way to examine processes of economic and cultural integration, investigating housing status and neighbourhood satisfaction can furnish important insights by virtue of the significance our society attributes to where and how people live...” (2001, p. 497). The authors maintain the premise that housing plays a fundamental role in establishing the general circumstances of social life and intersects with a variety of personal attributes including age, gender and employment. Housing is bound with social meaning and economic well being for both newcomers and the host society, and therefore speaks to the process of integration in the broadest sense (Rose and Ray, 2001).

This thesis is organized around these objectives. The second chapter outlines the economic situation for newcomers and examines the thick literature base surrounding the residential patterns of immigrants in Canada. This section is followed by an analysis of social capital and networks in order to better understand the housing patterns of refugee claimants.

The third chapter examines the settlement experiences of refugee claimant. It begins by describing the claimant process and demographic statistics for the claimant population, before turning to Canadian-specific literature on refugee settlement.

Chapter Four focuses on methodology, commencing with an analysis of methods taken by the authors of the studies discussed in the previous chapter on refugee claimant settlement. This section is followed by a discussion of the research focus of my study, concluding with a section on the barriers that restrict research on the housing situation of refugee claimants.

Chapters Five and Six address the findings of my case study, conducted on the
settlement of successful refugee claimants in the GVRD. Chapter Five focuses on the socio-economic integration of claimants in Vancouver by examining the human, financial and social capital brought by refugees. Chapter Six focuses on the housing situation of claimants, commencing with the orientation and initial experiences of claimants in Vancouver. The next section explores the housing conditions that claimants are subject to, including substandard conditions, crowding and unsafe environments. Chapter Six concludes with a case study of Chinatown, a place where many of the themes discussed in Chapters Five and Six can be found in combination with one another.

The Seventh and final chapter places the empirical work on claimants in Vancouver in the context of the wider literature surrounding immigrant settlement discussed in chapter two. This chapter will draw from the studies conducted on claimant settlement in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, and attempt to situate claimant settlement in a larger, cross-national context.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Settlement Literature

This chapter will outline the literature that surrounds immigrant settlement. It begins examining the economic position of immigrants upon arrival. The economic disadvantage that immigrants face upon entry has direct implications for their subsequent residential patterns. This chapter will then introduce theories of social capital, bringing to light a dimension in housing research that has often been overlooked, especially in the case of refugee claimants.

The Economic Position of Immigrants

There is a growing literature base on the issue of immigrant incorporation, which stipulates that upon arrival, immigrants do not fare as well economically as their Canadian-born counterparts. The economic assimilation model has dominated much of this literature and asserts that although immigrants earn less than the average Canadian-born person, this gap narrows over time. This longstanding theory of economic incorporation has recently come under attack. Garnett Picot (2004), for example, asserts that immigrants who arrived in Canada during the 1970s have been able to achieve economic parity with the average Canadian-born citizen. However, later cohorts have not been able to ‘assimilate’ at the same pace as earlier cohorts. Picot’s findings indicate that subsequent cohorts are subject to lower relative incomes than the native-born, and experience a delayed catch-up period. This economic disadvantage is consistent for both genders, and even amongst well-educated immigrants (Picot, 2004). In the Toronto case, the greatest economic disparities are among visible minority immigrants. Poverty levels
for foreign-born visible minorities have increased from 20.9 percent in 1991 to 32.5 percent in 1996 (Reil and Harvey, 2000). This is also true in Vancouver, where evidence of this may be seen in the falling wages for recent immigrants to Vancouver that dropped well below the Canadian average. The average annual income for a Canadian-born citizen was $26,213 in 1991, compared with $18,208 earned by immigrants of less than ten years stay in Canada. In addition, 42 percent of this group of immigrants in Vancouver lived below the poverty line, almost triple the poverty rate for the Canadian-born (Pendakur and Pendakur, 1996). David Ley (1999) further reports that poverty tends also to be higher among immigrants who: have less than high school education, are females, do not speak English at home, or who are of non-European ethnicity. Hiebert and Ley (2001) add to this point by showing that European groups earned average incomes 34 percent higher than non-European groups. They interpret this financial gap as the result of a combination of factors, including human capital discrepancies, ethnocultural clustering, and labour market discrimination. According to David Ley (1999), poverty underscores the visibility of immigrant groups, and may lead to both alienation among newcomers and antipathy among the Canadian-born.

Spatial Patterns of Immigrant Settlement

The economic incorporation of immigrants has direct repercussions on their residential trajectories. The housing patterns of immigrants, as well as their limited resources upon arrival, are captured in the spatial assimilation model. This theory stipulates that newcomers are often young and arrive with little economic capital, and therefore are forced to settle in inner-city ethnic enclaves. As these newcomers acquire economic resources over time, they are subsequently able to move to more desirable
neighborhoods. Greater socio-economic achievements are converted into improved settlement conditions, and immigrants are able to move out of ethnically clustered neighbourhoods, thereby spatially assimilating among the majority group (Massey and Denton, 1985). This model has described the residential patterns of earlier waves of migrants reasonably well. Hou and Picot (2003) have conducted research in order to gauge the applicability of the spatial assimilation model within contemporary Canada. Within Canada’s three largest cities, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, the authors found a dramatic increase in residential segregation amongst recent immigrants. This study found that from 1980 to 1990, the level of same-group exposure increased. The number of visible minority neighbourhoods, defined as having more than 30 percent of the population from a particular ethnic group, increased from 6 in 1981 to 254 in 2001 (Hou and Picot, 2004). In Canada, the continual emergence of ethnic neighbourhoods does not necessarily imply the emergence of ghettoized communities, as this may reflect institutionalized practices of multiculturalism (see Qadeer 2003).

In a publication funded by Statistics Canada, Myles and Hou (2003) explore *Spatial Stratification Theory*, which adds to the spatial assimilation theory by highlighting the constraints upon spatial mobility that affect some visible minorities. This theory posits that, despite the general process of spatial assimilation, visible minorities may face barriers when the majority group uses mechanisms of exclusion to create and maintain social distance between them and racial minorities. The authors concur with work conducted by Logan, Alba and Zhang (2002) in the US, which argues that early settlement success, marked by rapid home ownership, may retard and/or postpone the spatial assimilation process. This, according to Myles and Hou, is the primary difference that sets apart Chinese immigrants from all other newcomers. The
high levels of financial and human capital possessed by recent (business class) Chinese immigrants enable them to create *ethnic communities*, whereas the residential patterns of black and South Asian immigrants are more consistent with *immigrant enclaves* associated with the spatial assimilation model. Given the emergence of ethnic enclaves in Canada, Ley (1999) offers an optimistic image of immigrant incorporation, noting that there is little evidence that Canada is facing the establishment of an underclass. This is further reiterated by Ley and Smith's (2000) findings of social polarization and urban deprivation, which imply that a shallow pattern of deprivation exists in Canadian cities. However, these generally optimistic conclusions are challenged in later work by Smith (2004). In updating the original analysis by using 2001 census data, and adding Montréal to the mix, Smith finds that the association between concentrated immigrant settlement and indices of poverty increased considerably over the 1990s. She continues to see the degree of marginalization in Canada as less extensive and alarming than that in the US, but nevertheless charts a trend towards three converging forms of concentration: the location of immigrant settlement, visible minority communities, and low income.

**Barriers to Accessing Housing**

For immigrants various barriers have hampered access to adequate and stable housing. These barriers are composed of both micro and macro level factors. That is, housing barriers are experienced on a micro-scale by the individual (or household unit), but are the result of macro level dynamics (Chambon, Hulchanski, Murdie, and Teixeira, 1997). Obstacles to finding housing may be separated into primary and secondary barriers. The former include physical characteristics that cannot be changed by the individual, such as skin color and gender. Ethnicity, culture and religion are also
considered to be primary barriers since they are difficult to alter (Chambon et al., 1997). Primary barriers are socially constructed by the larger society, implying that these barriers are given meaning by other groups. On the other hand, secondary barriers, including language, knowledge of institutions, can be altered and often do change over time (Chambon et al., 1997).

Micro-scale barriers such as ethnicity, race and gender all play an integral role in shaping access to the basic necessities in society. Hulchanski (1997) asserts that if such (primary) barriers arise, full incorporation will not be fully attained by many newcomers. According to his study, people tend to view race as immutable and as inextricably bound with skin color. This visible marker is a key barrier for many black immigrants seeking rental accommodations. In Hulchani’s study, participants noted that being a young black male often was seen to imply the presence of drug use and violence. Social class was viewed as a product of income, skin color, accent and cultural behaviours. Among black immigrants, males face the greatest barriers in the housing market. The stereotypes associated with this group often imply a stigmatization despite one’s former social class and educational background. Turning from this specific example to the larger story, Hulchanski concludes that there are real barriers that translate into unequal access to housing for many new immigrants. Negative stereotypes, prejudice and ethnocentrism are the underlying motivators for unequal incorporation into the Canadian housing market.

Discrimination appears to be prevalent within the Canadian housing market. Novac, Darden, Hulchanski, Seguin, and Berneche (2002), authors of *Housing Discrimination in Canada: The State of Knowledge*, detail the research conducted over the last forty years. The authors report that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that discrimination has been and continues to be an issue for many groups in Canada.
Discrimination is particularly present in the private-rental sector, primarily affecting racial minority groups and women.

Macro level factors further exacerbate the difficulties of finding housing for newcomers. Robert Murdie and Carlos Teixeira (2001) show that, in Toronto, rental units are in high demand among recent immigrants. The size of affordable dwelling units is inadequate for new immigrant families. In addition, the supply of social housing units does not remotely meet its demand. Approximately 60 percent of private households in Toronto are home owners. The remaining 40 percent is divided between the private (75 percent) and public or social (25 percent) housing sectors (Murdie and Teixeira, 2001). Within the private rental sector, approximately half of the rental market is purpose built. More recently, this sector of the rental market has become less accessible, especially for immigrants. The remaining half of the rental market consists of rented houses and condominiums, apartments in houses, and social housing. These less conventional forms of rental accommodations have increased in significance. Robert Murdie and Carlos Teixeira (2001), write that immigrant households have had a high demand for large private rental accommodations. However, there have been no new rental developments of this type in Toronto during the latter part of the 1990s. Moreover, vacancy rates are extremely low for large rental units. The result has been a constant ‘bidding war’ for apartments, which has led to inflated prices. To further aggravate the housing situation for new immigrants and refugees, the authors report that since 1997, there have been no new social housing projects, owing to recent federal and provincial funding cuts. A high demand for subsidized housing coupled with an extremely limited supply has resulted in a ten-year waiting list for upwards of 40,000 households. The size of affordable dwellings also poses a great concern for many immigrant families, owing to larger than
(Canadian) average family sizes. Murdie and Teixeira (2001) have indicated that 20 percent of immigrants live in households with more than five members, as compared to 10 percent of non-immigrant households. Chambon et al. (1997) write that immigrants who enter Canada with limited financial capital are restricted to the rental sector. In Toronto, public housing is generally clustered in less accessible, and less desirable, suburban areas. These pockets of public housing are often in proximity to low rent private apartment buildings. The limited stock of public housing administered by the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority amounts to just 124 developments scattered across Toronto. These dwellings tend to be utilized by low-income families, lone-parent households and visible minorities. The authors therefore express concern over the potential creation of social ghettos, since many families are faced with few alternatives (Murdie and Teixeira, 2001).

In a comparative study of immigrant housing, neighbourhoods and social networks in Toronto and Montreal, Ray (1998) examines the geography of housing for various visible minority groups. In order to contest static ideas of the ‘immigrant experience’, Ray uses a comparative approach and finds that there are considerable socio-economic, demographic and cultural differences within each city’s immigrant population. Ray’s findings indicate the importance of suburban initial settlement. In the two cities, Jamaican, Haitian, Vietnamese and Central American immigrants are most likely to be: renters, living in apartments, and spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Ray also notes that even after long periods of time in Canada, the housing status of both Jamaicans (in Toronto) and Haitians (in Montreal) remains considerably lower than the British/French population, but also lower than recent Chinese and South Asian immigrants. The geographies of immigrant groups, particularly Jamaicans and Haitians,
are influenced by the location of affordable high and low-rise apartments within the city.

As a result of the obstacles faced by newcomers, access to housing is significantly compromised. Zine (2002) explains that -- for any household -- access to stable and affordable housing is made possible by a combination of social, cultural, economic and political factors. Structural barriers such as high rent prices, lack of social housing, long waiting lists and low vacancy rates, are intersected by reduced social assistance, legislation that generally favours landlords, and the lack of political intervention in housing crises. These factors are mediated by micro barriers such as race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, age, religion and sexuality. Immigrants and refugees suffer further vulnerabilities as a result of their migration, such as economic instability, lack of knowledge of new cultural norms, language barriers, and unrecognized educational credentials in the labour market.

**Responding with Strategies**

In response to the challenging circumstances that immigrants endure in the housing market, various strategies and/or coping mechanisms have been developed. Following the *life course perspective*, Chambon et al. (1997) argue that housing needs are given first priority by newcomers. Once settled into appropriate housing, the educational needs of their children are assessed, followed by the immigrants' own job training and labour market opportunities. For many new immigrants, housing is essentially the primary step in successful settlement.

It is important to realize that traditional inner-city immigrant reception areas have been bypassed and the search for housing is now mainly taking place around the city fringes. According to Murdie and Teixeira (2001), three factors are especially prominent
in the suburbanized settlement process currently under way by refugees from Somalia and Ghana: housing affordability, particularly in older suburbs, highly structured social networks in the housing search process, and employment opportunities in manufacturing situated in the suburbs of Toronto. These factors have yielded a settlement pattern that is significantly different from that of previous generations. This newer pattern of settlement among recent immigrants and refugees hampers their ability to build institutionally-complete ethnic neighbourhoods, since newcomers settle in proximity but not in large numbers in any one location. This point is reinforced by Owusu (1999) who found that Ghanaians have a high propensity to settle in social housing in Toronto, which is scattered in relatively small clusters throughout the middle-distance suburbs. They are therefore spatially concentrated but not in a single location with the critical population mass required to support a thriving ethnic economy and attendant social services.

Recent research by Murdie and Teixeira (2001) describes immigrant and refugee strategies to finding affordable housing. However, in addition to cost, many immigrants experience barriers related to the size of their households. Rental accommodations, both private and public, are not designed for large families. Research conducted by Miraftab (2000) revealed that many refugees in Vancouver felt obligated to be dishonest about the size of their family in order to negotiate a contract. Family members were later ‘smuggled’ in after accommodations were attained, leading to prevalent overcrowding among many refugee households. These conditions often lead to tensions among family members and increase the likelihood of domestic violence (Miraftab, 2000). Chambon et al. (1997) report similar developments in Montreal. As in the Vancouver case, Somalis particularly encountered problems related to family size and the need for appropriately sized housing. Somali immigrants in Toronto occasionally hid family members from
landlords in order to compete for rental units. The consequence is often overcrowding, since rental apartments are generally limited to smaller households. In addition, immigrants face the potential for eviction if they are caught hiding family members. In these situations, families are subject to frequent moves, placing greater financial strain on the household and inciting potential psychological problems.

In Vancouver, multiple family households are often disproportionately associated with immigrants, especially visible minorities (Ley, Murphy, Olds and Randolph, 2001). ‘Doubling up’ helps to inflate household incomes and therefore allows households of modest means to afford larger rental units. Multiple family households are also seen as economic strategies drawn upon to cope with economic and emotional tribulations. In addition, larger households may increase the likelihood of homeownership (Ley et al., 2001).

* * *

Literature surrounding the residential patterns of immigrants has established that newcomers are, at the outset, at an economic disadvantage. This disadvantage has its repercussions on the accessibility of housing. As a result, the geographies of settlement for immigrants have changed in more recent years and many immigrants are limited to low-income rental units in the city fringes. The literature has furthermore provided evidence that resilience plays a key factor in housing searches, and immigrants often combat housing barriers with strategies. A key strategy that is often overlooked in studies of immigrants is the importance of social capital as a resource and a tool in finding housing. This thesis seeks to incorporate theories of social capital and the importance of networks, both strong and weak, into an analysis of residential settlement for recent refugee claimants in Vancouver.
Social Capital

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was one of the first to produce a theoretical analysis of social capital. Bourdieu has defined social capital as,

...the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or lessinstitutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in various senses of the word (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248-249).

Bourdieu emphasizes the benefits that individuals reap owing to their membership in certain networks. His work furthermore asserts that sociability is constructed for the purpose of accruing these benefits (1985). Bourdieu’s ideas of social capital were published in the late 1970s, and were not extensively acknowledged in the English-speaking world owing to a lag in translation (Portes, 1990). The work of James Coleman has been more accessible, particularly in North America, and more widely acknowledged. Coleman (1988) has argued that that there are two approaches in understanding social action. On the one hand, many sociologists see actors as overly socialized, and choices are governed by norms, rules and obligations. In this description of social behaviour, action is constrained and shaped by, and within, social contexts. The other major stream is characteristic of neoclassical economists whose work has portrayed actors as individualistic. Coleman has drawn from the work of economist Glen Loury (1977, 1987) who asserted that neoclassical economic theories such as human capital were overly individualistic. According to this understanding of social action, individuals set and attain goals independently of any other actor. Moreover, one’s actions are wholly self-interested and lie in the purpose of maximizing utility. Continuing from Loury, Coleman begins with the premise that actors are rational beings, whereby each actor has
control over certain resources, events and interests. Social capital, therefore, constitutes a resource that is available to an actor. Owing to these polar conceptions of social action, Coleman has developed a theoretical orientation that bridges ideas from these two intellectual streams. Coleman asserts that rational and purposeful action, in conjunction with social contexts, can account for social actions and the development of social organization (1986a, 1986b, 1988). Coleman introduces social capital as a conceptual tool in understanding the theoretical conundrum of collective social action. Social-structural resources represent a capital asset for individuals. This resource, or social capital, is not a single entity, but instead it is defined by its function. This function has two characteristics: it consists of some aspect of social structure, and it facilitates certain actions of individuals who are within this social structure (Coleman, 1990).

Portes (1998) writes that the growing consensus surrounding the concept of social capital is the ability to secure benefits owing to memberships in social networks. Both human and economic capital is acquired and belongs to a person; however, in order to possess social capital one must tap into resources that lie within others. Therefore, in order to possess social capital, one must look to others and not him/herself.

Putman (1993) furthered the idea of social capital to include in its definition the importance of trust, norms and networks. For Putnam, social capital is a resource, but is unlike other forms of capital, it increases with use rather than decreases. The more two people display trust for one another, the greater the mutual confidence will increase. Trust facilitates cooperation, and cooperation breeds trust. However, trust is based on what a person expects of another's dispositions, options and related consequences. Trust is therefore based on what one expects the other will choose to do. This form of individual trust may transfer into social trust when forces of norms and reciprocity are at
play. According to Putnam (1995), social capital refers to the features of social organization that foster coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Communities function more optimally when there is a stock of social capital. Networks of civic engagement foster norms of reciprocity and social trust, and these networks further reduce individualistic incentives by facilitating cooperation and fostering social trust.

However, in his analysis of American civic participation, Putnam has reported that social capital has fallen. This is most prevalent in the declining rates of civic engagement, which includes political participation, and social involvement such as clubs and leagues. Putnam’s ideas of declining political participation do not fully embrace social capital found within groups outside of mainstream American society. Putnam discusses the importance of social networks in the context of building up social cohesion and participation within the larger society. In so doing, he discusses social capital as a resource of accumulation for a larger collective, and neglects to see it as a tool necessary for survival, which is common for many minority groups. Servon (2003) asserts that ‘Othered’ groups have spaces in which to be political, aside from the predominantly white, male, citizens that Putnam discusses. These spaces are less visible and less legitimized than mainstream political spaces. By acknowledging the importance of social capital amongst minority groups, Servon queries, “...when and where do we see bridging happening?” (2003, p. 16). Servon asserts that the links that bind networks are not based on racial, ethnic, or gender identities. Instead, these connections are often fused as a result of an exclusion from mainstream functions or opportunities.

Granovetter (1973) has argued that people who find themselves amongst weak ties, or networks made of acquaintances, are less likely to be socially involved than those who find themselves within dense networks of family and friends. A decade later, he
revisited his assertions regarding weak ties and argues to the contrary, weak ties are in fact critical in facilitating larger heterogeneous networks. For Granovetter, most people find themselves part of a dense social group, made up of family and close friends, as well as part of a circle of acquaintances. Each acquaintance will have their own circle of close family and friends, which will be different from one another’s strong ties. According to Granovetter (1983) the existence of one’s circle of acquaintances (weak ties) is crucial in bridging two or more densely knit groups of close friends and family.

Granovetter’s assertions regarding strong ties have also shifted in the last decade. In his earlier work (1974), he drew upon Rapoport and Horvath (1961), and asserted that information will reach fewer people when it travels via strong ties, made up of family and friends. Owing to an overlap in contacts, strong ties will have limited flows of information. Hanson and Pratt (1991) point out that women tend to have concentrated circles of contact. As a result of their close networks, women are channeled into locally segmented jobs, which result in localized work experiences. In their later publication, Hanson and Pratt (1992) argue that women are most likely to learn about jobs close to home, because their female informants are familiar with those geographically constrained jobs. Women are therefore likely to work in locally segmented labour markets as a result of gender-biased networks (Pratt and Hanson, 1992). Drawing on this research and revisiting his assertions made in 1983, Granovetter (1994) notes that weak ties may increase the number of potential recipients who receive information; however strong ties ensure that information flows amongst a set group of people who share the same ethnicity and/or gender (Granovetter, 1994). Waldinger (1996) supports this line of reasoning by arguing that since many new immigrants settle amongst family and friends, flows of information circulate through homogenous ethnic groups. Ellis and Wright (1999) further
this argument by suggesting that social capital overrides human capital as a determining factor in finding work. By tapping into ‘ethnic resources’, immigrants in Los Angeles use contacts with family and friends of the same ethnic group to find employment. (Ellis and Wright, 1999; 2000). For groups similar in ethnicity or gender, Granovetter asserts that strong ties limit information from outside social groups, while weak ties generate momentum for individuals to move beyond their clique. Although Granovetter focused much of his work on information that leads people to employment, his ideas surrounding networks are applicable to housing searches. Many new immigrants are not familiar with the housing market upon arrival and rely on information flows from networks of family, friends and acquaintances. Drawing on Granovetter’s work, Ray (1998) discusses the importance of social networks in the housing choices of immigrants in Toronto and Montreal. The strength of bonds tying people together is usually related to the time spent together, their level of trust, and reciprocity that exists. Both strong and weak networks have been shown to be influential in providing newcomers with practical assistance and knowledge surrounding the housing market.

Until recently, research on social capital has focused on the benefits that active members accrue. Portes and Lanolt (1996) assert that this resource is not always favourable. The authors have established three arguments. First, social capital has become a resource available for social groups and not for individuals. Since social capital is the property of groups made available by social networks then some members will claim this resource at the expense of others. Second, there is no separation between the sources of social capital and the benefits derived from such capital. If a person is able to benefit economically from social networks, then one is said to have reaped the benefits of this resource. However, if a group lacks economic resources, this does not necessarily
imply that a weaker connection exists; there seems to be too much emphasis on the outcomes and benefits as markers of these networks. Finally, while strong ties amongst ethnic groups help same-group members attain opportunities, they similarly exclude outsiders from penetrating into certain occupations and industries. Drawing on Waldinger (1996), Portes and Lanolt note that the process of recruitment in some industries ensures that certain groups acquire certain jobs, while some groups are excluded from other jobs.

Social capital can further work against individuals by placing them in what Wiley (1966) calls the *mobility trap*. By tapping into ethnic resources such as information on jobs and housing, a person is likely to be channeled into same-group patterns of job and housing choices. This has an additional bearing, as Wiley notes, because social mobility in one’s own group may contradict mobility within mainstream society.

In an analysis of social mobility and in-group mobility, Wiley (1966) revisits the metaphor of the social ladder. He begins with the premise that social mobility is not applicable to all members of society. Social strata are not continuous and are clearly separated from one another. For some members of society, ascending into higher strata is impossible. There is a clear duality amongst ethnic groups in regards to social mobility, which requires more than the social ladder metaphor can offer. In order to assign a more accurate metaphor for social mobility, Wiley examines mobility from the reference of ethnic minorities in the United States. Ethnic minorities are in many cases internally stratified as well as externally stratified, alongside larger society. The discontinuity between internal and external mobility places one within a mobility trap. This dilemma essentially implies that for some (not limited to ethnic minorities), moving up within a stratum is often contrary to moving up in other strata. There usually exists conflict between intra and inter-strata norms. Wiley replaces the ladder metaphor with that of a
tree in order to more accurately illustrate social mobility in a manner that captures the mobility trap. Like the ladder, climbing the tree attains mobility. However, the limbs are situated outward and away from chances of mainstream ascent. Each limb represents a stratum for which an individual may progress in his/her own group’s stratum, to move outward on a limb will move that individual forward in his/her own group’s standards for mobility. At the same time this brings the individual further away from achieving mobility in larger society, or the trunk of the tree. If the individual chooses to attain mobility within larger society, he or she must first descend the limb and move towards the trunk. Despite this person’s attempts to move upwards within the mainstream, this move subsequently requires downward mobility from within the individual’s own group.

Bourdieu and Coleman have defined social capital as a collectively owned resource that is available based on group membership. Putnam has furthered this definition by adding to it the importance of trust and self-reinforcing norms of reciprocity. The information that is derived from strong networks of family and friends may work to further segment members into ethnically homogenous occupations and neighbourhoods, while networks of acquaintances may help bridge heterogeneous groups and dilute information that flows within ethnic and gender-biased networks. The negative repercussions of membership within strong networks include the possibility of falling into the mobility trap.

What is the role of social capital in the housing patterns of refugee claimants? Earlier in this chapter it was established that immigrants and refugees face an economic disadvantage upon arrival. This translates into specific obstacles in the housing market and are sometimes followed by adaptive housing strategies. This thesis seeks to understand the role that social capital plays in assisting (or hampering) the acquisition of
adequate housing for refugee claimants. Before we can move on to this point, the next chapter will examine Canadian-specific research on refugee claimants.
Chapter 3: Refugee Claimant Settlement

Renaud et al. (2003), note that the refugee experience is not a monolithic one. Generally, there are two categories of refugees: those who seek asylum - referred to as claimants, and those who are sponsored (either by private agencies or by the government). To become a claimant, the process begins with a claim to a Canadian Border Services agency immigration officer at any port of entry into Canada, or at a Citizen and Immigration Canada (CIC) centre. A claim that is deemed eligible by an immigration officer is then referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) for a hearing (IRB, 2005). Refugee claimants are arguably the most vulnerable group of migrants since, aside from basic welfare aid, there currently are no formal avenues of assistance other than that which the claimant seeks through non-governmental organizations and/or informal networks. Unlike claimants, sponsored refugees are provided with assistance upon entry; given temporary housing and basic necessities; along with continued settlement support (CIC, 2005).

The number of migrants considered to be refugee claimants or asylum seekers has increased steadily over the decade, but then has decreased in the last three years (See Table 3.1).

Table 3.1- Annual Flows of Refugee Claimant Population, 1994-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Refugee Claimant Population</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Refugee Claimant Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>16,050</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>29,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>19,195</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>34,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>19,426</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>25,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>18,773</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>22,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>19,642</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>18,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>24,396</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(CIC, 2005)
In 2004, the top three source countries for refugee claimants to Canada were Columbia (2,724), Mexico (2,040) and China (1,429). These three countries make up one-third of all claimants who entered that year. In the previous five years, the top source countries were predominantly a permutation of the following: Pakistan, Mexico Columbia, China, India and Sri Lanka.

Refugee claimants are likely to settle in Canada’s three largest cities - Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Combined, these three cities have received forty percent of all refugee claimants. In addition, Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia have received ninety-three percent of all claimants to Canada (see Table 3.2). British Columbia houses a smaller number of claimants compared to the two other major landing provinces. Although the number of claimants arriving in Vancouver is small compared to the vast numbers who arrive in Toronto and Montreal, this group is nonetheless susceptible to the same settlement difficulties. But given the small population size in British Columbia, as a mere function of its claimant size, the claimant class has rarely been the subject of research, and so the unique needs of this specific group often go unnoticed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Montreal</td>
<td>4,337</td>
<td>3,605</td>
<td>2,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Quebec</td>
<td>6,684</td>
<td>5,039</td>
<td>3,484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>9,503</td>
<td>9,841</td>
<td>5,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Ontario</td>
<td>15,862</td>
<td>15,437</td>
<td>12,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total British Columbia</td>
<td>1,666</td>
<td>1,237</td>
<td>881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25,494</td>
<td>22,809</td>
<td>18,226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(CIC, 2005)

In the GVRD, very little is available for, specifically, refugee claimants. Inland
Refugee Society (IRS) is the only agency that caters exclusively to the needs of claimants. This modest organization consists of one full time and one part time settlement councillor. With limited funding and staff, IRS provides claimants with: information on the claims process; information on housing and employment; referrals and initial emergency fees. Storefront Orientation Services (SOS) assists primarily Chinese and Spanish-speaking refugees and claimants, by providing information and advocacy during initial settlement. Other agencies such as the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Multilingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities (MOSAIC), United Chinese Community Enriched Service Society (SUCCESS) and the Immigrant Service Society (ISS) assist in immigrant settlement, but do not specifically cater to the needs of claimants. Kinbrace House, operated by Salisbury Community Service, is a Christian based organization that houses a small number of claimants in the Lower Mainland (since 1998). Until recently, Kinbrace has been the only house that has exclusively sheltered refugee claimants. Corban House, operated by Olivet Baptist Church, was a small house for claimants, but ran for only year in 1999. New Hope Welcome House, opened in December of 1994, houses seven claimants at a time and has more recently opened an additional house for women claimants.

**Refugee Claimant Literature**

Although Canadian-specific research is limited, there is an emerging theme in the literature that analyses the unique struggles of claimants. I now turn to outline the findings of these studies that focus on the settlement experiences of refugee claimants in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver (methodological details of these studies may be found in Chapter 4).
Toronto

Robert Murdie (2005) has conducted research that compares the settlement patterns of sponsored refugees and refugee claimants in Toronto. His findings indicate that sponsored refugees are more likely to settle in larger units in apartment buildings (given that they generally have larger families), while claimants tend to dwell in smaller units in low-rise apartments and basements suites. For both groups of refugees, rent is a critical barrier to accessing affordable housing. As a result, this study indicates that refugee claimants are more likely than their sponsored counterparts to share accommodations with people other than family members. Sharing is found to be a likely strategy used by claimants in order to offset affordability issues, and participants note that this is not always a comfortable situation (Murdie, 2005).

The First Contact Project was planned and developed through the collaboration of the Toronto Region Canadian Red Cross and the City of Toronto's Refugee Housing Task Group. Through this research initiative, Bushra Junaid (2002) examined the settlement trajectories of recent refugee claimants in Toronto. Her study demonstrates the unique needs of refugees and the variability of their needs by gender, age, race, culture, language, religion and economic background. These factors have profound consequences on the viability of finding suitable housing. Discrimination, language problems and lack of knowledge about the housing market may contribute to homelessness among refugees (Junaid, 2002). The study found a lack of services within the ports of entry (airports), which direct refugee claimants to adequate shelter, legal and health services. Moreover, the report detailed that refugees arriving at these ports of entry are not provided with sufficient information regarding available services, or means of
transportation to take them to proper shelter. Once refugees manage to find transportation, the author notes that shelters with available emergency beds are limited. Service organizations often lack funding, or the available staff is under-trained to deal with the complexities of the refugee settlement process. Of the agencies studied, Junaid reports that 80 percent provided services to refugee claimants; however, only 30 percent of them were funded to serve this particular group. The availability of legal assistance is also precarious. The lack of available resources and insufficient information about services creates a difficult settlement situation, which makes refugees vulnerable to homelessness (Junaid, 2002).

**Montreal**

The research conducted by Renaud et al. (2003) compares the economic integration of refugees selected abroad with refugee claimants. This research found that refugees who were selected from abroad were five times more likely than claimants to find employment after the initial six-month period. After two and a half years in Montreal, refugee claimants were still less likely to attain employment. This latter conclusion is fundamental since it illustrates that over time claimants are still unable to reach economic parity with their counterparts selected abroad. The authors note that after two and a half years, claimants were able to obtain status, education, language skills and social networks, but the difference in attaining employment still remained. The authors argue, first, that the difference between the two groups did not lie in human capital factors, demographic variables (gender or age), or national origin. Instead, the authors assert that a factor impeding economic integration for claimants is *the lengthy process of being recognized as a refugee and in attaining permanent status*. Second, the impact of forced
migration is quite apparent for claimants whereas the process of reconciliation and family reunification may begin before arrival for those selected abroad. Lastly, the authors argue that stigmatization and marginalization based on temporary status further impedes claimants from attaining employment. The acceptance of low-skilled jobs and thus lower status further disqualifies claimants from pursuing professional careers in which they are trained.

Drawing on the data produced by Renaud in 1998, Rose and Ray (2001) further examine the housing situation of refugees claimants (who have received permanent status) at the end of the survey’s three year period. The authors report that most claimants were relatively well-housed and satisfied with their housing situation. Rent, however, surfaced as an issue. In the Renaud and Gingras (1998) study, rental costs were recorded as the greatest barrier faced by refugees, followed by lack of knowledge of the housing market and inadequate transportation for housing searches. Rose and Ray further emphasize the issue of rent affordability. They found that about one-sixth of the respondents were in core housing need (spending more than thirty percent of income on rent), while sixty-one percent were in critical housing need (spending more than fifty percent of income on rent). Refugees were more likely than immigrants and non-immigrants to spend more than fifty percent of their income on rent.

The study shows that networks of friends and family were an integral aspect of the overall housing situation. Nearly one-third of refugees stayed with relatives or family during the initial stages of settlement, and more than half of the respondents used these networks to help locate housing. The authors found that, in general, refugees were not isolated from ethno-cultural networks. In addition, the study showed that refugees were settling in French-speaking areas of the city, illustrating optimism in light of socio-
economic integration.

Vancouver

Faranak Miraftab (2000) conducted a study surveying the housing barriers faced by recent Kurdish and Somali refugees in Vancouver. She found that both groups of refugees were composed of larger than average family sizes. As a result of asylum-seeking circumstances, Miraftab also found that both groups of refugees were likely to have fragmented households, since spontaneous flight often results in some family members being left behind.

Administrative practices create additional obstacles for newcomers. Miraftab noted that various forms of discrimination constitute barriers limiting refugees in their search for accommodation. The author concludes that sheer racism was the primary form of discrimination, and that refugees are often refused accommodation based on their skin colour. Ethno-religious cultural practices also enter the equation, and specific attire or forms of cooking, for example, can be targets of discrimination. Finally, the source of household income also matters, and welfare recipients are often targeted (Miraftab, 2000). Miraftab asserts that these forms of discrimination against refugees, whether perceived or real, are significant as they may trigger self-exclusion. When visible minorities sense the presence of discrimination, many limit their housing searches to areas populated by similar people. This poses further obstacles in finding decent housing. For new refugees, administrative challenges can significantly affect the quality and rate at which adequate housing is attained. Refugees are particularly limited in knowledge about public housing, the lack of available information provided to newcomers is an undeniable barrier, further evident in the ambiguity surrounding subsidized housing in
Canada. The selection process is largely covert and newcomers are unsure of exactly who qualifies for it, and language barriers within the application system exacerbate this problem. Since political and military crises occur throughout the world, refugee migration often arises from non-traditional source regions in terms of Canadian immigration, and refugees therefore do not have the same access to social support or established networks to assist with housing applications. The absence of legal documents also creates tensions. The law requires recipients of public benefits to provide identity documents. However, refugees coming from war-torn situations often arrive without identification, and in some cases children born in refugee camps have never been issued birth documentation (Miraftab, 2000).

A survey was conducted in the Lower Mainland by Parveen Mattu (2002) and examined the housing conditions of immigrants and refugees. In a series of focus groups and questionnaires, participants discussed living in overcrowded, inadequate and substandard conditions. Assistance from service providers was not generally fruitful, since agencies were often under funded and overworked. The participants in Mattu’s study expressed negative perceptions towards landlords, because landlords would often incite prejudice and discrimination towards immigrants and refugees. Newcomers often experience increasing deprivation; Mattu reports that immigrants and refugees are caught in a cycle that may be impossible to break free from. The barriers that further aggravate this situation include: lack of knowledge of the Canadian culture, available services and the application process; unrecognized human capital, issues of deskilling and problems finding employment; and a low stock of affordable housing. Mattu’s participants felt vulnerable to episodes of homelessness, and were concerned about the lack of available assistance.
This portrait of claimant settlement is then best described by what Chambon et al. (1997) call *differential incorporation*. This term refers to the unequal opportunities faced by particular groups. Zine (2002) discusses the intersection between three types of barriers to adequate housing: structural barriers (such as high rent prices, lack of social housing, long waiting lists and low vacancy rates); institutional barriers (reduced social assistance, legislation that generally favours landlords); and micro barriers (such as race, ethnicity, immigration status and age). Refugee claimants seem to have an additional barrier as a result of their arrival class, which appears to amplify the difficulties faced by immigrants more generally, including economic instability, lack of knowledge of new cultural norms, language barriers, and unrecognized educational credentials in the labour market.

The intersection of various barriers has hindered socio-economic integration for refugee claimants. A major theme that persists throughout the studies is the lack of available information in order to access housing and services. In some studies, claimants have looked to others in order to assist with housing, by sharing accommodations and offsetting costs, or by tapping into networks to locate housing. These studies do not explicitly examine the role of social capital in the settlement patterns of claimants. However, there exists a continuing theme, which shows that claimants are tapping into community resources in order to overcome these multiple barriers.
Chapter 4: Methodology

Reviewing Methods of Refugee Claimant Studies

The settlement patterns of refugee claimants have only recently emerged in the larger body of immigrant literature. The studies covered in the last chapter have centred on the housing patterns of refugee claimants, but have done so using varying methodological tools. Research surrounding the settlement patterns of refugee claimants has been limited since larger data sources do not differentiate between classes of entry (Canadian Census), or claimants are left out all together (Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada). Thus far, there has been no systematic method of examining the settlement patterns of refugee claimants. In some cases, researchers have created their own large sample. As in the case with the Renaud study, refugee claimant participants were limited to those who had received permanent status. Others have had to rely on smaller, less representative, sample sizes. Studies that employed in-depth analysis have been subject to issues of recruitment. In order to access participants, researchers must have access to a pool of potential participants. The studies presented in the previous chapter have relied upon collaboration with settlement councillors or frontline workers. Even with such contacts, refugee claimants are difficult to recruit due to their highly transient nature. This limits the possibility of conducting a longitudinal study, which could accurately document the key issues and the critical periods in which they generally arise. As a result, researches are limited in their available participant pool, utilizing non-random and non-stratified methods of research. This raises the issue of potential bias in the studies and ultimately in the overall picture of refugee settlement that has been presented.
In the following, I will outline the methods of the studies discussed in the previous chapter as well as those utilized in this one.

Toronto

The First Contact Project is one of the most significant studies conducted that explore the settlement needs of refugee claimants in the Toronto area. The project was planned and developed by the Toronto Region Canadian Red Cross and the City of Toronto’s Refugee Housing Task Group. In response to the lack of support that claimants receive upon arrival, the First Contact Project sought to gauge such needs specifically in the Toronto area, where the majority of claimants settle.

The project is comprised of four major components. First, the research included a Refugee Claimant Survey that focused on how refugee claimants coped in the initial stages of settlement. A questionnaire was administered to sixty claimants who had been in Canada for six months to one and a half years. Recruitment of survey participants involved referrals from refugee-specific shelters; ethno-specific agencies that serve claimants, housing help agencies, the service component of the First Contact Project, and a guidance councillor at a high school. The majority of the questionnaires were conducted face to face, while three were conducted by phone. The survey used a combination of closed and open-ended questions, and respondents were paid a twenty dollar honourarium for their participation. Second, the project mailed out three hundred and forty surveys to community agencies in order to determine what services were offered upon arrival for claimants. The researchers received responses from seventy-eight agencies, a twenty three percent response rate. Third, focus groups were conducted with five agencies and service providers that work with refugee claimants. Discussions revolved around first
contact scenarios, unmet services, and the level and depth of services required in order to meet the needs of this group. Last, the First Contact Project implemented a pilot service delivery initiative. This pilot program was designed to meet the needs of claimants upon entry and to further assess the gaps within the first contact stage.

Robert Murdie (2005) conducted a comparative analysis that explored the settlement patterns of sponsored refugees with those of refugee claimants in Toronto. The methodology included interviews with refugee serving agencies, a focus group with members of the Immigrant and Refugee Housing Task Group (an interest group of housing workers, service providers and city officials), and in-depth interviews with both sponsored refugees and refugee claimants. Participants were recruited through staff from refugee specific shelters and housing help centers. A snowball method of recruitment was then utilized. The study was designed to initially interview sixty refuges (thirty sponsored refugees and thirty claimants), but Murdie found that government-sponsored refugees were most difficult to recruit since they generally spend less than one month at a government-funded reception centre. As well, privately sponsored refugees were also difficult to recruit because the group is small in numbers, and difficult to identify. Refugee claimants, on the contrary, were easier to recruit, since they generally maintain a longer connection with shelters and settlement agencies.

Ryan and Woodill (2000) conducted a study on homelessness and refugee claimants through Romero house, an organization that serves and provides housing for refugee claimants in Toronto. Forty nine refugee claimants were interviewed, which included former and current residents of Romero house. Fifteen Romero House staff members along with five staff members of other refugee serving organizations were also included in the study. Three focus groups were used in order to provide feedback to the
study - the City of Toronto Refugee Housing Task Group, the Coalition of Shelter Providers for Refugee Claimants, and members of the refugee community at Romero House.

**Montreal**

Renaud et al. (2003) conducted a study that explored the differences in economic integration between asylum seekers and refugees selected abroad in Montreal. The authors used two data sources in this study. The first database includes a cohort of immigrants who arrived in Montreal in 1989. It was retrieved by Renaud and was funded by a consortium that included the Ministère des relations avec les citoyens et de l'immigration, the Institut Québécois de recherche sur la culture, and the Université de Montréal. This survey collected data in four waves (1990, 1991, 1992, 1999) from 1000 landed immigrants, which included 113 refugees selected from abroad.

The second survey was conducted in 1997 by Renaud and was funded by Quebec’s Ministry of Immigration and the Université de Montréal. This sample included 407 refugee claimants who had all obtained refugee status and permanent residence by the time the interview was conducted. The interviews were retrospective and explored the three years following the refugee claim period.

Both of the survey questionnaires were similar and were designed to explore settlement patterns including employment, education and household changes. Using strictly quantitative measures including regression analyses, the authors assessed key variables that explain the different economic integration experiences of the two groups of refugees.

Rose and Ray (2001) further examine the settlement and integration experiences
of the 407 refugee claimants surveyed in 1997. The authors add to the original study by analysing the housing conditions and neighbourhood context of the claimants at the end of the three-year survey period.

**Vancouver**

Mattu's (2002) study on immigrant and refugee housing in the Lower Mainland was conducted in conjunction with MOSAIC. The methodology included a survey/questionnaire, key informant interviews, a public forum and eleven focus groups. Seventeen questionnaires were completed and sixteen interviews were conducted. The focus groups were designed to address the housing situation of ethno-cultural minorities (namely newcomers from Africa, Russia, Iran, China, Poland, Vietnam and those from the South Asian, Arabic and Kurdish communities), 51 males and 72 females participated. The study examined the housing situation of newcomers and did not differentiate between the experiences of immigrants and refugees.

Between 1995 and 1996, MOSAIC was commissioned by the Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation (CMHC) to conduct a study that focuses on the housing needs of refugees and disadvantaged newcomers in Vancouver. A series of focus groups included one hundred and thirty-three newcomers, which was facilitated by the agency’s bilingual councillors. Workshops were held among the Somali and Kurdish communities, of which seventy five refugees participated (forty five Somalis and thirty Kurds). During the workshops, participants were also asked to fill in a questionnaire; thirteen Kurds and thirty five Somali refugees completed surveys. Although this study was instrumental in exploring the housing needs of refugees, it did not distinguish between sponsored refugees and claimants.
The original focus of my research was to investigate hidden homelessness amongst claimants, however it became clear after the research was completed that other factors were key in explaining this situation. Social capital became a critical force in understanding how claimants deal with the intersection of various barriers. However the initial methodology was not designed to further investigate these community resources. This is a critical issue for this research, since there have been no attempts to examine the role of social capital in the housing patterns of refugee claimants.

**Research Trajectory**

The purpose of this research is to examine the settlement and housing patterns of successful refugee claimants (SRCs) in the GVRD. For the purpose of this study, SRCs are defined as those who seek asylum in Canada and receive a positive decision on their claim by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) – regardless if they are considered Convention Refugees or allowed to stay in Canada for humanitarian or compassionate reasons – and reside in Greater Vancouver at the time of the interview. Those seeking asylum must be deemed either a convention refugee or a person in need of protection. A *convention refugee* is a person in fear of persecution within their home country based on race, religion, nationality, and/or membership to a social group or political opinion. A *person in need of protection* is someone who resides in Canada, and whose removal back to their home country would subject them to danger of torture, a risk to their life, or cruel and unusual treatment or punishment (IRB, 2004). Once eligibility is conferred, the
claimant is required to fill out a Personal Identification Form (PIF), containing questions about identity, family, work history, etc. that will be used by the IRB to make a decision on the claim. A hearing will occur no earlier than a few months after the claim was made. The decision for a claim may be made immediately after the hearing, or it may be mailed to the claimant days or several months later in some cases (see Appendix A for a sketch of the claimant process). If a positive decision is made, the claimant becomes a Successful Refugee Claimant (SRC) and cannot be sent back to his/her country of origin (unless under special circumstances). At this point the claimant has one hundred eighty days to apply for permanent status and may include on their application a request to reunify with immediate family members, a common law partner, and dependants under the age of twenty two. The empirical work conducted for this study focuses only on the settlement patterns of successful claimants who have reached this point in their migration process.

The research conducted in this thesis comes out of a larger project funded by the National Secretariat on Homelessness, entitled *A Study on the Profile of Absolute and Relative Homelessness among Immigrants, Refugees and Refugee Claimants in the Greater Vancouver Regional District*. This project was a collaborative venture, authored by two other academics at the University of British Columbia and the director of settlement services. The research is comprised of three sub-studies: the first examined those experiencing absolute homelessness by developing a portrait of the immigrant and refugee populations using emergency shelters and transition houses; the second explored the housing situation of SRCs; and the third examined the profile and extent of relative homelessness among immigrants and refugees, generating a basic estimate of the 'sofa surfing' or 'camping out' population among recent immigrants, and identified in-group
systems of support (see Chan, Hiebert, D'Addario and Sherrell, 2005). The empirical work for this thesis stems from the second sub-study, which I conducted in preparation for this thesis.

The broader research benefited from the guidance of a Research Advisory Committee (RAC), which met four times over the course of the year. The RAC was established in order to bring together a range of people with multi-sectoral knowledge for advice in the planning, implementation, and follow-up action of the larger study discussed above. The committee included a wide range of members involved in various aspects of immigration, housing and homelessness (see appendix B for a list of members, and their affiliation). The methodological trajectory of this project was therefore shaped in part by the RAC.

The RAC initially agreed that participants would best be recruited through settlement service agencies. Language barriers and lack of familiarity with the researcher was believed to decrease the likelihood of potential participants making themselves available. This strategy was therefore adopted in order to deal with issues of trust and privacy. In many cases SRCs inform service agencies that they have received a positive decision from the IRB. Upon hearing of successful claims, frontline workers were asked to inform these individuals about the research project and to seek their consent for participation. One drawback of this method inevitably is that participants could only be drawn from those who were known to service agencies.

This research commenced with a focus group that included representatives from three prominent local organizations that help claimants (The Mennonite Central Committee; MOSAIC Settlement Services; and the Inland Refugee Society). The focus group was instrumental in the recruitment strategy and in the design of the interview
schedule for refugee claimants. In particular, focus group participants highlighted several issues that they hoped could be explored in the interview phase: perceptions of safety; the process of choosing a neighbourhood in which to live; recommendations on the most effective ways to help claimants find housing; and systems of in-group housing support.

The initial plan was to interview fifty participants three times during a six-month period between September 2004 and March 2005. The research was designed so that the fifty participants would be selected from a sampling frame of approximately one hundred claimants and selected randomly with stratification based on gender, age and cultural origin.

Following the focus group, a letter was sent to five local settlement agencies inviting their participation. They were contacted by phone about one week later to confirm their participation and to explain the study in more detail. Agencies were asked to provide a preliminary list of potential participants by the beginning of September 2004, so a round of interviews could be completed by October 2004. It became evident that this preliminary goal was not feasible. The timing of the project coincided with summer vacations, and most agency workers were unable to begin thinking about the recruitment of participants until after September (after clearing away other work that had accumulated over the summer). Agencies began responding slowly, with fewer names than expected, by the beginning of October.

The number of names that trickled in was far less than expected, and so the plan to receive a large list of potential participants, and to sample from it, was compromised. Subsequently, another methodological issue arose. Several of the settlement agency workers participating in the recruitment of claimants are themselves, and/or work with a clientele, that is mainly of Hispanic origin. As a result there was an initial ethnic bias,
whereby a high ratio of participants in the interview pool were from Latin American countries.

In response to these methodological challenges, the RAC suggested that other agencies that serve refugee claimants should be contacted. In this process, the Greater Vancouver Working Group on Poverty, and several of its constituent members offered assistance. Early in 2005, the broader recruitment strategy began to be effective. Additional names were provided, enough to meet the original goal of 50 participants. However, time constraints meant that only 36 individuals could be interviewed once over the entire six-month period. The regional composition of the participant pool of the study became more balanced, and the final list includes a reasonable representation from Asia, South/Central America and Africa (see Appendix C for a list of participant characteristics).

The interviews with claimants were semi-structured and varied between open-ended and closed questions. The interviews commenced with questions surrounding general background, which included age, gender, place of origin and educational attainment. The interviewees were then asked to comment on their past housing experiences in their country of origin. The bulk of the interview sessions explored the housing situation upon arrival, including rent, conditions, and neighbourhood context (See Appendix D for the interview schedule). Interpretation was provided for interviewees as needed, to ensure that they could speak in the language with which they are the most comfortable. Ten of the thirty six interviews required translation. Participants received a twenty dollar honorarium, intended to offset their costs (e.g., transportation, child minding).
The Barriers of Exploring Refugee Claimants

In his qualitative research on sponsored refugees and refugee claimants, Murdie (2005) noted that his study was compromised due to difficulty in accessing sponsored refugee participants. Murdie found that refugee claimants were more easily available to participate, since they were more likely to maintain longer connections to service agencies than their sponsored counterparts. The other qualitative studies reviewed in this section made no explicit mention of issues finding willing participants. A considerable barrier in executing this project was finding available participants, despite the strong support from six settlement agencies.

In January of 2005, an additional component was added to the study's methodology. In response to the difficulties finding participants and in order to broaden the knowledge base of the housing situation at hand, community representatives who were directly involved in helping claimants were also interviewed. The RAC was approached to facilitate this adjustment, and responded favourably. In all, four service agents were interviewed (from the following organizations: Kinbrace House, Mosaic, Inland Refugee Society, and SOS). All of the workers who were interviewed were directly involved in the recruitment process with the SRCs. The purpose of this additional methodological component was two-fold. First, the settlement workers are consistently engaged in housing issues with refugee claimants. Their opinions add breadth to the general conditions of settlement for these newcomers. Secondly, the settlement workers who were involved in the recruitment process were able to offer some comments surrounding the difficulties of conducting research on the claimant population. These interviews have provided some important insights on the precariousness of the claimant
situation, as well as providing recommendations for future research methods. Interviews with settlement workers were open ended and consisted of three broad questions: what does your agency do and what is your role within it; what are the housing/settlement barriers unique to claimants; and what do you think are the difficulties associated with examining the experiences of refugee claimants?

The largest theme that emerged from the settlement workers was that refugee claimants are generally a transient group. Owing to their vulnerable position within housing and labour markets, SRCs are subject to constant moves and abrupt changes in contact information. Single SRCs were described as the most difficult to track over time. SRCs with families are perceived to have greater stability as a result of parenting and labour responsibilities. And so, contrary to Murdie's (2005) experiences, settlement workers felt that strong and lasting linkages with the claimant clientele were unlikely.

One settlement worker noted that there was a further problem. (S)he stated that the settlement patterns of this group are difficult to examine owing to the circumstances that accompany their refugee status. The claimants were already in a vulnerable state during their visits with frontline workers, and collecting consent for the research project seemed ill-timed. The worker stated that,

Even though we are in contact with these people, it has to be the right moment. We can’t just throw something on top of what they already have to deal with ... that limits how much we can respond to you as a researcher ... Once you start talking to someone about their problems and it’s the right time, they’re hoping to talk to you, and it’s useful information. The reality is, there are... individuals trying to look at the big picture and then [there is] the small picture that’s the immediate solution. So the objectives don’t match.
(Settlement Worker 3)

This observation is quite useful in understanding the delicate nature of exploring the settlement needs of this group. Although the research produced by Renaud et al (2003)
was able to follow a large number of claimants, it is fair to say that the methodological issues of transience and delicacy discussed above are far less applicable to claimants who have already received permanent status. At the same time, this study is limited to successful refugee claimants. This methodological stipulation has its own limitations, which detracts from the larger picture of refugee claimant settlement.

There is one other issue that arose which speaks to the complex lives of newcomers, but in specific to refugee claimants in this study. The initial proposal of this study outlined the appropriate manner in which interviews should be conducted. Part of my role in this project was to find a convenient time and place for the participant to be interviewed. The latter implied that interviews should only be conducted at MOSAIC or at other settlement service agencies. It became clear shortly after the first dozen interviews were conducted, that many potential participants were being lost as a function of the inconvenience that these stipulations had created. I was taken aback by a conversation that I had with one woman. Her information had been passed on to me by an agency after she had had the project explained to her, and she had initially agreed to participate. When I phoned and described the project to her, she said, “I’m sorry, I have three kids and two jobs, I’m learning English, and I do not have any time left in the day to go anywhere”. Shortly after this phone call I was stood up three times by a single mother who said that circumstances kept her from being able to travel to the agency. This theme continued again and again. I feared that this was beginning to compromise the research. Valuable voices were being left out simply because of their attempts to cope with precisely those circumstances (e.g. working multiple jobs, English courses, child minding without being able to afford daycare, etc.) that this study is designed to examine. The twenty dollar honorarium designed to offset costs was not sufficient in
dealing with the actual costs in the lives of these claimants. For the disabled, the single mothers, those unsure of the area, and for those who just felt scared and isolated, the twenty dollar honourarium was not enough to convince them to participate. Out of thirty six claimants interviewed for this project, nearly half were unable to leave their houses for a variety of reasons, many of which are critical to the refugee experience. This methodological glitch furthermore speaks to the difficulties of conducting an in-depth study with refugee claimants. Therefore, a major component in examining the unique experiences of claimants is designing a methodology that is sensitive to their needs, by not only understanding the complexities associated with this group, but also acting in accordance with these limitations.
Chapter 5: Integration

In the second chapter, I looked at the economic disadvantage that immigrants face upon arrival. Renaud and others have argued that refugees, particularly claimants, face further obstacles as a result of their mode of entry into Canada. This chapter will focus on the case study of successful refugee claimants in Vancouver, and examine the socio-economic barriers that are unique to newcomers and refugee claimants. I begin this chapter by exploring the financial position of SRCs, and then examine the human capital (language and education) and labour market situations of the participants. The objective here is to understand the barriers that inhibit claimants from accessing adequate and affordable housing. The final section of this chapter examines the importance of social capital and networks, particularly ‘weak ties’, in offsetting the socio-economic barriers. It should be noted that during the interviews, both claimants and settlement workers were not asked any questions regarding social capital.

Financial Capital

Income
Successful Refugee Claimants are entitled to basic welfare provisions that range from $510 per month for single, employable recipients, to higher amounts depending on the structure of the family and number of individuals within it (Table 5.1).
Table 5.1: Welfare Rates in British Columbia 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Basic Social Assistance per year</th>
<th>Basic Social Assistance per month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Employable</td>
<td>$6,120</td>
<td>$510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person with a Disability</td>
<td>$9,437</td>
<td>$786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent with one Child</td>
<td>$10,147</td>
<td>$845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple with two Children</td>
<td>$11,893</td>
<td>$991</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The claimants voiced their frustration over the issue that during the intervening period between the acceptance of a refugee claim and official landing (obtaining permanent residence), it is nearly impossible to obtain work, since employers see them as temporary residents of Canada. Of 36 claimants, 32 relied upon government aid for at least the initial stages of settlement. Two of the remaining four claimants said that they were not eligible for welfare as a result of an initial negative decision of their case by the IRB. Twenty-two of the 36 claimants have remained on welfare now that they have the right of permanent settlement in Canada. None of the respondents were averse to looking for employment; however a large proportion of claimants were unable to work (see section on labour market). Instead, the claimants believe they have no other options, and that they must subsist on welfare, even though the amount of aid barely covers the cost of housing alone. According to the National Council of Welfare (2003), the poverty line (measured by the Low Income Cut-off) is $19,795 for a single employable person living in British Columbia. Therefore, we could say that there is a poverty gap of $13,351 for single recipients. In other words, the welfare system provides an income that is just 33 percent of the poverty line. For many claimants, this amount of aid was insufficient for initial settlement costs.
Case Study
Ali arrived in Canada by himself in 2003 from Afghanistan. At the airport Ali’s appendix burst and he was rushed to the hospital and underwent emergency surgery. Without any knowledge of the medical system or social support, Ali was charged medical fees and was required to take antibiotics after his surgery which cost him well over $200 a month. After one month of staying in Canada, Ali received his first welfare check totaling $500. He found housing with a friend and they each paid $350 a month in rent. Ali’s medical expenses exceeded the $150 that he had left over after paying his share of rent. In addition, Ali spoke of shrapnel wounds that he had endured during the war. He said that for months he required medical attention that he just could not afford. With no money left over, Ali said that he went hungry and thirsty for months. He stated that he had fainted several times owing to starvation and dehydration.

Rent
Rental rates in Vancouver have been increasing, while the basic welfare allowance has remained static, leading to a critical affordability problem. The average rental vacancy rate in BC is 3.3 percent. Although CMHC reported a slight increase in Vancouver’s vacancy rate in 2003, it remains well below the provincial average. Many interviewees admitted that unless people were sharing accommodations, refugee claimants and their families could rarely, if ever, afford larger units. Many of the respondents sought bachelor or one-bedroom apartments, their only choice given their financial resources, even though they were living with children. A 43-year old mother from Iran commented on the lack of affordable and vacant rental units in the lower mainland. She stated that, “I think there is not enough for the refugees that come here. The government has to plan to build [enough] apartments or houses”.

Despite a minimal increase over the past year, vacancy rates are lowest among
those units that are most in demand by refugee claimants - bachelor suites (Table 5.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.2: Vacancy Rates (%) in Market Rental Apartment Units in 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver CMA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted Average in BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(CMHC, 2003)

In this study, unaffordable rental rates were the most commonly cited barriers to finding housing in Vancouver. According to a report by the CMHC (2003), rental rates in Vancouver are well above the provincial average (Table 5.3). Without any information about, or prior knowledge of the housing market, claimants find themselves unable to pay rent amounts that greatly surpass their welfare provisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.3: Average Rent in Market Rental Apartment Units by Bedroom Type in 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver CMA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted Average in BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(CMHC, 2003)

A male claimant from China, age 22, commented on rent rates. He stated that,

The rent is high, I wish it could be lower. I am on welfare; the supportive allowance is $185, but housing costs me $325. The $325 I have received plus the amount of my younger brother, that is $650 [combined]. The $650 could hardly get us anything good; it is very, very hard.

(Interview 212)

Interviewees were asked about their rental payments as a proportion of their total income, both at the time of their initial settlement and currently. There was much variation in answers about their initial settlement experience. For all of the participants, the first experience in the rental market occurred no later than one month after arrival. An overwhelming number of participants found themselves in a state of critical housing
stress (spending more than fifty percent of income on housing). Of the 36 claimants, 32 found themselves spending between 50 and 74 percent of their income on housing in the initial settlement phase, and the remaining 4 respondents spent more than 75 percent. During this initial settlement period, all but three of the respondents noted that they were dependent on welfare alone for income.

The respondents were then asked about how much of their income is spent on rent at the present time. For many, the situation has improved. In terms of affordability, only one respondent is still spending more than 75 percent of her income on rent. The number of claimants living in critical housing stress fell to 21 from 32. Moreover, the rent/income proportions were closer to the 50 percent mark, whereas the majority during initial settlement spent 65 percent or more. The number of participants in housing stress (30-49 percent) increased to 6, and 8 participants now spend less than 30 percent of their income on housing.

Case Study
Brenda, a single mom from Congo has been paying more than 75 percent of her income on housing since she arrived in Canada in 2003. After staying in two emergency centres for the first three weeks here, Brenda found a one-bedroom apartment in New Westminster. Her rent costs $660 a month with an additional $140 for her phone bill and utilities. As a single mom, Brenda is entitled to $845 plus an additional child benefit of $246 a month. Brenda’s monthly income totals $1,091, while her housing expenses total $800. Brenda has been on the waiting list for BC housing for over one year. She is frustrated that she and her son have to survive on the provisions of his child benefit. Brenda began crying while discussing her situation, she says, “...it’s so difficult now...you can’t buy food, buy anything. Maybe if you go to the food bank, I can’t eat meat, I can’t eat food from my country. It’s so difficult. I went [to the welfare office] to ask, I need some [bus] tickets because I am going to school. They said we don’t give tickets. I said how can I find a job if I can’t learn English?
**Income Discrimination**

As noted, income and rent levels have been substantial obstacles in obtaining adequate housing. Low income claimants have faced an additional barrier, which further complicates the housing process. While discussing their experiences, 7 claimants (five women and two men) raised the issue of welfare discrimination. According to the participants, many landlords refuse to accept welfare cheques as payment for rent. Landlords are not willing to rely on this form of payments, since they consider it to be unstable. Payments are based on the recipients' need and may be suspended at any time, leaving recipients with no way to afford rent. Claimants were told by landlords that this was too much of a risk.

A 22-year old male from China asserted that,

> ...there shouldn’t be any problem with the government cheque; they need not to worry about [it]. Their attitude makes people feel uncomfortable, seems like I couldn’t afford to pay, that is not too good.

(Interview 212)

**Human Capital**

**Language**

Lack of fluency in English proved to be a significant barrier inhibiting access to adequate housing for refugee claimants. Only 5 of the 36 participants had arrived in Canada with fluent skills in English. However, even those who had some prior command of English expressed difficulties. A 36-year old male from Burundi noted that,

The problem for every person that comes from another country which is
not really English speaking, you think that you know some English well, but when you come to a place where English is first language, you don't understand what people say... not at all. They speak and you can't hear what they say.
(Interview 207)

Coming from Albania, a 32-year old male commented that, “it is hard because when you come, you don’t know nothing, you don’t know where to go. You don’t know no English...it’s hard if you don’t know somebody.”

Claimants who arrived without English expressed frustration, since they were unable to communicate or negotiate with landlords. When applicable, family members were sometimes called upon to mediate in these discussions. In three cases, (1 couple from Mexico, 2 single mothers from Peru and Guatemala), claimants were assisted by their children. A 53-year old mother of two from Mexico confessed that,

I feel terrible, bad, because I can’t communicate good in English, because my kids help too, but you feel uncomfortable because you are with the parents and in a new country you are indefinite

When asked about the availability of language classes, one settlement worker replied by saying that,

[Three settlement agencies] offer language, English classes for refugee claimants, but because funding is limited, they rely mostly on volunteers, so the level of English is just up to survival level, so it’s not enough to go out and get a job ... and most will be taken advantage [of] because of their status.
(Interview 224)

A 34-year old claimant born in China, but arrived from Peru with her husband and two young children, was interviewed with the assistance of an interpreter. She and her husband both work and live in Chinatown. She stated that although they work full time, they have taken several English courses provided by local settlement agencies.

... at the very beginning [we] studied English at Inland Refugee Society
and later on [we] went to Mosaic and then arranged for one to one tutor because [our] level of English is too low ... and now [we have] graduated and now [we] plan to enroll in a course at SUCCESS both of [us]. So [we] keep upgrading [our] language skills.

(Interview 209)

The claimant was then asked about her current level of comprehension in English. She began laughing and answered that her English was at a very basic level. Despite the time that she and her husband have already invested in English lessons, the woman explained that they could only afford to spare 1-2 evenings per week to practice English owing to their children and full time jobs.

There were 5 respondents who arrived at the airport in Vancouver with French language skills. The participants arriving from Africa (specifically those from Benin, Congo, Togo and Burundi) were fluent in a dialect, as well as in French. These claimants were surprised that upon arrival in a bilingual, French-English speaking country, there was no one who could communicate with them. The participants said that there was no one at the airport who spoke French, and that this made the asylum claim process much more difficult. A 25-year old male from Togo recounted his first experiences. He stated,

When I came here I could hardly speak any English...[the language] was difficult. The worker started to ask me a bunch of questions and I can’t speak English. I tried to speak, I asked if they speak French, and they didn’t know. I got so angry.

(Interview 234)

**Labour Market**

For the interviewees, gaining entrance into Vancouver’s labour market has been a trying and emotional experience. While some decided to wait and upgrade their language and education, those who sought work were stymied. The greatest barrier and point of
frustration for those who had searched for work has been employers’ expectation of Canadian work experience. These requirements are virtually impossible to attain, since one cannot gain Canadian experience without first having a job in Canada. As a result, most claimants are pushed into dependence on welfare aid.

Case Study
Paulo, a 51-year-old man from Mexico, discussed his frustrations about the Canadian labour market. Paulo was a very successful businessman in his country and has worked in film production and within the media for over 25 years. In addition, he has taught related subject matter at a university. With all his training, skills and impressive facility in English, Paulo has been unable to attain work since his arrival here in 2000. He says that he is discriminated against because he does not have Canadian experience in his professional field. However when Paulo attempted to look for low-skilled work in the local cafes, he reported that he was then discriminated against for being too old and overqualified. Paulo has had to spend a number of years volunteering in a variety of places in order to attain Canadian experience. “In my culture we don’t have this culture to be a volunteer, .....but sometimes like now when I need the money...after I arrived they said if you want to be a volunteer you are very welcome. I said ok fine I need to learn to speak English and learn many things. But now I can’t be a volunteer anymore, I need money. And they still say that if you want a job at the cinema because you have some knowledge in it...they ask why don’t you volunteer here. Because I don’t have time to be a volunteer I need a job, a real job. So the housing could be a problem for me and my future”. Paulo feels very desperate at this point and confesses that he has nowhere to turn. Without employment income, Paulo feels his housing situation is very unstable.

While many have had to deal with a labour market that does not recognize foreign experience or skills, some have accepted deskilling in order to attain employment. A large number of the claimants who have looked for work are quite educated. Out of the 36 claimants, only 3 had less than high school education (all these individuals were from China). Thirteen claimants had attained high school education or some level of secondary
school. A majority of the participants had received a postsecondary education. One man reported finishing three of the four years of university, while 15 claimants reported attaining a college or university degree (one claimant received his education in the US prior to coming to Canada, while the others received their education in their country of origin).

Given their relatively high level of human capital, claimants were shocked at how unprepared they were for Vancouver’s labour market. For example, Anthony, a 36-year old male from Burundi, received a post-secondary diploma in teaching. When asked to reflect on this situation, he said.

When I came here I was [qualified to] teach, I couldn’t teach and I have my training diploma back home ... I volunteer for an elementary school ... teaching French, but what am I doing as a volunteer? I can’t make money ... I am capable to doing very well. I can’t do that because I am not allowed. So I cannot make enough money to find suitable housing.

(Interview 207)

Of the claimants possessing a post-secondary degree, and who had attempted to attain employment, none were able to utilize their education, either in a practical application or in order to obtain a skilled job. Many of these claimants concluded that de-skilling was a necessary reality in order for them to find jobs.

A 24-year-old male from Sri Lanka asked,

I don’t understand why you don’t recognize education from another country...all the places need experience and reference and those kind of things. I don’t have experience [here] and education -- they don’t recognize. So go and work as a computer operator, I can’t do that because I have a computer certificate but I can’t work.

(Interview 233)

Upon arrival this young man found a job cleaning floors and washing dishes at a restaurant. Currently, he is working two part time jobs - at a fast food restaurant, and as a
stock person as a grocery store.

The respondents who have been employed made it clear during the interviews that newcomers are not capable of fully integrating into Canadian society, since much of their time is spent catching up. In order to gain a foothold into the labour market, claimants are required to volunteer and/or be placed at the bottom of the labour market, regardless of their skill and education level.

**Social Insurance Discrimination**

Discrimination has been noted in the literature as a factor that can contribute to homelessness for newcomers, as it restricts housing opportunities (Novae et al, 2002). Until permanent status is attained, individuals receive a Social Insurance Number (SIN) beginning with the number 9. Many claimants are unaware of the significance of this category, but several spoke of ensuing difficulties. Basically, their SIN tagged them as temporary visitors, and discrimination on the basis of one's immigration status is a further barrier for claimants in transferring the human capital into the labour market. Several claimants discussed their inability to find work; several were confused as to why they were never called back after interviews and/or asked to fill out personal information. Five claimants (3 men and 2 woman) were certain that the first digit of their SIN marked them as having only temporary status. A 46-year old male from Eritrea recounted his experiences. He said that,

> There was a job in Coquitlam and everything was great. They showed me what to do, they told me how much they pay me, everything. And then they asked me for my SIN number and it says ‘9’...if you are new it’s terrible. (Interview 219)

This source of discrimination was a key barrier discussed by 3 out of the 4 settlement
workers. One settlement worker suggested that by eliminating this visual cue of temporary status, the claimant might be able to better utilize his/her human capital thereby making integration into society more easily.

Social Capital

Only one participant had arrived to Canada with a family member who was already established here in Vancouver. The other 35 claimants arrived without any pre-existing social networks. Settling in a new country without any social support can make the housing situation for newcomers even more difficult. One settlement councillor stated that,

If they are very honest and tell them that they are a refugee claimant, then most probably the landlord won’t rent a place to them first. They don’t know much about refugee claimants in their mind it’s always someone very desperate, no job, maybe experienced violence in their home country or their personality is unknown and also they don’t have networks here, so if anything happens they have no other sources to help these tenants. Stigmatization is very serious.
(Settlement Worker 4)

Although the claimants did not have anyone to assist them in the first few days after arrival, some claimants did manage to tap into ‘ethnic resources’. One settlement councillor noted that,

[Claimants] will turn to people that seem familiar to them. Familiarity. If they speak their language then they will approach them...people who look like their group... they are looking for a face or words that will lead them to a place.

A 29-year old female from Sri Lanka recounted that she felt the safest approaching someone from her own ethnic group.

On bus I met some Sri Lankan Singhalese lady, my language. She said do you know about Inland Refugee Society, they help refugees. Go and talk
to them...then I go and I try to find them but it was difficult. We don’t know any information, especially BC housing, we don’t know anything. (Interview 232)

A 32-year old man from Cameroon was able to find housing by networking with other refugees and African migrants.

I met this friend from Liberia. Then I spoke to him that I was looking for accommodations. In fact I was with one African guy that just came at the same time. So we were both looking for accommodation, so we happen to meet this guy who is from Liberia, then that’s when he invited me to meet [a settlement worker] at church with the possibility of how I can get accommodation. (Interview 208)

Another settlement worker credited the settlement of claimants to their creative survival methods. He said,

They have been so creative, they develop these kinds of networks amongst themselves...they start talking about living in such a place and they know the landlord now...so it helps but it also brings its own problems because people end up being in places that aren’t necessarily the best. (Settlement Worker 3)

While discussing his observations in dealing with refugee claimants, another settlement worker asserted,

...the more supported a refugee claimant is, not only with housing, but with relationships...they have the support they need to pull it off and they settle in more quickly, generally find jobs more quickly. Refugee claimants are totally disconnected. (Settlement Worker 1)
Chapter 6: Housing

The previous chapter examined the barriers that hinder the search for adequate housing for refugee claimants. The importance of social networks, particularly those made of weak ties, was an evident resource used by some in order to deal with their socio-economic disadvantage. This chapter builds on the last by looking at the claimants’ housing situation as it has evolved since arrival. The conditions that these claimants have been subject to are a direct extension of their socio-economic position and the resources available to them.

Orientation

All of the respondents reported that there was little, if any, support offered upon entry to Canada and in the subsequent days after arrival. When asked what kind of support or information was provided, all the claimants said they experienced feelings of confusion and fear upon arrival, and in all cases the claimants were left on their own. A young female from Albania noted that, “[The Immigration officers] make it clear to you that this is what their responsibilities are and where they end, and so you are on your own from that point on”.

When asked about her initial experiences in Vancouver and whether she was notified about any services upon arrival in Canada, Gretta, a 35 year old female claimant from Mexico said that, “no one explained any services...no information what you can get as an immigrant, where to get money, how to get a home; I didn’t know about community centres. I feel totally isolated, no language, no family, no hope to go back, no money, no house.”
The participants were also asked, “Where did you stay the first night you arrived in Canada?” Several claimants stated that the first night, and in some cases the first several nights, were spent at the airport. Some were detained for lack of documentation, while others spent the first night at the airport because they had no other place to go to and were unable to find proper accommodations that first night. For example, one respondent from Nigeria arrived in Vancouver in 2003. She was 8 months pregnant and was accompanied by two children, aged one and four. She recalled her experience with the immigration officer,

...they said that I had to go...I said where do you want me to go? [The officer] said anywhere...[I said] I don’t know anywhere...you have to tell me. I [asked], if I can sleep on the floor. She said yes. So I slept on the floor ... I am pregnant.

(Interview 228)

Another woman from Congo had a similar experience. On her first night in Vancouver, at eight months pregnant, she said, “...I had to sleep on the chair because I don’t know where I am.”

When discussing her first few days in Canada, one woman from Albania expressed her frustration over the lack of support during such a trying time.

There are too many processes going on at the same time: you have find a house, you have report to immigration, you have to find a lawyer, you have to do your welfare papers, you have to go do immigration exam and if you lose the date, and then you have to go apply for the work permit and then you have to go apply for social insurance number and then you have to go and apply for a job, and then your hearing comes and ... it’s too many things to do at the same time ... And you only have twenty days to do everything and what if you don’t have your lawyer at that time, and what if the lawyer asks for too much money and you don’t have the time to collect all of that money.

(Interview 201)

The initial settlement period was trying for all of the participants. A single mother from Sri Lanka expressed the gender differences and cultural considerations that are
sometimes overlooked. She stated that,

Guys, they can go around and get the information, but ladies, in our country, we are taught that it is scary and especially because we don’t know the language and we cannot trust anybody and so we cannot find the information right away.
(Interview 232)

One settlement worker reflected on the capabilities of settlement agencies to provide initial information on housing to claimants. He stated that,

...unfortunately the situation for a lot of settlement workers is that we don’t have that many resources to offer in terms of housing. We can’t say to our clients, by the way there is this specific way where you go to get all of the information and they will help and give you assistance and inform you about housing and where to go. There is no such thing. [Housing] is an area that the settlement sector has not put that much attention to it, and it’s the key thing from the beginning.
(Settlement Worker 3)

Living Conditions

Sub-standard Conditions

Inadequate and substandard living conditions constitute a major component of relative homelessness. Although all of the claimants reported having a space in which to live, their dwellings were often of low quality (Figure 6.1). Ali, for example, spent many of his nights sleeping on the floor or on old mattresses that had been discarded on the street. In the second place that he stayed, he recounted,

...until that time we didn’t have blankets, we were sleeping on the floor...we didn’t have anything until four or five months we were sleeping on the floor. We had no pillows, no mattress, no...nothing. We didn’t even have cups, we were drinking water out of our hands.
(Interview 205)
One woman who arrived from Mexico with her husband and two children, spoke about her first rental situation, she recounted that “actually in the first house when I move, I don’t have nothing with us, only buy a...pillow, and the floor, we sleep on the floor, for 3
days, before we receive bed, mattress”. Her husband noted that they “received some furniture from Inland. They were helping a lot, and Mennonite Central…MCC…the same they help always”. Other claimants reported housing that was substandard. One man recounted his experiences since his arrival in 2002 from Eritrea. He has lived in six locations since he moved to Canada, and all of these places were described as unhealthy environments. At his fifth home, he said that he was forced into signing a one-year lease without knowing of the conditions. In order for him to avoid losing his $400 deposit, he lived in a basement apartment for 12 months. He felt powerless to change the situation and asks,

...what to do...nothing?.... upstairs they are, I don’t know what kind of people, I don’t understand the whole night I can’t sleep. I talk to them many times...but they don’t care....they smoke in the house and they throw cigarettes in my front door, every time they spit at my front door....they didn’t stop, they didn’t stop. The house is a basement and it’s so dirty and smelly. Because when I cook in that place there was no fan, no fan, so everything is dirty. Even all my clothes just smell... because there’s no fan.

(Interview 219)

Another couple noted that the conditions of their current home were affecting the health of their young daughter: “there are some problems with heat, [the landlords] really don’t care, he keeps the heat low because they want to save... it’s too cold for the baby.”

One settlement worker discussed, in general, substandard conditions that claimants experience. He noted that due to other barriers, these conditions continually deteriorate.

People end up being in places that aren’t necessarily the best, and then they don’t know what to do or how to respond when it comes to letting the landlords/owners know there is a hole in the wall, that the dark hole is getting bigger and bigger and the fridge isn’t working.
Crowding

A prominent housing outcome for many SRCs is overcrowding. A number of problems lead to ‘doubling up’ strategies in order to access rental units in Vancouver. As mentioned in the last chapter, vacancy rates for larger accommodations are higher, but so are prices. Therefore, newcomers are forced to seek out smaller and more affordable accommodations. This quotation is representative of many:

It was just a one bedroom and it was very hard for us; my son needs a bedroom and also me and my husband need one bedroom...for our culture it is very important for our child. My son got the bedroom and me and my husband sleep in the living room. It was really, really, really hard time.
(Interview 221)

A male claimant from Sri Lanka described his settlement experiences since landing in 2002. Since his arrival, he has lived in 6 locations, and he is currently searching for his seventh. He commented on the crowded conditions of a one bedroom suite that he lived in for six months. He said, “the whole house was filled with beds, like two beds in the room and one bed on the outside”. In addition to overcrowding, claimants also mentioned substandard conditions, describing many of these places as dirty, smelly and requiring upgrades.

Children

As noted earlier in the section on rent, larger accommodations are too expensive for claimants who subsist on basic welfare provisions. As a result, larger families seek smaller rental units and crowding occurs. During the interviews, three women highlighted issues surrounding housing and their children. They spoke of the difficulties of finding
housing that is adequate for the size of their family.

A single mother from Peru noted that,

It was small; we were together in one room, because when I was looking for [a] house, it was difficult because they all ask me about how many people and I have children and many times they tell me No if I have kids.

(Interview 230)

This woman continued about her experiences and stated, “if you tell the truth, you can’t find a home.”

One settlement worker confirmed such difficulties and added that,

If a [SRC] has young kids like under three years old, most landlords don’t like that because young children will cry at night and be noisy and write on the wall or riding a bicycle that will damage the carpet or use more water. So landlords prefer to rent to young couples without kids.

Safety

Owing to financial constraints, claimants are settling in areas that have low rental rates or are compromised in quality. Alongside low-income and cheap housing complexes are also high rates of crime, drug abuse and prostitution. This issue can be seen in the experience of a family from Nigeria. Nia was eight months pregnant and had two small children with her. Her husband Joseph was not able to reunite with them until several months later. Nia and the children spent their first month in an emergency shelter. She said that, “The [emergency shelter] was very dirty and there was a lot of smoke, marijuana...the smoke come inside, it was moldy and the kids were getting a lot of problems.”

Nia was very concerned about the health and safety of her children while living at the
shelter. Once Joseph arrived in Canada, the family was able to move into BC housing in the Downtown Eastside. The move out of the emergency shelter and into more stable housing did not increase feelings of safety for this family. Both parents are still quite concerned for the wellbeing of their children. Joseph says that, “We are so much worried about our own children, when we take them out there are the drunks and drug addicts…it is not a good place”. In response to concerns for their children’s safety, the couple applied for a transfer. They reported being told that a transfer is only possible after having lived in the housing complex for more than one year (they will be eligible in January 2006).

Another man spoke nonchalantly about the danger that surrounds him and his family.

Q. Do you find it safe here?
A. We are used to that.
Q. What about your children and wife, do they feel safe?
A. They need some time to adjust … They dare not go out when it’s dark.
(Interview 211)

A 43 year-old female claimant from Russia also commented on safety issues. She discussed how her personal safety was compromised, as landlords were emotionally and physically abusive. This form of abuse was made possible through the constant threats of deportation. She said that one landlord had threatened her by stating that she had “tools to kick her out of the country”. This claimant continued to say that,

Safety is always jeopardized, especially for the refugee claimant. Canadian, well-educated, intelligent women tried to use me as a free housecleaner, babysitter … they don’t care; [she says] I kick you from the country. And guys are always looking for how to use women. And no one cares.
(Interview 231)

A Home in Chinatown

The SRCs who have come from China tell an important and unique story. While
many claimants discuss one, or a combination of the above factors (crowding, substandard conditions and safety), the claimants from China speak of a housing situation that includes all of these factors in an alarming combination. Six of the seven claimants from China found their first accommodations in Chinatown, and all six still reside in this area of the Downtown Eastside. As newcomers to the country, they arrived alone, without any financial resources or English skills. Without any knowledge of the housing market, all six found themselves wandering the streets. Several Chinese claimants relied on the advice of strangers, which led them to seek accommodations in Chinatown. The respondents said that once they arrived in Chinatown, they were all able to find somewhere to sleep; all five claimants found themselves in similar rundown accommodations that are geared towards newcomers from China. The interpreter/settlement worker acknowledged one specific hotel as the same place that nearly all of her refugee clients from China find themselves. According to these six participants, the conditions here were nothing short of horrendous. A male claimant aged 49 from China gave these details,

Things there are in a mess...there were cockroaches everywhere. But the rent was cheap. There were a lot of seniors living there; they are dirty and have a lot of personal belongings, so things are in a mess. A lot of cockroaches. Dirty, stinky.
(Interview 213)

The description of crowding varied slightly between respondents, but the image remained the same. Four of the claimants noted how this site for Chinese refugees allots one washroom and a small kitchen area for twenty to thirty people (see figure 6.2).
Electricity and heating work sporadically at best. Each participant detailed the same list of unhealthy and unsanitary conditions, which include dirty, smelly and infested rooms. Being located in the Downtown Eastside, safety is also a major factor. A female claimant from China, age 63, became very emotional during the interview as she discussed her first reaction to living in Chinatown.

...first it's very noisy, second there is drug trading inside the hotel and some people using drugs and there is different mixture of people living there like refugee claimants, those very low income people, or long term residents and there is a gambling room for people to go gambling. (Interview 210)

This woman stated how unsafe she felt in an environment where there was rampant drug use and dealing, as well as illegal gambling. She still resides in Chinatown, five years after her arrival. All six of the claimants who have lived or are still living in Chinatown felt compelled to reside in this precarious environment, primarily because they cannot see
any other option. Without the ability to speak English, and no information on how to learn English, these claimants felt that there was no other way to communicate with others or even perform basic tasks such as shopping for groceries, unless they were in a culturally homogenous environment. Chinatown provided a familiar environment during a very daunting and unstable period. Financial constraints are also a key factor in the clustering of claimants in Chinatown. The participants all quoted the same rental rate of $325 per month and all were restricted to the welfare allowance of $510 per month. Spending more than fifty percent of their income on housing, these five were all in critical housing need.

One settlement councillor who works with Chinese claimants was asked about the settlement patterns of her clients. She discussed Chinatown as a likely starting point for claimants who are new to Vancouver, stating that,

These refugee claimants don't have many resources to look for other places, and plus these places, the landlord don't like to rent a place to refugee claimants, so they are stuck in a hotel in Chinatown and the living condition is very bad. I heard from my clients that there are mice, and people break in and steal their stuff and also the facilities, shared kitchen and shared bathroom and it's very noisy and also people are gambling...so the whole environment is not very healthy.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The experiences of the refugee claimants who participated in this research are consistent with many of the barriers discussed in the relevant literature. In addition, these interviews bring to light other barriers to settlement that are unique to refugee claimants.

The research conducted by Chambon, Hulchanski, Murdie, and Teixeira (1997) discusses the primary and secondary barriers that newcomers face upon arrival. They assert that primary obstacles include physical characteristics that cannot be changed by the individual, which include skin color, gender, ethnicity, culture and religion. Secondary barriers include factors that may be changed by the individual such as language and knowledge of institutions. This GVRD study found very little evidence that primary barriers were affecting the acquisition of housing for refugee claimants as much as secondary barriers. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Rose and Ray (2001), where the authors noted that claimants rarely mentioned the perception of discrimination as an obstacle to finding housing. The secondary barriers discussed by the claimants in my study proved to be far from temporary and changeable. The picture that emerges from this research is that refugee claimants face unique obstacles that are symptomatic of their immigration class. In many cases, immigrants who face secondary barriers are able to integrate over time into the Canadian housing and labour market. However, the likelihood for full integration is greatly hindered for refugee claimants owing to their more vulnerable position and compound barriers upon arriving. Claimants arrive in Canada with little financial and social capital, and for those who possess human capital, proper documentation is often lacking, and/or their foreign credentials go
unrecognized. And so, by virtue of their means of entry, claimants have a greater disadvantage in housing and labour markets. According to Picot, recent immigrants require more catch-up time in order to reach economic parity with the Canadian-born citizen. However, the process of ‘catching up’ may not apply to successful refugee claimants, who have fallen so far behind in the period after their arrival that they may never achieve income levels comparable to the Canadian-born.

David Hulchanski (1997) argued that primary barriers - when they are activated by discrimination - impede full incorporation. However, the case of refugee claimants in Vancouver provides evidence that secondary barriers can be just as significant a force. Finding shelter upon arrival has been the greatest struggle for claimants. From the outset, claimants are left to find housing in a city with little or no initial information, since they are not eligible for standard settlement services that are provided to immigrants and sponsored refugees. This thesis further highlights the lack of assistance available to claimants upon arrival, and so claimants are rarely assisted with information about shelter and social aid. Several of the respondents were left to sleep on the floor of the airport, while others (as in the case of Chinatown) roamed the streets searching for some form of assistance from members of their own ethnic group. This example raises another key barrier for claimants in the orientation and initial settlement process: language. Many felt confused and fearful, and even those with fluent skills in French were unable to communicate with immigration officials.

The search for adequate housing after the initial period of arrival raised other issues. Robert Murdie and Carlos Teixeira (2001) show that, in Toronto, rental units are in high demand among recent immigrants. The size of affordable dwelling units is inadequate for new immigrant families. In addition, the supply of social housing units
does not remotely meet its demand. In this GVRD study, it was clear that since SRCs mainly subsist on welfare, even small rental units are sometimes out of reach for these newcomers. There is a discrepancy between what refugee claimants are receiving in basic aid, and the average cost of renting an apartment in Vancouver. The vacancy rates for smaller, more affordable accommodations are particularly low. Individuals therefore face bleak alternatives: they can learn to cope at the very bottom of the housing market (as in the Chinatown example), or they can share accommodations and live with crowding. Moreover, the income-rent discrepancy means that these newcomers have virtually no money left over for other basic necessities, such as food and clothing.

The vulnerability associated with refugee status as well as the macro and micro barriers faced by all immigrants, results in high levels of poverty. Pendakur and Pendakur (1996) argued that, as a result of below-average earnings of recent immigrants, housing and rent affordability is a critical issue. The authors noted that in 2001, 42 percent of recent immigrants in Vancouver lived below the poverty line, almost triple the poverty rate for the Canadian-born. The situation is more extreme for claimants, who face deeper levels of deprivation than the average immigrant; recall that most claimants depend on welfare and assistance levels are far below the poverty line. In addition, most claimants are members of visible minority groups, which in general face greater barriers in the labour market (e.g., Hiebert and Ley, 2001; Ley, 1999).

This study has provided some evidence that refugee claimants are prone to episodes of homelessness, in one form or another. More recently, the literature on homelessness has tended to problematize the concept by contesting narrow definitions of the term (May, 2000; Valentine, 2001; Vaness, 1993). Valentine (2001) evaluates homelessness as a continuum between being housed and being without home. Peressini,
MacDonald and Hulchanski (1991) divide the definition of homelessness into two categories: *absolute homelessness* and *relative homelessness*. The former definition refers to those people who live without shelter and therefore reside on the streets or rely on public facilities such as emergency shelters. In contrast, relative homelessness refers to those people who possess shelter, but are subject to substandard, unsafe and/or temporary conditions. This group includes those people who 'sofa surf' or 'camp out' in often overcrowded dwellings belonging to either friends or family. Nearly all of the participants in this study were subject to living conditions that are consistent with high levels of relative homelessness.

Above all, claimants seem to be socially isolated. The individuals in this study did not arrive in Vancouver with elaborate, close social networks to draw upon (despite the fact that they were recruited from settlement service and advocacy organizations). Only a small number of participants were able to rely on the assistance of family members. In contrast, a number of respondents did discuss the importance of what Granovetter (1994) refers to as weak ties, acquaintances and friendships that were formed after arrival. This is most prevalent in the case study that discussed the experiences of SRCs from China. In the absence of strong ties (family and close friends), some of the Chinese respondents, as well as other respondents, said that they had no other option upon arrival, but to roam around the streets and look for a familiar face, someone who shared their cultural background. The spatial segregation that occurs among Chinese-speaking claimants is consistent with much of the literature, which reports the above-average levels of residential clustering among Chinese groups (Hou and Picot, 2003). It is interesting to note that the group of Chinese claimants in this study lives in the downtown area, which is quite different than what would be expected given the growing literature on the
suburbanization of initial settlement (e.g., Murdie and Teixeira, 2001). In the case of the Chinese claimants, the participants saw the combination of low rents and cultural familiarity in Chinatown as important, despite exceptionally poor housing quality in the area. This group is particularly vulnerable to the *mobility trap* discussed earlier. In this case, social connectedness is constrained by the limited resources of this particular ethnic group. In addition to this, Li (2004) adds that co-ethnic employers may use ethnic ties in order to take advantage of the vulnerability of newcomers. Nonetheless, for some claimants, social networks based on weak ties forged after arrival, were seen to be vital strategies for settlement.

In short, SRCs face challenging circumstances that are consistent with those discussed in the literature. These are common barriers faced by immigrants and visible minorities, but it is also clear that claimants face unique challenges that are associated with the refugee process. The minimal levels of financial, documented human, and social capital of individuals in this group is associated with extreme vulnerability to homelessness. The situation is quite different for those immigrants and refugees who have access to social networks and support systems.

**Refugee Claimant Settlement Across Canada: Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver**

Despite varying methodologies, the literature across Canada does yield some similar findings.

**Orientation**

In Quebec, refugee claimants are entitled to free and temporary shelter (YMCA) for up to two weeks. Surprisingly, Rose and Ray (2001) found that only nine percent of
claimants in their study had taken advantage of this resource. Instead, the authors found
that nearly one third of claimant respondents relied on the assistance of family and
friends to shelter them during their initial stages in Canada. Likewise, Murdie (2005)
found that nearly forty percent of refugee claimants in his study spent their first night
with family and friends, while nearly a third spent these first few nights wherever they
could find somewhere to sleep - a motel, a church or a stranger's house. In the GVRD
study, claimants did not rely on the assistance of pre-established social networks upon
arrival. Instead, claimants sought out alternative options such as asking airport
personnel, strangers, or staying in emergency shelters. Claimants were vocal about the
limited assistance available upon entry to Vancouver. In Toronto, the First Contact
Project found that there was a need for services within the ports of entry that direct
refugee claimants to adequate shelter, legal and health services. In response to this, the
project set up special services in order to assist in the initial settlement stages of
claimants arriving in Toronto which include: a 24-hour/7 day a week telephone number
to inform claimants of available services; a drop-in centre that serves as a point of contact
to provide referrals and services for claimants living in the hostel/shelter system; working
with ports of entry agencies (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Pearson Airport) to
provide service delivery upon arrival; and collecting data on refugee claimants with the aim
of improving the welfare of refugee claimants in Toronto. These forms of support upon
arrival in Toronto, as well as the provision of emergency housing in Montreal are key
services that are lacking for claimants arriving in the GVRD.

*Housing Barriers*

The studies in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver illustrate several factors that
have hindered the search for accessible and adequate housing for claimants. Murdie
(2005) found that the majority of his claimant (and sponsored) respondents were spending more than fifty percent of their income on shelter. In addition, both groups indicated considerable difficulty paying rent. In the GVRD study, thirty two of the thirty six participants were spending more than fifty percent of their income on rent, while the remaining four were spending between fifty and seventy five percent of their income on rent. Renaud and Gringas (1998) found that rent affordability was the greatest obstacle for refugee claimants in Montreal (likewise with Rose and Ray, 2001, drawing on the same data). Rose and Ray furthermore found that sixty one percent of respondents were in critical housing need (spending more than fifty percent of income on rent) and an additional one sixth of the respondents were spending more than thirty percent of income on rent. An overwhelming number of Somali and Kurdish refugees (ninety one percent) in Vancouver listed rent affordability as the main obstacle to accessing housing in the study conducted by Miraftab (2000).

Discrimination was also a central obstacle for many claimants throughout the studies conducted in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. The studies varied in the types of discrimination that inhibited claimants from finding adequate housing. Drawing back to primary and secondary forms of discrimination, Hulchanski (1997) noted that primary sources of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, etc. have affected access to housing for many newcomers. On this note, Miraftab (2000), concentrating on the refugee population of Vancouver, found that various forms of racial and ethno-religious discrimination constitute barriers limiting refugees in their search for accommodation. The author concludes that sheer racism was the primary form of discrimination, and that refugees are often refused accommodation based on their skin colour. Ethno-religious and cultural practices also enter the equation, and can be targets of discrimination. The study
by Rose and Ray (2001) found discrimination was rarely mentioned as a barrier to housing. In the GVRD, this study asserts that secondary barriers worked to inhibit access to housing more so than primary barriers. Such secondary barriers include social insurance tagging, source of income, and number of children. Miraftab also found that the source of household income matters, and welfare recipients are often targeted. Murdie (2005) has expressed that welfare discrimination is a longstanding barrier affecting newcomers, particularly refugees.

**Housing Conditions**

Rose and Ray (2001) optimistically reported that claimants in the Montreal study are relatively well housed. Respondents were positive towards the physical qualities of their housing and did not express being subjected to living in substandard conditions. The authors do note, however, that perceptions of housing in the Montreal case may be over-optimistic if respondents are comparing their current housing with the housing conditions in their place of origin. On the contrary, in the Murdie (2005) study, a majority stated that their housing did not meet their expectations. In GVRD case, this study indicates a strong concern that housing conditions are substandard, unhealthy, crowded and are often situated in unsafe areas. On a more alarming note, claimants have expressed that they do not have alternative options. With limited strong social networks and few financial resources, claimants in this study provided a bleak portrait of their housing situation.

Miraftab (2000) revealed that many refugees in Vancouver felt obligated to be dishonest about the size of their family in order to negotiate a contract. Family members were later ‘smuggled’ in after accommodations were attained, and overcrowding is
prevalent among many refugee households. These conditions often lead to tensions among family members and increase the likelihood of domestic violence. In Montreal, Chambon et al. (1997) noted that Somalis encountered problems related to family size and the need for appropriately sized housing. As in the Vancouver case, Somali immigrants in Toronto occasionally hid family members from landlords in order to compete for rental units. The consequence is often overcrowding, since rental apartments are generally limited to smaller households. In addition, immigrants face the potential for eviction if they are caught hiding additional family members. In these situations families are subject to frequent moves, placing greater financial strain on the household and inciting potential psychological problems. Murdie's (2005) study illustrated that claimants were more likely to share accommodations in order to offset costs of affordability. He noted that claimants were more likely than their sponsored counterparts to be sharing with people other than immediate family members. In the GVRD case, sharing and crowding has been a likely strategy owing to high rental prices that surpass the amount provided by welfare assistance. Vacancy rates are lower for affordable smaller units and so sharing becomes the only means to attain larger rental units.

**Social Support**

Many of the studies agree that social capital is a key factor that facilitates socio-economic integration. Ray (1998) discusses the importance of social networks in the housing choices of immigrants in Toronto and Montreal. The strength of bonds tying people together is usually related to the time spent together, level of trust, and reciprocity that exists. The scale of one's social network is directly related to one's length of time in Canada. Both strong and weak networks have been shown to be influential in providing
newcomers with practical assistance and knowledge surrounding the housing market. However, Ray reports that recent immigrants to Toronto and Montreal have an inadequate support base, suggesting that newcomers are required to make decisions based on limited knowledge. This is particularly the case for immigrants who have been in Canada for 5 years or less.

However, the level of support varies between cities. Rose and Ray (2001) found that more than half of their respondents used family or friends to help locate their first dwelling. The authors noted that surprisingly few (5.2 percent) used NGOs as a resource to help find housing. On the other hand, Miraftab (2000) noted that claimants are not included as readily as other immigrants in established social networks when they first arrive, and suffer from this when entering the housing market. Similarly, this research in the GVRD, found that claimants were rarely tapping into pre-established networks. In this study, it was noted that networks were nonetheless important to finding housing, albeit these networks were limited to weak ties. Murdie (2005) found that claimants were less likely than sponsored refugees to live amongst co-ethnics, since sponsored refugees were more supported by family and friends upon arrival.

* * *

At the beginning of this thesis, it was established that immigrants (especially visible minorities) are at a greater economic disadvantage than their Canadian-born counterparts. Refugee claimants face numerous problems upon arrival owing to their migration class. For some studies mentioned above, claimants have tapped into ethnic resources in order to offset their disadvantage and the additional barriers. In my study, I found that the claimants I spoke with had arrived without any pre-established social networks.
networks, which worked to further exacerbate their search for adequate housing. As a result of these compounded barriers, claimants are likely to be trapped in a never-ending cycle of catch-up. This places claimants at risk of becoming homeless; however, there is little evidence to suggest that claimants are living on the streets or in shelters. In this study, social capital was seen to be an instrumental tool in escaping absolute homelessness, albeit this resource was limited to weak ties, established after arrival.

As noted earlier by Portes and Lanolt (1996), systems of reciprocity do not include everyone. As a result of their immigration status, or lack of community knowledge, some claimants were not able to tap into their own ethnic community resources. This raises the question asked earlier by Servon (2003), “...when and where do we see bridging happening?” For many claimants who arrive without pre-established social networks, bonds go beyond racial and ethnic identities because they are forged based on survival. While for others, such as the Chinese claimants, established ethnic resources are more accessible. For this latter group, a larger and more well established ethnic community would appear to be the most supportive. However, the case study in Chapter Six illustrated the contrary. I found that the housing conditions of those settling within Chinatown were the most alarming. This raises the question of whether social capital plays a more positive and supportive role for claimants, versus it being a negative and exploitive force. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the original emphasis of this thesis was to examine the extent of homelessness among claimants. It became clear after the research was completed that social capital was a critical factor in understanding how claimants deal with the intersection of multiple barriers. This study, along with other Canadian research, was not methodologically designed to examine the actual details of social capital. What this study, and others like it, has done is raise the importance of
social capital and 'ethnic resources' as a tool in escaping the worst forms of homelessness for refugee claimants. This thesis furthermore highlights the need for research that focuses on the role of social capital in the settlement trajectories of newcomers, especially among refugee claimants.

Overall, this thesis raises a number of policy recommendations. First, there is an exceedingly low stock of housing available (both within the regular market or from non-market providers). This study, and others, suggests that there is a need for a greater proportion of housing that is allocated on need rather than price considerations. When claimants settle in unsafe housing in marginal areas of the city, they tend to enter into a cycle of homelessness. Second, there needs to be greater continuity between the instruments of the state (welfare aid and SIN) and how these instruments are received by the private sector (landlords). Third, there is a lack of social assistance geared towards claimants. There are no formal support systems provided by the state; and within the NGO sector, there are only a few small organizations that deal with the whole claimant population. This brings me to the third recommendation, which is to increase the support and information available to new claimants at the ports of entry. Vancouver requires its own *First Contact Project*, where claimants are greeted with information regarding the claims process, financial assistance and housing in his/her own language. Lastly, we should work to further strengthen civil society, there needs to be a greater movement to foster community involvement, supporting NGOs and religious institutions. This will undoubtedly further facilitate social capital, indirectly assisting in the integration of newcomers.
References


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84
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Appendix A: Overview of the Claims Process

Claim is made to a Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) officer

CIC makes a decision on eligibility

- Not eligible

Eligible - Claim sent to Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB)

Given a Personal Information Form (PIF) by CIC to complete and give to the IRB

Interview or hearing at the IRB

Claim accepted

- May apply for permanent residence

Claim rejected

- Pre-Removal Risk Assessment

- May apply for judicial review

- Accepted

- May apply for permanent residence

- Rejected

- May be removed from Canada

- Stay of removal if inadmissible for certain reasons

Source: Immigration and Refugee Board, 2004
## Appendix B: Members of the Research Advisory Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annie McKitrick</td>
<td>Surrey Social Futures Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansar Cheung</td>
<td>SUCCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbie Wu</td>
<td>MOSAIC Settlement Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carolyn Glover</td>
<td>Citizenship and Immigration Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catalina Hernandez</td>
<td>Inland Refugee Society (IRS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deborah Isaacs</td>
<td>Sisters of the Good Shepherd/SCION Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Hiebert</td>
<td>UBC Department of Geography/RIIM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gustavo Carcuz</td>
<td>BCSIWA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jim Siemens</td>
<td>Immigrant Services Society Welcome House</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joan Cotie</td>
<td>Shelter Net BC Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathy Sherrell</td>
<td>Research Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leslee Madore</td>
<td>Surrey Delta Immigrant Services Society (SDISS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesley Sherlock</td>
<td>City of Richmond</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sadia Ramirez</td>
<td>Tenants Rights Action Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shahnaz Eduljee</td>
<td>Shelter Net BC Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sherman Chan</td>
<td>MOSAIC Settlement Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silvia D’Addario</td>
<td>Research Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor Porter</td>
<td>MOSAIC Community Outreach Program</td>
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### Appendix C: Participant Information List

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
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Appendix D: SRC Interview Schedule

Individual demographics

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Pre Migration Characteristics:

| Year of birth |
| Year of migration to Canada |
| Did you migrate with anyone else? |

Housing situation during claim period
- Could you briefly tell me about your housing situation before you came to Canada?
- Have you lived in more than one place since arriving in Canada?
- Could you tell me about the place you stayed in the longest?
- What was the location of this place, postal code or intersection?
- What type of dwelling was it?
- How did you find out about that place?
- How much did it cost to live there?
- How much was total rent, including hydro, electricity and gas?
- How did you pay for rent?

[Quality of housing]
- Were there many things wrong with the house/apartment? e.g. plumbing, leakiness?
- Did you wish to stay there for a long time?

Household characteristics
- What is the location of the place you live in now, postal code or intersection?
- What type of dwelling is it?
- How many bedrooms?
- How did you find out about that place?
- How many people live here? Who are they/what relation to you?
- Why did you choose to live in this particular area?
- Are there many people from your cultural community that live in this area?

Current housing situation
- How much is rent now, including hydro, electricity and gas?
- How do you pay for the rent?
- Are there many things wrong with this place now? How is the plumbing and heating; are there leaks etc.
- How safe do you feel living here for you and for your kids (if applicable)
- (if applicable) is there room for your kids to play outside, is this adequate space?
What were the hardest things about trying to find housing here in Canada?
-How did you try to get over these obstacles?

Current labour market situation
-Where are you working right now?
(if applicable)
-How long?
-How did you find out about his job opportunity?

Sources of Income
-Do you have any sources of income [other than from your work (if applicable)]
-What proportion of your total household income goes to rent?
e.g. < 30% 30%-50% > 50%
-Are you currently financially assisting any other family or friends here in Canada or somewhere else, such as remitting money back home? If so, can you tell me about that? e.g. how much and how often.

Housing expectations
-How would you like to see your home change for the better?

Anticipated housing situation
-How do you see your housing situation changing over the next 3 months?
-How will you make this happen (strategies)?