

# POVERTY IN POST-WAR SUBURBS: ARE HOUSEHOLDS DOING BETTER OR WORSE?

by  
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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

Gentrification of downtown urban areas in many North American cities has meant a growing proportion of wealthier households locating in the urban core. This has created challenges for classical theories of urban spatial patterns which relied on wealthier households moving outwards from the core leaving behind older housing which filtered down to lower income households. The movement of wealthier households to the urban core has resulted in gentrification-led displacement. This displacement of low-income households has long been recognized in research on gentrification but what has not been as clear is where low-income households are locating and how this is impacting households.

Work by Hulchanski, and Skaburskis and Nelson indicated that low-income households were to some extent locating in post-war suburbs. The extent and effect of the shift of low-income households to post-war suburbs is the focus of this report. The research also seeks to consider the effects of dwelling in post-war suburbs on different low-income household types.

### Research Questions:

1. *What is the extent of low income household relocation to post-war housing?*
2. *What is the impact of this relocation on housing affordability, employment prospects and welfare for low income households?*
3. *Are different low income household types experiencing relocation to different extents?*
4. *What are the impacts of relocation to post-war housing on housing affordability, employment prospects and welfare for different low income household types?*
5. *Where are buildings built in the post-war period located in Toronto?*

### **Methods:**

Two methods of analysis were used to complete this research. Quantitative analysis was undertaken using public use micro data files (PUMF) from 1981 and 2001. Periods of construction were established in order to isolate housing built during two post-war periods of construction, 1946 to 1959 and 1960 to 1969. Analysis then looked at household characteristics for low income households comparing them by period of construction and change over the study period (1981 to 2001). Three household types were also studied in order to consider how the shift of low income households might be affecting different household types in different ways and to different degrees.

Geographical analysis was undertaken in order to map where post-war housing was built in order to establish that the periods of construction were a good proxy for geographical location based on census tract.

## Results:

The quantitative analysis shows that there was a growing proportion of low income households in post-war periods of construction over the twenty year study period (see table 1).

	Year	CMA	Period of Construction			
			pre-war	1946-1959	1960-1969	post 1969
Low income households	1981	0.147	0.162	0.12	0.164	0.145
	2001	0.182	0.166	0.178	0.223	0.173
	2001/1981	1.238	1.025	1.483	1.360	1.193

**Table 1:** Showing the proportion of low income households among all households by period of construction in the Toronto CMA in 1981 and 2001 and the proportional change over the study period. Data source: Statistics Canada, 2001 & Statistics Canada, 1981.

Analysis also revealed that the distribution of low income households by period of construction did differ by household type for the three studied (see table 2).

	Year	CMA	Period of Construction			
			pre-war	1946-1959	1960-1969	post 1969
Low income family	1981	0.076	0.077	0.064	0.093	0.07
	2001	0.106	0.081	0.095	0.131	0.106
	2001/1981	1.395	1.052	1.484	1.409	1.514
Low income single parent	1981	0.025	0.022	0.021	0.032	0.025
	2001	0.027	0.023	0.032	0.035	0.024
	2001/1981	1.080	1.045	1.524	1.094	0.960
Low income senior (65+)	1981	0.052	0.035	0.035	0.043	0.047
	2001	0.047	0.045	0.051	0.06	0.041
	2001/1981	0.904	1.286	1.457	1.395	0.872

**Table 2:** Showing the proportion of low income family, single parent and senior households among all households by period of construction in the Toronto CMA in 1981 and 2001 and the proportional change over the study period. Data source: Statistics Canada, 2001 & Statistics Canada, 1981.

Analysis of household characteristics also revealed an increasing proportion of households with children in high-rise apartments, seniors aging in place in single family detached dwellings and increasing proportions of low income families and single mothers who are also recent immigrants. Adults in low income households in post-war periods of construction have lower university completion rates than those in pre-war housing or than in all households indicating poorer future employment prospects. Low income households in post-war periods of construction had shorter commuting distances to work on average in 2001 than those living in dwellings built in the pre-war period of construction. Higher proportions of low income households in post-war periods of construction are in dwellings in need of regular maintenance

or minor repairs only. These indicate some of the advantages low income households locating in post-war dwellings are experiencing.

The high proportions of low income households with children in high-rise apartment buildings causes concern as research has indicated that high-rise apartment living may result in a higher proportion of young children with behavioural issues at school and higher levels of dissatisfaction with the dwelling among parents. Addressing issues experienced by low-income parents living in high-rise apartments will require ensuring that adequate support services and programs are offered that may help to address this concern at school and at home.

The growing proportion of low income seniors living in post-war periods of construction means a growing proportion of seniors in car oriented developments. The higher and growing proportion of seniors and low-income seniors and post-war period of construction raises concerns regarding active and healthy aging in car-oriented developments where access to public transportation can be limited. Effort should be made to develop active transportation networks, increasing walkability, public transportation access and strengthen the public transportation network in post-war suburbs in order to address these concerns.

The growing proportion of low income recent immigrant households faces increased challenges. Additional language supports will need to be made available in schools for children and for adults learning a second language as these may help households whose native language is neither French nor English acquire employment in Toronto.

Geographical analysis showed that post-war construction was concentrated in a ring around the urban core as can be seen in the accompanying map.

**Map 1:** (at right) Showing top quintile census tracts by proportion of housing built in the 1946 to 1960, and 1961 to 1970 periods of construction. Data source: Statistics Canada, 1981 & DMTI Spatial Inc., 2012.

In summary, low income households are locating in post-war suburbs which are car-oriented and further from the urban core. This represents a divergence from urban spatial theories which would suggest that low-income households occupy the oldest housing stock. In considering the welfare implications the shift of low income households to dwellings built in the post-war period has had on low income households, low income single seniors, low income single mothers and low income families it has become clear that households do not experience this shift evenly and the impact on household differs by type.

