CHAPTER 1 - RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

Context

Changing levels of inequality and poverty in Australia

The 2001 report by the Society of St Vincent de Paul, “Two Australias – addressing inequality and poverty,” claims that Australia is becoming a divided society, as the gap between rich and poor widens (National Public Affairs Committee 2001). In summary the report states:

“The single most important problem facing Australia now and in the years ahead is the crisis of the burgeoning gap between the wealthy and the poor and disadvantaged. The gap is so wide that unless action is locked in now to gradually reduce it, the emergence of two nations with conflicting aspirations and cultures will proceed.” (Executive Summary, p.i)

The report cites a number of indicators of this growth in inequality, such as disparities in the growth in household income between 1993-4 and 1998-9. During this five-year period the average household income for the 2.2 million households in the bottom 20% of household income increased by 5% or just $9 – to $160 per week. In the same period the income of the top 20% received an average weekly increase of 23.4% or $343 – up to $1,996 per week (p.9). Similarly, ACOSS (1999) reported that Australia’s poverty rate had doubled in the period between 1973 and 1999.

A recent report by The Smith Family could be seen to paint a different picture. Using a “relative poverty” benchmark of half the family income of the average person in Australia, the Smith family report finds that poverty rates fell between 1982 and 1999 (Harding & Szukalska 1999, p.6). This analysis focuses on rates of relative poverty, rather than degree of inequality as used in the other analysis cited in this section. It is possible that inequality has grown at the same time as the living conditions of the poorest have improved.
The contradiction between these findings and those of ACOSS are harder to reconcile, and may be explained by the different measures of poverty used in the two reports. ACOSS make use of the normative poverty measure, the Henderson Poverty Line, while the Smith Family report uses a relative poverty measure.

The Smith Family report highlights the impact of housing costs in relation to poverty. The level of after-housing poverty in 1999 was 17.3% compared with 13.3% before housing. As the authors point out, this reflects the fact that housing costs for the poor are a more significant proportion of their income than for middle and upper-class families (p.14, citing Harding & Szukalska 2000).

Internationally the United Nations considers the degree of inequality in Australia is amongst the highest in the world (Koutsoukis 1999). A 1999 UNICEF report found that Australia had the fifth highest rate of child poverty in the industrialised world (Horin 1999). Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom and Italy had a higher child poverty rate 4.

Inequality and poverty provide an important context for the following analysis of the relationship between housing and schooling. In a society that is becoming more equitable, the importance of strategies that interrupt the process of inherited disadvantage become less important. It appears, however, that Australia may be becoming an increasingly divided society, where the gap between rich and poor is widening and poverty rates are increasing. In this context, better understanding the process of transmission of disadvantage between generations is very important.

While poverty is of itself concerning, the risk of inter-generational or inherited poverty must surely be of even greater concern at this time. The social exclusion debate highlights the risks to a society when people become permanently disconnected from the broader community – when they feel that society is moving on without them. In such an environment alternate value systems that validate criminal and other anti-social behaviour may flourish.

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4 This study used 1994 data. More recent increases in family payments may have seen an improvement in Australia since then.
A society that values equality of opportunity for all should concern itself with ensuring that children born into poverty are no less able to gain an education and find meaningful employment than those born into more wealthy circumstances. If poor housing is a means by which disadvantage is transmitted from generation to generation, then Governments should be concerned to address this situation at this point in Australia’s history.

The growth in inequality in Australia is not only a moral issue. In a major study of the impacts of inequality, Wilkinson (1996) suggests that the degree of inequality, rather than poverty per se, is the key determinant of the overall health of a nation. As Wilkinson (p.3) states,

“In the developed world, it is not the richest countries which have the best health, but the most egalitarian.”

Wilkinson concludes that healthy societies are egalitarian and cohesive, and that providing a basic minimum standard of living for the poor will not help to create a healthy society if the gap between rich and poor is large. The importance of this analysis by Wilkinson is that it helps to clarify the broad policy objectives of Government, and of Government’s role in housing in particular. It also helps to provide a broad policy context for this research.

If, as Wilkinson proposes, health (and underlying this, quality of life more generally) is tied to egalitarianism and social cohesion, rather than achieving minimum standards for the poor regardless of the distance between the lives of the poor and the lives of the rich, then social policy should be targeted not just at creating a satisfactory safety net. Rather social policy should aim to help build a more cohesive and egalitarian society for the benefit of all.

Education is a key tool to achieve egalitarianism. For children to have equality of opportunity, they must first have equality of educational opportunity. If the income of one’s family of origin is a determinant of one’s chances of educational success, then the chances of building a cohesive and egalitarian society are diminished.
Understanding the role of housing as a transmitter – as a mechanism by which the children of poor families are less likely to succeed academically – therefore takes on a new level of importance.

The changing housing market in Australia

In this context of growing social inequality, the Australian housing market is also changing in ways that may disadvantage low-income earners. In particular, research suggests that there may be a decline in the supply of low cost rental housing occurring at the same time as the rental market in general is growing.

In a 1999 report produced by the Queensland Department of Housing, research by Dr Judith Yates indicates that the Brisbane private rental market grew by almost 93,000 units between 1986 and 1996. During that same period the supply of housing renting for less than $100 per week (adjusted to 1996 dollars) fell by almost 3,000 units. While the actual number of units renting up for to $150 per week grew, the proportion of stock in this category decreased from 68.6% in 1986, to 47.2% in 1996 (Housing Policy and Research 1999, p.4).

The report notes that the results for Queensland as a whole are similar. During the same 10 year period there was a growth in the total rental market in Queensland of 43% or 147,000 units. The supply of housing renting for less than $100 per week shrank by 13,000 units or 37% (p.5). Further research by Tim Seelig, cited in the same report, notes that this decline in the supply of low cost rental stock has continued during the period 1996 to 1999 (p.6).

More recently Professor Terry Burke from Swinburne University was quoted as warning that the Melbourne housing market was changing in ways that would significantly disadvantage low income earners (Cauchi 2001). Burke expressed concern that inner and middle ring suburbs had increased in value significantly, while values in outer suburbs such as Dandenong, Frankston and Ringwood have fallen. He warned that low-income earners were being forced to the urban fringe.
In summary, two processes are at work in Australia – a growing gap between the incomes of the wealthy and the incomes of the poor, and a geographic polarisation of these two groups as housing markets (particularly in urban areas) change. These factors together are likely to lead to a more divided society – the sort that Wilkinson suggests will also lead to increasing ill-health.

**Governments’ role in housing assistance**

Government’s role in housing assistance is at a cross-roads in Australia. Funding levels through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) have been steadily reducing since the mid-1990’s due to a lack of indexation and annual efficiency dividends. CSHA funding for Queensland, for example, peaked in 1993-94 at $91.32 per head of population, and is expected to decline to $60.30 by the end of the current CSHA at 30 June 2003 (see Figure 2). At the same time, expenditure on rent assistance has increased (DFaCS 2000). An analysis by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute found that this pattern was also true at a national level (AHURI 2001).

Changed taxation arrangements with the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) will alter the relative revenue raising capacities of the Commonwealth, and States and Territories. For the first time since Federation, States will have a growing untied revenue stream commensurate with their spending demands.
### CSHA Grants & State Matching Funds, Queensland, 1989/90 - 2002/03

**Figure 2 - CSHA Funding Levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Per Capita ($)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>89-90</td>
<td>60.908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-91</td>
<td>68.420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91-92</td>
<td>76.495</td>
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<tr>
<td>92-93</td>
<td>86.588</td>
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<tr>
<td>93-94</td>
<td>91.320</td>
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<td>94-95</td>
<td>87.720</td>
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<tr>
<td>95-96</td>
<td>84.781</td>
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<tr>
<td>96-97</td>
<td>81.034</td>
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<tr>
<td>97-98</td>
<td>74.552</td>
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<tr>
<td>98-99</td>
<td>72.357</td>
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<td>99-00*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>65.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01-02*</td>
<td>63.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02-03*</td>
<td>60.296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data provided by the Queensland Department of Housing, 2000
The questionable commitment of some States in the past to Government’s role in housing assistance throws further doubt over the future financial commitment of Governments to housing assistance. The previous (conservative) Queensland Government, for example, used CSHA funds to meet much of their contribution to the Commonwealth’s deficit reduction program in the mid-1990’s (DFaCS 1999, p.9), and the current (Labor) Queensland Government have been unable or unwilling to fully replace this lost funding (Queensland 2000).

Some would argue that the funding squeeze being experienced by housing assistance programs mirrors the funding squeeze experienced by most if not all other Government programs. The Commonwealth Government’s projection of a declining tax revenue base was a central argument used to justify the introduction of the GST (Wright, T. & Hudson 1998).

The role of housing assistance in the broader social policy framework

There are a number of related policy debates occurring in the national social policy landscape. One of the most visible is welfare reform, which challenges the welfare system to be both a supporter and an enabler.

In 1999 the Commonwealth Government commissioned a review of welfare in Australia. The resulting report from the committee chaired by Patrick McClure was delivered in 2000. While many of the recommendations of the McClure report relate to improvements in the responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness of service provision by the welfare system, the report introduces an emphasis on the importance of economic participation that has not been as prominent a driver of welfare policy in the past (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000). The belief implicit in this emphasis is that welfare without an accompanying encouragement to economic participation is ultimately disabling for many people.
This emphasis is supported by a recent evaluation of the impacts on children of a similar welfare reform push in the United States. In that analysis, welfare reform appears to benefit children, although the authors suggest that the alleviation of poverty may be a more significant contributor to improved wellbeing for children than increased participation (Duncan & Chase-Lansdale 2001). The nature of the link between welfare reform and children is captured by this author diagrammatically (see Figure 3).

Associated with the welfare reform process is the increased concern by Government with tackling the *causes* of social problems as well as the symptoms. Preventative health care is one such example. Focussing effort on reducing unemployment is another. The ambitious Cape York Partnership Agreement, that aims to redirect welfare payments from individuals to indigenous communities to help fund employment and economic development, is a significant example of this new emphasis (Roberts 2000).

Finally for a number of years there has been growing concern with the concept of inherited disadvantage. The recent discussions surrounding social inclusion are part of this issue (Jones & Smyth 1999). In particular this social policy dialogue throws open questions such as:

![Figure 3 - Welfare Reform and Children](image)

Duncan & Chase-Lansdale 2000, p.6
• Are there factors, such as where one lives, that inhibit one from moving out of poverty?
• What are the mechanisms by which many children of poor parents inherit this poverty in their adulthood?

The UK Government has approached this problem through the establishment of a central agency unit titled the Social Exclusion Unit. It aims to develop and coordinate strategies to stop people from becoming socially excluded, and to assist people to reintegrate with society if they become disengaged (Social Exclusion Unit 2001).

Where housing assistance fits in this national policy context is not always clear. Housing gets a mention internationally when discussing preventative strategies, such as preventative health, but less so in Australia (except in relation to health on remote indigenous communities – see for example Pholeros, Rainow & Torzillo 1993). Housing also gets a mention in the social exclusion debate and, in the United States, housing assistance policy is increasingly driven by the idea of moving to opportunity (Varady & Walker 1999).

The role of housing in employment and participation was not a strong theme in the Commonwealth Government sponsored report into welfare reform (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000), although the work disincentive of an income based rent policy is considered (p.28), and innovative housing management practices are also discussed (p.47). Yet housing advocates claim that you need to get the basics such as food, clothing and shelter right before moving on to higher order needs such as education and employment.

This simple idea of getting the basics right, provides the conceptual framework for this research. Is it true that you need to get the basics right – and in particular a minimum quality of housing – before children can have equality of opportunity in the school system?
Research objectives

Given this context, this research is intended to answer the questions:

- What impacts do various aspects of housing have in relation to a range of non-shelter outcomes, such as health?

- What relationships (if any) exist between aspects of housing and aspects of children’s schooling?

This research is intended to help explore the role that housing plays in relation to other outcomes. The study design is such that it is not intended to establish causality. This examination will particularly focus on those non-shelter outcomes that may impact on schooling (such as health), as a means of contributing to a better understanding of the relationships that may exist between housing and academic attainment.

While these objectives are posed as quite neutral questions about relationships that may or may not exist, they are predicated on a hypothesis – that is, that poor housing may contribute to reduced academic attainment. This hypothesis is described below diagrammatically, using the approach outlined by Bouma (2000), as an aid in clarifying research objectives.

![Figure 4 - Underlying Hypothesis]

This research is not intended to test this hypothesis, but rather to add to the body of knowledge that already exists about the relationships between this independent variable (housing) and this dependent variable (academic attainment).
Research policy objectives

As outlined in the Introduction, this research has been undertaken in part to contribute to the work of strategic policy making in the Queensland Department of Housing. As such it has been undertaken to help inform a number of very pressing policy challenges facing housing authorities in Australia. In particular this thesis aims to:

- Assist in the clarifying the role of housing assistance in the broader national social policy framework;
- Help inform macro budget decision-making processes (in particular, Government investment choices between social programs); and
- Help inform the review and development of policy frameworks by State and Territory Housing Authorities.

As Government revenue continues to decline, and demand for social services grows with our ageing population, making public sector investment choices between worthwhile social programs will become increasingly difficult. Better understanding the role that housing plays becomes important when determining the relative importance of funding a housing intervention, or some other social or economic intervention.

Housing practitioners have long argued that housing assistance is a highly leveraging social program – that is, expenditure on housing assistance results in savings that exceed that expenditure through other Government programs, such as health care, family support, education and the criminal justice system (Queensland Department of Housing 2000). Better understanding the links between housing and non-shelter outcomes such as schooling may contribute to the emerging body of research aimed at testing this view. This body of research may ultimately help inform macro-budget deliberations of Governments, by assisting Treasuries to better understand the financial and social consequences of not providing secure, affordable, appropriate housing to low income households - particularly families with school aged children.
While helping to inform Government’s macro-funding decision making processes, this research may also contribute to resolving strategic policy challenges facing State and Territory Housing Authorities. As funding has declined in recent years, most housing authorities have been forced to re-examine underlying policy assumptions regarding targeting, eligibility and entitlements. Who gets assisted, and how much assistance is provided, become more critical questions as capacity relative to demand declines.

Better understanding the relationship between housing and non-shelter outcomes such as school attainment may help towards resolving some fundamental policy questions facing housing authorities. For example:

- Knowing who at-risk children are, may help guide targeting and eligibility decision making.

- Knowing what aspects of housing impact most on child development and school performance (security of tenure, crowding, noise levels for example), may assist in the development and refinement of more efficient and effective housing interventions to specifically tackle these problems.

- Better understanding the mechanisms by which housing impacts on schooling (for example, overcrowding may contribute to broken sleep and poorer concentration levels at school), may also assist in the development of new performance measures, such as the degree of reduction in overcrowding amongst at-risk households.

These policy objectives of this thesis are discussed further in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

A search of journal articles and texts directly concerning housing and schooling yields a very slim selection of writings, however there is a large body of research relevant to this topic. The reason that this research is not immediately obvious when studying this issue is that much of the research relates to one of the many elements of this relationship, rather than the total relationship.

Housing is more than walls, doors, windows, and fixtures. Housing occurs within a context, a neighbourhood. As well, housing stability is an aspect of housing that may impact on childhood stress and well-being. This chapter uses the aspects of housing discussed in the Introduction section of this thesis (page 6). These aspects include housing stability and transience; characteristics of the home itself, such as size, crowding and quality; the nature of the community in which the home is located is also considered under the headings of neighbourhood and peers; and housing cost.

This chapter begins with an examination of research into the role of housing, and the possible links between aspects of housing and child development. Housing and health studies are also examined. These pathways (child development and health) may shed some light on the relationship between housing and non-shelter outcomes such as schooling. Before examining research into specific aspects of housing such as crowding and transience, this chapter examines research into the impacts of an absence of housing (i.e. homelessness). Examining the effects of a deprivation of housing may again help to shed light on why aspects of housing matter. The chapter concludes by examining research directly exploring the links between housing and schooling.
The role of housing

While there appears to be little written about the relationship between housing and schooling, much has been written about pieces in this puzzle that together paint a picture of inter-relatedness. For example, parents play a critical role in shaping children’s attitudes to school. A parent’s expectations and attitudes seem to be very influential in relation to how a child approaches school, and ultimately whether the child expects to succeed in this context (Patrikakou, 1997).

Whether a parent exercises this significant influence positively is in part influenced by their environment – including their home. As Bartlett (1997a, p.170) notes:

“Both cross-cultural observations and experimental findings indicate that the physical world structures and mediates interactions between children and their caregivers; and that physical and social environment work both jointly and independently to influence behavior.”

Housing is a basic human need along side food and clothing. Bartlett suggests that housing needs are sequential – that housing must first provide shelter from physical and emotional threats in the environment, before it can start to fulfil other functions such as self-expression. Bartlett (1997a, pp.190-1) goes on to summarise this role that housing plays in family life:

“If housing is adequate for family needs and provides parents with a sense of control, choice, and identity (in other words, if it functions as a home), it can support the capacity of parents to function in goal-oriented ways, and to rear children in keeping with their socially constructed beliefs and values, as members of the larger society. If, on the other hand, housing fails to meet this ideal, and instead limits choice and control, it may contribute, along with other factors in life, to stress and to reactive parenting behavior that is less likely to be responsive to children’s needs.”
The approach taken in this literature review is to attempt to map any direct and indirect relationships that may exist between aspects of housing, and schooling. The method used to summarise these relationships is a simple diagram, with relationships shown as weak or assumed/untested (arrow with dotted line) or strong (arrow with unbroken line). While this approach may seem over simplistic, it proved useful as an aid when constructing a conceptual framework to help guide the interview process.

**Child development – the importance of the early years of life**

Before exploring the role that various aspects of housing may play in relation to schooling, it is worth considering whether child development is a possible intermediary in the housing – schooling relationship. For example, if some aspects of housing can impact on whether a child is developmentally ready when they begin school, and “school-readiness” is a factor in later success at school, then this may help to explain a causal relationship between housing and schooling (if it exists).

When considering the effects of housing on children and schooling, one needs to be conscious of the time dimension involved. Different studies emphasise the importance of different ages at which children are more vulnerable to the disruptive effects of moving house, for example – the early years of school (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber 1996) or at adolescents when other changes and pressures are occurring (Brown & Orthner 1990).

Recent studies have emphasised the significance of the first four years of a child’s development. Hertzman & Wiens (1996) for example draw on a wide range of studies to assert that children are much more receptive to certain developmental learnings at various stages in the first four years of life. This is not to say that missed learnings cannot be caught up later, but rather that some ages are optimum times to achieve particular developmental milestones.

Hertzman uses learning a second language to illustrate this point. Children of certain ages can master a second language much more easily than most adults can. Missing this optimum learning period does not make it impossible to learn a second language, just more difficult.
There is a body of evidence to suggest that, particularly for at-risk children such as those living in poverty, parent-infant stimulation programs result in improved cognitive and socio-emotional development, which is critical for school-readiness (Hertzman & Wiens 1996, p.1089). Hertzman goes on to state that school-readiness is very predictive of subsequent school failure, employability, criminal behaviour, and psychological morbidity in young adulthood.

Sawhill (1999) also emphasises the importance of early childhood years in terms of longer term development, and considers interventions with disadvantaged children has the capacity to lead to improved school achievement, lower incidence of repeating grades, and less need for remediation.

How significant housing is in relation to early childhood development is not considered by Hertzman. Coll et al. (1998) studied 127 homeless and 91 housed infants between the ages of four and 30 months. This study found no significant difference in developmental progress between both groups. However Coll expressed concern that both groups were high risk, single parent households with higher than average incidence of poverty, violence, maternal depression and substance abuse. She felt that these factors may over-ride any additional impacts as a result of homelessness.

Parke (1978, p.35) considers that, “The early social and physical environment that the home provides for the child has a marked impact on his later social and cognitive development.” He goes on to discuss some possible links between the physical aspects of the home, and child development.

As also observed by Bartlett (1998), Parke (op. cit., p.41) suggests that a physically safe home rewards a child’s curiosity and encourages exploration and therefore growth. He also emphasises the importance of a “stimulus shelter,” such as a private bedroom, that a child can retreat to in order to escape constant noise and stimulation. Without such a refuge, children are at risk of delayed cognitive development (p. 61). Studies are cited by Parke that indicate that children with private home space are more likely to perform better in relation to spelling and language development.
In other studies cited by Parke, children living in more crowded homes were rated by their peers as more aggressive than other children. Parke speculates that such cramped living conditions might encourage more punitive parenting which may in turn be modelled by children in the playground – a conclusion also reached by Bartlett (1997a).

Similarly, a study of families living in a high rise development near to a busy expressway found that children living in apartments that were higher and quieter displayed better auditory discrimination, suggesting that children exposed to constant noise learn to tune out (Cohen, Glass & Singer 1973).

Other longitudinal studies have shed some light on this question of the importance of the home (eg. Bradley & Caldwell 1984a). Gottfried, A. W. & Gottfried (1984, p.104), for example, found that some physical aspects of the home environment were positively correlated with cognitive development. In particular the level of crowding (the room to people ratio), the safety of the environment and the cleanliness of the home were all predictive of cognitive development. Of these, crowding had a very high correlation independent of other factors such as maternal intelligence (p. 105). They conclude that, “It is an empirical fact that environmental variables within the home correlate significantly with cognitive development.” (Gottfried, A. W. 1984, p.1)

In a comprehensive review of research in the field of housing and children, Bartlett (1997a) argues that housing is a very significant factor in the early socialisation of children. Amongst a range of characteristics of housing studied, she cites the importance of outdoor play in childhood development. For example, a study in Japan of families living in high-rise housing found that five year olds living above the 14th floor were significantly less independent than those living below the fifth floor, due to their reduced access to outside play (p.177).

Bartlett also discusses the importance of crowding, and the impacts of inadequate indoor play space. Studies cited by Bartlett have found that children become more easily frustrated if they are unable to play outside and there is inadequate indoor play areas. Also in crowded living conditions parents are more likely to engage in more punitive parenting practices, and abuse is more likely to occur as children are less able to get away from potentially explosive situations at home (p.181).
Studies have also found that interior housing design impacts on parenting practices. For example, housing designed to maximise direct line of site between parents and toddlers encourages less rules, as parents feel that toddlers are safer playing in adjoining rooms given this improved visibility (Bartlett 1997a, p.181).

Bartlett (p.183) concludes this examination of research on this topic as follows:

“Limited outdoor access may encourage more anxious and protective behaviour; overcrowding has been observed to contribute to a lack of responsiveness and to more punitive parenting; and a closed layout may encourage greater dependence on rules and prohibitions. The effects of these constraints may be alleviated or accentuated by the quality of neighbourhood surroundings.”

In a 1998 article, Bartlett reports on research undertaken by spending 18 months with three families, observing the relationship between housing and the development of the children in those households. She noted that adequate play space in the home encourages the development of autonomy and reduces parental stress. Lack of play space can increase reliance on the use of television as a pacifier of restless children (p. 408). Children living in families with a number of dangers associated with housing inadequacies (such as exposed hot water pipes) were much more likely to hear “no” as a default answer to many questions, and were observed to learn that their natural impulses to explore and learn were potentially quite dangerous, and therefore were to be curbed (p. 413).

These two important studies – one emphasising the potential long term impacts of inadequate stimulation in the early formative years of life (Hertzman & Wiens 1996), and the second arguing that the nature of the home can impact on parenting practices (Bartlett 1997b) is not sufficient to conclude that poor housing increases the likelihood of poor school performance, reduced earnings and increased participation in criminal activity. Bartlett herself notes that some households cope very well in poor housing, and others do not. She suggests that the sense of control over ones life is an important mediating factor in this dynamic.
Below is a diagram mapping possible relationships between aspects of housing, through child development, to school performance. These simple diagrams are used throughout this thesis as a visual representation of possible processes. The diagrams are intended to be simple, and as a result may not always be complete. For example, a research finding that suggests a possible relationship between an aspect of housing and a non-shelter outcome will be simply represented as an arrow joining two or three words. Such an approach cannot hope to properly represent the full complexity of this relationship, but rather is intended to contribute to the building of a map of possible and likely processes.

At times dotted arrows are used when the research evidence to support this possible relationship is uncertain or weak. Also positive and negative signs are occasionally used to signify the direction of the relationship. In the absence of an arrow, the reader should assume a positive relationship (that is, an increase or improvement in one element may lead to an increase or improvement in the other).

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5 - Child Development**

*Source: Author*

**Housing and health**

The relationship between housing and health is perhaps the area of non-shelter outcomes that has received the most research attention in the past. However while many studies have identified associations between poor housing and aspects of ill-health, less have been confidently able to attribute causality to the poor housing.
Methodologically those studies that are longitudinal are, according to Phibbs, Kennedy & Tippett (1998), more likely to be able to assist in explaining causality.

One such study, Ambrose (2001), examined the health gains for households who participated in a major urban renewal program in Stepney, London. The “before” interviews in 1996 established benchmark data, and also identified possible processes that may explain the poor health outcomes for this population group (such as constant dampness, overcrowding, infestations and cold). The “after” interviews in 2000 found a dramatic 700% improvement in illness days attributable largely to the improved housing conditions for this population group.

It would appear from the work of Wilner et al. (1962) and others that health may be a key intermediary in the housing – schooling relationship. If poor housing contributes to increased incidence of illness, and as a result increased rates of absenteeism from school, then poor housing may indirectly contribute to reduced success at school due to these increased incidents of absence.

Marsh et al. (2000, pp.412-3) cites a number of studies that indicate a clear association between current housing and health. Aspects of housing that may impact include:

- Overcrowding – infectious/respiratory diseases;
- Damp/mould – respiratory disease, asthma etc;
- Indoor pollutants/infestations – asthma;
- Cold – respiratory infections; and
- Homelessness – a range of ailments.

Marsh (p.425) conducted a study drawing on the National Child Development Study data set, and found that multiple housing deprivation led to a 25% greater risk of disability or severe ill health across the life course of the cohort members in the NCDS study (1965 – 1991) – largely due to this poor housing.
Asthma is a significant health problem affecting Australian children (Moon, Rahman & Bhatia 1998), and dampness and the presence of fungus or mould seem clearly to be associated with asthma (eg. Wever-Hess et al. 2000). A 1998 study of 80 households with children aged between seven and 14 years in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria, found higher concentrations of fungal spores associated with musty odour, water intrusion, high indoor humidity, limited ventilation, few extractor fans, and a failure to remove indoor mould growth. This higher concentrations of fungal spores increased risk of asthma and other respiratory problems (Garrett et al. 1998).

Significant improvements in the incidence of asthma were identified in an evaluation of the Moving to Opportunity Program in the United States. Katz, Kling & Liebman (2000, p.637) found that households who relocated to areas with less than 5% poverty rate experienced a decline of 65% in the probability of an asthma attack requiring medical attention. This same benefit did not occur for the Section 8 Comparison Group who were rehoused, but not required to move to low poverty neighbourhoods. Katz suggests that this finding reflects a reduction in the main environmental triggers of asthma, namely stress, dust and poor air quality; cold; cockroaches, mice and rats; and crowding. Similarly, a project to heat 59 damp houses in Cornwall in the United Kingdom measured significant improvements in asthma attacks in children, particularly in terms of the incidence of nocturnal coughs (Somerville et al. 2000). Sandel et al. (1999, p.26) also cites research suggesting that cockroach infestation is a major contributor to asthma attacks, and that poor housing is a major factor in the incidence of asthma.

The inclusion of stress in this list of Katz’s triggers is consistent with findings from other studies. The pathways between poor housing and health may be more than physical links such as dampness, spores and asthma. In a significant study of the impacts of inequality on health, Wilkinson (1996, p.178) suggests that housing related ill-health, like unemployment related ill-health, may be more psychosomatic than physical. Wilkinson suggests that housing instability or insecurity causes ill-health, in the same way that the threat of unstable employment also contributes to poor health.
Related to this issue of housing instability is the issue of control. Wilkinson suggests that the sense of lack of control over one’s environment is an important factor in contributing to stress and ultimately ill-health. This perspective may help to explain the different impacts that transience has on children’s schooling – those that move by choice (for example to take up an employment opportunity) may experience significantly less stress than those who move because they are evicted, or forced out in some other way, because of the difference in relative control over this event.

Wilkinson (1996) also identifies social relationships as a mitigating factor. Those who have close relationships are less likely to be impacted upon by unstable housing and employment than those who are socially isolated.

Related to this theme is the link identified in some studies between mental health and housing. In a review of research concerning the links between housing and health, Dunn (2000) cites studies suggesting that mental health may be affected by:

- Overcrowding;
- High density housing
- Housing type and location; and
- Housing amenity and repair.

New Zealand research confirms that living in substandard dwellings creates an additional stress in the lives of low income households (Smith et al. 1993, p.610).
Homelessness and children in crisis

One approach to help make sense of the complex web of inter-relationships between housing and schooling is to consider the impact of a complete lack of housing. While this understanding is important in order to inform Government and community responses to the problem of homeless families, an examination of the impacts of homelessness on education may also help to illuminate the links between housing and education more generally.

A number of studies have confirmed that homelessness impacts on health and wellbeing, as well as on the schooling of the children of homeless families (Clark 1996; Faulkner-Hill 1996-97; Neil & Fopp 1992; Wright, J. D. 1990). It seems clear that homelessness is bad for children’s schooling. However understanding the particular links that mean that homeless children are less likely to succeed academically is more challenging.

In their formative Australian study of homelessness, Neil & Fopp (1992, pp.17-18) found that almost half the homeless preschoolers in their sample had serious emotional and developmental delays. They suggest that the poor academic performance of homeless children may be due in part to, “…the problem of concentrating on studies during the day while wondering where to sleep at night.”
Other studies focus on the link between homelessness and health. As one author points out, poor physical and mental health is often caused by, and a cause of, homelessness (Wright, J. D. 1990, p. 49). The simple act of living on the street without adequate protection from the elements would seem inevitably to increase one’s risk of ill-health.

Faulkner-Hill (1996-97) suggests that this increased risk is exacerbated by the fact that homeless people are much less likely to take health measures beyond the relief of immediate symptoms. Also homelessness may not be conducive to reliably taking prescribed medications. This study concludes that sick, tired and stressed kids are less likely to go to school (pp. 15-16).

A 1990 examination of research into the impacts of homelessness found that homeless women are more likely to bear underweight children, receive less pre-natal care, and experience higher infant mortality rates – possibly double the rate for the rest of the population (Molnar, Rath & Klein 1990). This study also found that homeless children are less often immunised, suffer higher lead levels, poorer nutrition, and have higher rates of illness. The author suggests that homeless children display significant developmental delays, significant psychological distress, and much lower rates of school attendance. This latter outcome is thought to contribute to much lower academic performance.

In a 1996 study of 110 mothers and 157 children living in homeless shelters in the USA, 38% of children were assessed as requiring psychiatric evaluation for clinical depression. About 45% scored at or below the 10th percentile for receptive vocabulary, and 39% scored at or below the 10th percentile for age in reading (Zima et al. 1996).

Rubin et al. (1996) found that the homeless children in a 1996 study were no less intelligent than the housed children, but that their academic performance in relation to reading, spelling and maths was significantly poorer. This study was less confident than some others in attributing causality. The homeless children in this study experienced higher rates of absenteeism and changed school more frequently than the housed children, and the author concluded that the latter was more of a contributor to poorer academic performance than the former. Also, maternal depression was found to be a mediating factor in academic performance.
In summary, homelessness may be a contributor to developmental delays in children – reducing their school readiness and ultimately their chances of success as they begin their schooling.

Homelessness seems also to contribute to poor health amongst adults and children. This increased incidence of illness, combined with disruption to domestic routines, seems inevitably to result in an increased school absentee rate amongst homeless children. While Rubin et al. (1996) did not conclude that this was a major contributor to poorer academic performance amongst homeless children, it is difficult to imagine that a significant increased in missed days of schooling will not adversely impact on academic performance.

Similarly changing schools has been found to be a significant stressor for children (Johnson 1987). The impact of school moves has been found to be greater amongst those children who move mid-year, rather than a planned, end of year move (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber 1996). Sustaining attendance at the same school must be an overwhelming challenge for some families who are forced to move neighbourhoods to access crisis housing in short supply. These two factors (increased absenteeism, and school changes) may well explain much of the lower academic performance observed amongst homeless children, although stress, anxiety, ill-health and maternal depression may well also be important factors.

Figure 7 - Homelessness
Source: Author
**Transience**

Research suggests that moving house can have positive and negative impacts on children’s schooling. This may be due to the actual event of moving, other changes associated with the move (such as a change in household income), or a combination of the two.

Children may find moving schools stressful (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber 1996), and moving school mid-year seems to be harder on children than end of year moves. A new school entails a new physical setting, new teachers, different academic expectations and emphasise, possible curriculum differences, and importantly, a new peer group. Johnson (1987) ranks changing school on a par with hospitalisation of a parent for serious illness, or having a parent incarcerated in prison for a month. Bartlett (1997c, p.123) also cites studies that suggest that transience can be very stressful, and may be a trigger for depression for some people.

A recent study of mobility and schooling found that moves for families when children are in preschool and early primary may contribute to poorer academic achievement (Heinlein & Shinn 2000). The impact of these early moves seemed greater than moves after Year 3.

There are however conflicting studies regarding the impacts of moves on schooling. Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber (1996, p.4) state that the evidence that school moves set children back academically is, “…thin and inconclusive.” A longitudinal study of 762 children who began Year 1 schooling in Baltimore in 1982 found weak evidence that moving school adversely affected academic performance (p.9). The authors concluded that, “Our investigations….leave us with the impression that changing schools complicates school adjustment and slows academic progress.” (p.10).
Other studies have, however, identified strong associations between transience and schooling. Simpson & Fowler (1994), for example, examined schooling and emotional and behavioural outcomes for 10,362 children who participated in the 1988 National Health Interview Survey of Child Health. A multiple regression analysis controlling for socio-demographic variables found that children who moved three or more times were more than twice as likely to report emotional or behavioural problems, were 60% more likely to have repeated a grade, and were 80% more likely to have been expelled from school (pp. 305-6).

While Alexander expresses concern regarding the impacts of moves on children during the early settling in years at school, Brown & Orthner (1990) consider that moves are most difficult for adolescents, and for adolescent girls in particular. This can be a difficult period of life for children, and changing peer groups and re-establishing a role and identity in that new group may be very difficult. A study of 720 adolescents found that life-satisfaction for girls was significantly lower amongst those who had recently moved, than for those who had not. Also this group reported slightly higher rates of depression (p. 377).

Sandel et al. (1999, p.44) cites studies that suggest that children who move home regularly as a result of unstable housing are:

- More likely to fail a grade and to have behavioural problems;
- Likely to be three months behind their more stable classmates academically by the end of year four; and
- Fall one year behind their more stable classmates if they move home regularly over a six year period.
Sandel does not identify reasons for these impacts, however the effects of moving on schooling may be associated with the impacts of moving on the total family unit as much as on the individual child. When families relocate, each member leaves behind numerous social networks, and many interpersonal functions that were accomplished by these old networks are then unfulfilled. This can result in increased stress, and place strain on household relationships as members are forced to rely more on one another (Sluzki 1992). This author concludes that, “...this period of increased family stress frequently translates into multiple psychosomatic, interpersonal and other stress-related complaints in grown-ups and children alike.” Bartlett (1997c) also cites studies that suggest that moving is difficult for all family members – contributing to social isolation, and increasing the risks of depression even for those who move by choice rather than circumstance.

Related to this whole of family approach to analysing the impacts of transience. Tucker, Marx & Long (1998) considered the impacts of moving for two different family types – those with both biological parents present, and other family types. This study, based on data from a United States 1988 National Health Interview Survey, found that children with both biological parents present were not affected academically by up to seven moves in their lifetime. On the other hand, children from other family structures were affected by any moves (p. 125). Tucker speculates that children living in families that have undergone at least one family transition (that is a change in parental relationships) may be less robust when dealing with residential changes.

How long the impacts associated with moving last may in part be determined by the nature of a families new neighbourhood – and in particular levels of crime. An evaluation of the impacts of moving for a group of participants in the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program suggests that the importance of the loss of relationships as a result of moving may be affected by the nature of the neighbourhood that a family moves to. Pettit (2000) interviewed 27 families participating in the MTO program in Los Angeles, and concluded that children of families who move to neighbourhoods with high crime levels are likely to be slow to establish relationships within these neighbourhoods, as parents will attempt to shield their children from the risks of this new neighbourhood. In contrast, families who move to low crime neighbourhoods will be much quicker to build relationships with neighbours.
Pribesh & Downey (1999) suggest that the causal relationship between moves and school performance relates primarily to differences between families who move often, and those that do not (mainly socio-economic status), however social capital (that is relationships between family members and students, other parents, school teachers etc) was also a factor. Using data from the American National Education Longitudinal Study (1988), Pribesh found that frequent moves reduce social capital, and this does account for some of the reduced school attainment for this group.

Temple & Reynolds (1999) agreed that broken relationships resulting from moves may be a factor in reduced school attainment, however unlike Pribesh she considered that the impacts of moving regularly was as important as the impact of family and socio-economic characteristics that frequent movers have in common.

An evaluation of a Queensland Public Housing tenancy management outsourcing pilot suggested that the stability provided by public housing was of significant benefit to children in the minds of some parents (Morrison 2000). Security of tenure and the sense of physical and psychological security were the most common response to a question to tenants in this study regarding the impacts of public housing in their lives.

Other studies have examined the reverse of this relationship – that is, whether children who exhibit poorer academic performance are more likely to move. Nelson, Simoni & Adelman (1996) studied 2,524 children in kindergarten and Year 1, and found that those who were rated lower on a behaviour assessment scale by their teachers, and who had higher rates of absenteeism, were more likely to move schools in the subsequent three years of that study.

![Figure 8 - Frequent House Moves](Source: Author)
**Housing amenity**

If moving home can result in stress, then living in poor quality, overcrowded\(^5\) housing may also be a source of stress. Elsewhere in this chapter, studies are cited that indicate that school success is in part related to household dynamics – in particular the interactions between parents and children, and the encouragement and interest shown by adults to their children’s schooling.

Stress, including that generated by poor housing, may well reduce the capacity of adults to provide the active, positive encouragement needed by children in order to maintain a positive attitude to schooling. As one author states, “Parents who are exhausted, frustrated, depressed or disturbed are more likely to compromise in their desire to do the best for their children.” (Bartlett 1997a, p.174).

A New Zealand study of 213 public housing applicants and 66 households drawn randomly from suburbs known to have a high proportion of poor housing, found that housing stressors – and in particular over-crowding – exert a significant influence on psychological distress, independent of economic, social, geographic and demographic characteristics (Smith et al. 1993, p.608). This study did not conclude that this psychological distress was caused by poor housing alone, but rather that substandard housing represented an independent, additive source of stress that added to other stresses of life.

This finding seems consistent with that arrived at by Lepore, Evans & Palsane (1991) who examined the relationship between crowding and social hassles\(^6\) in India and the USA. The study combines longitudinal, random sampling with cross-cultural sampling to provide a compelling argument that people living in over-crowded housing are significantly more likely to experience psychological distress as a result of social hassles (such as day to day arguments or conflicts) than those who do not live in over-crowded housing. The author concludes that chronic stressors such as over-crowding may diminish the capacity of people to cope with adaptive demands.

\(^5\) Most authors cited in this section use a normative measure to define “overcrowding” (determined, for example, by considering numbers of bedrooms relative to household size and composition), although different normative measures are used in different studies.

\(^6\) The term “social hassles” is that used by the author to describe minor social conflicts such as an argument with a work colleague.
As with the earlier discussion regarding moving home, the relationship between housing and stress is in part an issue of control. As Bartlett (1997a, p.175) notes, stress is more severe when the environmental factors contributing to this stress are beyond an individual’s control, such as that experienced by low income households living in poor quality housing. This author further develops this theme by suggesting that a house becomes a home in part when choice is exercised, that is, when the house starts to reflect the identity of the occupants.

Overcrowding stands out in the study by Smith et al. (1993) as the aspect of housing most predictive of psychological distress. Similarly in a significant longitudinal study of 16,000 children, Davie, Butler & Goldstein (1972) suggest that crowding results in children having less space to play, work and read. They also state that children living in overcrowded housing may be more likely to experience broken sleep due to the conflicting sleep patterns of children of different ages with whom they shared bedrooms.

An analysis of the substantial data set from this study found that overcrowding and basic amenity impacted on reading levels – equivalent to 9 months retardation in reading and 1.5 months in arithmetic (Davie, Butler & Goldstein 1972, p. 57). Davie concludes that, “…poor housing conditions may well lead to a low standard in physical health; depression and irritability in parents; and may produce a feeling of ‘distance’ from the more privileged sections of society.”

Gray (2001) similarly concludes that crowded housing may impact on health. She identifies this as occurring through stress related illness, and the increased chance of catching infectious illnesses when people live in crowded housing.

These findings are consistent with the views expressed in an Australian study of the benefits of improved housing (Epic, Kennedy & Tippett 2000). In a series of focus groups, public housing tenants reported that improved housing had led to a reduction in their levels of anxiety, increased household optimism, and renewed self-confidence. A study in Newcastle in NSW also emphasised the importance of self-esteem in terms of improved relationships and increased personal ambition (Everett & Telfer 1983).
Neighbourhood

The relationship between housing and schooling may be more to do with neighbourhood effects than the physical structure of the home. Housing occurs within a neighbourhood context, and this is intimately associated with the housing choices that households make.

A fundamental housing choice made by a household is the price – amenity trade-off. A household may choose to reduce their housing costs in order to increase their discretionary spending capacity, either as a lifestyle choice or through necessity. Housing location is one key determinant of housing cost, and households will make trade offs between dwelling size, dwelling quality and neighbourhood within their housing budget constraints.

There are a large number of studies that suggest that neighbourhood may be a significant aspect of the housing – schooling relationship (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Burns, Homel & Goodnow 1984; Duncan & Ludwig 2000; Duncan & Raudenbush 1999; Garner & Raudenbush 1991; Goering & Kraft 1999; Kaufman & Rosenbaum 1992; Ladd & Ludwig 1997; Mayer & Jencks 1989; Turner 1998; Varady & Walker 1999). Those households that trade off location for amenity may therefore be making a significant choice in relation to the schooling and future prospects of their children.
These studies of the importance of neighbourhood necessarily confront a variety of methodological challenges. As pointed out by Ellen & Turner (1997), studies must consider what aspects of neighbourhood are important, and why these aspects make a difference. Ellen suggests that the lack of adequate explanation of processes casts some doubt over the validity of research that identifies associations between neighbourhood and outcomes such as schooling and health.

This issue of locational choice has emerged as a major policy driver in the housing assistance strategies of the U.S. Broadly categorised as, “Vouchering Out,” the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is exploring a range of methods to move households out of high poverty neighbourhoods (many of which are public housing estates) into more mixed neighbourhoods. Such an approach is being implemented through the use of Section 8 Housing Vouchers, and Scattered Site Public Housing developments in mixed communities (Popkin et al. 2000).  

While many authors suggest that households who live in more diverse communities have an increased likelihood of better health, finding employment, and of their children succeeding at school and moving on to college, some suggest that this major policy driver is not based on solid research. Like Ellen & Turner (1997), Galster & Zobel (1998) state that this policy is not grounded in a clear understanding of the mechanisms by which such benefits might flow to disadvantaged households who relocate. He cites a number of studies that seem to demonstrate that such benefits do flow to relocated households, but warns that such a policy should not be pursued without an understanding of why and how this benefit is passed on.

Before exploring the research on neighbourhood effects in more detail, it is worth considering this question of mechanisms more closely. Mayer & Jencks (1989) suggests that there are four possible mechanisms that may be at work when disadvantaged households move into more mixed communities. These are:

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7 Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program is a United States, federally funded payment made directly to private landlords to subsidise the rent of very low income tenants, the elderly, and people with a disability. – see www.hud.gov/section8.cfm for further details.
1. “The contagion model,” that is disadvantaged neighbours are a disadvantage. According to this model, if children grow up in an area where other children are committing crimes, for example, then ones own children are more likely to also commit crimes.

2. “The relative deprivation model,” whereby rich neighbours engender a sense of deprivation and encourage socially deviant behaviour.

3. “No effect model,” that is, disadvantaged neighbours are irrelevant, and people make their own choices irrespective of the influence of peers and neighbours.

4. Neighbours do not matter, but neighbourhoods do. This model suggests that neighbourhood resources such as the quality of local schools vary according to the nature and social mix of neighbourhoods. This may be particularly the case in countries such as the U.S. where schools are administered by local authorities.

Mayer & Jencks go on to examine these models in light of available research, and concludes in relation to schooling that the socio-economic status (SES) of a school catchment has no overall effect on a students likelihood to plan to attend college, attend college, or graduate from college. Mayer does however suggest that this may result from two effects cancelling one another out – that is, students do benefit from attending schools with other students from a higher SES, but that attending school with students who scored higher on standardised tests has a negative effect that counteracts the former benefit.

Brooks-Gunn et al. (1993) suggests a fifth model. They suggest that neighbourhood effect is quite powerful – rivalling the influence of family – and that the absence of affluent neighbours may be much more significant than the presence of poor neighbours. This “collective socialisation model” rather than the contagion model, provides a more accurate explanation of the neighbourhood effects identified in this 1999 study, which draws on data from the Infant Health and Development Program, and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics.
This study identifies a number of possible mechanisms that may account for this neighbourhood influence, including:

- Economic resources,
- Parenting behaviour,
- School environment,
- Peer group influence, and
- Local economic opportunities for teenagers.

Ellen & Turner (1997) also identifies some mechanisms through which neighbourhood may influence individual outcomes:

- Quality of local services;
- Socialization by adults;
- Peer influences;
- Social networks;
- Exposure to crime and violence; and
- Physical distance and isolation.


Such associations do not, however, necessarily assist in determining causality, although Briggs (1997, p.225) concludes that the body of research in this field provides,

“…consistent, if limited, empirical evidence that neighborhood makeup influences child cognitive outcomes (including IQ), school drop-out rates, and teenage childbearing. These appear to be more highly associated with the presence of high-status workers in the neighbourhood…”
Two major programs in the United States do help to provide some insight into the impact that changed neighbourhoods may play in the lives of disadvantaged households. These are the Gautreaux Program, that commenced following a successful lawsuit in 1966 brought on behalf of public tenants against the Chicago Housing Authority and HUD; and the Moving to Opportunities (MTO) program that began in 1994.

Both of these programs provide a unique opportunity to learn about the importance of neighbourhood, as both are large scale projects using quasi-experimental design principles. MTO in particular provides a powerful learning opportunity in that 1,800 volunteering households were randomly assigned to three groups:

1. Those who received a housing voucher plus assistance to relocate to a low poverty neighbourhood (one with less than 10% of residents living below the poverty line);
2. Those who received a housing voucher but no other assistance and no requirement regarding where they could move to; and
3. A third group who acted as a control group – that is, they received nothing.

The evaluation of this program has not yet been completed, however preliminary results suggest that parents in groups one and two report that problems with their male children occur one-third less often than those in group three. Also, the arrest rate for violent crimes amongst group 1 families is one third of that in group 3 (Duncan & Ludwig 2000). The authors conclude that, “…our best guess is that expanding housing voucher programs to offer more public housing residents the opportunity to relocate would improve the life chances of a large number of poor children.” (p.6)

A further preliminary examination of results from the MTO program also noted that crime had reduced for households who moved to lower poverty areas – both in terms of their involvement as offenders and victims of crime (Goering & Kraft 1999). Some of the benefits may be attributable to improved resources in these new communities, such as better resourced schools. As Goering (p.45) concludes, “Parents also report seeing positive changes for their children, including better and less crowded schools, teachers taking time with individual children, exposure to different cultures, and more role models of working people.”
An evaluation of the Boston MTO experiment by Katz, Kling & Liebman (2000, p.633) found that improvements in boys’ behaviour was one of the main benefits of moving to neighbourhoods with lower levels of poverty. Boys displayed a 42% decrease in reports of behaviour problems, relative to the control group. Girls did not demonstrate the same degree of improvement, and Katz suggests that this may be due to the impacts of lost friendships from previous neighbourhoods. This would seem to be consistent with the findings of Brown & Orthner (1990), who found that adolescent girls were most adversely affected by transience, due to the importance of social relationships for girls in this age group. Other studies (eg. Luthar & Cushing 1999, p.775) have found that boys are more influenced by neighbourhood factors because they are less sheltered by their families than girls.

A further benefit identified by Katz (p.636) was a significant decline in the incidence of asthma for those children rehoused to low poverty areas. This reduction is attributed to improvements in environmental contributors to asthma such as stress, dust, poor air quality, rats and mice, cold, and cockroaches.

The Gautreaux Program has been under way much longer than MTO, and the impacts of changed neighbourhoods are more apparent from this experiment. Since 1976 more than 4,000 households have been relocated as a result of a successful lawsuit brought in 1966 against the Chicago Housing Authority and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

As with MTO, the Gautreaux Program provides a quasi-experimental approach. Households have effectively been randomly allocated to a variety of neighbourhoods, ranging from predominantly black, urban areas to outer suburbs housing traditionally white, middle class families. In an oft-cited study of the Gautreaux Program, Rosenbaum (1991) surveyed 108 city moving households, and 224 suburb movers. As well, 43 city movers and 52 suburb movers were interviewed.

While the choice of neighbourhood is largely a random allocation process, there are some filtering mechanisms that do shape this to a small extent (such as the small rate of rejection of housing offers – 5% of households rejected an offer), however Rosenbaum concludes that these two populations (that is, those moving to middle-class suburbs, and those remaining in predominantly black urban areas) are effectively identical apart from their new neighbourhoods.

His research concluded that suburban movers were 25% more likely to get a job, even when controlling for human capital (work history, education, training, age and benefits history), family background, years in the Program, and post-move education. Interviews with participants suggest that this improvement can be attributed to greater availability of jobs, greater neighbourhood safety (not being afraid to walk home from work after dark), increased motivation, feeling better about oneself due to the better environment, and working role models.

Other studies of Gautreaux have similarly identified neighbourhood related benefits relating to employment. For example Popkin, Rosenbaum & Meaden (1993, p.569) interviewed relocated households to identify possible factors that made finding employment easier in their new neighbourhoods. They identified three main factors:

- Increased availability and access to jobs (spatial match between home and employment opportunities);
- Safety (being able to safely travel to and from work); and
- Increased motivation to find work associated with the overall lift provided by living in a nicer community.

In relation to schooling, Rosenbaum (1991) found a number of indications of educational benefits from the moves to white, middle class suburbs, including:

- Lower drop-out rates (5% compared with 20%),
- Slight improvement in grades,
- Higher proportion in college tracks (i.e. studying subjects that lead on to college rather than trades or employment – 40.3% compared with 23.5%),
- Higher rates of college enrolment, and
- Higher rates of employment, and better pay and conditions between employed youth.

Educational benefits may in part be due to differences in schools. For example suburban movers were more satisfied with their teachers, and felt that class sizes were smaller. However, participants also felt that role models and social norms were also an important factor for both adults and kids – “Seeing neighbors work, Gautreaux adults reported that they felt they could have jobs, too, and they wanted to try.” (p.1205).
This study concluded that, “Our results clearly indicate that moving to the suburbs increased adults’ employment and children’s education and employment.” (p. 1203) As the author states (p.1204):

“The Gautreaux Program had these effects without providing additional services. By doing no more than helping low-income people to move to suburbs, this program put children in better schools and put adults in better labor markets. Although preliminary concerns about discrimination and initial disadvantages were legitimate and sometimes presented serious problems, most low-income families were able to overcome difficulties and benefit from the new opportunities.”

These conclusions were similarly reached by Kaufman & Rosenbaum (1992), who attributed improved school performance to:

- Escaping the negative influence of peers,
- Increased motivation from the improved physical environment,
- Higher expectations from the schools,
- Better teachers, and greater availability of extra tutoring,
- Striving to match the better lifestyles of peers, and
- Positive role models.

Not all studies have been as unequivocal about the positive outcomes for tenants who relocated through the Gautreaux Program. Popkin et al. (2000, p.929) for example suggests that there are a number of methodological shortcomings with the research associated with Gautreaux. They suggest that these include the self-selection and screening process associated with the participant selection process; the risk that those who successfully found alternate housing in predominantly white neighbourhoods were atypical (potentially the most determined and motivated of the tenants); and that those who moved and failed were unlikely to have been found by the researchers – thereby exaggerating the perceived benefits of the moves. Popkin does, however, consider that the results from the MTO program should be more reliable.
Some of these criticisms of the Gautreaux program evaluations seem to have been predicted and addressed by Rosenbaum in his 1991 report. For example, Popkin (2000, p.929) states that “…participants…were heavily screened, undergoing home visits and credit checks.” Rosenbaum (1991, p.1187) acknowledges that there is a risk that the screening process may make the participants atypical, however he notes that only about 12% of applicants were rejected through credit checks and rental records. Rosenbaum goes on to model the impacts of this and other potential sources of bias to demonstrate that the impacts of these factors could not meaningfully alter the overall results of this analysis.

Popkin’s contention is that the social dispersment approach currently driving housing policy in the United States may disadvantage the most marginal tenants, as these tenants are unlikely to successfully relocate to low poverty neighbourhoods (p. 933). Regardless of the merits of this argument, it would appear that Popkin may have been too quick to dismiss the results of evaluations of the Gautreaux program.

In drawing lessons from this Program for an Australian context, it should be noted that schools in the United States come under the jurisdiction of local authorities, and as such neighbourhood differences between schools in poorer versus more affluent areas (such as funding levels) may be more pronounced. Also the extent of urban blight (in particular the level of street crime in urban areas) may be less in an Australian context. One suspects that not working through fear of returning home after dark may be a less common occurrence in Australia than in urban areas of Chicago.

**The role of peers**

The research discussed in the previous section suggests that peer influence may be a powerful neighbourhood related factor in relation to school success. Due to the possible significance of this issue it warrants further examination in some detail.

The choice of where one lives is in part a choice regarding school and neighbourhood peers, although it is by no means a guarantee that one’s children will seek out a typical cross-section of neighbourhood children as friends. That said, living in a neighbourhood with predominantly higher SES households must increase the likelihood of children getting to know if not befriending other children from such backgrounds.
Like Brooks-Gunn et al. (1993), Gonzales et al. (1996) also concludes that peer influence rivals family influence in relation to school achievement. Using interviews with 120 year seven and eight children, and follow up interviews 12 months later, Gonzales found that family status and parenting variables did not predict adolescent grade point averages, however peer support and neighbourhood risk did explain a significant proportion of the observed variance in school performance.

![Diagram of Social Mix](image)

**Housing cost**

Housing cost is also an important consideration, as housing costs are generally the single most significant outlay in the budget of low income households (Harding & Szukalska 2000, p.29). The relationship between poverty and schooling may not always be relevant to a discussion of housing and schooling, as expensive housing will not always be a cause or even contributor to a household experiencing poverty. This will, however, be the case in many high-cost housing markets, particularly as low cost rental housing disappears so rapidly (see Housing Policy and Research 1999).
There are a number of studies that suggest that poverty is an important predictor of school success. For example Levy & Duncan (2000) studied 1,364 families with more than one child during the period 1968-76, using completed years of education at age 20 as the dependent variable. The use of siblings allowed the researcher to control for genetic inheritance of abilities. Their concern was that a correlation between household income and school success may be due to genetics rather than environmental impacts (i.e. higher income parents have better jobs in large part due to their greater abilities, and these abilities are passed on genetically to their children).

Levy (2000, p.17) found that, “Income during the first stage of childhood has a positive and significant effect on completed schooling.” The study found that a 2.7 fold increase in parental income when the child was four years of age or younger is associated with an increase of 0.5 to one year increase in schooling completed. This is a significant increase in household income that may be unlikely to occur in many cases.

Levy indicated that the early life of a child is the period when family influence is greatest, and that increased income may reduce family stress and increase the chances of a family purchasing books, toys etc as part of creating a more stimulating home environment.

Recent reviews of welfare reform programs have reached similar conclusions. Morris et al. (2001) concluded in her examination of research into the impacts of welfare reform policies that those programs that resulted in increased employment and increased household income resulted in higher school achievement for children. In contrast, welfare reform programs that result in increased workforce participation but no increase in household income did not have the same benefits for children. Morris (p.1.5) concluded that, “Welfare reforms and anti-poverty programs can have a positive impact on children’s development if they increase employment and income, but increasing employment alone does not appear sufficient to foster the healthy development of children.”
Schmitz (1992) similarly concludes that poverty is the major determinant of school failure, and he attributes this increased risk of school failure to a range of factors including neighbourhood effects, peer influence, nutrition, lack of recreational facilities, and adult role models. Bradley & Caldwell (1984b) found a significant correlation between the availability of play materials when children are quite young, and subsequent school achievement. While availability of play materials may be a product more of parental priorities than poverty, the absence of discretionary household income makes the purchase of toys and craft materials harder.

Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn (1995) cite a body of evidence that confirms that growing up in poverty causes impaired cognitive development, problems of socio-emotional adjustment, and poor health. These contribute to lower academic achievement at school, increased rates of school failure and drop-out, and higher rates of depression and delinquency. Ultimately the authors suggest that these consequences mean that children who grow up in poverty are more likely to be poor themselves in adulthood, and to therefore pass on this inheritance to their own children (p. 2).

![Figure 11 - High Housing Costs](source: Author)
**Housing tenure**

Little appears to have been written about a possible link between housing tenure and child development or schooling, although some of the studies cited earlier (such as Wilner et al. 1962) use public housing as a proxy for secure, affordable housing of an adequate size. Similarly, the studies that refer to the impacts of mobility (such as Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber 1996) could be taken as being more relevant to households living in private rental housing, than those in homeownership or public rental.

Boehm & Schlottmann (1999) do explore the question of whether home ownership benefits children. They state that parental influence and wealth have been recognised as having an influence in children’s education (p. 219), but that the link between housing and education is less clear. This study then uses data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics to explore the effect of home ownership.

This Panel Study tracked 5,000 families between 1968 and 1992. Boehm’s analysis of that data found that, controlling for wealth and improved neighbourhoods, parental home ownership is associated with increased success in educational attainment (p.225), and that annual earnings for individuals whose parents were home owners was, on average, $7,497 higher as a result of this improved educational attainment. Boehm does not provide a possible explanation for this observed relationship.

**The home dynamic – parent child interactions and schooling**

In an attempt to understand the relationship between housing and schooling it is helpful to also understand the environmental factors that are known to impact on school achievement. This is necessary in part because these other environmental factors may be confounding research designed to understand the effects of housing. More importantly, though, these other factors may be intermediaries in the housing – schooling relationship. The home dynamic may be one such intermediary.
Already we have seen that the degree of stimulation provided by parents during the first four years of life can be significant in terms of attainment of developmental milestones and ultimately in terms of school readiness (Hertzman & Wiens 1996). Other studies suggest that the involvement that parents play in homework and encouraging school success is very significant in terms of school success.

Izzo et al. (1999) for example surveyed teachers of 1,205 primary school aged students in a poor area of New England in the United States. This research found not surprisingly that Year 1 performance was the strongest predictor of Year 3 results. If Year 1 performance is controlled for, however, parental participation in the child’s schooling (as rated by two different teachers) became the highest predictor of success. In this case, parent involvement related to the interest that parents displayed in their children’s schooling and homework. Keeves (1972) states that parental attitude is a key factor in school success. He cites a study that found parental attitudes to have a greater impact on school success than home circumstances, school or teacher differences.

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth is a major longitudinal study that tracked 12,686 randomly selected people born between 1957 and 1964 in the United States. From this data, Crane (1996) analysed a sample of 1,123 using a weighted regression technique. This analysis found that home environment as measured using the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) inventory was a strong predictor of school attainment, as was socio-economic status and maternal cognition, although home environment appeared to be a more significant factor. Home environment was particularly significant for younger children.

Similarly in a longitudinal study of 96 children, Gottfried, A. E., Fleming & Gottfried (1998) found that a cognitively stimulating home environment at age eight resulted in more academically motivated children at ages nine, 10 and 13, even when socio-economic status is controlled for. Academic intrinsic motivation is positively and significantly related to student achievement, and inversely related to academic anxiety (Gottfried, A. E., Fleming & Gottfried 1998, p.1448).
A recent study sought to examine the relative importance of genetic versus environmental factors in a child’s cognitive development. Cleveland et al. (2000) studied natural and adopted siblings (drawn from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth) and confirmed through this analysis that genetic inheritance is the more significant determinant of intelligence and eventual school achievement.

However, Cleveland did find that, while genetics accounted for between 40% and 70% of intelligence, environment accounted for up to 30%. The study also found that environment was a mediating factor in whether intelligence translated into school achievement. This study does however note that environment is also indirectly a product of genetics, in that parents may be implementing inherited parenting practices.

![Cognitively stimulating home environment](Source: Author)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitively stimulating home environment</th>
<th>Parental interest in schooling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased intrinsic motivation for children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved school achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 12 - Cognitively Stimulating Home Environment**

**Housing and education – studies that examine direct linkages**

The research cited elsewhere in this literature review attempts to explore the building blocks that may eventually illuminate the relationship between housing and schooling. Very few studies have, however, sought to measure changes in school progress and achievement as a result of changed housing.

A major longitudinal study by the University of Sydney, funded through the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, is tracking households who are waiting for public and community housing, through into public housing, in order to see whether a range of non-shelter outcomes such as improved health and better school performance can be attributed to this housing improvement. A similar approach was adopted by a study by Wilner et al. (1962) in the early 1960’s.
Wilner selected two study groups – those who were about to move into public housing, and a matched control group from the bottom of the public housing waiting list (that is, a group who were not expected to experience a change in housing in the near future). In total 1,029 households were selected in 1955 (396 test families, and 633 control group families), and a further 891 in 1958 (352 test and 539 control). Wilner anticipated an improvement in the school performance of children from the test group, due to an anticipated improvement in household morale, improved space to complete homework uninterrupted, and possibly greater participation by parents in their children’s schooling.

Wilner did however acknowledge at the outset that the likelihood of getting measurable improvements in educational performance were small, due to the indirect nature of the relationship and the significant effect of other confounding variables such as the school environment.

This study tested three aspects of school performance – intelligence, arithmetic, and reading. As well, progress through grades was also monitored. The result was that children did not demonstrate any improvement in the three tested areas as a result of the improved housing (p. 237), however the control group was less likely to be promoted through year levels than the test group. Wilner attributed this difference to the higher rate of absenteeism amongst the control group due to higher rates of illness (p.92 and p.252). The study did however find that the housing change did result in the expected improvement in household optimism and life satisfaction (p.250).

In relation to the impact of improved housing on schooling, Wilner (p.226) concluded:

“…the hypothesis in connection with school performance of children was somewhat more tenuous than was the case with other substantive areas of study…(as)…a number of the hypotheses were of a secondary rather than a primary order, i.e. housing would need to have a discernable effect in a given area and this effect in turn might then influence school performance.”

Wilner also conceded that the impact of this indirect housing effect may not be sufficient to overcome factors at work in the school context.
Summary

The table overleaf summarises possible relationships between aspects of housing and aspects of schooling. This table has been constructed as a summary of relationships identified in this literature review.¹⁰

The focus of this table is on processes. It aims to add to the picture of how aspects of housing may impact on other outcomes, such as health, stress levels and school attainment. As the diagrams in this chapter show, such relationships are rarely as simple as one or two steps. An aspect of housing may contribute in some way to a chain of events – for example transience may contribute to poverty (due to the costs of moving and reconnecting services), which may contribute to poor diet, which may contribute to poor health and so on. Transience may also contribute to breaking of relationships, which may contribute to loneliness, which may add to stress, which might fuel a disposition for depression. These relationships are often complex and multifaceted, and therefore this table (and the preceding diagrams) are not able to provide a complete picture of these relationships. Rather they are used as a simple and accessible summary.

¹⁰ This table was first presented in a conference paper delivered by the author to the Autumn 2001 Housing Studies Association conference in Cardiff, United Kingdom.
Table 1 - Possible housing-schooling pathways

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of housing</th>
<th>Possible processes</th>
<th>Possible outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security of tenure</td>
<td>Broken friendships for children</td>
<td>Increased stress and depression, poorer health, inability to concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regular unplanned moves</td>
<td>Broken relationships for parents</td>
<td>Increased household stress, less external supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>due to instability in private</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rental market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling amenity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size – external</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safe outside play space</td>
<td>Delayed development of independence due to reduced opportunity for outdoor play</td>
<td>Reduced school readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size internal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Indoor play space;</td>
<td>Increased family conflict/punitive parenting due to closer contacts in home</td>
<td>Poorer health and increased days absence due to stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shared/separate bedrooms;</td>
<td>Broken sleep due to age differences between siblings sharing bedrooms</td>
<td>Less able to concentrate and increased days absence through illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Space for uninterrupted homework time;</td>
<td>Failure to complete homework reliably</td>
<td>Perceptions of teacher and child affected by homework not completed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 This table has been developed as a summary of possible relationships identified through a review of earlier studies on this issue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of housing</th>
<th>Possible processes</th>
<th>Possible outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality internal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Repair and amenity;</td>
<td>Self esteem</td>
<td>Child sees self as less able to succeed due to lower self-worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safety;</td>
<td>More rules to maintain safety in physically dangerous environment</td>
<td>Increased conflict, increased stress, reduced health, reduced capacity to concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adequacy of services such as kitchen and bathroom;</td>
<td>Poorer diet due to inadequate food storage and preparation spaces</td>
<td>Increased illness and increased days absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education and employment status of neighbours and school peers;</td>
<td>Peer influence – nature of role models</td>
<td>Reduced motivation for school success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Physical amenity of local community;</td>
<td>Self esteem</td>
<td>Child sees self as less able to succeed due to lower self-worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality of local resources, especially local schools;</td>
<td>Attitudes, morale and expertise of teaching and support staff</td>
<td>Lower expectations of children (self-fulfilling prophesy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Traffic and other street noise;</td>
<td>Ongoing auditory stimulation – contributing to language development delays</td>
<td>Reduced school readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safety on local street;</td>
<td>Delayed development of independence due to reduced opportunity for outdoor play</td>
<td>Reduced school readiness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Broken sleep
- Less able to concentrate, and poorer health

- Reduced school readiness
- Reduced school readiness
- Reduced school readiness
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of housing</th>
<th>Possible processes</th>
<th>Possible outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing cost</strong></td>
<td>Reduced capacity to buy nutritious food</td>
<td>Poorer health and increased days absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced capacity to buy toys, books and to afford outings</td>
<td>Developmental delays and reduced school readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased worry regarding money</td>
<td>Poorer health, increased family conflict, inability to concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absence of housing</strong></td>
<td>Increased stress</td>
<td>Reduced health and increased days absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduction in preventative medical care</td>
<td>Reduced health and increased days absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor diet</td>
<td>Reduced health and increased days absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased risk of harm from accident or attack</td>
<td>Reduced health and increased days absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater mobility to access crisis housing services</td>
<td>Changes in schools, interrupted learning process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, earlier research has identified a range of possible non-shelter impacts associated with poor housing. The links between these non-shelter impacts and schooling are less clear, although some studies have found a relationship. Interestingly, very few studies into housing and non-shelter outcomes have occurred in Australia, although research on this theme funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) during the last two years should begin to be published shortly.  

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12 See the AHURI web site for more details: [www.ahuri.edu.au](http://www.ahuri.edu.au)
The next two chapters outlines the approach taken and findings of semi-structured in-depth interviews with public housing tenants and primary school educators, to further explore the non-shelter impacts of housing and possible relationships with schooling. This research has been designed to particularly examine the stronger themes identified in these earlier studies – such as neighbourhood and health, and to help explain the ambiguous findings from earlier studies examining the non-shelter impacts of transience.
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

The goal of this research is to better understand the non-shelter impacts of housing, and in particular to shed light on the relationships between aspects of housing and schooling. The research is not attempting to establish causality, but rather to help explain processes, and through this improved understanding to provide a basis for both further research, and the development of social policy responses.

**Approach**

This research is qualitative, as it is intended to shed light on “…what is going on” between housing and schooling, rather than test a specific hypothesis (Bouma 2000, p.91). As suggested by Mason (1996, p.96):

> “…qualitative methods are usually used when the object of study is some form of social process or meaning or experience which needs to be understood and explained in a rounded way, rather than by attempting to understand…causal patterns…”

The literature review identifies a number of attempts to map parts of the relationship between housing and schooling. There is a body of literature that considers the impact of transience on academic performance, for example, although a much smaller sub-set of these studies attempts to test an explanation for the observed relationships (eg. Pribesh & Downey 1999). Those that are most effective at shedding light on processes, however, are more ethnographic in approach. The case studies of three families presented by Bartlett (1998) is a powerful example of a researcher explaining the roles that poor housing may play in child development. Through detailed observations conducted over a relatively long period of time, Bartlett is able to identify aspects of housing impacting on family processes, and in many cases provide an explanation of how the housing-family dynamic occurs. The power of this study helped to confirm that a qualitative, case study approach was appropriate in this instance.
Ideally, building an understanding of the relationship between housing and schooling would occur through a longitudinal approach – in this case, interviewing households before and after a change in their housing circumstances, with a view to identifying impacts that aspects of the changed housing have had on aspects of schooling. The time period for such a study would need to be long enough for the impacts of the changed housing (if any) to be felt. In the short term the disruption of packing, moving, and re-establishing home may mask any other effects resulting from this change.

The time required for a longitudinal study of this type was not feasible for this research, and so that approach was rejected.

The most appropriate approach was therefore thought to be retrospective interviews at a point in time after a significant change in housing – long enough after the move to allow time for the disruption of the move to have abated and for the benefits of the new housing (if any) to have had some effect, but recent enough that the interviewees might still recall fairly accurately life in their former housing. There are a number of data accuracy risks with a retrospective approach such as this. As suggested by Bijleveld & Kamp (1998, p.26) these could include:

- Memory loss: the respondent being unable to remember;

- Retrieval problems: there may be recall accuracy problems of events that are remembered;

- Telescoping: difficulty recalling the timing of events, for example reporting that events have taken place more recently than they actually did; and

- Re-interpreting events, opinions and feelings so that they fit in with their current perception of their lives and their past lives.
The interviews for this study were designed and conducted so as to minimise these risks as far as possible. Subjects were assured that failing to remember past housing conditions or events was understandable, and that their honesty was more important than their capacity to recall. The focus of this study of housing and schooling was explained to subjects, however the researcher emphasised that the goal of the research was simply to better understand the changes (both good and bad) that may accompany a change in housing. This assurance was intended to reduce the risks of subjects reinterpreting past events to “help” the researcher.

**Dependent and Independent Variables, and Intermediaries**

As outlined in Chapter Two, there are many aspects of housing that may have an impact on schooling (neighbourhood, crowding, noise, cost, amenity etc), many vehicles that may act as intermediaries between housing and schooling (health, peer influence, poverty, social capital etc) and a range of aspects of schooling that could be considered as part of this framework (attendance, academic performance, behaviour, attitude etc).

The summary section at the end of Chapter Two provides a framework of dependent, intermediary, and independent variables adapted from earlier studies. Dependent variables are outcomes that may be affected by, or be dependent on housing related changes. Intermediaries are mechanisms by which a housing change may influence a non-housing outcome. Independent variables are aspects of housing (these may be physical characteristics such as size, location or repair; or attributes such as cost or security of tenure). For example, dusty housing (independent variable) may increase the incidence of asthma (intermediary), thereby increasing days absent from school (dependent variable).

While this framework provides the broad context for this research, it is necessary to identify priority variables to bring focus to what would otherwise be a very broad field of exploration. While the act of focussing risks reducing the chances of discovering unexpected processes, the limited scope of this research requires some narrowing in order to adequately explore key relationships in sufficient depth.
The strength of evidence now emerging from evaluations of the Moving to Opportunities (MTO) experiment in the United States, and the earlier evidence from the Gautreaux Program, suggests that neighbourhood may be a key independent variable when studying housing and schooling. One policy belief underpinning the MTO experiment and the current focus on vouchering out public housing tenants in that country, is that the children of households living in neighbourhoods of concentrated disadvantage are less likely to succeed academically than children of households living in more socially diverse neighbourhoods. As discussed below, the sample selection for the interviews in this study has therefore been developed to maximise the likelihood of observing a neighbourhood effect if it exists.

Transience (as an independent variable) and social capital (as an intermediary) have been identified in earlier research as possibly impacting on academic performance (Pribesh & Downey 1999). Given that so few studies into transience test intermediaries, this seems an area worth further exploration, and interviews explored this issue.

The work by Bartlett (1997a) and Parke (1978) suggests that crowding (independent variable) may contribute to more punitive parenting practices (intermediary) and ultimately school yard aggression and behaviour difficulties (dependent variable), and this relationship is explored in interviews. Crowding may also contribute to difficulty completing homework, and broken sleep due to sharing bedrooms with siblings of very different ages.

Also studies into constant noise both from outside, such as traffic, eg. Cohen, Glass & Singer (1973) and within the home (as might also be associated with overcrowding) suggest that children from such environments may be less attentive and have delayed language development. Interviews therefore explored the issue of before and after housing noise levels.
The interviews also attempt a less traditional approach – starting with intermediaries and working forwards and backwards to schooling and housing respectively. The questions relating to health and participation were developed because of the potential importance of these as intermediaries between housing and schooling. Rather than start with aspects of housing that may impact on these intermediaries (such as housing instability contributing to stress, which may lead on to poor health and increased absences from school), the interviews included questions specifically relating to these intermediaries. This approach was intended as a complement to questions focusing on independent variables in order to provide space to capture information about aspects of housing not predicted when designing the interview process.

Not all aspects of housing and possible intermediaries identified in the summary table at the end of the previous chapter are directly explored in these interviews. Instead a decision was made to focus on the stronger themes, while remaining alert to other possible non-shelter impacts identified in earlier research. There are some risks with this approach, which are discussed further in Chapter 6.

**Sample Selection**

As outlined above, it was decided to choose sample households who had experienced a change in housing within the last six to 18 months. A further criteria for choosing sample households was that their children were likely to have experienced environmental (and ideally housing related) barriers to school success. The sample households should have preferably either moved to, or moved from, housing that in some way impacted on their children’s schooling – the importance being the contrast between the two recent housing experiences. These starting assumptions about possible housing related factors that may prove to be relevant to non-shelter outcomes therefore formed the basis for a sampling framework.

The size of the sample was set with consideration to the likely diversity of cases and capacity to generalise more broadly. Miles & Huberman (1994) suggest that a study with more than 15 cases may become unwieldy (p. 30).
The search for families with school aged children, known to have moved within a specified period, and who are likely to have moved from or to housing that in some way impeded their children’s schooling, naturally led to considering the appropriateness of public housing tenants as a sample group. These households are generally on low or very low incomes, and are therefore likely to have experienced poor housing in one form or another. Also demographic information (such as the age of household children) and the date of their move into public housing are available on Departmental administrative data sets, making efficient sample selection possible. A subset of public housing tenants can easily be derived that meet many of these criteria.

Not all public housing tenants have moved from housing that has impeded their children’s schooling. Similarly not all public housing is appropriate in all respects, and in the United States efforts are being made to assist families to leave some public housing, as much as anything for the sake of their children’s schooling.

This problem was in part addressed by selecting a subset of public tenants who have moved to housing that was more likely to benefit their children’s schooling. The criteria used to identify this subset was that the suburb of their current housing was in the top (least disadvantage) quartile of suburbs in the State using the 1996 ABS Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) - Index of Disadvantage. This method was chosen in the belief that neighbourhood may prove to be one of the most important aspect of housing that assists or impedes school success.

In order to recruit a target sample of 10 – 15 households, invitations were sent to 110 public housing tenants from one inner-urban Area Office of the Queensland Department of Housing. That office was chosen due to the high proportion of stock managed by that office in relatively low disadvantage suburbs. The criteria used for selecting the mailing list was:

1. School aged children;
2. Tenancy commenced between 6 and 18 months ago;
3. Household address in a suburb rated in the top SEIFA quartile.

These criteria yielded a list of 440 households. Every fourth household from this list was selected to make up a mailing list of 110.
In order to maintain public tenant privacy, the mail out to tenants was undertaken by the Department of Housing. Letters were prepared from the General Manager Public Housing, introducing the research project and stressing that participation was purely voluntary and would in no way affect the recipient’s tenancy.

Accompanying this Departmental letter was a letter from the researcher (on University of Sydney letterhead) providing further details of the research project, and inviting recipients to telephone a free call number to find out more about the project and to register to participate if interested. The letter also advised that participants would receive a family movie pass as a gesture of thanks for their time. The movie tickets each have a value of up to $12 per person.

From a mail out of 110 letters, 22 telephone calls were received, and 14 households volunteered and were chosen to participate in the study. Some households who did not meet the original criteria were inadvertently sent letters by the Department of Housing, and some of these were eventually interviewed. This proved beneficial. For example, a household who had lived in public housing for seven years provided helpful insights into the benefits of stable housing.

Previous housing details were checked when tenants rang to register to participate in this study, in order to ensure a reasonable number of sample households had moved to their current suburb of low disadvantage from suburbs of high disadvantage. The intention was that at least 50% of those households interviewed would have moved from a suburb rated as below (3rd quartile) or well below (4th quartile) the mid-point in the SEIFA scale. This target was achieved.

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13 A mistake in the Departmental mail out meant that some households who did not meet the specified criteria received a letter in error.
The approach taken in sample selection was therefore a form of stratified random sampling. There are a number of risks with the approach taken. Firstly public housing tenants are not necessarily representative of the rest of the population, even taking account of socio-economic differences. The Queensland Department of Housing has found, for example, that many more households who are normatively assessed as being in housing need do not register for public housing assistance as do register. There may therefore be characteristics unique to public tenants, meaning that conclusions based on observations from a sample of this population cannot be confidently applied to the broader community.

Also, those public housing tenants living in the least disadvantaged suburbs have likely waited many years for allocation to such housing, while others in similar or greater housing need have chosen to wait shorter periods of time for less popular housing in lower wait time suburbs. It may be that tenants in these least disadvantaged suburbs have just been lucky in the allocation process, but equally it may be that these tenants made a conscious choice (possibly even for the perceived good of their children) to list and wait for housing in a relatively advantaged community.

Such behaviour suggests a few possibilities – decision making motivated by their children’s long term welfare, a relatively sophisticated understanding of the locational dimensions of opportunity, and also a patience (and capacity) to wait. All of these characteristics may make this group atypical of the wider community, and all may ultimately make the conclusions drawn from this study only applicable to a like sub-set of public housing tenants.

These issues are not thought to reduce the value or importance of insights gained through these interviews. Rather they provide an importance context when considering the applicability of these findings beyond public housing tenants.

As well as interviewing public housing tenants, three interviews were conducted with primary school educators. The sampling process for these interviews is described in the next section.
Interview Process

Interviews with public housing tenants

Interviews were planned as semi-structured, in-depth interviews that were intended to last between one and two hours. They were conducted in the subject’s own home. Where more than one adult was involved in parenting children in the household, these other adults were also invited to be interviewed. Such interviews were conducted separately in order that their recall was not affected by hearing the recall of their partner.

The approach taken in designing the interviews was developed with consideration to the Grounded Theory method as outlined by Strauss & Corbin (1990). In particular the interviews began with unprompted, open ended questions that simply sought to record the subjects primary recollections and interpretations of their move from private rental housing into public rental housing. The intention of these early questions was to learn about what mattered most to the subjects in relation to these moves. As Strauss (p.23) suggests, it is important to “…begin with an area of study and what is relevant to that area (be) allowed to emerge.”

The full interview schedule is included in the Attachments section of this thesis. As can be seen, the interviews were to commence with an introduction to the purpose and area of study – relayed so as to reinforce that the goal was to build a better understanding rather than prove or test a hypothesis. Issues of confidentiality were addressed at the outset, and permission to tape record interviews for subsequent transcription was sought\(^\text{14}\). Subjects were then given an opportunity to ask questions before the interview commenced.

The interview began with the collection of base line data such as household structure, past and current housing, and children’s ages and year levels at school. This information was collected in order to categorise subjects according to the nature of the change in their housing circumstances when they moved into public housing. For example, the recent move into public housing may have resulted in a change:

\(^{14}\) All subjects agreed to the taping of their interview.
• From more disadvantaged to less disadvantaged neighbourhood (all subjects were chosen on the basis that they now lived in a suburb of relatively low disadvantage);

• From crowded to appropriately sized housing (all public housing tenants are allocated housing with sufficient bedrooms given the age and gender of children);

• From expensive to affordable housing (public tenants pay rent calculated as a percentage of their household income);

• From poorly repaired and maintained housing, to housing that is in reasonable to good repair (all public housing dwellings in Queensland have been recently inspected as part of a complete stock condition audit, and most urgent repairs identified in this audit have since been completed);

• To more or less noisy housing; and

• To a home with more or less indoor or outdoor play space.

The base line data was collected so as to provide a context for subsequent statements regarding the nature and possible impacts of housing changes, and as a means of checking recollections regarding aspects of their past housing.

Following this stage, the interview then focussed on asking subjects to recall life in their last home before they moved into public housing. They were asked what aspects of their last home stand out for them now, and what life was like for their family in their last home. These early questions were asked with little or no prompting, in order that the responses reflected as far as possible the issues that mattered most to the subjects.

Subjects were then asked to talk about their move into their current home – what were their hopes and expectations regarding this move, have these expectations been met, in what ways if any has life changed since the move? Again these questions were designed so as to gain insight into the role and importance that aspects of housing play for these households.
The interviews then moved to address more specific aspects of the change in housing and possible impacts, assuming that these aspects had not already been covered in the earlier questions. Subjects were asked about the impacts of their move on relationships, health, and employment or participation; and about the impact of changes of particular aspects of their housing, including reduced cost, and the increased security of tenure.

As the interviews drew to conclusion, subjects were asked about a number of specific relationships between aspects of housing and aspects of schooling that have been identified in earlier studies. These questions were deliberately left until the end of the interview so as not to influence or shape recollections during the earlier part of the interview.

**Interviews with educators**

The main source of information for this research was gained from interviews with public housing tenants. Interviews were also conducted with two primary school principals (interviewed separately), and a deputy principal and remedial teacher (interviewed together), in order to supplement the insights gained through the literature review phase of this study. These interviews were therefore largely intended as one strategy in the preparation for interviews with public housing tenants. The interviews with educators were designed to explore specific relationships between aspects of housing and schooling that had been identified in earlier studies, and to consider the applicability of these results in an Australian context.

Subjects for these interviews were selected through stratified sampling – one was selected from the northern outskirts of Brisbane, one from the southern outskirts, and one from a middle ring suburb. Outer suburb schools were chosen as their catchments were primarily suburbs with relatively low land values and relatively high levels of disadvantage (in the third or fourth quartile of Statistical Local Areas using the SEIFA index). These schools were considered more likely to see the impacts of high levels of disadvantage, and poor quality housing.
The middle ring suburb school was chosen as a suburb in transition – one that has serviced a catchment of relatively high disadvantage (third quartile on the SEIFA index) but one that is changing through the process of gentrification. This current school population of students from both advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds was hoped to provide an opportunity to explore the hypothesis in literature that children from poorer families benefit from attending schools with a variety of other children, as compared with a more homogenous population of similarly disadvantaged students.

Subjects were recruited via a letter and follow up phone calls. All three schools who were approached agreed to participate. While these interviews commenced with a less directive question about possible linkages between housing and schooling, the balance of time was spent exploring specific possible linkages, such as crowding, cost, neighbourhood and amenity. The schedule for these interviews is included in the Attachments section.
CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH RESULTS

Method of analysis

The earlier literature review identified a number of potentially important aspects of housing. The analysis of interviews in this study has been undertaken to build on this earlier research.

Analysis began by firstly categorising aspects of these interviews by theme and sub-theme. This occurred through the gradual building of a checklist matrix highlighting themes identified in each interview. For example, the first transcript was reviewed and themes identified and added to a matrix. The second interview transcript was then reviewed, and occurrences of themes identified in the first interview were checked off. New themes not present in the first interview were added to the list of themes, and this amended list of themes was then used as the basis for reviewing the third transcript, and so on.

The end result of this process was a checklist matrix listing interviewees on the y-axis, and themes across the x-axis. The significance of these themes was then assessed using a simple scoring system (see the later section in this chapter, “Relative Importance of Themes.”)

There was a high degree of correlation between this checklist matrix and the themes identified in the review of earlier studies on this topic. Themes and sub-themes identified through this process are as follows:

Theme 1: Aspect of housing

Sub-themes: Housing quality; Neighbourhood; Security of tenure; Cost

Theme 2: Outcome

Sub-themes: Work; Health
There is clearly overlap between these two themes – characteristics of housing such as repair can impact on outcomes such as health. Similarly an examination of an outcome such as work necessarily includes an examination of aspects of housing relating to that outcome (such as neighbourhood). This approach is an attempt to understand processes from both ends – from the causal end and the effect end. The aim is to describe and understand the same processes, but from different perspectives.

After identifying aspects of housing and outcomes, interviews were analysed by comparing the relative importance of sub-themes across the interviews, and then by examining each sub-theme in detail. This chapter begins by providing details of households interviewed, and then examines these interviews using these two approaches.

**Background to households interviewed**

Fourteen households were interviewed for this study. Of these 14 households, 12 were single parent families. In all but one case, interviews were conducted with one adult member of the household. In one case, two separate interviews were conducted so as to better elicit the views of both partners. All participants had school aged children.

The first task in analysing interview results was to summarise key characteristics of households, and their past and present housing circumstances. Following is a table summarising key characteristics of these households, followed by a brief overview of the housing histories and current circumstances of each household.

---

15 Details such as family member names and, in some cases, suburb names and other information have been altered so as to maintain confidentiality.
### Table 2 - Profile of households interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Household size (* = 2 adults)</th>
<th>Current suburb</th>
<th>SEIFA rating (quartile)(^{18})</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Last suburb</th>
<th>SEIFA rating (quartile)</th>
<th>Time in current dwelling (yrs)</th>
<th>Number of moves last 5 years(^{17})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam 2</td>
<td>New Farm</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>Enoggera</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol 5</td>
<td>Bracken Ridge</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>Stafford</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassie 2</td>
<td>Newmarket</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very advantaged</td>
<td>Newmarket</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very advantaged</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie 2</td>
<td>Keperra</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Advantage(^{19})</td>
<td>Albion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug 3*</td>
<td>Kelvin Grove</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>Albion</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny 3</td>
<td>Bracken Ridge</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>Bracken Ridge</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine 4</td>
<td>Stafford Hts</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>Stafford Hts</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda 3</td>
<td>Keperra</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>The Grange</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Very advantaged</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha 3</td>
<td>Enoggera</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>The Gap</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Very advantaged</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary 4-5</td>
<td>Toowong</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Very advantaged</td>
<td>Toowong</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Very advantaged</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona 3</td>
<td>The Gap</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very advantaged</td>
<td>The Gap</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very advantaged</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silvia 3</td>
<td>Stafford Hts</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>Stafford Hts</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne 2</td>
<td>Keperra</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>Everton Park</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very advantaged</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry and Narelle 2-3*</td>
<td>Keperra</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>Keperra</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{16}\) Not their real names.

\(^{17}\) Excluding their most recent move into public housing.

\(^{18}\) Socio-Economic Index For Areas (SEIFA) taken from the 1996 ABS census. Ratings are from top quartile (Very advantaged) to bottom quartile (Very disadvantaged).

\(^{19}\) Keperra is rated as “advantaged” using the SEIFA index, although the researcher felt that pockets of this suburb would be rated as disadvantaged or very disadvantaged.
Overview of households

Neighbourhood
As can be seen from the preceding table, the sample provided a good mix of households who moved from less advantaged to more advantaged suburbs (four households), and from more advantaged to less advantaged suburbs (three).

Stability
There is a good variety of households who have had reasonably stable housing over the past five years (seven who had moved less than twice), and those who have moved relatively often (four who had moved four or more times). As well, four of the households have lived in their current housing for at least three years.

Close to family and friends
Three of the households moved from housing close to family and friends to housing no longer close to these supports, providing good opportunity to explore the importance of this aspect of their housing.

Following is a brief overview of each household interviewed.

Adam
Adam lives with his six year old daughter in a two bedroom unit in New Farm, in a complex with about 20 other units. They have lived here almost three years, after transferring from a public rental property on a busy main road at Enoggera. They lived in that dwelling for almost a year, and Adam described this as a very depressing period in their lives, due to isolation, noise and air pollution. Adam was allocated this dwelling well away from his friends in East Brisbane during a period when the Department of Housing was allocating housing on the basis of large zones – effectively reducing the choice and control that applicants had over where they lived.
Carol

Carol has four school aged girls, aged 15, eight, and six year old twins, and lives in a relatively quiet street in Bracken Ridge. The street appears to be a mixture of mostly private housing and some public housing. They moved to this four bedroom house 18 months ago, after being transferred from a three bedroom public housing property at Stafford. Their move to this home was prompted by lack of space, and in particular difficulties in sharing a bedroom for the two eldest girls. Carol grew up in Stafford and her parents still lived close by when she lived there. Her preference was to remain in that area, and would have ideally preferred to remain in the same dwelling with an additional bedroom added. She reluctantly transferred to Bracken Ridge as it was the only means she could see of easing her families crowding problem. As well as moving away from her parents, this move also meant a change in schools for her children.

Cassie

Cassie has lived in a small town-house development in Newmarket since it was constructed seven years ago. Their street appears to have a high percentage of private dwellings, some being renovated as part of the gentrification under way in this suburb. She lives with her 11 year old daughter. Prior to living here she lived with her mother and sister nearby. Cassie’s ex-husband died under very difficult circumstances last year, which had a significant impact on this family – particularly on the daughter. Their stable housing and proximity to family and friends has been a significant benefit for this household.

Connie

Connie lives with her seven year old son in a three bedroom home in Keperra. They have lived here for about 15 months, and previously were living with her mother, grandmother, and a number of other family members in a four bedroom house in Albion. In this previous housing Connie was sharing a bedroom with her son. The street Connie lives in now is a mixture of public and private housing.
Doug

Doug lives with his wife and six year old daughter in a two bedroom unit in a large medium density unit development in Kelvin Grove. Doug has a brain injury and does not undertake paid work, although he is very involved in their tenant association. This unit development is on a busy road, and Doug reported that there are a number of tenants living there with disabilities and drug problems. He indicated that he does not feel safe allowing his daughter to play outside unsupervised because of these neighbours, and he is unable to see the children’s play area from his unit.

Jenny

Jenny lives with her two daughters aged nine and seven in a three bedroom house on a very busy Bracken Ridge road that consists mostly of public rental housing. They moved to this home 10 months ago after living in two very poor quality, community managed rental properties\textsuperscript{20} at Bracken Ridge (10 months) and Strathpine (six months). Jenny maintained her children at a local Catholic school during these moves, despite needing to travel four and one half hours per day on public transport from her home at Strathpine.

Katherine

Katherine lives in a three bedroom property in Stafford Heights with her three sons aged 11, 14 and 19. This dwelling has a new kitchen and is carpeted (not common in public rental housing in Queensland). It is on the edge of a pocket of public rental housing, and is boarded by a mixture of private and public dwellings. Having lived in a high density public housing estate in the past, Katherine indicated that she would not have accepted the offer of this dwelling if it had been surrounded by other public rental dwellings. Katherine has lived in this dwelling for eight months, and moved six times in the previous five years. Some of these moves were prompted by private rental houses being sold, and the family were under significant financial strain during this period, which may have contributed to some of the moves.

\textsuperscript{20} The Queensland Department of Housing funds community managed transitional housing for households in crisis, as an intermediate housing option while waiting for public rental housing. These Community Rent Scheme properties are head leased from the private rental market, and tenants pay the equivalent of public housing rents (approximately 25\% of household income).
Linda

Linda lives in a street with a high concentration of public rental housing in Keperra. This is a three bedroom home that she shares with her daughter aged 22, and her nine year old son. They have lived in this home for about eight months, after renting privately in The Grange for 12 months, and living in a house that they owned in Caboolture for five years. They left Caboolture after Linda’s husband died. Linda’s son has a degenerative muscle condition, and an intellectual disability. Linda described a street with terrible neighbourhood hostility directed towards her son, such that he is unable to play outside when neighbouring children are home. She also said that a different neighbour spies on them in their bathroom.

Martha

Martha lives with her 12 and 14 year old daughters in a three bedroom house at Enoggera, in a street that appears to be predominantly private housing, although boarded by other public rental dwellings. They have lived in this dwelling for almost five years, and previously lived in private rental properties in The Gap and Ashgrove. Their current home is in a quiet street adjoining a park. The aspect of housing that has most impacted on this family seems to be neighbours, and in particular the effects of a girl living next door who Martha felt had more freedoms than she considered appropriate for a girl of that age.

Mary

Mary lives in a three bedroom house in Toowong, in a street surrounded by private housing. She has seven children, three teenage girls who live with her, and four older boys – one of whom lives with her sometimes. Mary and one of her son’s suffer from mental health problems, and both have been hospitalised with this illness. They have lived in Toowong for two years, and before this lived in a public housing town house development in Toowong for six years. Mary reported that this last home was very unsatisfactory due to neighbourhood conflicts – in part a result of discrimination relating to Mary and her son’s ill-health.
Mona

Mona lives with her two sons, aged 9 and five, in a three bedroom house at The Gap – a relatively affluent Brisbane suburb. Their street is a quiet, leafy street with some other public rental and defence force housing, and the majority private housing. They have lived in this home for seven months, and previously rented a townhouse privately in The Gap for three years.

Silvia

Silvia lives with her two sons aged 11 and one, in a three bedroom house at Stafford Heights. They have lived in this property for two years, after transferring from a two bedroom public rental property nearby. They had lived in that home for three years, and before this were renting privately in Gordon Park. This pocket of Stafford Heights seems to have a fairly high percentage of public rental family homes.

Suzanne

Suzanne lives with her 12 year old son in a two bedroom house in Keperra, in an area with a mixture of public and private housing. They have lived in this dwelling for five years, and previously lived in a large shared house with three other adults. During that period Suzanne shared a bedroom with her son. She described the shared housing as a supportive arrangement, and the housemates provided company for her son, however she was grateful for the increased space and privacy that accompanied the move into this public rental property.

Terry and Narelle

Terry and Narelle live in a three bedroom house in a street in Keperra in an area with a fairly high proportion of public housing. They have a 15 year old daughter who usually lives with them, but is currently living with her older sister. They have lived in this home for two years, and had previously moved four times in the past five years. This household were home owners who came into financial difficulties due to costs associated with a protracted court case involving Narelle’s previous husband. Terry is not working due to a stress related condition, and Narelle is studying full-time.
Examples of housing types occupied by some of the interviewees

Photo 1 – Typical of post-war public housing in Keperra and Bracken Ridge

Photo 2 – Inner city public housing unit block
Relative importance of themes

A detailed examination of aspects of housing, and of housing related outcomes, may shed light on processes or explanations for relationships. Examining the relative importance of each of these sub-themes may also assist. Such an analysis may help to explain which aspects of housing (if any) matter most in relation to non-shelter outcomes such as schooling, and which outcomes seem most affected by housing related factors.

The interviews for this thesis were semi-structured in nature, that is, an interview schedule was developed prior to conducting interviews, and this schedule was either followed throughout the course of the interview, or used as a checklist at the conclusion of the interview. Given that almost all interviewees were asked about the same aspects of housing, and the same housing related outcomes, it is not appropriate to count the occurrence of these themes during interviews as a means of calculating relative importance. Such an approach would likely result in too flat an analysis, as all issues would receive some score by virtue of being covered in the interview schedule. As well, some interviewees used very few words to express very strong views on some matters, and word counting seems an inadequate approach to determining relative importance given such differences.

The use of a qualitative, computer based data analysis tool such as NVivo or Ethnograph was considered but rejected – in part because the sample size and length of transcripts did not seem to warrant the use of analysis by software, and in part because the analysis of themes occurred using approaches other than counting the occurrence of words and phrases, due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews. Instead a manual coding approach similar to those employed by these software packages was utilised to assist in identifying recurring themes. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Common themes were identified during a preliminary analysis of all transcripts using a checklist matrix approach (see the section at the beginning of this chapter titled “Method of Analysis”), and interview transcripts were then colour coded using highlighter pens to identify text relating to these key themes.
Rather than counting the occurrence of key words, a scoring system was developed to rate the importance of each issue in that interview. Importance was determined by looking for statements by the interviewee regarding the importance of an aspect of housing, and for accompanying tangible impacts described by the interviewee that they attribute or relate to an aspect of housing (i.e. as a means of confirming the validity of the statement through triangulation). The scoring system is as follows:

Score of 2 = Very significant (statement of significance and reported impact);
Score of 1 = Significant (statement of significance but no reported impact);
Score of 0 = Not significant.

For example, Carol described the impacts of changing neighbourhood and school on her daughter. Her observation that moving house was “…hard (on her teenage daughter) because she went from just knowing like she had friends all round the area that were five minutes away,” was confirmed by her subsequent statement that her daughter had missed a month of school last year that she attributed to changing schools and suburbs. In this example the relative importance of transience was rated as “very significant” (score of 2) because of the confirmation of the perception (that it was hard on her daughter) with the tangible impact (missing one month of school). Without the impact this interview would have been rated as “significant” (score of 1) for this sub-theme.

Comments could relate to an aspect of their past housing, present housing, or while comparing present with past.
Table 3 - Relative Importance of Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Score&lt;sup&gt;21&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Coverage&lt;sup&gt;22&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspect of Housing</strong></td>
<td>Security of tenure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moving</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security of tenure</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housing quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repair</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crowding</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homework space</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amenity/standard</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighbourhood</strong></td>
<td>Neighbours</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area/suburb</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noise</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distance to school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing cost</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome</strong></td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This analysis highlights the importance of four key aspects of housing – security of tenure, dwelling amenity or standard, neighbourhood, and cost. Almost universally, interviewees identified that one or more of these aspects of these housing were very important in their lives. This corresponds with the key themes identified in the literature review (Chapter 2).

<sup>21</sup> “Score” is an aggregate of each score for this sub-theme from each interview.<br/>
<sup>22</sup> “Coverage” is the percentage of total interviewees who scored 1 or 2 for this sub-theme.
The degree of importance of neighbours and peers was a little unexpected. While studies have found that neighbourhood is a significant factor in terms of schooling, employment etc, little research has been undertaken to understand the reasons for this link. These interviews suggest that neighbours can have a very significant impact on people’s lives. A positive, supportive set of neighbours can help to create a sense of belonging that can be very important during times of crisis. Conflict with neighbours, on the other hand, seems capable of driving people out of their streets and yards, to a life largely confined indoors, with significant implications in terms of stress and health.

As well as neighbours, most parents talked about the important role that peers played in their children’s development. Most were aware of the importance of encouraging friendships that they considered to be beneficial to their children, often with other children whose parents provided similar levels of supervision, and who had similar expectations regarding behaviour. Some parents were aware that their choice of where they lived would shape who their children played with, and two indicated that they would rather remain marginally housed than accept a public housing allocation in an area surrounded by other public housing dwellings for this reason.

In terms of outcomes, both health and work seemed significant, although health stood out as the aspect of life that participants felt was most affected by housing. There was a smaller than expected coverage for work, but most households who identified a housing related impact on health were able to cite specific examples of impacts (such as increased use of medication, or increased visits to the doctor). Asthma antagonised by cold, dust, mould and stress was mentioned on many occasions, as was injury due to poor repair, and ill health related to housing related stresses such as transience and housing induced poverty. Each of these aspects of housing and outcomes is discussed in more detail below.
Analysis by sub-themes

Transience

Of the 14 households interviewed, just over one third had moved frequently during the five years preceding this interview. Six households had moved three or more times in the past five years.23

On the basis of earlier studies conducted into the impacts of moving, I anticipated that transience would be seen to be both positive and negative in relation to children’s schooling.

Only a small number of parents described moving as a positive experience, and these were largely referring to the benefits of moving into their current, relatively secure public rental housing property. One mother noted that moving from sharing a bedroom with her son in a shared house, to their current two bedroom house, was like Christmas. Her son was able to unpack and enjoy toys that had been in storage for years due to the limited space at their last home. She also appreciated the increased privacy and control as a result of their last move, for example being able to cook when and what she wanted, without having to negotiate the use of the kitchen with her three housemates.

In contrast, a number of parents described moving as a very disruptive event. As identified in the literature review (eg. Brown & Orthner 1990), the social impacts of moving for teenage girls may be most significant, due to the importance of peer groups and social relationships for this group. Carol identified particular problems for her teenage daughter:

23 Research by Tim Seelig from the Queensland Department of Housing indicates that 60% of private renters moved three or more times over a five year period (Seelig 2001). The average number of moves for these 14 households was 2.6 moves over five years, or approximately one move every two years.
“On the teenager, it was very hard because she went from just knowing like she had friends all round the area that were five minutes away, she moved out here and she just… Oh, she’s started socialising with one girl that lives a few streets away but we used to always have her friends over and she’d be at their place and then when we moved out here it was just her sitting around the house all the time, not going anywhere, not doing anything. She’s only just recently started socialising with one girl. So she left a lot of friends behind.”

Carol

Later in that interview the mother estimated that her teenage daughter had missed one month of school last year, largely due to the impacts of changing suburbs and schools. Other parents also identified the loss of friendships for their children as a major disadvantage of moving house. This impact is consistent with research identifying the loss of social capital as a major difficulty associated with moving (Pribesh & Downey 1999).

Some tried to mitigate against this effect by maintaining the children at the same school. One parent travelled 4.5 hours each day to maintain school consistency:

“At that time, we didn’t have a car. We did just a couple of weeks before we moved out and we had to spend about four and a half hours a day on public transport to get… Only the older one had started school and she had already started at St Joseph’s up there and I didn’t really want to move her because she was only in Grade 2, but like to be able to get from Strathpine to there which is not a great distance, it took us four and a half hours most days on public transport. And so between that and the condition of the house itself, it was not a good period of our lives. I don’t think any of us really even liked being there if we didn’t have to be there. We didn’t try and spend a lot of time there. It was like sort of a transitory period where I just hoped that we’d get out of there really quickly.”

Jenny
This theme of moves impacting on friendships and on schooling was repeated in a number of other interviews. One mother had changed school four times in the first three years of her son’s schooling, due to changing domestic arrangements and an offer of public housing outside their last school’s catchment:

“I look and I think, yes, it has affected him. It probably wasn’t very stable for him and I think a lot of that, he has had problems….I think it’s making new friends for him, getting used to more teachers. William doesn’t like change. William is a child that really hates change. You can’t move his bedroom around. He hates change. So for him probably to go from school to school to school has been very hard and making new friends. It’s a good job he makes friends easily otherwise…”

Suzanne

The family with the highest rate of transience of the group interviewed (six moves in the preceding five years) also described some of the most significant benefits arising from the stability provided by her current housing. When asked about the impact of her recent moves she responded:

I: “Devastating. It really was devastating. It was quite disastrous.

PY: In what way?

I: Just emotionally and every other way that you could think of. Financially devastating, but also emotionally devastating when you’ve got as many moves. Because they were short-term leases and when you’ve got as many moves as that you wake up in the middle of the night and you don’t know where you are, and the kids were the same.”

Katherine

She went on to describe benefits that she attributed to their recently stabilised housing relating to her own health, and a change in her son’s behaviour such that her doctor revised an earlier diagnosis of attention deficit disorder:
“For me in particular, I have suffered from depression which in the last, like serious depression where I’ve been on Prozac and everything and I’ve actually been, on my doctor’s advice, halved my dose of Prozac because it’s more… I just feel more stable and my children’s behaviour, one of them was actually diagnosed with ADHD and since we’ve moved here, they’ve actually said, no it’s not.”

This experience is consistent with findings from other studies in this field. Research suggests that moves contribute to increased pressure on family relationships. When families relocate, each member leaves behind numerous social networks, and many interpersonal functions that were accomplished by these old networks are then unfulfilled. This can result in increased stress, and place strain on household relationships as members are forced to rely more on one another (Sluzki 1992). This author concludes that, “…this period of increased family stress frequently translates into multiple psychosomatic, interpersonal and other stress-related complaints in grown-ups and children alike.”

When asked about the importance of security of tenure in their current housing, nine of the 14 families interviewed discussed the importance and/or positive effects that security of tenure made in their lives. Two families said that they would remain in public housing even if they were paying market rents, because the stability it offered was so important to them.

Parents discussed the strengthening of relationships with neighbours as a result of housing stability.
“Yes, yes, I think the thing is it’s like, I think housing is about staying around for a while, don’t you? You know, I think the longer you… I think it’s good when you start know your neighbours a bit and feel as if you, I think belonging, and like you go down the shops here and the fish and chips man or the bottlo and newsagent, there’s about six shops, I actually feel about belonging is when you actually can go down there and say “Hi” and you go to the shops here and there’s a few shops I go, like the same coffee shop at Toowong, he says, “Hi.” Of course it’s good for his business! But it’s about belonging, so that other aspect, positive thing about, what do you call that, because that’s about that belonging thing, isn’t it? Being part of the community.”

Mary

The mother who had moved six times in the past five years described a lack of incentive to invest in relationships with neighbours in the past, as they knew they would soon be moving on.

“It’s really wasting time to get involved with people around you because you’re not going to be there that long anyhow.”

Katherine

Interestingly, one woman described the benefit of time spent in the same place as wearing down the animosities associated with quite significant disagreements with neighbours:

…and the woman next door actually said hello to me the other day and I nearly fell off the balcony. It’s really started to pick up and I’m getting the odd wave and it’s just like all that animosity has just sort of exhausted itself…”

Martha
The three teachers interviewed identified stability as one of the most important aspects of housing impacting on education. From their perspective, the main effect of moving was the interruption of remediation of at-risk children. Teachers described the time taken to understand the exact nature of a child’s learning difficulties and to develop and implement appropriate interventions as wasted when children moved schools. These senior teachers (two Principals and a Deputy Principal) were sceptical about the capacity of the Education system to appropriately communicate such learnings about these children quickly to their next school environment, and also were concerned about the impacts of changes in school routines and styles on these children:

“Yes, and I think a lot of times, the kids that we’re looking at having the most disruption are the ones who are very transient, very mobile. I mean, we have kids who come in here, not as much now but we used to have Army as well … And the thing was that if you had a kid, say out of one of those areas that had learning difficulties, by the time you’d actually got on top of it and were working, had a program sorted out, their three year tenure was up and they were moving on to somewhere else, and you’d be concerned about what would happen at the next step for that child.”

* Inner south side school

This same theme came up in the other two interviews with teachers. As a teacher from an outer north side school noted:

“That issue though, of the family just having to move on because they haven’t met their rental obligations is a very disheartening one because you see children who are just starting to make progress because they’ve been here for a while and then off they go and you know that their education will now falter because it will take some time for them to be picked up. They may not have the same resources in the next school and they just fall behind. You know, each school does things a little differently so the work that’s been started in a particular place won’t be continued at the next place. So stability of housing is critical, I think. Even though we don’t have a large number of transient children in our school, the ones that have had multiple schools that they’ve attended prior to coming here, inevitably their results are well down on the kids who have been here over a long period of time.”
Possibly the most positive instance of the benefits of stability was described by the household who had lived in the same public rental property for seven years. This family experienced a terrible tragedy last year, and was supported through this extremely difficult time by friends and family in their immediate vicinity, and by the school community. In a sense their stable housing had provided a form of immunisation, that buffered against the full effects of this event. When asked about the possible impacts of this event if they did not have stable housing she replied:

“I think that would have made it harder because at least she had here, this was home, she could hide here. She had people around here who knew and cared and loved her, so she was very protected by everybody around here who knew. They were all very watchful over both her and me...”

_Cassie_

In summary then, transience may reduce the motivation to build relationships with neighbours, thereby increasing isolation and reducing social supports. This isolation may contribute to stress and reduced health for both adults and children, and may result in increased days absent from school, or may reduce the quality of home life such that schooling may suffer as a result. This observed causal relationship between transience and reduced social capital is consistent with the findings of earlier research (eg. Pribesh and Downey 1999).

Parents often felt that transience was difficult for their children, and some tried to mitigate against this through keeping their children at the same school. Transience is also likely to break continuity at school, and for children who are struggling academically, transience may make remediation much more difficult. While this finding of a relationship between transience and reduced school attainment is consistent with earlier studies, this understanding of the process (i.e. that school based remediation can often be interrupted by transience) did not emerge in the literature review conducted for this thesis. It may be that this is a new explanation for this relationship.
Below is a diagrammatic representation of possible transience – schooling pathways:

![Diagram of possible transience pathways]

Figure 14 - Transience
Source: Author

**Neighbourhood**

Along with transience, neighbourhood stands out as an aspect of housing identified in earlier research that is likely to impact on schooling.

While these in-depth interviews were not conducted to test this proposition, it was hoped that in-depth interviews may shed some light on processes that may explain such a causal relationship.

One way of exploring this issue of neighbourhood is to consider the neighbours – the people living in one’s immediate vicinity, and the area or broader community. A number of households talked about the significant positive and negative impacts that neighbours had in their lives, and many also discussed what it was like living in their particular suburb and participating in a particular school community.
Approximately half the people interviewed talked about neighbours as an important part of their lives – both very positive and very negative. On the positive side, neighbours were at times a great source of support. Stable, friendly neighbours provided an increase in security, support when sick (particularly important for single parents), and positive playmates for children.

A not uncommon story relayed in interviews was that of neighbours helping out with child-care, school transport etc:

“It does get too much and I’ll be ready to crack because I’ve got no one to help me, but Sharon (a neighbour), she’ll be the first to come and help me. I was very sick at one stage, I couldn’t even move I was so bad, and she came over, she cleaned up my house for me, she took my son to school for me and she made sure he got home safely. She kept him there most of the time so that he wouldn’t catch what I had. So I suppose it helped that I knew her, and I mean, I look after her kids when she has to do something on the spur of the moment and I’m here.”

Connie

As outlined in an earlier section, this support can be crucial in times of crisis. As well, parents felt that knowing their neighbours provided a higher level of security. As a mother of a 12 year old daughter described:

“…the security is just not of people living here, it’s the people who live in the area, like the neighbours. Like there’s an old lady who lives next door who keeps an eye on the place and she tells me the things that goes on here, like if a house has been broken into in the street, she knows, but she tells us. But they also keep an eye on the kids too, especially with Tania, because Tania walks to school by herself. You know, she’s a big girl now, I don’t have to take her to school any more. But the neighbours keep an eye on her too.”

Cassie
While neighbours can be a very positive aspect of life, they also have the potential to be the source of great conflict and hardship. A number of people described the very powerful impacts that conflicts with neighbours had in their lives. Some went outside much less often for fear of running into a neighbour with whom they were fighting.

I: “It made it unpleasant for me to live there and it also meant that if I wanted to come and sit outside, I didn’t want to really sit outside when the neighbours I’m in conflict with were there…. there was a heavy conflict, and for me, a couple of times it was really quite distressing because it was discriminatory, I mean, downright discriminatory.

PY: In what way?

I: Abusing me and calling me names and stuff like that, and one lady saying that I should go and live at Wolston Park for the rest of my life in an asylum. Yes, well, I mean, that isn’t really going to make your life very pleasant, and she sprayed me with water so I soaked her actually and she called the police and then the police went mad on me…. I’m sure they were trying to get me out and things like that, and the whole conflict, the thing about mental illness is that people are saying that “you’re doing things, we don’t want those kind of people around….”

PY: Did that have an effect in terms of your health or your family’s health?

I: Yes. It had an effect on MY health, yes, because it meant that I didn’t have a secure place to live, so in other words, I had escaped from domestic violence and also I’d come from bankruptcy and I’ve had a long-term mental illness which was well under control, so I’m already in conflict and distress, or stress, so it just increases the stress. Instead of coming here and being supported in some way, I’d been actually kicked in the arse! And I also was the major caretaker of everybody.”

Mary
This theme of neighbourhood discrimination on the basis of disability was described in a second interview. A mother of a child with a disability explained that they had installed cable TV because the neighbouring children were teasing her son to the extent that he was unwilling to go outside unless he was sure the neighbouring children were away:

I: “Oh, they throw mud and call him vile names that I wouldn’t repeat, you know, from a six year old and then the mother, the little girl said to Tony, “Your mother’s not much of a mother” and things that hurt Tony, and the man next door, she’s got a man just moved in, he threatened to cut Tony’s hands off if he put them through the fence.

PY: What sort of impacts has that had? What effect do you think that’s had?

I: Well, Tony doesn’t want to go outside and if we do go outside, we walk down there and across the road there’s that park with a bikeway and we take him there and he rides his bike around the place, but you can’t do that every day.

PY: So he plays inside a lot then by the sounds of it.

I: Yes.

PY: How does HE find that, do you think?

I: Boring. We’ve got Pay TV but it’s not enough.

PY: Does he say it’s boring?

I: Sometimes. You just get that impression or because he won’t go to sleep until half past ten at night.

PY: Why do you think that is? Why do you think he’s still up that late?
I: Because he’s not running around. He’s not doing enough to be tired. Usually he’s running around. If we go for walks or we walk over to K-Mart which is a fair walk and he sleeps well those nights when we take long walks, but it’s terrible to have to go out to get away from it.

PY: What’s it like for you having him inside a lot?

I: During school holidays he drove me insane! But he’s a pretty good kid. It’s just sometimes you need a break!”

_Linda_

The impact of this neighbourhood conflict was not just impacting on sleep times and the lack of breaks afforded this very stressed mother. The reduced opportunity for outdoor play was also contributing to this child’s degenerative condition:

I: “And see, his time is running out. They reckon he might be in a wheelchair by the time he’s fourteen, fifteen.

PY: Why’s that?

I: Because he’s got muscle dystrophy, not bad but enough to, they’re saying fourteen, fifteen, and the doctor said to me, the specialist said, let him rollerblade, ride his bike, do all the things because he mightn’t be able to. They’re not sure.

PY: Is his condition affected by how much he exercises, like how much he plays?

I: Yes.”

It would seem therefore that neighbours can have a very powerful impact on stress levels at home. Whether this goes on to impact on schooling may be determined by a range of other factors. Perhaps neighbours have the potential to exacerbate an already stressful situation, or provide support and safety to help ease the effects of other stressors.
Related to this issue of neighbours is that of community. This came up in nine of the 14 interviews as an important issue in parent’s minds.

Community means different things to different people. It can be a sense of belonging (or not belonging), a sense of identity, a group of potential peers for one’s children, and it can be a dominant culture – in particular a dominant way of behaving or responding to events.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the Gautreaux Program in the United States provided an opportunity to test the importance of neighbourhood, and in particular neighbourhood diversity, in relation to health, employment, schooling and a range of other areas. Some attempts have been made to explain improved school performance in the case of the children rehoused through the Gautreaux Program. These studies point to:

- Escaping the negative influence of peers,
- Increased motivation from the improved physical environment,
- Higher expectations from the schools,
- Better teachers, and greater availability of extra tutoring,
- Striving to match the better lifestyles of peers, and
- Positive role models.

Many of the parents interviewed believed that their children’s behaviour and attitudes was shaped to a large extent by their peers. Some parents tried to encourage friendships that they considered to be a positive influence, while others tried to limit or restrict contact with children considered to be a bad influence. Some parents made a direct link between housing location and peers – two indicated that they would not have accepted this offer of housing if it had been in an area with a high proportion of public rental housing. When pressed however, these parents were not so much concerned with neighbours because of their housing tenure or income, but because they did not care about or adequately supervise their children.
I: “...I guess I would never have accepted this house had it come like some of the others that I have seen, that friends of mine have accepted. As per the position that it’s in, we’ve been very, very fortunate. The house came carpeted, new kitchen and inside laundry and things like that, so I guess that was really important to me. I wouldn’t have taken this house had it have been any different or been in a different position.

PY: In terms of the neighbourhood, do you mean? When you say ‘position’ what do you mean?

I: Yes, in terms of the neighbourhood and the people. Like if you walk further into Stafford Heights, it’s quite, houses are very unkempt and kids are quite wayward. I wouldn’t have moved there.

PY: …why not? What were you concerned about with that?

I: Trying to raise kids by yourself, the last thing you need is for your kids to have peers that are allowed to run rampant.”

Katherine

Katherine was speaking from experience, having lived in a high density public housing estate on the outskirts of Toowoomba, west of Brisbane:

I: “First lot of cluster houses. One of the first lot of cluster houses in Queensland, and a beautiful unit but the environment was absolutely… You couldn’t let your kids outside. There was no car cover for your car, no security for your car so you’d come out and your car would be spray painted.

PY: When you said you couldn’t let your kids outside, what was going on, or what were the things that you were worried about? What were the problems there?

I: Oh, the other kids. There was drug use, open drug use, intimidation by the bigger kids, just absolutely horrendous.”
This theme was repeated by a number of other parents.

PY: “And can you tell us about what it’s been like living here?

I: Here, too many kids with like mothers that just don’t care, I think, what the kids are doing. That’s one of the hassles of the place…. it’s just more with the parents not caring, you know. It’s “get out there and play, I don’t care where you play as long as it’s not in my front yard, go and play in somebody else’s.” I have a lot of drama with that.

PY: So can you tell us more about that? Can you give an example or examples of what will happen?

I: Oh, sometimes I can have ten to fifteen kids in my front yard. I feel like a creche! Because that’s what I think parents say “go out and play, get away” so that’s a bit of drama.

PY: And what’s that like? What sort of effect does that have in terms of the influence? Have you noticed it having an impact for him in terms of the kids that he’s spending time with?

I: Oh yes. Yes, well like I said, some of them have got bad language and every now and then Nathan will come out with something and I know he’s not an angel either but if I don’t hear it, I’d rather that. But sometimes he’s cheeky, you know, just backchat me and then I try and figure out who he’s been playing with so he doesn’t play with that kid again but it’s so hard.

PY: … are there other sort of things that some of the kids are doing that you’d rather that Nathan wasn’t seeing or wasn’t part of?
I: Well, some of them like to play with lighters but I’ve found out that Nathan had a lighter downstairs apparently but yes, some of them like to play with lighters. There’s an older boy that likes to read dirty magazines kind of thing and I found some magazines underneath the house, so just stuff that I don’t think, if he wasn’t shown, he wouldn’t know anything about. But if these older kids are showing the littler ones, well then they’re going to be inquisitive, and “ooh, what’s this!”

Silvia

Silvia lives in an area with a high proportion of single parents living in public rental housing. Her perception is that local parents just want their kids out of their hair – out of the house. This seems consistent with the process described earlier by Katherine. She called this “kids running rampant,” and she said this was the last thing a single parent (and in her case, a single mother with teenage boys) would want. Silvia goes on to describe seeing her son learning bad language and bad behaviours from these neighbourhood children.

Katherine and Silvia were speaking about the neighbourhood influences on their male children. Studies have suggested that boys may be more susceptible to the effects of peers and neighbourhood than girls, as girls tend to be more sheltered by their families than boys (eg. Luthar & Cushing 1999).

Another parent living in a largely public housing area in Bracken Ridge was relieved not to be housed at Lawnton, after visiting friends in that area. She listed for public housing just before a policy change that gave applicants more control of the area in which they were listing.

I: “Well, I had to initially and then probably only a month or so after I’d put my name down, they changed the system and so you only had to nominate suburbs.

PY: How was that for you? How did you feel about that?
I: Oh, relieved, because the zone that included say, Strathpine, it went right out to Lawnton and Petrie, places like that and there are streets there that are like full of Housing Commission tenants and some of them are pretty wild. That’s only from like one person I know that’s lived in one and I’ve been in the street and I’ve thought, wow, this would be pretty rough living here, not so much because of families but there’s a lot of people in their early twenties, say, and unemployed people and while I’ve got nothing against any of them personally, just like what was going on around the neighbourhood the day I was there, I thought wow, I would hate to ever be here.

PY: …what concerned you, or what were you worried about?

I: Oh, all the houses, not ALL the houses but a lot of the houses were very unkempt, like the lawns were long and a lot of old cars everywhere and one guy was running to somebody’s house asking if he could borrow some pot and there were people screaming at each other like a verbal brawl across the road and yes, that would concern me because I’d be concerned about the safety of my property if I lived there, like I’d be worried about it being broken into or whatever, and the woman that I knew that was there had said there were x amount of break-ins in the streets in a week or whatever and I thought, oh my God.

PY: So your main concern was about physical safety and stuff getting stolen?

I: Yes. Yes.

PY: How did you feel from the kids’ point of view living there?

I: Oh, I didn’t really want the kids being exposed to that sort of thing at all. I mean, it’s not another child’s fault but if another child grows up with certain things being allowed in the household, that’s what they consider to be normal and I didn’t really want other kids telling my kids, well, telling them things that I would rather they didn’t hear, using swear words, whatever. I can’t say I had any definite idea what might go on, but yes, I’d be happier if I just wasn’t in the situation.”

Jenny
Exposing children to drugs and violence was a concern of other parents.

I: “But the problem is that I don’t want to expose MY child to these problems. Like I’ve had the kids from next… Look, the police have been out here for the next door neighbours so many times, I just got sick of it. I said, “That’s it, I can’t deal with this any more, I don’t want to deal with…” Irene had been exposed to this amount of alcoholism, of domestic violence, of drug abuse, of antisocial behaviour, of swearing, of beating up kids, I don’t want to expose her to it any more. Not because she doesn’t get along with the kids, but because of the chronic social problems that are going on with the parents, I’ve had to isolate us. Now this is only making the whole isolation problem worse, because you’ve got people who have got so many problems, social problems, and the people who are in your socio-economic group who are not coping, as I’m not coping at times, and yet when you get together you’re compounding these problems. It’s all coming together and it almost gives it a justification of validity, of “oh, we CAN feel this way. You feel this way and I feel this way, therefore it’s acceptable.”

Adam

Earlier studies (eg. Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993) describe a process of collective socialisation, whereby children and families take on the dominant culture of an area. Adam describes this process quite clearly when he describes the feeling of being given permission to give up, because that is the response taken by those living around him. Presumably if others around him were pressing on regardless of setbacks, he believes he would be encouraged to also press on. Jenny also describes the process of children learning that some behaviours are normal through ongoing exposure to children with different values to her own. Later in this section this theme is repeated when a teacher describes a dominant culture of seeing authority figures as separate from rather than part of the community.

While relationships and the behaviour of children and adults in the immediate area were of concern to parents, these extracts also mentioned physical amenity as important. Jenny and Katherine both talked about unkempt yards as a sign of people not caring.
Their concern did not seem to be the yards as such, but the attitudes that this untidiness might signify.

These parents expressed a belief that their children’s behaviour and attitudes could be affected by other children in their neighbourhood. They talked about children learning new behaviours, or gaining a distorted view of the world by seeing behaviours that they felt children should not be exposed to. Whether these concerns were well founded or not is impossible to say on the basis of this research alone, although it is consistent with the findings of a number of other studies (eg. Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993, Gonzales et al. 1996).

Adam was less fortunate than Jenny in terms of the timing of his allocation to public housing. After his wife died, Adam tried living close to his family in Sydney in order to have some support parenting his young daughter. The cost of his housing made it impossible to stay in Sydney, and he relocated to East Brisbane in Brisbane where he had friends.

Again housing costs became a problem, and Adam described working long hours and seeing his daughter being raised in child care centres. He therefore listed for public housing – at a time when applicants could only list for large zones. He was unfortunate enough to be allocated housing about 10km away from his support networks, with no direct public transport connections. The impact of this loss of relationships, combined with being housed on a busy road, was devastating for this very vulnerable family.
I: “My main gripe, I think it’s important to say that my main gripe at the time was the fact that I was offered housing which was completely removed from all of my friends, all of my social support and that really, that completely isolated us because like all of my friends at that stage were in East Brisbane, so anybody that I’d used to help me at that stage was around East Brisbane. When we moved out to Enoggera, suddenly we had no friends. Nobody could be bothered coming out to see us. We were completely on our own. So not only did I not have family but I didn’t have friends around me any more and it was a case of like, you know, I used to have friends who used to pick up Irene from child care if I had to stay back at work. I couldn’t do that any more, that wasn’t an option, and so suddenly my ability to even stay in work was even less of an option because I had less support…. Suddenly you’re completely isolated, you’re away from your friends, you’re away from your support network. You have no option of trying to re-locate back to your friends, which I tried. They don’t want to know about it, their waiting lists are too long, bureaucracy, blah blah blah. But what they don’t realise is they’re setting up a lot of long-term social problems by denying people their access to their support.”

Adam felt that this isolation at a difficult period in their lives contributed suicidal thoughts.

I: “It was. It was really bad. I was, there were many times when I was thinking of just killing myself and my daughter. I just thought, bugger it. I mean, it was that bad. Many times I thought about it. You know, if there was a gun in the house, I would have done it. It was pretty bad, and I’m sure a lot of other people go through the same problem because when you don’t have friends, when you don’t have a job, when you don’t have any hope and it’s just so difficult day in, day out, day in, day out, with the same shit, you just say fuck it, what am I doing this for? Why? Why am I putting myself through this?”

He also described the impacts of neighbourhood on motivation and attitude.
“What happens is it becomes a downward spiral, that everyone starts… No matter where you came from previously in your life, everyone goes downhill, everyone does. And you start becoming comfortable with that way of life. You start becoming comfortable with your lot in life, you become comfortable with the people you start associating with and then your aspirations lower, you forget about education, you forget about all these things which are unattainable or too difficult.”

Again this theme of collective socialisation is repeated.

Wilkinson (1996, p.182) suggests that the isolation experienced by Adam may also explain the strength of the impact that his poor housing had on his stress and health. His stress levels and health may have been much less affected by his poor housing if he were not also socially isolated. Wilkinson would argue that the health effects associated with his housing (and isolation) related stress may directly contribute to his daughter being ill more often, missing school more often, and falling behind in her work.

The educators interviewed identified neighbourhood as one of two major housing related factors that they observed impacting on schooling (the other being transience). They talked about the positive and negative effects of modelling that they had observed in the classroom, and also discussed the impacts of children growing up in areas where negative behaviours and attitudes were modelled by adults.
I: “They have modelled different behaviours in communities. I think what can
tend to happen, and certainly not as a rule, but I think in a sense you almost get
streets, you know, within suburbs where you have this happening, where you
have people with low social capital. They also have limited repertoire of means
to manage conflict and issues and that therefore the kids within those
communities have a limited range of ways modelled to them of managing these
situations and therefore it reinforces and perpetuates those behaviours and norms
within that community …there are very clearly streets and pockets within the
community where there isn’t any diversity at all and there is these constant
issues and problems arising in those areas, drugs and violence and abuse of a
range of types that the police are constantly getting involved in, building up that
attitude within those small pockets of the ‘them and us’ instead of seeing
authority figures as part of the community.”

*Outer south side school*

I2: “…if you get a group of people together who don’t value education or have
negative views about education, then those views get passed very, very quickly
onto the children and so if you’ve got a high population in your school with
those sorts of ideas, then of course homework doesn’t get done, the parents
aren’t talking to the kids about the things that they’ve done through the day. We
see it when we get kids who’ve come from other areas and their behaviour is
atrocious when they get here. After a short time, the community seems to…
Sometimes it’s a long time, I suppose, the community seems to change…”

*Outer north side school*

This same teacher summarised the issues of transience and neighbourhood well.

I2: “It needs to be stable (*housing*) but it also needs to be a positive place to be so
that you’re getting the sort of critical mass of parents in the area who do care
about education. But not just education, but just care.”
In summary, neighbourhood appears to be an aspect of housing that can significantly impact on people. Supportive neighbourhoods can provide support during times of illness and hardship. Hostile neighbourhoods can significantly increase stress levels, and can result in children and adults spending much less time outdoors. Both higher stress levels and reduced physical activity may contribute to reduced physical and mental health.

Neighbourhood culture may also be an important influence over adult and child attitudes. Neighbours may take on one another’s despair about the future, and may inadvertently encourage one another to give up. Children may see a limited range of behaviours and attitudes being modelled by those around them, and this may influence their own attitudes and behaviours.

Some parents consider that their children are likely to learn unhelpful behaviours from neighbouring children. In particular they expressed concern about their children spending time with the children of parents who don’t care, or who have very different values in terms of parenting and acceptable behaviours.

How these impacts of neighbourhood impact on schooling is less clear, although the teachers interviewed felt that the inheritance of both positive and negative attitudes from peers and the community was clearly a factor in some children’s schooling.

These observations regarding the impact of neighbourhood are consistent with many other earlier studies. Parent anxieties about safety and about children modelling bad behaviour seem consistent between studies in the United States and this study. This study suggests that stress levels associated with neighbourhood conflict (which may in turn be associated with high densities of public housing tenants of similar life circumstances) may help to explain why neighbourhood can impact on health. Earlier research tends to focus more on crime and urban decay as more likely causes of stress and ill-health, however neighbourhood conflict may be a mechanism worth further examination.
**Housing amenity and repair**

The earlier section on neighbourhood also touched on this issue of housing amenity. Some parents were concerned about living near very poorly maintained housing as they felt it indicated possible associated problems such as drug use, criminal activity, and poor parenting practices.

While these instances point to a concern about the underlying reasons for poorly maintained housing, other interviews identified specific consequences directly associated with poorly designed and maintained housing. One tenant (Adam) was clearly quite upset and depressed about the noise and design of a townhouse at Enoggera. He described it as like a cell.
“...to shut out the noise you’ve got to close all the windows. You close the windows and you’re suddenly in a cell. You don’t have any pleasure to the outside. You’re living indoors completely shut out from the outside world and yet you open up the window and suddenly all you’re doing is you’re exposing yourself to the road. Bad planning. A really bad move. And your sleep is disrupted because of the traffic. You’ve got a hard enough time as it is, like raising a child on your own is a demanding task. It’s no fun. It’s no picnic. And like me, you haven’t got family around and you’re doing it really on your own. You’re trying to balance work and you’re trying to balance, at times, studies, and then you can’t sleep well because, you know. It just makes it all worse and in the end you just say “bugger it.” Your work suffers, everything suffers and that’s why we eventually, after about a year and a half of trying to move out of there, we were eventually re-housed but it took a long time. It took about a year and a half of hassling them to say we can’t cope there any more. I was suffering from pretty bad depression in the end. I wasn’t coping.”

Adam identifies poor quality housing as a source of additional stress adding to his already difficult situation. The design of the housing contributed to him feeling closed in, and traffic noise (due to location and poor design) contributed to broken sleep. This additional stress contributed, in his eyes, to his eventual depression (which he later explained led to regular suicidal thoughts).

Other tenants interviewed discussed direct links with specific health problems. Asthma associated with dust and mould came up on a number of occasions. Parents were able to identify periods of time when asthma attacks and visits to the doctor increased after moves into poorly maintained housing. Also some parents reported children being injured due to poorly repaired housing.
“They (the Department of Housing) came and cleaned the ceilings, mind you, I cleaned all the walls. I cleaned most of the ceilings but I couldn’t get it properly, but I was moving, having a bad asthmatic and the other two were on puffers as well in winter, I moved a set of drawers one day and I moved their beds to change the room around and I hadn’t been in here long, and all along the wall where the beds had been, it was all black dots, and back of the drawers had fungus on the back, that’s how bad this was. And my kids have breathing problems and they still haven’t really done anything about it. I’m cleaning all the walls slowly, one by one and painting them.”

Carol

I: “Both the houses that we had where they hadn’t been maintained well, the carpets were like in really bad condition and my oldest daughter who had asthma when she was a baby but had virtually grown out of it, but being in those places, she had regular asthma attacks, so she had to go back on to being fairly regularly medicated, whereas here with no carpeting and like no really old curtains, she hasn’t had any asthma in the time we’ve been here.

PY: So she’s not on medication any more?

I: No. No.

PY: What’s the effect of the medication? Does it have side effects?

I: It can make children very wound up, like they find it hard to go to sleep and they get stressed very easily. They have what you’d call mood swings, I suppose and you have to be on the lookout for it because you really have to tread pretty carefully. If they get upset, they’re likely to run off and cry whereas normally they’d just go “oh yeah.”

PY: Were you noticing that when she was on the medication?

I: Oh yes...
PY: Were there other aspects of health that you noticed were impacted or affected by living in those two houses? Did you or the daughters get...

I: Sarah seemed to regularly get minor injuries around the house because of the bad maintenance, like the second one we had, for some reason it had a ramp at the back where normally you’d have stairs but they’d used the wrong sort of nails and the heads of them would keep coming up out of the boards and one of them, no twice, they went into the soles of her feet, and she had her foot cut open with the thing in the carpeting because it hadn’t been maintained properly, and the stairs on that place too, the place at Strathpine, were really worn. A couple of them had to be, well, probably the whole lot of them should have been replaced but the owner would only replace about four or five, and yes, they both got really bad splinters from them too. So I’d say maintenance has an effect as far as minor… Well, if it was really badly maintained I suppose you could have bad accidents but we haven’t had any health issues here at all.

PY: Would you say that you’re going to the doctor less often now?

I: Oh yes. Yes. I haven’t taken the kids to the doctor this year at all probably.”

Jenny

These parents did not draw a direct link between these housing related health effects and schooling, however increased incidence of illness and associated increases in days absent from school, is a possible pathway between poor housing and poor school outcomes. As well, the side effects of asthma medication as described by Jenny, such as difficulty sleeping and mood swings, may reduce the capacity of her daughter to succeed at school (although again she did not mention this link herself).

An absence of insect screens on public housing in Bracken Ridge was mentioned by both parents interviewed in that suburb. This suburb is close to wetlands on Brisbane’s north east cost, and according to these parents has a very active mosquito community. While neither parent associated insect bites with illness, it would be reasonable to assume that children who are bitten more often by mosquitos have a higher chance of contracting an insect born illness.
Two parents also described design hazards in their current and past housing. One involved a lack of battening under a public rental house, making it possible for young children to crawl into spaces under the house which may contain hazards such as discarded razorblades. One mother was aware of dangerous electrical wiring under the house, but was unable to convince a private landlord to close off this area to stop her children gaining access to this wiring.

Two parents complained that they could not see their children playing from their cooking and living areas, making supervision difficult, and increasing the risks of injury.

I: “My kids, the only place really for them to play is at the back. Now the back of his house, the windows start about up here. I’ve got to climb up on the furniture otherwise, if I’m down that end of the house working or something, I’ve got to come all the way up here and then keep going all the way down to check on them. So every now and then I stand up on the furniture, like I was in there yesterday in the bathroom doing something and I was standing up trying to look out the window to see what was going on down the back…”

Carol

One possible consequence of design that reduces the capacity of parents to supervise children’s play, is that parents may have less time for other pursuits because of the time they must spend supervising play. A better housing design may allow a parent to supervise play and carry out other tasks such as cooking or cleaning.

Lack of space was identified as a problem by a couple of parents. Carol noted that her teenage daughter had to do her homework on the kitchen table, as there was not enough room in her bedroom to place a desk. While this may have allowed opportunity for the mother to be more involved in the homework process, the presence of three younger siblings may also have made the kitchen a less than ideal venue to undertake high school homework, because of noise and other interruptions.

One family that had a history of conflict with their teenage daughter described a link between their close living situation and fighting between the daughter and step-father.
They felt that the close proximity of the living spaces meant that physically confronting one another was more likely, and that the incidence of conflicts was higher as a result.

“… you meet to go to the toilet, you bump each other there, and then “hmpm, why did you bump me, why did you push me” you know. That type of thing. But what would you expect in a government house?”

*Narelle*

A similar story was relayed by the mother of the child forced to spend most days indoors due to bullying from neighbouring children. Linda described her son as always underfoot, and that sometimes she just needed some space from him – a reasonable requirement for any single parent, and particularly for a mother caring for a child with a disability.

“During school holidays he drove me insane! But he’s a pretty good kid. It’s just sometimes you need a break!”

*Linda*

Crowded housing has been identified as a contributor to conflicts in other research. Lepore, Evans & Palsane (1991), for example, examined the relationship between crowding and social hassles in India and the USA. The authors conclude that chronic stressors such as over-crowding may diminish the capacity of people to cope with adaptive demands. For Linda in particular, having her son indoors for much of the day may have had a similar impact to overcrowding.

Marsh et al. (2000) identifies a possible link between crowding and the transmission of infectious diseases, and this mechanism was also identified by one of the parents interviewed:

PY: “How do you think your health has been since moving? Have you noticed any change in your health or in Liam’s health since moving?

I: Yes, we don’t get sick as much!

PY: Why do you think that is?
I: We’re not exposed to it as much as we were when we were in Albion. When the kids had a cold and they came over to Albion, you can be sure one of us was going to get it, and then he’d get it and I’d get it.”

*Connie*

Connie comes from a strong extended family situation, where families would spend weekends together at her previous home – often sleeping close together on mattresses on the floor. Family members would also share bedrooms, and the transmission of infectious diseases would seem more likely as a result.

Design and housing amenity was clearly an issue for many families – particularly those who had lived in very poor quality housing. Adam however, would have gladly traded his nice apartment in a very affluent suburb, for more modest housing close to friends.

“And I can appreciate, it’s a great place. It’s comfortable. I should be happy as. But that’s not what life’s about…. The Department of Housing doesn’t understand that housing is not a physical need, it’s an emotional need….. As I said, I could be much happier in a shitty little one bedroom dodgy little place as long as I had family around. I would be happy….. I think if people were to sort of like say, well, let’s scrap this whole public housing thing, it’s too inflexible, and look at subsidising people so they can choose their own housing close to where their communities are, close to where their family is and because the rental assistance scheme is far from ideal. It’s just not, it’s nowhere nearly financially as safe as public housing.”

In summary, the impacts of poor housing that were most strongly reported in these interviews related to health, particularly as a result of increased incidence of asthma attacks and through injury. Jenny in particular was aware of the health impacts of her previous poor housing. Poor housing design was a source of some additional stress for some parents, as it made supervision of children more difficult. Linda’s experience of her son being indoors much more often than she would like gives some insight into the additional family pressures that occur for families with no or unsafe outdoor play space. Crowded housing, in particular for households with a large number of children, may also be an environment conducive to the spread of infectious illnesses.
These findings are all consistent with earlier studies.

Whether these outcomes associated with poor housing amenity ultimately contribute to poor schooling outcomes is difficult to say on the basis of these interviews alone. Reduced school attainment due to increased days absent from housing related illness may be a process worth further exploration. Also increased use of asthma medication may contribute to children having difficulty concentrating, and getting on with teachers and peers. The capacity of Linda’s son to focus at school when he is unable to enjoy active play at home may also be worth further exploration.

![Diagram of Housing and Health](image)

**Figure 16 - Housing and Health**
*Source: Author*

**Housing cost**

Half the families interviewed identified housing cost in the private rental sector as a significant contributor to financial stresses in their lives. Even when receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance, families described having inadequate after housing income, resulting in having to go without nutritious food, outings, shoes, owning a car, and undertaking further training and education. Some families felt that the cheaper rent in public housing was the main benefit.
I: “Well, it was like 50 percent of my income at the time (was being spent on housing) and it just leaves you less for food, clothes, everything else, and at times you get in a position where, like a bill will come in like electricity, something pretty vital, and you’re really at a pinch to pay it which is a hard way to live. It’s very stressful if you’ve got debts that you can’t meet or that you’re under pressure to meet….I just knew that I had to find a solution to it somehow and my first thought was to move into public housing because it was cheaper…It wasn’t something that I really wanted to do but it’s better than not having any money.”

Jenny

I: “… when you’re paying $215 a week (in rent), it can be difficult to put food on the table so if you get a couple of bills in at the same time, not to mention the cost on the welfare system that you’ve got to go to Salvation Army or wherever for them to supply you with food...

PY: Have you got a sense of over the two year period how much use you would have made of support services like that?

I: Probably once every three months. Usually when all the bills came in at once. You’d get your electricity, you’d get your phone, and your rent doesn’t change so when you get big bills like that especially over the winter when you’re looking at, you’re trying to run a little blow heater in the corner to keep everybody warm.”

Katherine
I: “So what it’s meant, I think the basics, we’ve always got food on the table now. At the end of each week I’ve got extra bucks I can put, and I’ve got a car. I can actually put a few dollars aside and save up for the rego and tyres and buying the kids uniforms or shoes or something isn’t such a major drama, and you’ve got kids going to school and it’s always something, isn’t it? It’s bus fares for an excursion or it’s this or it’s a camp or need a new text something or other. It’s never ending. So those dramas, well, they’re not like a drama any more. Because I found like with all that work and paying all that rent, even though there was subsidy there, at the end of each week I was still scratching for bucks, really.”

Martha

Jenny’s comment that she had to move into public housing for financial reasons even though she did not want to, resonate with Adam’s comments about public versus private housing in the previous section. Both saw reduced housing cost as one of the main benefits of moving into public housing. Jenny was concerned to have enough money for food and other bills, and Adam was wanting to reduce his time spent at work so as to have more time for his daughter.

The degree of stress experienced by families in housing related poverty may have an impact on schooling. Having to rely on charities to provide food every three months when utility bills arrive may be unsettling – particularly for families such as Katherine’s who experienced the additional stress of moving home many times during the last five years.

This pathway from housing related poverty to schooling via stress may help to explain the findings that seem to indicate a link between poverty and school attainment. There are a number of studies that suggest that poverty is an important predictor of school success (eg. Levy & Duncan 2000). Levy (p.17) found that, “Income during the first stage of childhood has a positive and significant effect on completed schooling.” The study found that a 2.7 fold increase in parental income when the child was four years of age or younger is associated with an increase of 0.5 to one year increase in schooling completed.
Levy indicated that the early life of a child is the period when family influence is greatest, and that increased income may reduce family stress and increase the chances of a family purchasing books, toys etc as part of creating a more stimulating home environment.

![Diagram of Housing Cost](image)

**Outcomes**

The previous sections have explored the non-shelter impacts of various aspects of housing. The next section provides an examination of housing impacting on two key non-shelter outcomes – health and employment.

**Housing and health**

As discussed in the earlier section about housing amenity and repair, a number of families described a direct connection between aspects of housing and their families’ health. Specifically they described links between asthma and mould, dust, old carpets and curtains. Jenny was aware that she visited the doctor less often, and used asthma medication much less once they moved into public housing. Some parents also described links between poorly maintained housing and children being injured, and between housing related stress (from moving, poor design and location, isolation etc) and depression.
The financial impacts of expensive private rental housing may also be a contributor to stress related illnesses, as well as poor diet. Katherine believed that her recent halving of her anti-depressant medication was a direct result of the reduced pressure from her housing being finally resolved. This family was relying on emergency assistance from welfare agencies once every three months due to housing related poverty.

Poorly designed housing, and housing located in hostile neighbourhoods, contributed in some cases to children leading more sedentary lifestyles. In the case of Linda’s son with muscular dystrophy, her doctor had advised that this inactivity would exacerbate his condition. Doug also reported that he was unable to let his six year old daughter play outside unless an adult accompanied her, due to concerns for her safety from neighbours. It would seem reasonable to assume that any of the children confined to indoors due to poor housing were at greater risk of obesity and reduced fitness, with accompanying health impacts.

Some potential pathways from housing to health therefore seem reasonably clear. In Australia, asthma may be a key housing related health condition in the same way that respiratory tract infections have been identified as a key housing related illness in colder climates such as the United Kingdom. The extent to which these pathways operate in practice, and therefore the significance of housing in relation to health was not tested through this research, but possible mechanisms that could then be studied in greater detail have been identified.

Similarly, the pathways from housing to schooling via health as an intermediary are not confirmed through this research, and this has not been the intention of this study. However, while it is quite plausible that children may miss additional days at school through housing related ill-health and not be educationally disadvantaged, it is also plausible and even likely that some children may be educationally disadvantaged as a result of missing school due to housing related illnesses. There may be particular groups of children, such as those requiring ongoing remediation, whose schooling may suffer through additional absences from the classroom. This research has identified a potential relationship and pathway that would require further study in order to confirm a pathway of significance.
Earlier research has found strong links between housing and health, however these studies have often been conducted in areas with much colder climates, where poor housing often means cold and damp housing. Poor housing seeming to contribute to an increased incidence of asthma is consistent with Australian research (eg. Wever-Hess et al. 2000). This may be an area worth further study, given the high incidence of asthma in Australia.

**Housing and work**

This research suggests possible pathways between housing and work – some unique to public housing (in particular the work disincentive of an income based rent policy), and some more generally applicable. Whether there is a further linkage between workforce participation and schooling is less clear. Some parents were glad to give up work when their housing costs decreased, in order to spend more time supporting their children. For some they felt that their work was a barrier rather than a positive contributor to their children’s schooling. For others work provided a needed break from single parenting, and a means of reducing isolation and feeling more confident.

The McLure report into Welfare Reform (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000) noted that an income based rent system could provide a disincentive for public housing tenants to seek work. If tenants are paying approximately 25% of their income in rent, then tenants are effectively losing 25 cents for every additional dollar earned through work. This problem is exacerbated by similar income support policies that reduce benefit levels as earned income increases. Tenants who pay additional financial costs to go to work, such as child care and travel, face a further disincentive to work.

In light of the very high effective marginal tax rate faced by public tenants (that is, the cumulative effects of rent increasing and income support payments decreasing as a result of additional earned income), one would expect that such tenants would not be inclined to seek employment. This was a consideration for a number of tenants interviewed for this study.

PY: “So does that figure in your thinking? When you’re thinking about work, do you take the rent policy into account?”
I: Yes. Well, the rent policy and the Centrelink policy, so most people don’t want to work for three dollars an hour, besides it probably isn’t worth your while, and it doesn’t really have to be constructive that way because other countries, it’s a poverty trap.

PY: Have you made decisions not to take work opportunities because you’ve worked out how much you’d be worse off or better off?

I: Yes. Yes. It’s not worth your while, and also it usually involves some kind of cost of time and effort for me.”

Mary

“I had a part-time job at McDonalds last year or the year before maybe and it just wasn’t worth it. It really wasn’t worth it. The rent went up, the pension went down, three hours of cleaning…. I found that completely exhausting, and then because of my age, they dropped my hours and then because I receive a pension I’m taxed at the highest rate because it’s considered my second income, so at the end of each week I was ahead ten dollars but that didn’t cover the cost of cleaning the uniform or the petrol. It was crazy and they treated me poorly.”

Martha

For single parents such as Martha, the poor financial returns from working were not worth the time taken away from her children, or the impact that her work related tiredness had when she did have time with her kids. This theme recurred in other interviews.

PY: “Does the impact in terms of your rent affect your decision-making about work?
I: Yes, and somebody’s got to be here. My little boy gets dropped off by the bus and somebody’s got to be here at three o’clock because they finish at half past two, so somebody has to be here at three o’clock and it’s very hard to get a job that works those hours. I said to Kim, when he’s twelve, thirteen and big enough, I could probably leave him and let him come home to an empty house but for now, no. When he’s bigger and more responsible, I probably would work and let him.”

_Linda_

For others, however, the financial disincentives inherent in public housing and Centrelink policies were balanced by other considerations. For some people, work is a means of building relationships and overcoming isolation. For others work is a way of gaining a sense of identity and self-worth. These other factors seem to be as important if not more important than financial gain for some interviewees. Also, while public tenants lose some of the work related financial benefit through higher housing costs, they are generally still better off financially. This relatively small financial benefit can be quite significant for a low income earner, making it possible to pay for small luxuries that may otherwise be unaffordable.

I: “Yes, it (work) gives me a different… I get to socialise with different people and there at work I’m not Tania’s mum, where around here, I’m Tania’s mum.

PY: It’s sort of a different role in a sense, isn’t it?
I: At the school, I’m Tania’s mum. At netball, I’m in between the two because a lot of them know me separately than her because I was an umpire out there long before she played and I was in the club long before… I mean, she was around but I stood probably alone a bit more there. But yes, work gave me the first time because I’d been Tania’s mum, you know, it’s one of those Catch 22s that all women have, you’re either somebody’s mother, somebody’s wife or somebody’s daughter. It’s very rare that you can be you, so women get lost, and I know when I first, I’d been with this man eight, nine years so it was always Cassie and Steve, Cassie and Steve so I had no real sense of me, so work gave me back a chance to be who I am. And I think it’s good for my daughter too because I can go out and be me and come back and be her mum. It gives me a break, and any single mum or single dad who says they don’t need a break from their kids is a liar. You do. It’s all right for couples because one can walk away and the other one can stay and they can have a life away from the kids where when it’s you, you’ve got no one to dump the kids on.

PY: If you were renting privately, what effects do you think that would have in terms of this issue of work?

I: Well, working, the only thing rent, if I was working the money would be mine because my rent would stay the same. That wouldn’t affect anything. It probably wouldn’t really make any difference whether I was working privately or living here.”

Cassie

I: “Then as I was saying, I was working when I was here and the rent was so high because they go on your gross wage. Housing Commission, I said to them, you shouldn’t do that. By the time my hundred dollars comes out for tax, I said, my rent is so high I’m no better off. I’m really not, and I said it’s not as if I’ve got somebody else here helping me, so that’s where it hurts because the rent goes sky high.

PY: Is that a consideration? Like when you’re thinking about working or not working, is that a consideration, the issue of rent?
I: No, but your self-esteem is much better when you’re working. Your self-esteem is so much higher. Like being stuck at home is no fun. It’s no fun whatsoever.”

Connie

Two interviews shed light on another aspect of the relationship between housing and employment. Cassie felt that the sense of stability and community resulting from living for seven years in a fairly stable and supportive neighbourhood helped to provide her with a base from which to think about retraining and future work options. Similarly Katherine felt that she was much more able to think about participation in work and community activities now that her previously unstable housing situation had been resolved.

I: “For somebody maybe like me, who thinks that this (public housing) gave me the security and this gave me everything I needed to let me go to where I needed to go. And there’s a lot of parents around, there’s quite a few in here that I know, one guy has gone to college, because they got the kids settled in school and everything and then they decided well, it’s time for me. I don’t have to worry about home, I don’t have to worry about this, let’s move on.

PY: Is that something that you’ve talked to other tenants here about?

I: Yes, well especially with the one that I’m friendly with here. She went back to school. She felt comfortable. I know other people, not living in this housing but who do live in (public) housing and lot of them have gone back to study and things like that.”

Cassie

PY: “So is that (the income based rent policy) sort of a disincentive?
I: Yes. Mmm. I guess too, and this is just my belief, I think that it’s really important for children to see their parents going to work otherwise you just repeat the cycle with your children of them not going, and I guess that’s been the other motivating factor for me is for them to see, for my kids to see that this is the way the world goes round and as I say, I guess that’s the second, you know… But it does de-motivate you when you know that you’re going to earn a hundred dollars and at the end of the day you’re going to lose twenty-five to the Department of Housing and fifty to… You know, you’re going to lose fifty cents in the dollar after you get to a certain point.

PY: Since you’ve moved here and the improvements in terms of your health and stuff, has that changed your capacity to work or your motivation to work. Do you feel more like going to work?

I: It’s really interesting you should talk about that. I feel more like committing myself to community activities. I guess that’s the reason you’re here, and I also feel, I’ve just applied to one of the women’s refuges for volunteer work which I would never have dreamt of before.

PY: What brought that on? What led to your deciding to do that?

I: Honestly, I can say you feel like you’re in a part of a community, this is a community. You feel like you belong for the first time in many years. As I say, a lot of houses were flats, there were flats all around them, even though it was a house, so there was no sense of community there because your neighbour’s there today and gone tomorrow.”

Katherine

Talking with Adam about this issue helped to illustrate the impacts of a bad housing solution on work. Because his public housing is so far from his supports in East Brisbane he has been unable to continue to work. In contrast to Cassie, who is able to use neighbours and her mother around the corner for child care while she works, Adam now considers himself to be chronically unemployed, in part because of his housing related isolation.
“Work is largely restricted because I don’t have the support with Irene. All of these things are becoming chronic problems and I’m chronically unemployed now because I don’t have the fundamental basis of support. I don’t have that support network, and no matter how much I say to people until I’m blue in the face about moving closer to support so that I can go back study, so that I can have a job and hold down a job and need that support, they don’t want to know about it. All they want to know about is the fact that “do you have cheap housing, that’s it” and that’s not enough.”

*Adam*

Finally, access to employment can be affected by housing location. Cassie works odd hours during evenings and weekends, and this is made possible partly by child care support close to where she lives, and partly because of good public transport options (she lives very close to a main transport corridor). In contrast, Carol is aware that her move from Stafford (a middle ring Brisbane suburb) to Bracken Ridge (an outer ring suburb) reduces the capacity for her and her teenage daughter to find work.

I: “… last Saturday I worked 4 till 11 at night, 4 o’clock in the afternoon till 11 o’clock at night. If you don’t have family and friends around who can take her (*Cassie’s daughter*), I can’t work. Public transport also, because I don’t drive. Public transport around here also is a big thing too, the fact that I can get to and from work.”

*Cassie*
I: “Well see, where I came from I was at Stafford Heights, that was... To me, it was a good place to be living because it was right in the middle of so much and it wasn’t far from the city, like Kylie wants to get a part-time job now she’s fifteen and it would be good for her. It would be excellent. But I’ve got the problem where she wants to put her name down, there’s a new Woolworths coming in at Taigum and I said, well you can’t because I can’t come and get you at night. I’ve got three little kids. I cannot get in the car and drive to Taigum every night to come and get you after work, whereas if I was still at Stafford it would probably be totally different. She would probably have that much chance to get a job and because I knew the neighbours so well and the area, I felt it wouldn’t be too bad for me to pop out.”

Carol

This discussion identifies some possible pathways from housing to employment. The public housing rent policy24 may reduce the financial benefits, and therefore incentive to work for some people. Stable housing and sense of community may help provide some people with the supports needed to undertake training and work, and the sense of belonging may provide a sense of motivation to become more engaged in the community. Practical issues such as proximity to public transport and work opportunities also may play a part. Feeling that more pressing, basic needs such as food and shelter are resolved may also free some people up to consider longer term issues such as training and employment.

Whether employment is an intermediary between housing and children’s schooling is a more illusive question. Katherine touched on this issue when she discussed the importance of children seeing their parents going out to work, as a strategy to help break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage. Perhaps if children see their parents working, they may be more motivated to succeed at school in order to maximise their own chances of future employment.

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24 Most housing authorities charge public housing rent at the rate of 25% of household income.
Cassie talked about the benefits from working for her sense of self, and saw this as a positive factor in her relationship with her daughter. Connie also identified self esteem as an important by-product of working, and this may have benefits for the home environment. Similarly, it seems reasonable to assume that Adam’s sense of pessimism about his own future may impact on his daughter, and perhaps reduce her own optimism about the future.

While more relevant to welfare policy than housing specifically, Cassie’s views on how to encourage greater participation in the work force are worth repeating here.

“…the way to get people off the dole is not to make them feel like victims. To get them off the pension isn’t to make them feel like they’re second class citizens, and by making them go “oh, you need to work for this, and you need to do this for that, and you’re not entitled to this because you’re that” the government itself is telling them that they don’t deserve any better than where they are.”

This Chapter examines the findings of this research using a number of themes that were identified through the literature review, as well as a scoring system to rank the relative importance of issues raised. Possible processes are also mapped out. The following Chapter discusses some of the policy implications of these findings.
CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

This research aimed to shed light on processes:
- What difference do various aspects of housing make in people’s lives and why? and,
- What is the nature of the relationship (if any) between aspects of housing and children’s schooling?

The pathways between aspects of housing and schooling may at times be complex. There are a number of inter-related aspects of housing and family life that may combine to impact on schooling. Stress and health appear as themes in many of these pathways. Neighbours, relationships and a sense of community also appear fairly regularly.

Families such as Jenny and her daughters faced significant hurdles in life relating to their health and sense of optimism when they lived in very poor quality housing. For some families, such as Adam and his daughter, the quality of their housing is of secondary importance to proximity to family and friends. Other families, such as Jenny and Katherine, would choose unstable private rental housing ahead of secure, affordable public housing in what they consider to be a bad neighbourhood. Cassie felt that she had benefited greatly from being housed close to family, in a stable and supportive community, and Linda stated that she is almost at her wits end coping with life in a hostile neighbourhood where her son with a disability is not welcome. Constant moving in the private rental market had a significant impact on Katherine’s health, and she felt that stable housing contributed to a change in behaviour of her youngest son such that doctors revised their earlier diagnosis of attention deficit disorder.

Each family who participated in this study is in a unique situation with unique housing needs. One person’s housing solution could be another person’s housing problem.
That housing is complex and specific to the individual needs of a family is one insight from this research. The importance of housing was repeated again and again in almost every interview. Housing related impacts were felt by people in many aspects of their lives. Few could identify specific linkages between housing and schooling at the beginning of their interview, but most had little difficulty identifying the two or three aspects of housing that mattered most in their lives by the end of the interview.

It is impossible to conclude from this research alone whether these insights regarding the importance of various aspects of housing, and links to non-shelter outcomes, are more broadly applicable beyond this sample group of public tenants. There are however indications that this may be the case.

A qualitative study of new and existing public housing tenants conducted in the Bayside Area Office in Brisbane, Queensland, found that neighbourhood disputes was the issue that generated the most concern amongst long standing tenants (Epic 2000, p.14). This same study also found that poor housing was a major factor in household stress levels. The health impacts of a neighbourhood dispute for a tenant with an anxiety disorder in the study by Epic was consistent with the stress related health impacts relayed in a number of interviews in this study. Also, parents felt that the stability provided by public housing, and the fact that their children were no longer regularly changing schools, was of benefit to their children’s schooling (p.15). Again the nature of that research also makes it impossible to make conclusive statements about housing causing non-shelter outcomes, however the degree of consistency between the Epic study and this research increases the probability that these insights have wider applicability than this sample population.

In the 2001 National Tenant Satisfaction Survey of public housing tenants, the main benefits of living in public housing identified by tenants were that it helped them to feel more settled (94% agreed), that it helped them to manage their money better (94%), and that they are able to stay in the same area (89%) (Donovan Research 2001, p.92). These correspond strongly with the themes of security of tenure, affordability and neighbourhood identified in this research, suggesting that the importance of these issues may be shared by a wider group of public tenants than those who participated in this research.
This is significant, independent confirmation of the importance of these issues for this population group, given the size and frequency of this survey. The Donovan tenant satisfaction survey this has been an annual national survey running since 1996 with a sample size in Queensland of over 2,500.

Following are some key insights from earlier studies and from this research, and a brief discussion of possible policy implications of these findings.

**Transience**

Earlier studies provide mixed results in relation to the importance of transience, with some authors concluding that the evidence that transience has a detrimental impact is thin and inconclusive. This research suggests however that transience may contribute to health and schooling related problems for families in crisis, or those experiencing other stresses such as financial hardship. Regular moving may result in financial and emotional stress, as well as social isolation, which may affect the health and emotional well-being of children and parents.

School aged children move house for a variety of reasons. Private renters may be forced to move in order to accommodate the needs of landlords, because rent costs increase, or because of intolerable tenancy management practices. Property owners may sell and move due to financial hardship, or as part of the trading up process as their wealth increases.

The experience of moving house may be considered by a household to be a natural and exciting part of life. It may equally be considered to be one more consequence of poverty and powerlessness – a hardship that strikes unexpectedly as a result of forces beyond the control of that household.

The impacts on children of moving house may in part be a product of whether the move is of the households choosing, or imposed on the household as a result of environmental factors beyond their control. Moving house because, “we have to,” may feel different for children than, “moving because we want to.” When this move results in a change in schools, the impacts on children may be magnified.
Also, moving can be associated with both positive and negative life events. For example, moving house because of a work promotion or to be closer to a better school, may result in improved schooling outcomes; while moving house due to eviction or to escape a neighbourhood conflict, for example, may provide little or no benefits to balance against the disruption of the move.

The ambiguity of past research into this topic may result from earlier studies into transience failing to adequately take account of the reasons for moves, and the destination. Perhaps children of families that move in a planned way to a better life (for example to an area with better community facilities such as schools) benefit from such moves, because the benefits outweigh the negative effects such as lost relationships and interruptions to schooling. On the other hand, children who move to an equal or worse environment may do worse. It may also be the case that some children (such as those in need of remediation) are more affected by moves.

Interviews with teachers, in particular, highlighted the significant effects of transience on children who require school-based remediation. Some teachers felt that the next school that these children move to may not quickly or effectively diagnose the learning needs of these children, resulting in interruptions to necessary remediation work.

Providing security of tenure is a relatively inexpensive housing need for Government to address – compared for example to providing affordable housing in high land value markets, or accessible housing for people with specific physical design needs. The costs may be as little as matching up property investors who are seeking long term tenants, with those seeking a long term lease.25 Many low income households may require long term security of tenure, but may not be able to risk entering into a long term lease because of the financial costs of breaking this lease due to unforeseen circumstances. In such cases, housing authorities could act as an intermediary, offering one way leases to eligible households that provide the option of security of tenure without the associated financial risks.

25 The success of the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) sale and lease back program suggests that there is a group of property investors seeking long term tenants. DHA is a Government housing authority that takes out long term (up to 9 year) leases on privately owned housing to provide housing for defence families. Anecdotal evidence suggests that DHA housing with such leases has a market value higher than the value of the housing alone – thereby suggesting that the market positively values such long leases.
Such housing assistance strategies would need (at least initially) to be well targeted, for example to those households for whom security of tenure is needed to help achieve other non-shelter outcomes such as schooling. If such a program were designed to target schooling related outcomes, then development, implementation and evaluation should occur in partnership between housing and education agencies.

A policy response to this issue of transience would therefore require:

- Identification of at-risk families (for example, low income families in private rental housing, perhaps with a history of transience, and with children who are engaged in school based remediation);

- Development of a housing intervention that specifically targets the aspect of housing most impacting on the non-shelter outcome (in this case security of tenure). One possible method worth considering may be a one way head-leasing mechanism, whereby a Government or Government funded agency provides long term leases to eligible families, that may be terminated by the tenant if required, but that offer long term stability.

- Establishing collaborative development, implementation and evaluation arrangements between housing and education agencies. Identification of at-risk families, rationing access to this form of housing assistance, and evaluating the school-related impact of this housing intervention will require new relationships across these two agencies.
Neighbourhood

Longitudinal, quasi-experimental studies in the United States on the role of neighbourhood provide strong support for the hypothesis that neighbourhood is a significant factor in non-shelter outcomes such as health, employment, and schooling. Brooks-Gunn et al. (1993) suggests that “collective socialisation” may help to explain why neighbourhoods can influence peoples’ attitudes and behaviours. This explanation is consistent with some insights gained from an evaluation of the Gautreaux Program in Chicago. The evaluation by Rosenbaum (1991) identified that seeing neighbours work (for example) acted as a motivator for unemployed adults to seek work for themselves (p.1204).

This process was also reported in this study. Teachers felt that the dominant attitude of children at a school helped to shape the attitudes of new students arriving with different attitudes. They felt that a school with a dominant culture of valuing education could have a positive effect in encouraging new students to try harder to succeed.

An evaluation of Gautreaux also identified a fear of crime as a factor in shaping peoples’ behaviour. In particular people living in high crime neighbourhoods were less likely to go out to work in part because they feared being robbed when returning home at the end of the day (Popkin, Rosenbaum & Meaden, 1993, p.569). This factor did not come up in this study, however neighbourhood conflicts did feature as a factor.

The significant negative impacts of neighbourhood conflicts, and the positive impacts of a sense of community that were identified by some families interviewed in this study, suggest that neighbourhood can be an important factor in household stress levels. Two parents interviewed described a fear of going outside and facing possible abuse from or arguments with neighbours. Another had to keep her child indoors because of the bullying he experienced from neighbours. On the positive side a number of participants in this study relied on neighbours for child care and emotional support.
These pathways from neighbourhood conflict on the one hand, and emotional and practical support on the other, through stress, to physical and mental health, were not identified as clearly as this in earlier studies on neighbourhood effects. In fact, the lack of a credible explanation for processes whereby neighbourhood may have a causal effect was used to caution against pursuing rehousing strategies in the United States (eg. Galster and Zobel 1998).

Parents in this study believe (rightly or not) that the choice of friends that their children make is a significant factor in their own development, and that neighbourhood is a factor in who their children socialise with and eventually choose as friends. This link is consistent with the results of earlier studies (eg. Gonzales et al. 1996).

The methodological strength of the Moving to Opportunity experiment, and the early findings from recent evaluations; the significance of the findings from the longer running Gautreaux Program; and the insights gained from this study; all provide fairly compelling arguments that neighbourhood may be a contributor to chronic unemployment, school failure, social isolation and poor health. Housing assistance strategies in Australia have tended to focus on meeting housing needs (such as affordability and crowding) rather than neighbourhood needs, although neighbourhood has increasingly become a policy driver in more recent capital works planning processes for public rental housing. These findings suggests that even greater emphasis may need to be placed on neighbourhood, if housing assistance is to be driven by non-shelter outcomes such as schooling, health and social cohesion.

The significance of neighbourhood may be important for asset management decisions by Government housing authorities, and in the design of recurrent housing payments or allowances. In particular:

- These findings suggest that housing authorities should consider the whether to accelerate their strategies to divest themselves of housing stock in areas with high concentrations of households in poverty. The challenge for housing authorities is to undertake this divestment in such a way as to maximise financial return (to allow for a reasonable level of replacement housing to be acquired in higher land value areas), and to exit in such a way as to maintain or increase social mix in those communities.
• If rehousing strategies being implemented in the United States prove successful, there may be benefit in considering rehousing strategies for at-risk households currently living in social housing in low land value areas in Australia.

As well, the Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) Program offers some relief from housing affordability problems, but may not be providing enough incentive or opportunity for households to live in diverse neighbourhoods. This study suggests that, for many households reliant on pensions and benefits for their income, CRA payments go towards helping to meet basic living costs such as food and clothing. Unless benefit levels are increased to allow households to adequately meet their minimum living costs, people may be unlikely to use their CRA payment to help afford rents in higher cost areas, and this decision may ultimately help to perpetuate their poverty.

The current design of CRA provides limited financial reward for households renting in higher cost areas, even though living in more diverse neighbourhoods may be to the benefit of that household. For example, a single parent with two children can receive the full CRA payment if their rent is more than $122 per week.26 Three bedroom houses rent for at least this level in many outer metropolitan suburbs in Australia, and many of these areas have populations with high levels of unemployment and poverty. This suggests that there may be limited financial incentive in the design of this program to rent more expensive homes in higher land value areas.

A further policy response to this issue of neighbourhood could therefore include:

- A review of the design of the Commonwealth Rent Assistance payment in relation to the locational impacts of this housing assistance program. In particular, the decision to make this payment through the income support system (rather than in the form of a housing voucher, for example) may need reconsideration if CRA is not working to encourage and facilitate low income households to gain access to housing in a wide range of diverse neighbourhoods. Alternately, financial incentives could be added to encourage households to rent in higher cost neighbourhoods (e.g. increase the rent level required to be eligible for the full CRA benefit), although the adequacy of CRA and income support payment levels may need to be reviewed for such changes to have an impact.

**Flexibility**

Interviews with public tenants highlights the unique housing needs of each of these households. For some, proximity to friends and family was paramount. For others, the physical amenity and space of the housing was most significant. Neighbourhood mix, and the parenting practices of neighbours was most important for some parents. For others, being able to maintain consistency at school mattered most. For the majority of families, affordability and security of tenure were also priorities.

The importance of flexibility and choice in housing assistance did not come up as a major theme in the review of earlier studies into this topic. The Moving to Opportunity study contrasts the benefits of providing unconstrained choice for one group (a housing voucher with no conditions attached) with constrained choice on the other (a housing voucher and a condition that tenants use this to move to a low poverty neighbourhood). Early evaluations from this experiment suggest that both groups fared better than the control group who remained in their current housing, but that those who were forced to relocate to low poverty neighbourhoods did best of all (Goering & Kraft 1999).

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A housing allowance system similar to the Section 8 Voucher used by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development may be worth considering. More details of Section 8 are available on [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov).
Given the absence of research into the importance of flexibility and choice in housing assistance, and the emergence of this theme in this study, it may be worth further examination of this issue in future research.

For housing authorities, flexibility and choice come at a cost. Providing applicants with more time to decide whether the offer of a new public rental home is right for them, and greater flexibility to reject such an offer if it does not meet their unique requirements, comes at a significant financial cost due to increased vacant turnaround times. Similarly, more generous transfer opportunities for existing tenants again increases days vacant, and reduces rental revenue. With static or declining funding for housing assistance, such policies may come at the expense of numbers of households assisted (although this assumption requires testing to identify whether increased costs may be partly or wholly offset by savings associated with reduced complaints, neighbourhood disputes, and maintenance).

Making the case to provide more assistance to less people (or to increase the overall budget for housing assistance) requires among other things a greater focus on outcome based measures of success. At present housing authorities spend significant time and effort measuring efficiency (for example, vacant turnaround times), and little or no time measuring outcomes such as improved health and well-being. A shift to greater flexibility may therefore need to be accompanied by the development of new performance measures to indicate the impacts of such policy changes. Another option may be to reduce overall subsidy levels (for example by increasing rents) to offset the costs of increased flexibility. Policy changes could include:

- Greater resources spent on providing the right housing solution at the outset, to maximise the non-shelter outcomes of such interventions;

- Greater flexibility to allow transfers and other changes in the type and level of assistance provided as household needs change.

- The development of a more rounded suite of performance measures, particularly with respect to outcome based measures to help guide decision making regarding the appropriate level of investment to make for individual clients (i.e. to help guide the quantity versus quality decision making by housing authorities).
• Consideration of reducing subsidy levels in other aspects of social housing (such as reducing the effective rent rebate) to offset additional costs associated with increased tenant flexibility and choice.

**Housing cost**

Past research suggests that poverty may be an important factor in shaping a range of outcomes, including health and children’s schooling. An interesting longitudinal study by Levy and Duncan (2000), for example, found that household income when a child was growing up was a useful predictor of academic attainment, independent of genetic factors. Levy attributed this outcome to the impacts of poverty related stress, which is an explanation consistent with some other studies into this issue. Some researchers also suggest that poverty can contribute to reduced expenditure on toys and outings, which can impede child development.

Given that housing costs are often the largest single outlay in a household budget, past research suggests that poverty may be an important intermediary between housing and non-shelter outcomes, and may help to explain why improved (and cheaper) housing can have significant positive effects in peoples’ lives.

This finding is consistent with the results of research conducted for this thesis. A significant number of participants felt that private housing rental costs had contributed to stress in their lives in one shape or another. For some of these households, public housing provided a way out of poverty as much as a way of improving other aspects of their housing. Again this research may not have added to the understanding of whether housing related poverty matters, or why, but it adds a finding consistent with the existing body of evidence on this topic.
For a number of households interviewed in this study, the reduction in housing costs associated with the move into public housing may be a significant contributor to the non-shelter benefits experienced by these households. Affording private rents for many of these single parents reliant on pensions and benefits, came at the expense of paying other costs such as activities for children (eg. dance classes), clothing and new shoes, repairing (or even owning) a car, and food. Some parents described stress and ill-health that they attributed to their housing related poverty, and others suggested that they moved more often due to high housing costs. Some used the reduced housing costs associated with their move into public housing to reduce their time spent at work, in order to better support their young families and reduce their own stress levels.

For some participants in this study, public housing was a clumsy and inflexible means of claiming additional income support. For these households, they would have much preferred the money rather than the rebated rent, largely because public housing meant a loss of control over where they lived (although for some the reduced property standards in public housing was the main problem). For many, the greater security afforded by public housing and the higher property and maintenance standards, combined with lower rents, more than compensated for this reduction in control and flexibility, although this was not universal.

Not every household interviewed felt that private rental housing was inherently unstable. Some felt that they could achieve a reasonable level of security of tenure in the private market, and others were not phased by the prospect of moving if required, as long as they could afford to stay in their desired neighbourhood.

This perspective raises a number of issues. Firstly, it may be that some households are being inappropriately provided with public housing, when a more flexible form of income support or housing allowance would suit their needs better (and be cheaper for Government). Secondly, there is a continuing issue of inequity between those in receipt of Commonwealth Rent Assistance and those in receipt of the effective rent rebate associated with public rental housing – particularly for those living in newer, better located public housing. Given the stories relayed by participants in this study of how difficult it is to meet basic living costs in the private rental market, the solution to this problem may lie more in increasing CRA levels rather than reducing public housing rent rebate levels.
These issues could be tackled through a number of different policy responses:

- A national housing policy may help to resolve the inequities and policy conflicts between public rental housing and Commonwealth Rent Assistance. In particular the level and possibly form of support provided for private renters may benefit from review to reduce the demand for public housing from those households seeking an escape from housing related poverty.

- There may be benefits in Governments pursuing other strategies through planning and housing supply mechanisms to reduce private rental housing costs.

- Housing authorities could consider providing a State rent assistance or housing allowance top-up payment as an alternate assistance program for households who are seeking or currently living in public rental housing primarily for financial reasons. At the same time, housing authorities need to be careful not to inadvertently push out public tenants who currently benefit from the security of tenure and improved maintenance and management of public housing.28

**Health and housing**

There seems to be a strong body of evidence linking poor housing with reduced health. Ambrose (2001) for example found a dramatic reduction in illness days associated with an estate improvement strategy. Aspects of housing that may impact include crowding, damp and mould, indoor pollutants and cold (Marsh et al. 2000).

Past research seems to indicate a clear link between damp and dusty housing, and the incidence of asthma (eg. Wever-Hess et al. 2000). Interviews conducted for this thesis also identified a link in some parent’s minds between their current or past housing, and the incidence of asthma for their children. Some attributed this to dust from badly maintained housing, or mould associated with dampness and shade from trees.

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28 The risk of cost-shifting from the Commonwealth to the State would need to be addressed when considering such a proposal, as many would argue that this problem is largely due to inadequate Commonwealth income support levels. A State based rent assistance program may have the effect of reducing the need for the Commonwealth to increase income support levels to reasonable levels.
As well, some parents felt that the stress associated with unstable housing, or housing in a hostile neighbourhood, may have contributed to poor health for themselves and/or their children. Some parents felt that poor housing maintenance may have increased the risks of accidents, and poor design as well as neighbourhood conflict may have contributed to reduced opportunity for children to play outside. Others felt that crowded housing may have added to their stress levels, and to an increase in the likelihood of the transmission of infectious diseases. These findings are all broadly consistent with the results of earlier research into this topic. This study may not have added to an understanding of the relationships between housing and health, however it is also not inconsistent with past findings.

While public tenants should generally be better off from a health perspective than private renters living in sub-standard housing, this may not always be the case. One public tenant interviewed had a mould problem that she felt was exacerbating her children’s asthma, and a number living in a suburb close to coastal wetlands were concerned about mosquitoes and the absence of fly screens on their windows.

For others, however, the move to public housing meant a move away from dusty, poorly maintained housing that they felt had been contributing to their health problems. For others the reduction in stress as a result of settling into a stable home meant improvements in their health and reductions in medication levels.

Public housing is clearly not the only means of achieving improved health through better housing. Loans or grants to assist property owners to upgrade housing could lead to higher private housing standards, as could stronger tenancy legislation concerning property standards.

Wilkinson (1996) suggests that health is in part a product of social fragmentation. The process of geographic separation between the rich and poor in our society that is accompanying a growing income gap and changing housing markets, suggests that Australia’s overall health may in part be determined in the future by our capacity to tackle this problem of an increasingly divided society.
A review of annual reports and corporate plans for State and Territory Housing Authorities confirms that housing assistance is generally not designed or implemented in Australia as a health related intervention, except in the case of remote indigenous communities. This perspective may be a contributor to the reducing Government support for the funding of housing assistance interventions (i.e. because of the lack of understanding of the flow-on health benefits of improved housing), a reduced emphasis on targeting households with a housing related health condition, and the design and delivery of housing assistance that is not as effective as it may otherwise be at tackling housing related health problems. Policy responses to this situation may include:

- The development and implementation of more health specific performance measures for housing assistance programs.

- The review of targeting and eligibility policies to include households with housing related health conditions – for example households with children suffering from environmentally stimulated asthma.

- Greater emphasis on the provision of housing opportunities in mixed neighbourhoods (see the earlier section on neighbourhood).

- The review of fly screen policies in areas with higher than usual mosquito infestations.

- The inclusion in stock condition audits for social housing of maintenance and design factors that may contribute to dust and mould.

- Housing authorities develop, implement and evaluate strategies to tackle housing related health problems (such as childhood asthma) in the private housing market, in partnership with health authorities and tenancy regulation bodies.
Housing and work

In the United States, housing interventions are increasingly being evaluated in terms of their contribution to breaking the cycle of unemployment. The Moving to Opportunity program is one such example of housing being used to help achieve this non-shelter outcome. Results from early evaluations of this program, and the Gautreaux Program, indicate that housing conditions (and in particular neighbourhood) may be a significant factor in terms of social and economic participation.

This study has also found that a range of housing related factors may impact on decision making regarding work. Proximity to work opportunities, public transport, family and friends to provide child care support, may all be factors. Living in an area with mostly other unemployed people may reduce one’s motivation to work, and help to validate the decision to give up seeking work. Income based rent policies, combined with income support policies that effectively tax pension and benefit recipients at very high levels when they move into work, may also be a consideration for some people when considering work options.

Like health, social and economic participation has not been a strong policy driver in the design and implementation of housing assistance arrangements. Policy responses to these issues could include:

- The review of targeting and transfer policies to include housing related impediments to social and economic participation. For example, priority could be given to unemployed people seeking to transfer to improve their employment options.

- The review of rent policies to reduce work disincentives. Queensland’s public housing rent policy has less poverty traps than some other State and Territory public housing programs, by virtue of a rent increase amnesty of up to six months for tenants who experience an increase in household income. It may be that further improvements could be made to rent policies, and that existing work incentives (such as the rent increase amnesty) could be better explained and promoted to tenants.
The development of new products and services specifically to assist households to achieve participation outcomes. For example, relocation assistance, and time limited rent assistance or headleasing of housing in low unemployment neighbourhoods, may help overcome some of the barriers to finding and retaining employment.
CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

The program for the 2001 National Housing Conference in Brisbane, Australia, included a range of speakers who alerted to the unsustainable position of housing assistance in Australia, typified by declining public housing portfolios and growing unmet housing need. Speakers also discussed the lack of a clear national policy framework that linked the various housing assistance strategies (most notable Commonwealth Rent Assistance and those funded through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement) with both strategic whole-of-Government objectives and other social and economic programs of Government.

One speaker from the floor described this context as “policy drift,” and suggested that Government would not increase levels of investment in housing assistance until the policy vacuum was filled.

A second theme at this conference was the role that housing plays in relation to non-shelter outcomes such as health, employment, and education. The suggestion underpinning many of these presentations was that this policy drift needs to be tackled through a stronger understanding of the importance that various aspects of housing play in relation to these non-shelter outcomes.

This thesis begins suggesting that understanding the links between housing and non-shelter outcomes such as schooling can assist in strategic policy decision making (such as who to target for assistance during this period of declining capacity). Also, understanding this relationship may help to alert to the risks from a whole of Government perspective of not providing housing assistance to families with school aged children.

The goal of this research has been to provide a clearer understanding of the non-shelter impacts of housing, and in particular of the possible processes by which aspects of housing may impact on aspects of schooling. The intention has not been to prove a causal relationship, rather to shed light on mechanisms. To that end the approach taken has been qualitative, involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with a sample of public housing tenants and a smaller group of educators.
Prior to conducting interviews, an examination of previous research around this topic identified a number of important points:

- Child development and school readiness may be an important intermediary between housing and schooling. Aspects of housing such as noise, space and safety for independent play opportunities, and crowding may contribute to children not achieving all their developmental milestones when they begin school, and this lack of school readiness may reduce their chances of reaching their full potential later in their school careers.

- Homeless children seem much less likely than housed children to succeed at school, due to the effects of moving regularly, increased rates of ill-health, stress and developmental delays associated with their housing condition.

- Transience may contribute to family stress and isolation – in particular for adolescent girls who move school mid-year, and may contribute to reduced school performance. Some children of families who move regularly are not adversely affected by moving, and some studies suggest that they may benefit as a result of learning to adapt to these changes.

- Poor quality housing may contribute to increased family stress levels, a reduced capacity to deal with other stresses effectively, and poorer health due to increased rate of accidents and increased rates of illnesses such as asthma and respiratory tract infections.

- Crowding may contribute to an increase in household conflict and more punitive parenting practices, reduced opportunity for independent play, increased rates of transmission of infectious illnesses, and delayed auditory and language development due to constant stimulation and the absence of quiet spaces at home. Lack of space to complete homework may also impact on schooling.

- Neighbourhood may be an important factor in relation to children’s schooling, because of collective socialisation effects in local neighbourhoods, the impact of local amenity on mood and motivation, and differences in local resources and teacher expectations.
• High housing costs may contribute to family stress levels, and reduced capacity to buy food and provide toys, outings etc for children. Poor diet and stress may both contribute to poorer health and an increase in missed school days.

Given these findings from earlier studies (in particular the importance of neighbourhood effects identified in some United States’ studies), a sampling method was developed to ensure a reasonable number of households who had experienced a change in neighbourhood as well as housing conditions. As well, an interview schedule was developed to provide a framework to ensure that possible pathways between housing and schooling identified in earlier research would be explored in these interviews.

Public tenants were chosen as the population group from which to draw the interview sample, as this group have undergone a significant housing change (when they moved into public housing), and their income levels increase the chances of them having lived in poor quality housing in the past. Also administrative data held by housing authorities makes possible the generation of a mailing list of families with school aged children, living in specified postcodes, who have undergone a housing change within a specified period of time. Such sampling would be much harder if not impossible in the private housing market.

A small number of interviews with educators were also conducted. Schools were chosen randomly from outer suburbs where poor quality housing and transience were expected to impact on school populations. As well an inner-city school in a gentrifying suburb was also selected for interview.

These interviews identified four main themes – transience, housing amenity, neighbourhood and cost.

• Transience may be a significant problem for children who are already struggling in the school system, especially those who are receiving school based remediation. For these children, moving house may interrupt important remediation work at school, and may result in children falling further and further behind their peers. Also, transience may contribute to family stress levels which may impact on health and happiness, thereby reducing motivation and levels of school attendance.
- Housing amenity can impact on health, as a result of injuries related to poorly maintained or designed housing, from stress associated with noise and broken sleep, and from insect born illnesses due to the absence of insect screens. Possibly the most significant housing amenity related health impact seems to be due to the link between asthma, dust and mildew. Children who are susceptible to asthma may suffer a significantly higher incidence of asthma if they are living in housing with mould and/or dusty curtains and carpets. Increased use of asthma medication may impact on their mood, capacity to concentrate and sleep. Reduced health may result in an increase in missed school days, and may contribute to children falling behind in their work.

- Neighbourhood seems to have the potential to be a significant positive and negative force in people’s lives. Supportive neighbours can make single parenting much less stressful, for example by helping with child-care, increasing the sense of safety, and reducing isolation. Hostile neighbours, on the other hand, can create levels of stress that may force adults and children indoors to avoid conflict. As well as the health impacts of this increased stress and reduced outdoor play, neighbouring children and adults may also provide role models that may reduce children’s motivation and performance at school.

- High housing costs can cause significant stress for families. For those who are already suffering from stress this additional pressure may contribute to stress related ill-health. As well, these families may not be able to afford to eat properly, and may not be able to afford to pay for extra-curricula activities such as outings, dance classes etc. Poor diet may contribute to increased incidents of illness, and extra days missed from school.
Limitations, Strengths and Future Research

This study has been developed and undertaken as an exploration of possible relationships and processes, rather than as a method of determining causality between an independent variable (in this case, aspects of housing) and dependent variables (in particular, school attainment).

The method developed for this research further limits how the results of this research can be interpreted. For example, a very small sample of public tenants was interviewed. Because of the sampling method used, this group can not be considered a typical representation of public housing tenants. A much larger sample, generated through a more representative sampling approach would be required in order to be confident that the range of households and housing contexts were represented in the sample group. Interviewing households in private rental and owned housing may also provide new insights not identified amongst public tenants.

The interview method was intended to be semi-structured, so as to allow opportunity for unanticipated insights into the relationships between housing and schooling, but also ensure that anticipated relationships identified in the literature review were adequately explored. The risk with this approach is that neither objective is adequately achieved – that is, there may not have been adequate opportunity in the interview format for the identification and exploration of unexpected processes or relationships to be explored. Also there may not have been sufficient time spent exploring anticipated issues such as the role of neighbourhood, or the intermediary of health.

That said, in-depth interviews seem to be an appropriate approach for exploring processes, compared with a more structured survey tool. Some people interviewed found it difficult at first to articulate the impacts that recent changes in their housing had meant in their lives, yet over the course of a one to two hour interview were able to articulate quite significant housing related impacts. The reasons for these impacts – the pathways between aspects of housing and these non-shelter outcomes – required further exploration.
Point in time research also has limitations, and some participants found recall difficult. Many, however, were easily able to identify and discuss the aspects of their previous housing that were most important, and the impacts of these aspects of housing in their lives. Before and after interviews may have been a more effective means of identifying the impacts of changes in housing, and future studies that seek to explore these relationships in greater depth may require this more reliable approach (for example, interview households on public housing waiting lists, and then again six months after allocation to public housing).

This research began with a goal of better understanding the non-shelter impacts of housing, and in particular the relationships between housing and schooling. It did result in insights into a range of non-shelter impacts of changes in housing, however the insights into the links between these non-shelter impacts (such as poorer health associated with poorly maintained housing) and schooling were less clear. For example, a number of parents described very clear links between aspects of housing and their own stress levels. Few were, not surprisingly, able to go on to describe how this increase in stress may have affected their children’s schooling.

Future research could focus on this second aspect of the housing-schooling relationship. Specific areas to explore could include the impacts of missed days of schooling due to housing related health problems, the impacts on concentration and behaviour at school of increased use of asthma medication due to housing related asthma, and the impacts at school of increased household stress levels due to unstable or unaffordable housing. This further research may benefit from interviews with teachers of participating children, to test whether housing related impacts are being observed in the school context.

It may be that interviews are not the right method to better understand these processes, as it may be unrealistic to expect such a high level of self-awareness from participants. A more ethnographic approach over a much longer period of time may be necessary to understand the role that aspects of housing related outcomes (such as housing related stress) play in relation to school attainment. This approach was used very effectively by Bartlett (1998), who observed the lives of three families over a 12 month period so as to better understand the impacts of poor housing on the perpetuation of poverty.
Despite the limitations of this research, this thesis represents a contribution to the exploration of the links between housing and non-shelter outcomes. The systematic review of literature provides a helpful analysis of related studies, and the simple diagrams that aim to summarise possible processes to explain how aspects of housing may contribute to other outcomes is an approach not often seen in other research reviewed for this study. The table summarising possible pathways from housing to non-shelter outcomes at the conclusion of Chapter 2 has been favourably noted by other researchers in this field.

The in-depth qualitative study of the key themes identified in both the literature review and interviews helps to shed light on possible processes that may explain why housing may impact on other non-shelter outcomes. The interpretation of the findings from this research and earlier studies in light of the policy and fiscal challenges facing Australian Governments in relation to the provision of housing assistance is also of significance. The current renegotiation of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement appears to be occurring with very limited reference to the importance that housing plays in relation to other non-shelter outcomes. Hopefully this analysis may add a different perspective to this process.
ATTACHMENTS

Interview schedule - Tenants

Household code (date of interview plus letter – a,b,c etc): __________

Introduction to research

• Thank you for agreeing to see me.

• Reminder that everything that you tell me in this interview will remain confidential. I will use a code rather than names to identify households, and there will be no way of identifying you or your family through the report from this research.

• I would like to tape record this interview so as to be sure that I don’t miss anything that you say. I will also take some notes. The interview could take about one hour.

• I am interviewing up to 10 or 12 households over the next 6 months. Once I have finished the interviews I will write up a summary of the interviews and send this to you for your information.

• The purpose of the research is to help to better understand the changes that happen in peoples’ lives as a result of moving into public housing. One area that we are particularly interested in is the impact of these moves on children and their schooling. My goal is to see whether there is a link, and if there is a link to understand why. I am not trying to prove something.

• Do you have any questions before we start? If you have any questions afterwards you can ring me on the same number that you rang to register to be part of this research (offer number again if they don’t have it).

• I would like to start by getting some details about your household and housing history. This is the boring bit before we start to discuss your move into public housing.

Household details

Age and gender of adults:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>A2</td>
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<td>A3</td>
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<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Age, sex and year level of kids:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year at school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C2</td>
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<tr>
<td>C7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Current housing details

Suburb name: ___________________________  Postcode: ______________

Number of bedrooms: ______

Age and gender of children sharing bedrooms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedroom</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Separate indoor play space: Yes/No

Private outdoor play space: Yes/No

Street noise (select):
- Noisier than average
- Average
- Quieter than average

Current weekly rent: _____________

Housing history
It would help us to have a history of your housing over the two years before moving into this home:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month and year</th>
<th>Moved in</th>
<th>Moved out</th>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Postcode if known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

(If remembering details of the moves is difficult, ask for suburb of last home, and approximate number of moves in that period.)

Details of last home before moving into public housing

Suburb and postcode (if known): __________________________

Number of bedrooms: ______

Age and gender of children sharing bedrooms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedroom</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Separate indoor play space: Yes/No

Private outdoor play space: Yes/No

Street noise (select):
- Noisier than average
- Average
- Quieter than average
Weekly rent: ____________

Were you collecting rent assistance: Yes/ No

If yes, how much? ____________

Thank you – that’s the end of the first section of the interview. I’d now like to talk about your last home before you moved here, and then talk about how things have been since moving into this home.
Questions

Last home

I would like to start by asking you to remember back to your housing before you moved into this home. What things stand out in your mind about your last home?

(No prompts to start with – then if needed, prompt in relation to the house itself, the street, and the area. If needed, ask about the size and condition of the home, the state of repair, the yard, street noise, safety, cost. Goal is to gather facts about last housing, and to learn about the significance of these aspects by seeing what they volunteer unprompted.)

What was life like for your family in your last home?

(Careful not to prompt about causality between housing and aspects of life then – just gathering information at this stage)

Moving and the new home

Could you tell me about your move from that home into your current home?
- How did you feel about moving?
- What was the move like?
- What were you hoping the move would bring?

How does this new home compare with your expectations?

What changes have you noticed for you and your family since moving?

(No prompts)

What effects do you think the move has had for your (partner and) child(ren)?

(No prompts)
What have been the biggest differences between your current home and your last home? Think about the neighbourhood as well as the home itself.

(No prompts)

**Relationships**

What impacts if any did your move have on your relationships? Do you still keep in touch with friends and family since your move?

How about kids friendships? Do they still keep in touch with their old friends? Have they made new friends? What have these changes meant for them?

**Money**

What has the reduction in your rent meant for you?

**Security**

Where do you expect to be living in five years time?

Living in public housing involves different tenancy conditions to the private rental market – such as an automatically renewing lease, and rent levels that change with your income. How do you feel about these aspects of your current housing?
Health

How has your health been since moving into this home?

Do you think you and your family are sick more or less often now than you were in your last home? Do you have any thoughts on the reasons for this difference?

Do you visit the doctor more or less often now than you did in your last housing? Do you have any thoughts on the reasons for this difference?

Training and Employment (almost finished)

Do you have time for any paid or voluntary work these days, or maybe re-training?

(This could include things such as school involvement in tuckshop, P&C etc)

Thinking back to when you were living in your last home, has your involvement in paid or voluntary work changed since that time? If there has been a change, do you have any thoughts on the reasons for the difference?

School

Have your children changed school as a result of the move? If they have, what differences have you observed between their last school and their current school?

(No prompts to start with. If needed ask about teachers, peers group, expectations of work/standards, bullying)

Have you noticed any changes in their attitudes towards school since the move? If so, what do you think may have caused these changes?
Do you have any sense of whether your children’s marks have changed at all since moving? If so, what do you think may have caused these changes?

*If the following issues have not come up:*

Have there been any impacts on your children associated with changes in friendships or classmates when you moved home?

Are you aware of any changes associated with your new home that might have had an effect on their schooling?

(If necessary prompt in relation to where homework is undertaken now, bedroom sharing arrangements and impact on sleep, the mood of the family since the move)

*Finishing up*

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your past or present home?

Given the discussion we have had today, what stands out for you as the 3 most important impacts of moving into public housing?

- **Check that notes are complete**
- Thanks for your time
- Please ring me if you have any questions about this research project
Interview Schedule - Educators

Date:

School name:

Suburb:

Staff member:

Position:

Background

• Thank you for agreeing to see me.

• The goal of this research is to try to understand the ways in which aspects of housing might impact on schooling. By “housing” I mean the physical dwelling and yard – its size, amenity, repair etc; the neighbourhood; and also the cost and security of tenure of housing, including the considering the effects of transience.

• I will soon be interviewing parents who have recently moved into public rental housing, to discus the effects of this move on a range of aspects of their lives, including the impact on their children’s schooling. In preparation for these interviews, I am meeting with educators from a range of different schools to discuss the sorts of housing related impacts that you may have observed in your work.

• I expect that this interview will last about 30 minutes. I would like to tape record this discussion to ensure that I don’t miss anything that you say.

• You or your school will not be identified in the write up of these interviews. Information will be collated with other interviews, and if you are cited it will be attributed to an educator from a primary/secondary school in a disadvantaged/mixed community from an urban fringe/middle urban/inner urban area.

• Any questions before we start?
Questions

The literature I have read to date suggests that some aspects of housing can impact directly on schooling, and other aspects can impact indirectly via an intermediary such as health.

I would like to start by getting your views on the aspects of housing that you think most affect schooling, as well as your views on the reasons or mechanisms by which these aspects of housing impact on schooling.

(No prompting – goal is to learn about their priority issues)

Neighbourhood

I am interested in your views on the role that neighbourhood plays in relation to schooling.

(No prompting to begin, then ask about the influence of peers inside and outside the classroom, parental and school expectations of kids academic future, crime and violence, self-image)

Mobility

Studies suggest that mobility or transience can have both positive and negative impacts on schooling and child development. Could you tell me about your observations of the impacts of transience on schooling?

(No prompting to begin, then ask about the effects of loss of relationships for parents and kids; adjusting to different levels, culture and expectations between schools; remediation for kids who move regularly; levels of confidence and social skills amongst children who move and children who do not)

Crowding

It may be difficult for teachers to know whether children come from overcrowded homes, although children from large, low income families, and those living in caravans or mobile homes may well be living in crowded housing. I would be interested in your observations about the effects of crowding on kids and their schooling.

(No prompting, then ask about sharing bedrooms with older siblings and broken sleep; space to do homework; family dynamics, conflict and parenting styles in crowded housing)
Housing and neighbourhood amenity

I am interested in your views about whether living in poor quality or poorly maintained housing, or in a street or suburb that appears run down and poorly maintained, impacts on children’s self image? Do you think poor housing amenity may impact on schooling?

Noise

Are you aware of any of your children who live in unusually noisy environments, such as on a busy road? How would you characterise the behaviour and attending abilities of these children?

Health

One of the intermediaries between housing and schooling may be health – that is, families who live in inappropriate or insecure housing may be less healthy, and their children may be absent from school more often. Do you have any views on this theory?

Cost

Another possible intermediary is housing cost and poverty, as there seems to be a lot of research to suggest that children of poorer families are less likely to achieve academically. I am interested in your experiences relating to family poverty and schooling, and in particular the ways in which poverty may make it harder for children to succeed at school.

Key issue

Given the discussion we have had, I was wondering what you consider to be the most important aspect of housing in relation to schooling, and why?

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions before we finish? Please feel free to ring me if you think of any questions after today.
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