

Under My Umbrella: The Housing Experiences of HIV Positive Parents Who Live With and Care for Their Children

What is this research about?

This research tries to understand the housing needs and experiences of HIV positive parents and the social and economic factors that put their housing at risk.

What you need to know

People living with HIV most at risk of homelessness are women, Aboriginal populations and new Canadians. Housing is known to be fundamental to the health and well being of individuals, and therefore one of the most urgent unmet needs for people living with HIV. Many families affected by HIV experience near homelessness as a result of social and financial challenges. HIV

positive parents experience a number of interconnected barriers to living in appropriate and stable housing for both themselves and their children. Parents who are HIV positive must cope with discrimination, stigma, poverty and the stresses of planning for possible sickness or death, as well as the everyday stresses of life. The combination of these concerns can lead to feelings of depression and hopelessness.



Photographer: YST

ARTICLE SOURCE

Greene S, Tucker R, Rourke SB, Monette L, Koornstra J, Sobota M, Byers S, Hwang S, Dunn J, Guenter D, Ahluwalia A, Watson J. (2009). "Under my umbrella": the housing experiences of HIV positive parents who live with and care for their children in Ontario. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 13(3): 223-32.

KEYWORDS

HIV, families, mothers, housing instability, mental health

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What did the researchers do?

The researchers interviewed thirteen HIV positive parents living with and caring for children under the age of 18 in Ontario. The interview questions were open-ended and focused on the participants' housing and health experiences since being diagnosed with HIV. The open-ended questions provided flexibility, such that the participants were able to elaborate on their unique housing experiences.



What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that HIV positive parents have limited choice in terms of places they can live. Subsequently, they are at risk of housing instability. They often face stigma and discrimination when trying to obtain housing in the private market, and report that living in HIV designated housing jeopardizes the privacy of their HIV status. Some of the HIV positive parents reported having lived in unsafe housing as a result of not being able to afford to move to a safer neighbourhood. Other participants continued to live with an abusive partner to avoid living on the street. One participant lived in a cramped bachelor apartment,

with her child, to be closer to the child's school in case of emergency. Medication compliance, which is critical in fending off drug resistance, was also found to be difficult to maintain for HIV positive parents suffering from housing instability, as they sometimes had to flee their homes for safety reasons. Finally, HIV positive parents expressed a sense of fear of losing their children to Child and Family Services. Providing inadequate accommodation, such as a cramped apartment, conflicts with the Child and Family Services' mandate to protect the welfare of children and thus places HIV positive parents under scrutiny.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Saara Greene, PhD is an Assistant Professor at McMaster University. One of her current research focuses on the impact of housing instability and homelessness on families with children who are affected by HIV.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research highlights the need to use a holistic approach to effectively address the housing needs of HIV positive parents. It can therefore be used to provide HIV education to teachers and family service workers such that they gain a deeper understanding of the complex interrelationship between housing, health, poverty and parenting. This research can also be used to advocate for supportive housing models for HIV positive parents to help them care for their children throughout the various stages of their illness.



Photographer: Eva-Maria Vogel