

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING AFFORDABILITY IN THE HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY (HRM)



Summary Analysis of Corporate Research Associates Inc. 2003 Second Quarter Metro Quarterly Report

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Development Services

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Executive Summary

Halifax Regional Municipality's (HRM) Planning and Development Services commissioned Corporate Research Associates Inc. to include questions on housing, homelessness and housing affordability in their Metro Quarterly Review in April 2003.¹

The significant overall results of these questions indicate the following:

People staying with others - "Hidden Homeless" Population

- Out of the 400 randomly selected respondents in HRM 7% (28 households) had someone living with them due to severe financial problems, eviction or discrimination in seeking accommodation, recent immigration, domestic and/or other personal problems. This provides an indication of the extent of "hidden homelessness" in HRM.
- Women and those on lower incomes (less than \$35,000) were more likely to have someone staying with them, and more likely to have more than one person staying with them.
- The length of stay ranged from a week to more than a year. Sixty nine per cent (69%) of the households had someone staying with them more than a month.
- These results indicate that there is a "hidden homeless" population in HRM, which should be considered when profiling people who are homeless and at risk. Individuals that otherwise would have had to be serviced by social agencies are supported by family and friends.

Homelessness on the Rise in HRM

- Forty nine per cent (49%) of respondents said that in their opinion homelessness was on the rise in HRM.

Housing Costs Increases in HRM

- Eighty-nine per cent (89%) of the respondents said that housing costs increased in the last five years in HRM. Fifty-eight per cent (58%) said that the costs increased significantly. This was consistent across HRM.

Difficulties in Finding/Maintaining Housing

- Over a third of the respondents (36%) said that either they or someone they knew had difficulty finding or maintaining housing over the past five years due to its cost.
- Six per cent (6%) were personally affected, 26% said that they knew someone who experienced difficulties, and 4% were both personally affected and knew someone in a similar situation.

¹ Thirteen questions were conducted to 400 randomly selected people in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) out of an initial sample of 5,000 households. The questions were broken out by communities, gender, income, age, and education. The communities included: Halifax, Dartmouth, Bedford/Sackville and other parts of HRM (rural areas). The results are accurate within +/-4.9 in 95 out of 100 samples.

- Twenty five per cent (25%) of HRM households pay 30% or more of their gross income on shelter. In this survey 10% were directly affected by increases in housing costs.

Government Responsibility for Affordable Housing

- Seventy per cent (70%) of respondents said that the three levels of Governments were responsible for ensuring a supply of affordable housing in HRM, either alone or in partnership with other sectors.²
- The highest percentage of respondents (28%) said that the Provincial Government was solely responsible for providing affordable housing, 14% said it was a Federal responsibility, and 12% said that it was a Municipal responsibility.

Support for Government Spending on Affordable Housing

- Seventy per cent (70%) of the respondents would support increased government spending to ensure that housing in HRM is more affordable even if it meant transferring funds from other areas of government spending. Twenty per cent (20%) were against increased spending and 10% were undecided.

Government Priority – Urban, Suburban, Rural

- Support for placing priority on the provision of affordable housing was the highest in urban areas (61%), followed by suburban (52%) and rural areas (45%), but housing affordability in all areas of HRM were identified as being relevant.

Acceptance of Affordable Housing Located in Own Neighborhoods

- Only 16% of respondents would definitely oppose affordable housing development in their neighbourhood, while 49% would support it and 35% were undecided. This indicates that more people were supportive, and a significant proportion (35%) would support or reject specific proposals rather than affordable housing in principle.
- There was variation between general support for increased spending on affordable housing (70%) and acceptance of such developments in the respondents' area of residence (50%), with many undecided.
- Women, respondents with a lower income (less than \$35,000), younger individuals, and those with lower education appeared to be more supportive of affordable housing developments in their area.

² Affordable housing was described as housing costing less than 30% of a household's total income.

Introduction/Methodology

Corporate Research Associates Inc. (CRS) were commissioned by HRM Planning and Development Services to include questions on housing and homelessness in its Metro Quarterly Survey in April 2003.³

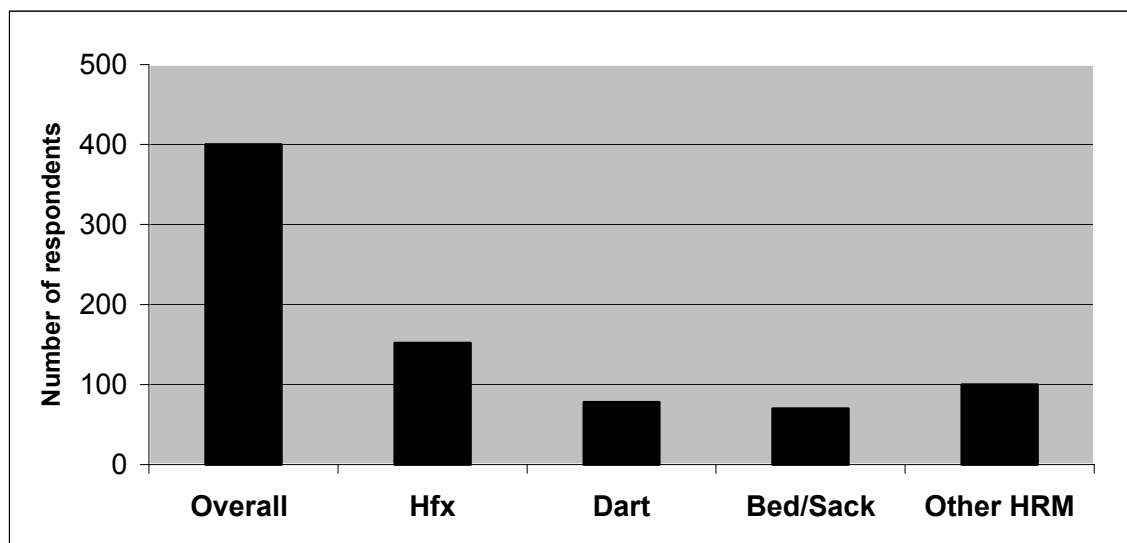
P. Richards Planning Consultant prepared this report for HRM Planning and Development Services and accepts responsibility for the contents, omissions and errors.

The summary report presents key findings of the CRS survey and to highlights significant differences related to area of residence, gender, age, income and education.

Each question was reviewed and the results in the tables analyzed. Figurers and tables were broken out to determine if any other results could be considered and are shown where appropriate. Only significant responses are reported. All results can be found in the overall tables provided in Corporate Research's Report.

The Corporate Research Associates Inc. survey sampled 400 randomly selected HRM respondents. Figure I shows the overall sample size in relation to area of residence: 152 respondents from the old City of Halifax, 78 respondents from the old City of Dartmouth, 70 respondents from Bedford/ Sackville and 100 respondents from other suburban and rural parts of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM).

Figure I – Sample size and distribution by area of residence



* The "Other HRM" category refers to HRM areas beyond the old city of Halifax, the old city of Dartmouth, the old town of Bedford, and Lower, Middle, and Upper Sackville.

³ A complete Report of the questions and responses in table format can be found with Corporate Research Associates, Metro Quarterly Survey, April 2003, Report for Halifax Regional Municipality.

Results

1. Persons Living with Others

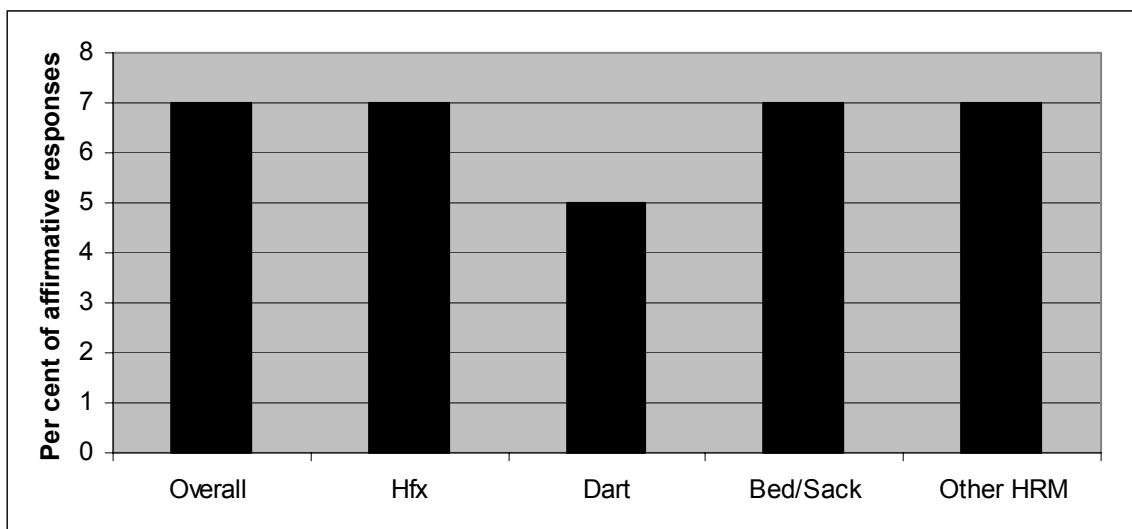
Individuals having difficulty finding or maintaining independent accommodation may stay with others for various periods of time, and may be considered part of the “hidden homeless” population. It is difficult to profile this hidden population, as they do not show up in homeless counts or census information.

According to the survey results 7% of the surveyed households had someone (“not a usual member of the household”) living with them due to severe financial problems, eviction or discrimination in seeking accommodation, recent immigration, domestic and/or other personal problems. Five respondents indicated that they had 2 persons staying with them. This means that in the sample of 400 households there were 33 individuals who “doubled up” due to housing difficulties.

As figure II illustrates this proportion was consistent across HRM, although it was slightly lower in Dartmouth (5%). Corporate Research’s Survey did not ask about the specific reasons of individuals doubling up with others.

The results indicate that people in HRM do “put people up” when they are having difficulties with shelter and people stay with them for a variety of lengths of time. Without this social support those individuals would potentially have to be cared for by social services and emergency shelters (7% of the 144,000 HRM households translates into 10,000 individuals). This information provides an indication that there is a “hidden homeless” population in HRM and that it is spread throughout the different communities.

Figure II – Households with someone staying with them due to financial or personal difficulties



The length of time that individual in need may stay with others ranged from a week or less to more than one year, with only 23% staying for less than a month. Fifty-four per cent (54%) of the households had someone staying with them for up to six months and a significant number of people (38%) had someone staying for a year or more as illustrated in Figure III.

Figure III – Length of Time People Staying with Others

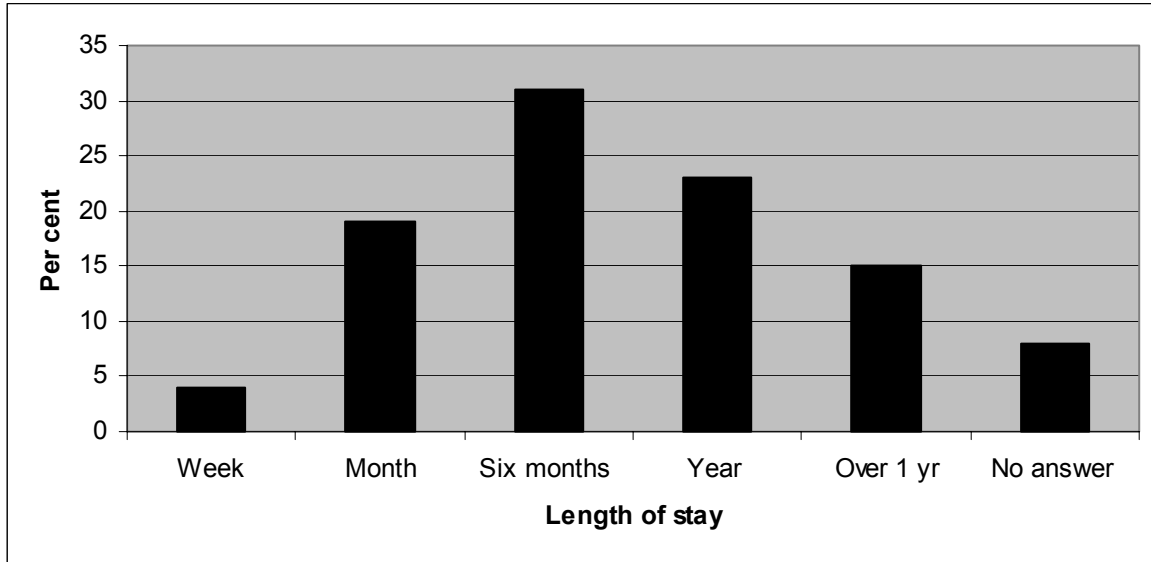
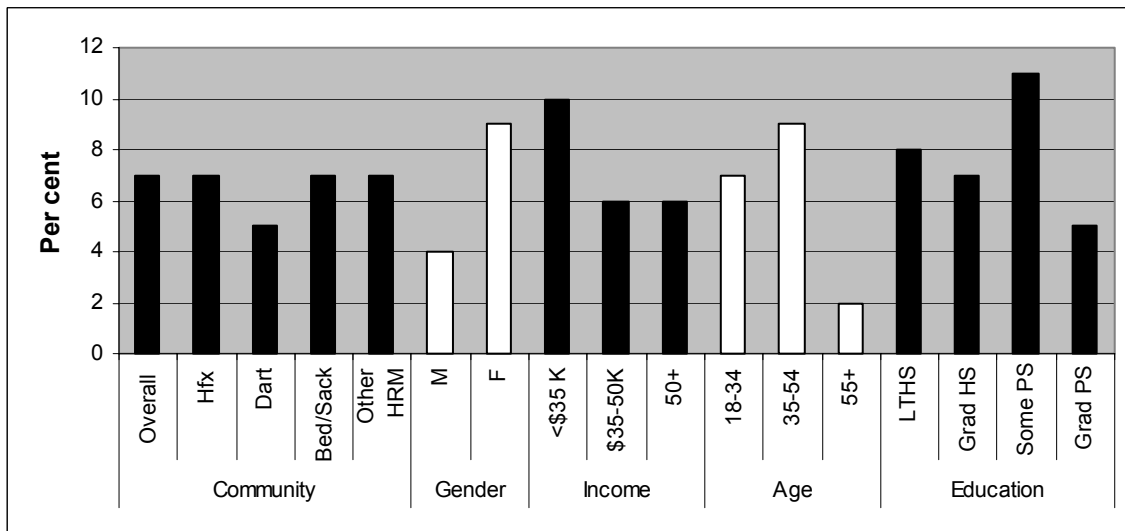


Figure IV breaks down the results of people living with others by area, household income, gender of respondent, age and education. Women, households with less than \$35,000 annual income, individuals between 35-64, and those with some post-secondary education were more likely to have someone staying with them. Females were more likely to have individuals staying with them and more likely to have more than one person staying with them.

Figure IV– Profile of households having someone staying with them

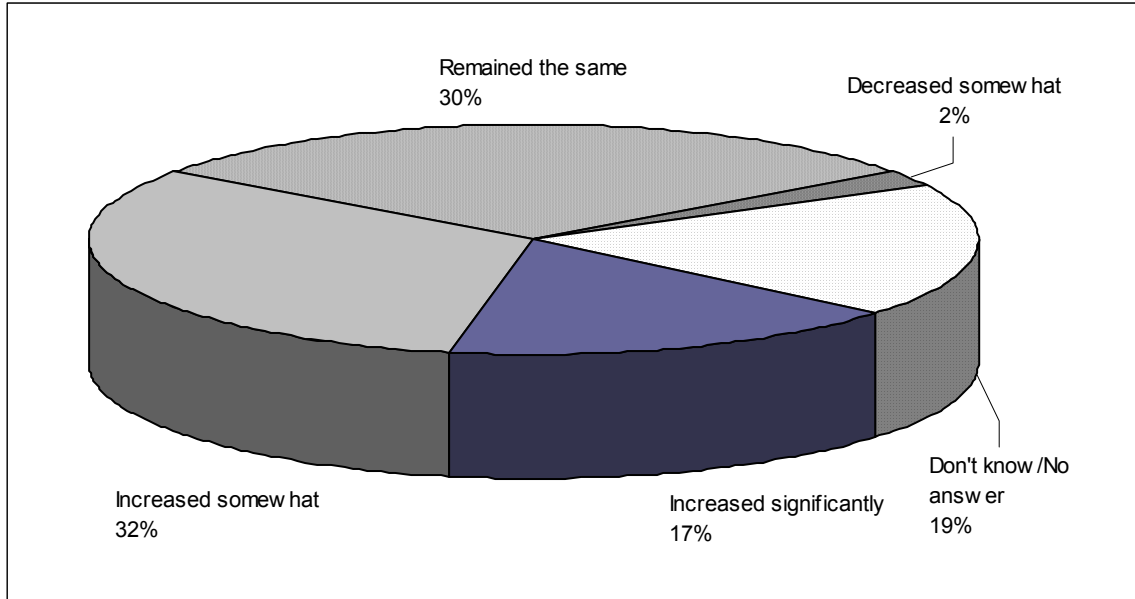


* Education: LTHS – Less than High School, Grad HS – Graduated High School, Some PS – Some Post Secondary (University), Grad PS – Graduated Post Secondary (University)

2. Perceptions of Homelessness in HRM

Half of the respondents (49%) said that in their opinion homelessness in HRM increased in the last five years. A significant proportion of residents may be concerned about homelessness while 30% thought that there was no change and 19% could not comment on the issue. Only 2% said that homelessness was on the decline.

Figure V Perceptions of Changes in the Scope of Homelessness in HRM



3. Perception of Changes in Housing Costs

Eighty-nine (89%) per cent of respondents to the survey said that housing costs increased in the last five years in HRM, out of which 58% said that it increased significantly (Fig. VI).

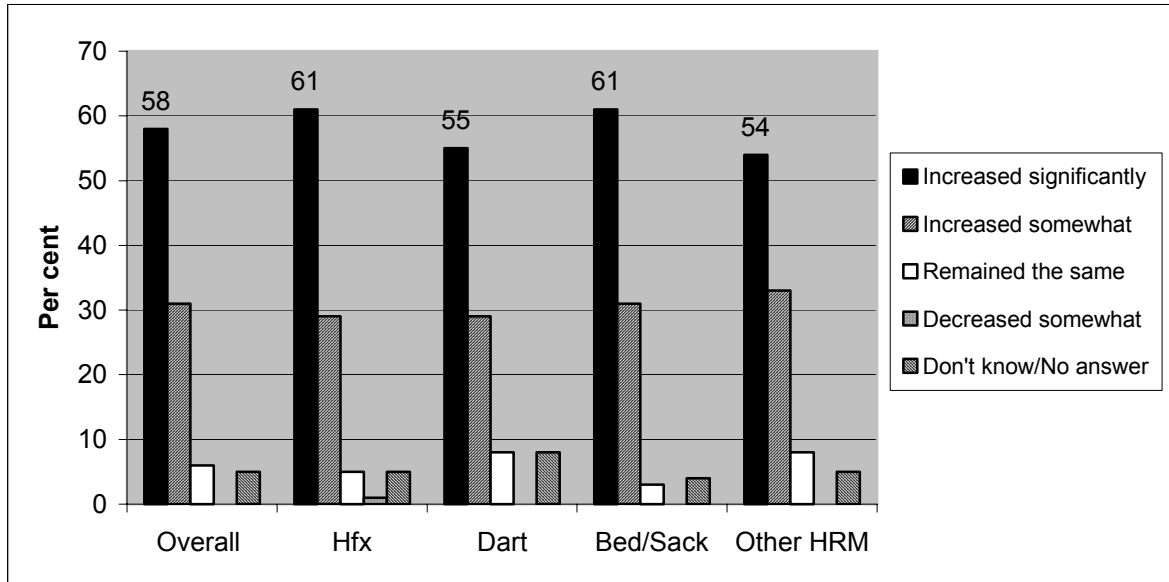
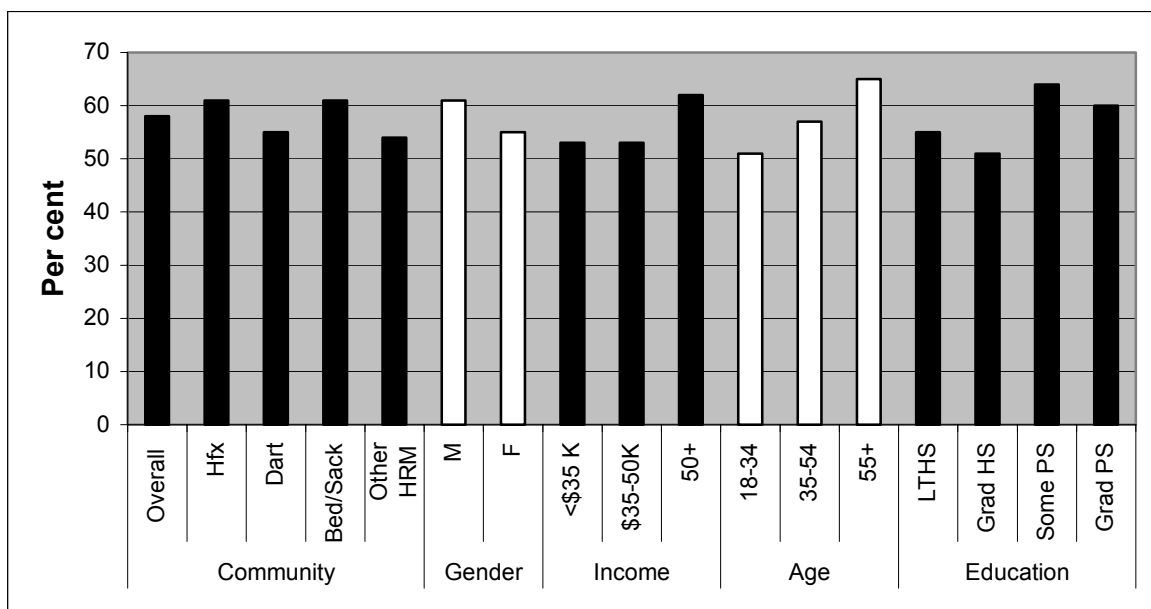


Figure VI – Housing Costs

Residents of Halifax and Bedford/Sackville, men, those with higher incomes, older individuals and those with higher education levels were more likely to report that in their opinion housing prices increased significantly.

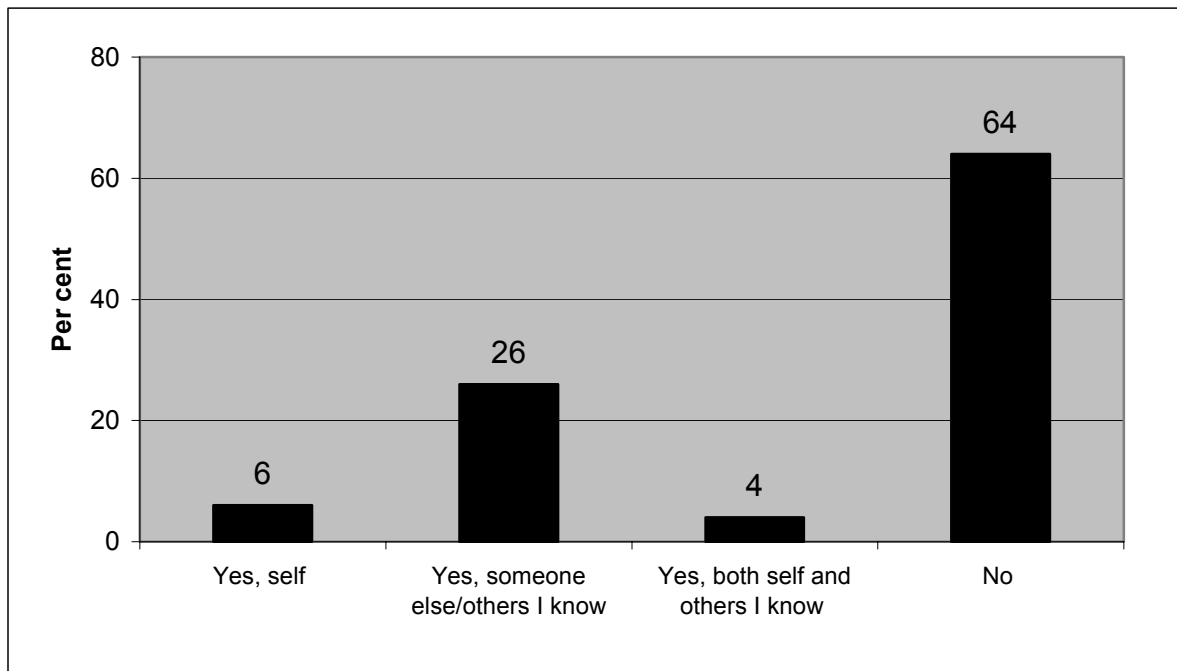
Figure VII – Profile of Households that said housing costs increased significantly



4. Personal Experience in Finding/Maintaining Housing

Figure VIII illustrates the percentage of respondents (36%) that have either personally experienced difficulty in finding or maintaining housing, or know someone who experienced housing hardship due to cost. Six per cent (6%) personally experienced difficulties, 26% knew someone who had experienced this, and an additional 4% indicated that both themselves and others known to them were affected by housing costs.

Figure VIII – Housing difficulties experienced in the last 5 years – self or others known to respondent



5. Responsibility for Providing Affordable Housing

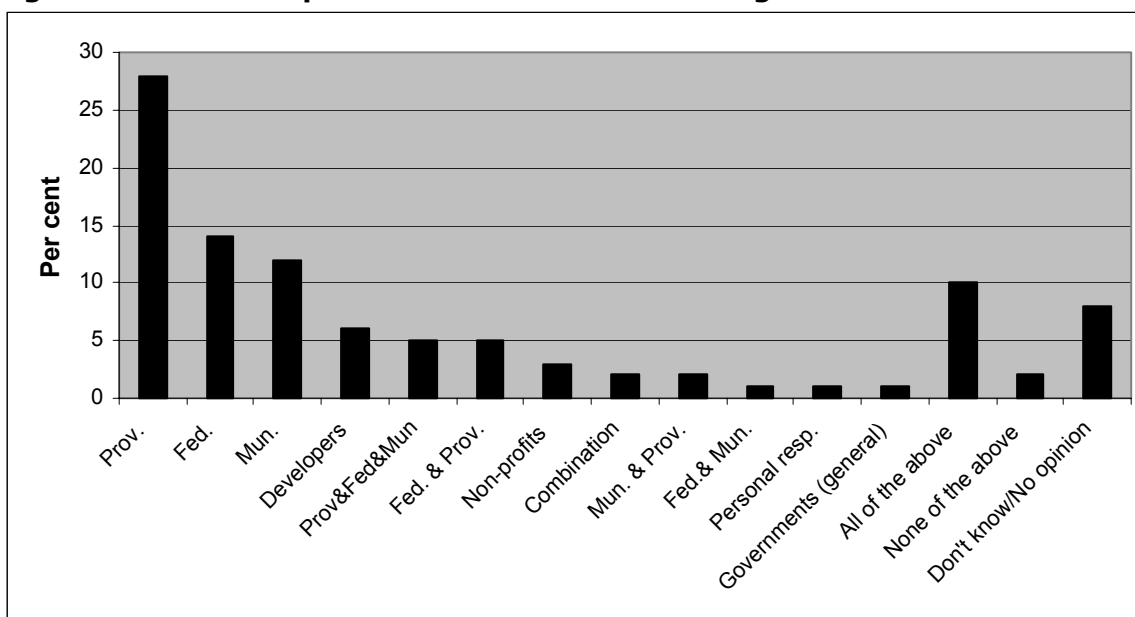
Respondents were asked who is primarily responsible for ensuring that there is a supply of affordable housing. Altogether 69% said that the public governments – either individually or together with other players - were primarily responsible. This indicates a strong support for public role in the housing sector.

Respondents were provided with a number of choices to this question, which included various combinations of government levels, private and non-profit sector. Twenty eight per cent isolated the Provincial Government as being primarily responsible for affordable housing, followed by 14% who said it was a federal responsibility and 12% who said that it was a municipal responsibility. Overall, the provincial government was mentioned in 53% of the answers, federal government in 38% of the answers and municipal government in 33% of the answers.

Table 1. Levels of government mentioned (individually or in combination with other players)

Provincial	53%
Federal	38%
Municipal	33%

Figure IX Who is responsible for affordable housing



6. Public Support for Increased Public Spending on Affordable Housing

A high percentage of respondents – 69% said that they would support (completely or mostly) spending more public money to ensure that housing in HRM is affordable for all, even if it meant taking money from other areas of government spending. An additional 7% would possibly support it depending on where the money would come from, and 4% were undecided. Twenty per cent (20%) would oppose increased public spending on housing, and 8% would completely oppose it. Overall there is a strong support for government involvement in affordable housing and it is consistent with support for a public role in the housing sector.

Figure X Support for increased public spending to ensure a supply of affordable housing

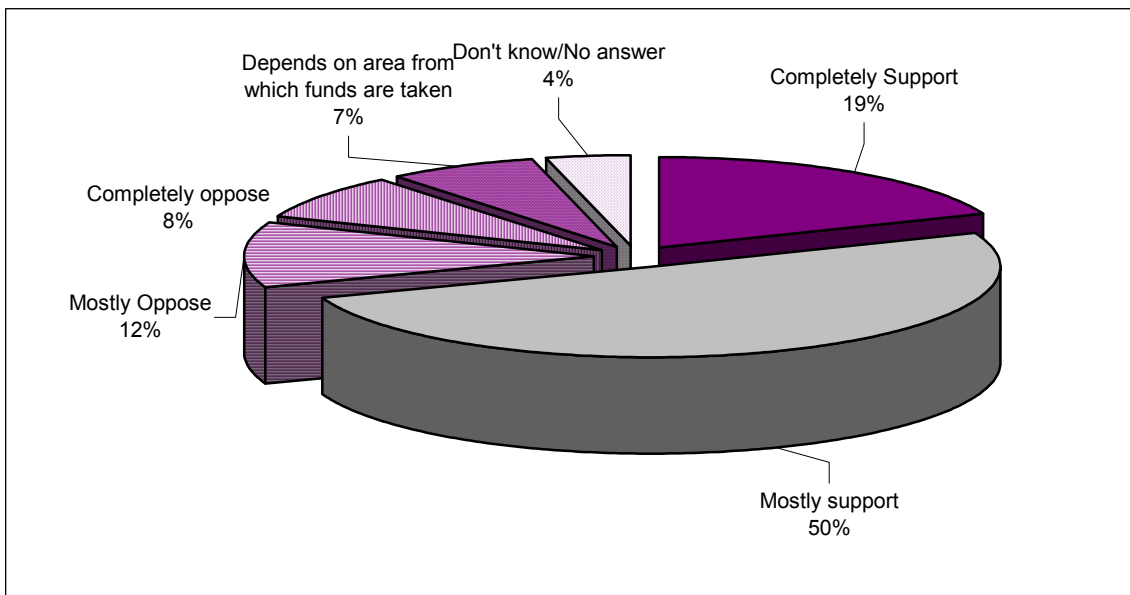
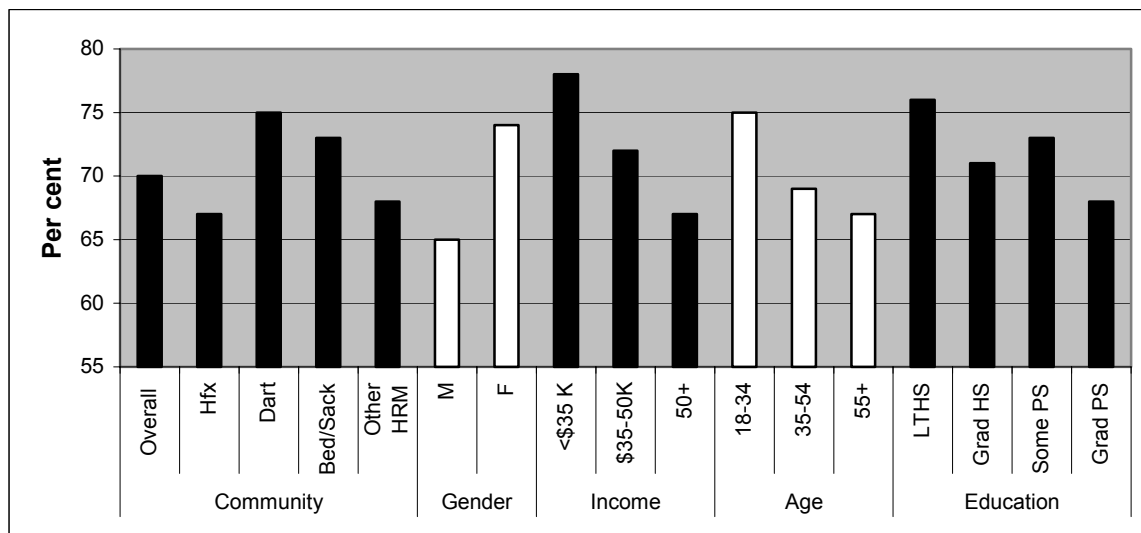


Figure XI Profile of respondents supportive of increased public spending on affordable housing



7. Support for Affordable Housing in a Respondent's Neighbourhood

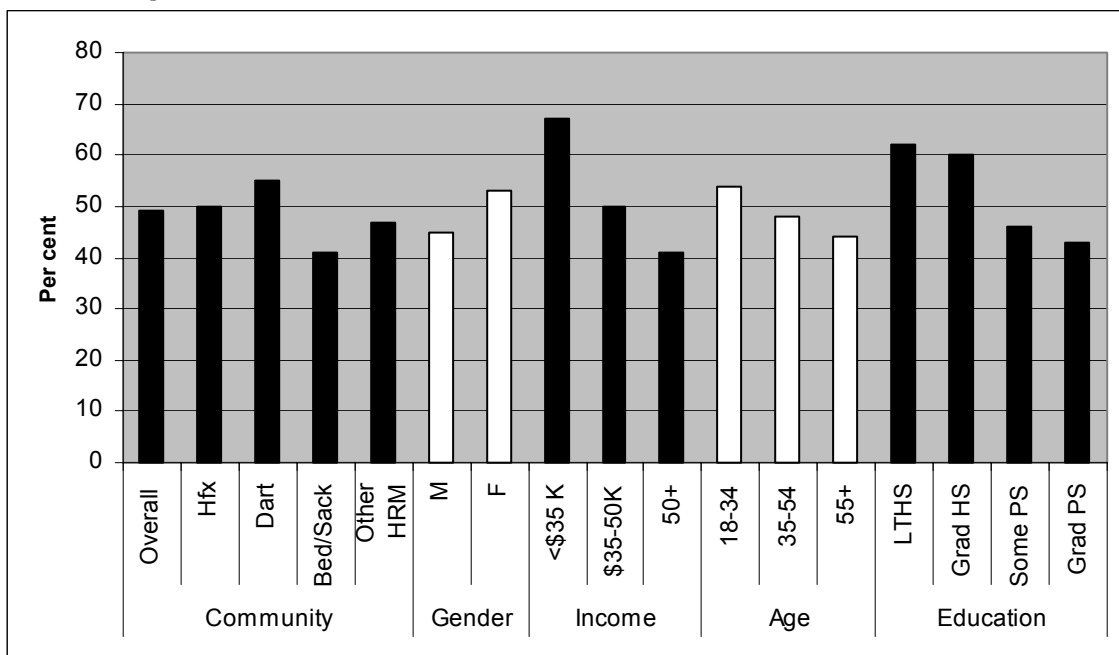
Although 70% of respondents supported public role and increased public spending on affordable housing, when asked about accepting affordable housing development in the respondent's area of residence the level of support was 50%, therefore a drop of 20%.

In this survey, Halifax, Dartmouth and the rural areas indicated more support for locating housing projects in their neighborhoods than residents of Bedford/Sackville. The decrease in support was notable in Bedford/Sackville, among higher income households, individuals over 55 years old and those with higher education levels. Those respondents were aware of the rising housing costs (fig. VII) and supportive of increased public spending (fig. X) but tended to be less supportive of affordable housing projects in their area – possibly because affordable housing was defined very broadly as housing that cost no more than 30% of household's income. No other details were provided.

Overall 49% would likely support affordable housing in their area of residence, 26% were undecided, 12% did not have an opinion and only 16% would definitely oppose such development.

Affordable housing projects often are opposed by current residents because of potential impacts (real or perceived) that may occur due to the development. This survey indicates that more people would support than oppose affordable housing in their area of residence, and 38% were ambivalent and would react to a specific proposal rather than affordable housing in principle. This indicates that communication and community consultation must be part of any development strategy as affordable housing projects should be integrated in a wide range of neighbourhoods.

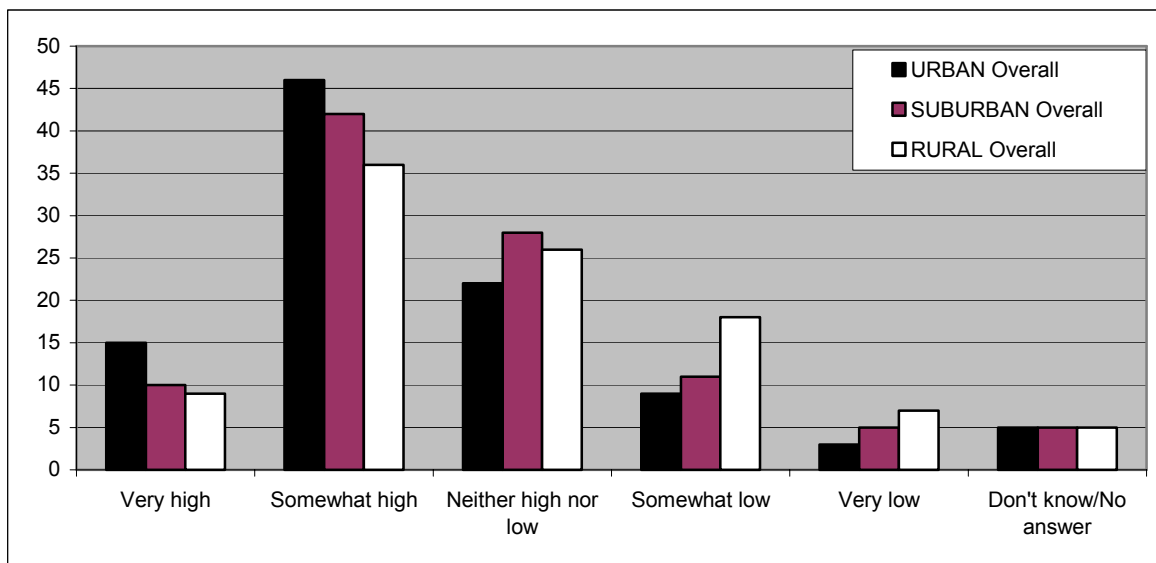
Figure XII – Profile of respondents supportive of affordable housing in their community



8. Priority for Affordable Housing in Urban, Suburban and Rural Areas

HRM encompasses urban, suburban and rural communities. The location of affordable housing projects in these communities is an important consideration. In this survey respondents were asked whether priority for affordable housing should be directed at urban, suburban or rural communities. The results indicate that in the opinion of the respondents a higher priority should be given to providing for affordable housing in urban areas, slightly lower priority should be placed on suburban communities and still lower on rural areas (figure XIII). This may reflect the profile of the respondents, but also HRM's population distribution and a perception of variation in the scales of housing affordability problems in HRM's communities.

Figure XIII – Location of Affordable Housing by Priority Area



9. Comments

Forty three per cent (43%) Percent of the respondents provided comments at the end of the survey related to homelessness and affordable housing. The following are worth noting:

- Respondents commented that there should be affordable housing because rents are too high and that everyone should have a home (16%)
- Affordable housing was a government responsibility (6%)
- The need for more housing/shelter/co-op programs was commented and people expressed the need for help and assistance for the homeless (9%)
- A very small number of people said that homelessness was a personal choice (2%)
- A small number commented on the need to increase employment and minimum wage (3%)
- Respondents commented that everyone should help out, that homelessness is was the responsibility of everyone (2%)

Conclusions

The survey results indicate that residents of HRM are knowledgeable and concerned about homelessness and affordable housing in HRM. Many were directly affected by increased housing costs. Respondents strongly said that governments have a strong role to play in providing affordable housing, particularly the Provincial government and that they would support increased public funding to ensure a universal access to affordable housing. Although respondents were more cautious about supporting affordable housing developments in their neighbourhoods, only 12% would definitely oppose them. Generally residents would accept affordable housing projects in their community (although this may be highly contingent on the nature of the development). Respondents generally said that priority should be given to providing affordable housing in urban areas followed by suburban and rural areas, although affordability was identified as an issue in all areas of HRM.

Survey Questions

Halifax Regional Municipality (n =400)

1. Do you have one or more people currently staying with you who are not usual members of your household, but who are temporarily staying with you due to severe financial problems, eviction or discrimination in seeking accommodation, recent immigration, domestic and/or other personal problems?

CODE ONE ONLY

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Refused

2. **[ASK Q.2 ONLY IF “YES” IN Q.1]** How many people currently are staying with you under these conditions?

PROBE TO RECORD EXACT NUMBER, DO NOT ACCEPT A RANGE

RECORD NUMBER: _____

- 97 Refused

3. **[ASK Q.3 ONLY IF “YES” IN Q.1]** For how long [has this person/have these people] been staying with you? Have you had someone with you ... :

READ RESPONSES IN ORDER - CODE ONE ONLY

- 1 A week or less
- 2 More than one week up to one month
- 3 More than one month up to 6 months
- 4 More than 6 months up to one year, or
- 5 More than one year

VOLUNTEERED

- 8 Don't know/No answer

4. In your opinion, would you say that in the past five years the problem of homelessness in HRM has ... :

READ RESPONSES IN ORDER - CODE ONE ONLY

- 1 Increased significantly
- 2 Increased somewhat
- 3 Remained the same
- 4 Decreased somewhat, or
- 5 Decreased significantly

VOLUNTEERED

8 Don't know/No answer

5. In your opinion, would you say that in the last five years housing costs in HRM have ... :

READ RESPONSES IN ORDER - CODE ONE ONLY

- 1 Increased significantly
- 2 Increased somewhat
- 3 Remained the same
- 4 Decreased somewhat, or
- 5 Decreased significantly

VOLUNTEERED

8 Don't know/No answer

6. In the last five years have you or has someone you know experienced difficulties in finding or maintaining affordable housing? **CODE ONE ONLY**

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Refused

7. In your opinion, would you say that providing additional affordable housing in **[READ AND ROTATE GEOGRAPHIC AREAS]** should be a **[READ RESPONSES IN ORDER]** priority for the Municipality?

CODE ONE ONLY PER GEOGRAPHIC AREA

- a. The Metro areas of HRM
- b. The Suburban areas of HRM
- c. The Rural areas of HRM

- 1 Very high
- 2 Somewhat high
- 3 Neither high nor low
- 4 Somewhat low, or
- 5 Very low

VOLUNTEERED

8 Don't know/No answer

8. In your opinion, which one of the following options best describes the term "affordable housing"? Would you say ... :

READ AND ROTATE RESPONSES – CODE ONE ONLY

- 01 Housing for the poorest members of society
- 02 Housing for people of modest means
- 03 Any housing that costs less than 30% of pre-tax income

- 04 Any housing that costs more than 30% but less than 50% of pre-tax income
- 05 Housing subsidized by government
- 06 Non-profit housing

VOLUNTEERED

- 98 Don't know/No answer
- 99 Other (**SPECIFY:** _____)

9. If a housing development were proposed for your neighborhood where rents would be lower than average market rents for the area, would you **[READ RESPONSES IN ORDER]** see it as desirable to have such a development in your neighbourhood?

CODE ONE ONLY

- 1 Definitely
- 2 Probably
- 3 Probably not, or
- 4 Definitely not

VOLUNTEERED

- 8 Don't know/No answer

10. Would you **[READ RESPONSES IN ORDER]** governments spending more money to ensure that housing in HRM is affordable for all, even if it means transferring funds from other areas of government spending?

CODE ONE ONLY

- 1 Completely support
- 2 Mostly support
- 3 Mostly oppose, or
- 4 Completely oppose

VOLUNTEERED

- 8 Don't know/No answer

11. In your opinion, would you say that ensuring a supply of affordable housing is primarily the responsibility of .. :

READ AND ROTATE RESPONSES – CODE ONE ONLY

- 01 The federal government
- 02 The provincial government
- 03 The municipal government
- 04 Private developers
- 05 Non-profit and charitable groups

VOLUNTEERED

- 96 All of the above
- 97 None of the above
- 98 Don't know/No opinion
- 99 Combination/Other (**SPECIFY:** _____)

12. Do you have any comments you would like to make about the issue of homelessness or affordable housing in HRM? **PROBE:** Anything else?

RECORD VERBATIM

98 Don't know/No answer