

## Executive Summary

Finding a suitable accommodation is critical for any newcomer to Canada. Many newcomers, during the adjustment period, have to conduct their housing search in an unfamiliar environment using the limited resources and information they have. The accessibility, affordability and appropriateness of housing for newcomers has been a prominent theme in recent housing research. Housing search behaviour is a crucial component of the studies on settlement and mobility. Recent research focuses on cultural ethno-racial variables, which puts emphasis on the housing strategies that minority groups use to overcome housing barriers. A survey interview method was employed to examine the case of Queen's Chinese international graduate students' housing experiences and strategies. The survey was conducted in April 2001, and a total of 33 interviews were completed.

The survey results indicate that Chinese international students' housing conditions have issues of affordability and overcrowding. Twenty-eight percent of the respondents spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Many respondents trade a desired quality of housing for lower rent. Most of them are satisfied with their housing condition in Kingston. Overall, they prefer a place that is quiet, clean, and close to school, shopping, and bus routes. They also prefer apartment-style buildings and avoid living with landlords. Overcrowding might be a concern when too many people share accommodation; for example, they may transform the living room into a bedroom. Furthermore, a large portion of the respondents live in Queen's owned apartment

buildings (An Clachan). A large number of them also live within a few blocks north of Princess Street, for instance, in the area of Colborne Street and Division Street.

Before the Chinese students arrived in Kingston, their housing search strategies consisted of searching the Internet, contacting their department/the Graduate School/the International Centre, or applying for Queen's residences. When they first came to Kingston, many of them knew no one but they soon built networks. They tended to get help from the people with the same ethnic background, or in the same department. After they gained more experience about the housing market and services in Kingston, they depend less on informal information and more on the formal housing agencies, such as the Apartment and Housing Services provided by Queen's. Another strategy is that they tend to find a place without a lease when they are not certain about the quality of such housing, or when they are not sure about their departure time from Kingston. Different information channels would lead to different search costs and housing outcomes. It was discovered that housing information, which targets the student population, would lower the searching cost. For example, the respondents who used resources and networks inside the university spent less on temporary stay.

Twenty-three respondents (70%) have no major difficulties, while ten (30%) showed that to some extent, it was difficult to find a place to live in Kingston. Their ranking of the factors that contribute to their difficulties are as follows: lack of short-term housing; lack of choice of affordable accommodation; lack of transportation access; lack of vacancies; lack of time to search; lack of knowledge of the housing system. The students needed

assistance mostly before they arrived, when they arrived late, or when they arrived during the Christmas holidays. Some of them experienced numerous difficulties due to their financial and international status. Respondents with more constraints, such as barriers due to gender, income level, lack of knowledge of the housing market, time constraints, language and culture differences, had to expend more effort on the search. There are indications of minor discrimination or xenophobia in Kingston's housing market, even inside an ethnic group (for example, amongst different Chinese sub-groups).

Student status and marital status influence housing needs and choices. Some respondents are interested in living in an international dorm-style residence because of the opportunities to practice English and to learn about different cultures. However, some of the students consider the residences are not suitable if they have a family, or because of the poor cooking facilities in residences as well as the noise, the cultural gap, and mostly, the high price. Many suggested that the university should find volunteers to provide consultation to new students on housing matters, such as a reasonable price range, market information, how to find vacancies, and language translations. Some of them also want to improve the effectiveness of housing information and hope that the university would provide affordable and sufficient housing with more variety in price range and facilities.