

Social integration in temporary housing: Perspectives of older persons experiencing homelessness

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Acknowledgements

Land

We respectfully acknowledge that Simon Fraser University is located on unceded and traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations and that the University of Utah is located on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Shoshone, Paiute, Goshute, and Ute Tribes.



Funders



Partners

Researchers

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I have no commercial relationships to disclose.

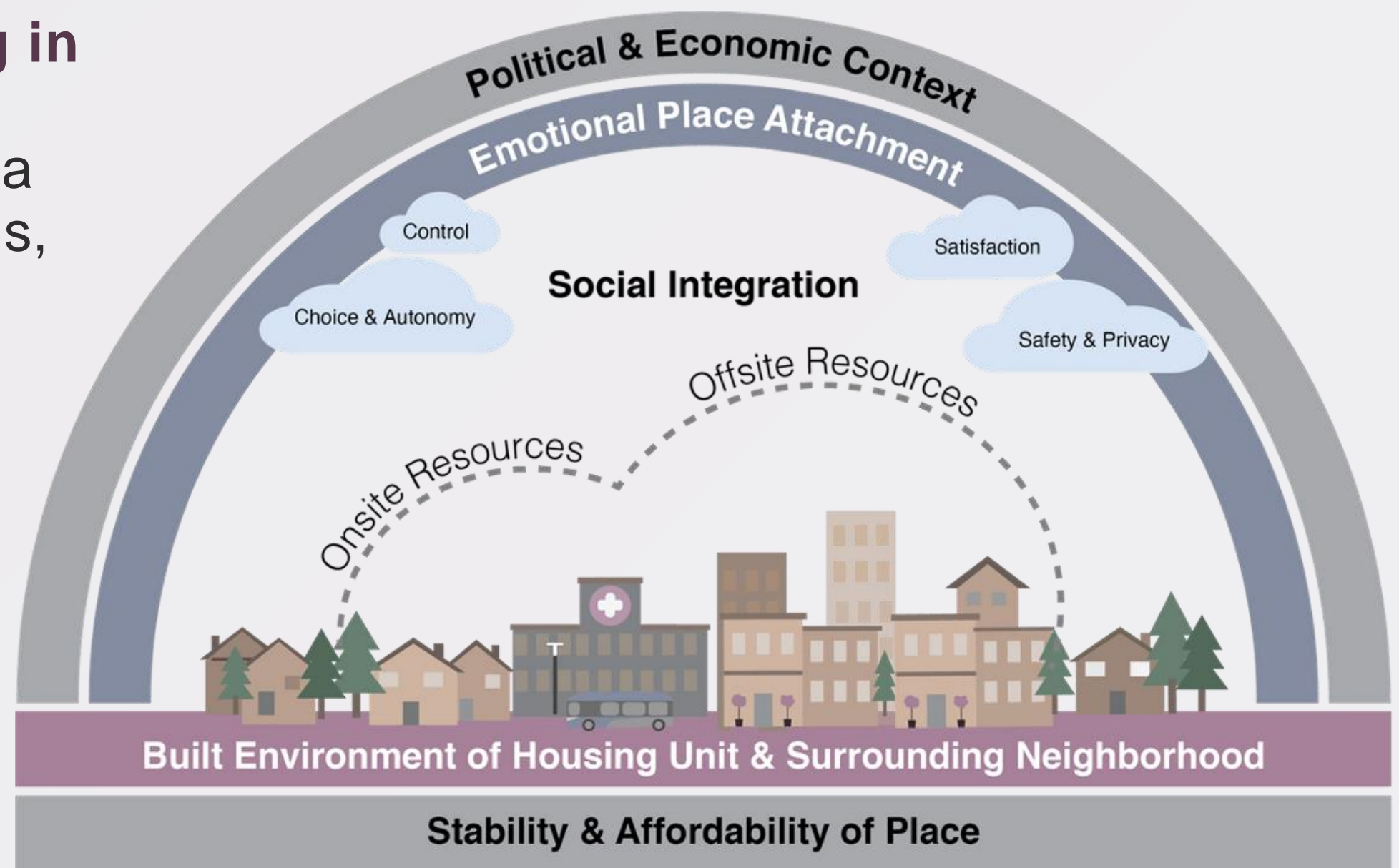
Introduction

- **Homelessness** and housing insecurity is a growing issue / rates increasing across Canada and beyond
- Overrepresentation among **BIPOC older adults and veterans** resulting from structural inequities, discrimination, policy failure
- Urgent need for shelters and **supportive housing models** to meet needs of OPEH



Background: Aging in the Right Place

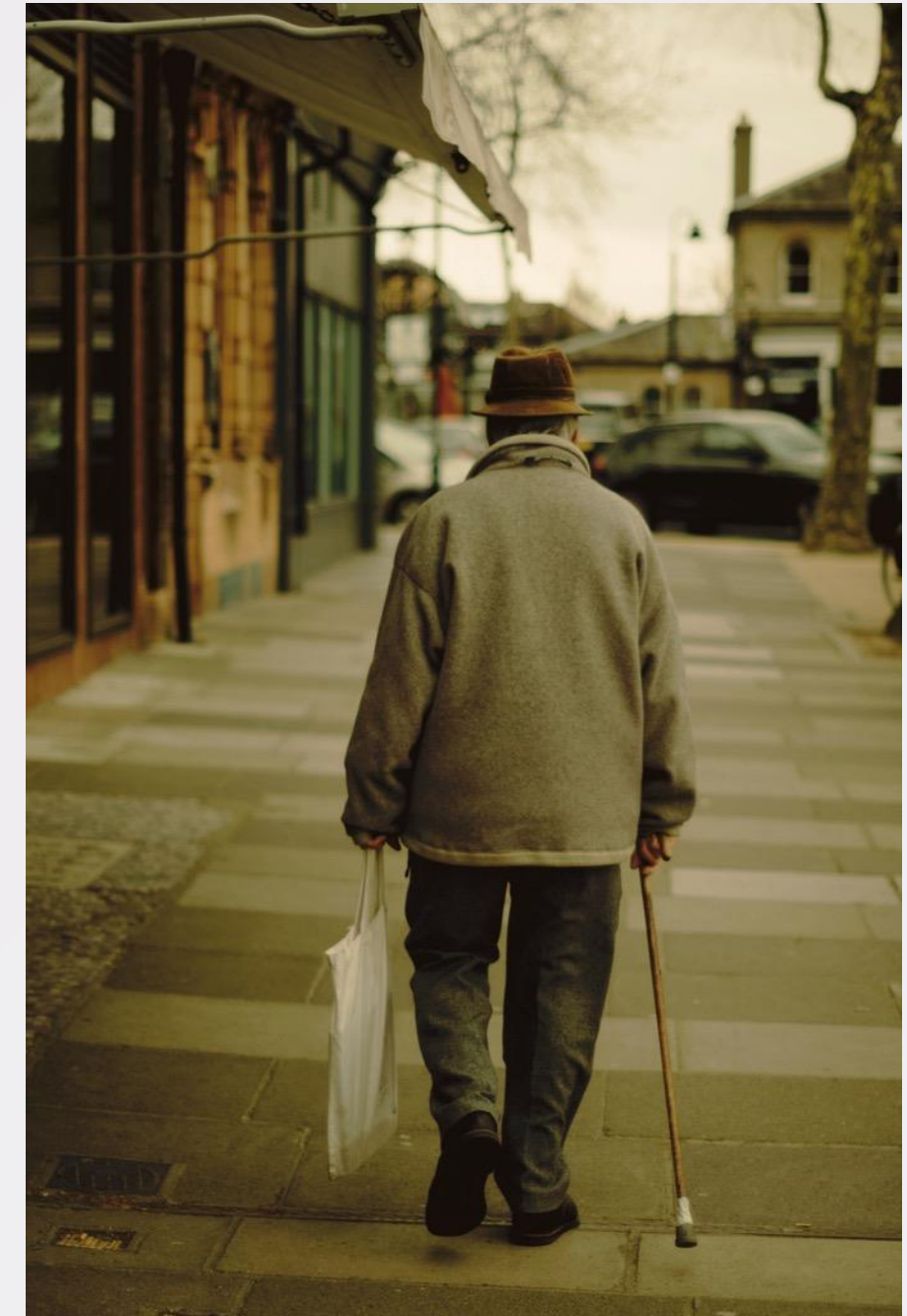
We recognize the importance of **aging in the right place** (Golant, 2015) – the perspective that people should age in a place that meets unique needs, desires, lifestyles, and vulnerabilities.



Graphic from Canham et al. (2021)

Background: Social integration

- A key indicator of aging in the right place
- No single definition of social integration
- Broadly, refers to **the extent to which a person is 'integrated' into society via social participation, relationships, connections, and engagements**



(Hartwell & Benson, 2007; Holt-Lunstad & Lefler, 2019)

Social Integration in Supportive Housing

What we know:

- Importance of social integration has been recognized in existing work on homelessness and housing
- Being/ feeling integrated can help to 'break the cycle' of homelessness
- It is a programmatic goal of the Housing First approach and other permanent supportive housing models

What we don't know:

- Little to no research to-date has examined:
- social integration within temporary supportive housing programs (THPs)
 - social integration among OPEH
 - the underlying mechanisms that can contribute to social integration

(Harris et al., 2029; Johnstone et al., 2016; Tsemberis et al., 2004)

Present Study



1

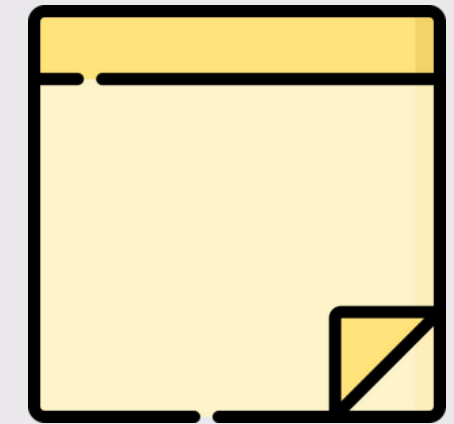
To what extent is social integration (e.g., support, participation, connection) felt in a THP for OPEH?

2

What factors appear to influence social integration among older persons experiencing homelessness in a THP?

Temporary Housing Program (THP)

Methods



- **Community-based participatory research (CBPR)** design
- Semi-structured **interviews** with **11 residents of a THP** for adults aged 60+ in Metro Vancouver
 - scattered-site housing program operating in four buildings at time of interviews
- **Realist-informed thematic analysis** to identify mechanisms and contexts which contribute to (dis)integration

(Fryer, 2022)

Findings

1

Technology access can facilitate connection to individuals and organizations

2

Frequent communication with program staff enhances feelings of social support and reduces isolation

3

Accessible environments promote social connection and participation

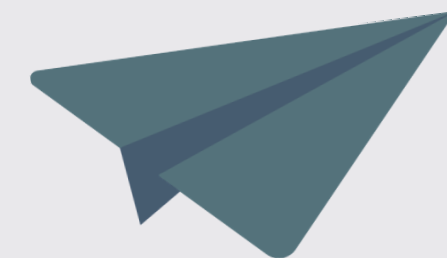
1

Technology Access



Social Connection with Friends, Family, Community

- Tablet loaning program on site
- Tablet training for those who needed/wanted it
- Phone access in-suite
- Free Internet on-site / in-suite

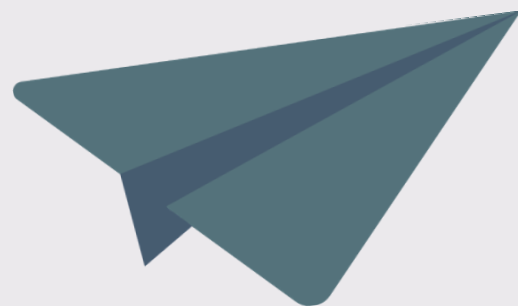


1

**Technology
Access**



**Social Connection with
Friends, Family, Community**



“[The Internet and tablet] allow me to connect with the world. And when you’re going through trauma and you’re homeless...you lose connection with a lot of people. You can lose friends...there’s a lot of grief involved. [The Internet and tablet] can give you entertainment...connection, like emails to other relatives... I have a mother who’s ill... it helps me to sometimes look up things on the Internet to help her...it gives me some meaning again.”

-THP Resident

2

Frequent Communication with Staff



Social Support and Reduced Isolation



- Reliable and frequent communication (in-person and via phone)
- Staff listening to & checking-in with residents often
- Clients built individualized/personal connections with staff

2

Frequent
Communication
with Staff



Social Support and
Reduced Isolation



[This organization] is functioning as kind of like a guiding light..., they call me, they give me updates on [housing]... remind me of this meeting here, meeting there... I've been put back into a situation where I'm all alone. There's no friends to back you up...no family. And yet this became like family.

-THP Resident

3

Accessible Environments



**Social Participation within THP
and Broader Community**

- Spaces on site and within community create social opportunities
- Gazebos, parks, casual recreation spaces build connections across residents
- Access to greenspace supported relaxation and informal social support
- Free to access & no fear of “loitering” or being forcibly removed



3

Accessible Environments



Social Participation within THP and Broader Community



When it's pouring [rain], you can go [to the gazebo], you can smoke. Although I shouldn't be smoking...but it's just a community. Like, how do I say that...communication with the other neighbors... It's also [a space for] community updates. Like, you'll find some information if anything's happening.

-THP Resident

Implications & Next Steps

1

Tech access can go a long way!



- **Training**, device loans, internet access

2

Spaces that are geographically and financially within reach become third places!



- **outdoor & indoor spaces** are both critical
- **no criminalization** or victimization
- allow for **leisure**, recreation, socialization

3

Regular & reliable communication with staff is critical!



- aligned with **trauma-informed** approaches
- **supports integration** within and beyond organization
- supports securing **long-term housing**

Thank you!

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