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Coping with change and adversity: The responses of older residents to the increasing residualisation of public housing in Sydney, Australia

Alan Morris
School of Social Sciences
University of New South Wales
UNSW SYDNEY NSW 2052
AUSTRALIA
a.morris@unsw.edu.au
Phone: 61293853541

Abstract

Since the early 1990s, public housing in Australia has become increasingly residualised. The high demand for public housing and its limited availability means that in order to be eligible, potential tenants usually have to be in 'greatest need'. The implications of this eligibility policy is that a proportion of the new tenants are severely disadvantaged and socially excluded, and there has been a marked increase in anti-social behaviour (vandalism, threatening behaviour, substance abuse and noise are the key features of the anti-social behaviour identified). For older (65 plus) residents this increasing residualisation has special significance. Many are long-established residents and relatively frail. The data for this paper is drawn primarily from 24 in-depth interviews with older residents in inner-city neighbourhoods in Sydney. The paper has two main objectives. It first considers the processes which have led to the residualisation of public housing and the features of this residualisation. Secondly, how older residents construct the anti-social behaviour, its impact on their everyday lives and how they cope, are explored. Loïc Wacquant's concept of advanced marginality is used to examine the residualisation of public housing. The effects of residualisation are assessed by exploring how it impacts on older residents' concept of home and, drawing on the guidelines developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), what is considered an age-friendly environment. What the article argues and illustrates is that the ability of older residents to cope varies and is largely dependent on the intensity of the residualisation and the attendant anti-social behavior. In most complexes, the older tenants had developed strategies to cope. The presence of safe spaces and strong social connections within their complexes meant that they were able to endure. However, in instances where the anti-social behavior was substantial, older residents had been forced to take drastic action. Most spent their days in community centres in other neighbourhoods. The paper first discusses the residualisation of public

housing in Australia. This is followed by a discussion of the methodology. The paper, drawing on the in-depth interviews, then analyses the responses of older public housing tenants to anti-social behavior.

Introduction

This study draws on in-depth interviews to explore the ways in which older public housing tenants (defined in this study as tenants who are 65 or older) in inner-city neighbourhoods in Sydney conceptualise and experience the increasing residualisation of public housing in their housing complex. I have focused on older tenants for several reasons. Firstly, they constitute a large proportion of tenants; in 2009-10 about one in five public housing tenants were 65 plus (AIHW, 2011). Secondly, most have been in public housing for a considerable period of time (see Table 1) and they are perhaps the group that has been most affected by residualisation. Finally, many moved into public housing when it was still constituted mainly by low-income nuclear families that had at least one member employed. They were thus able to discuss the changing composition and the impact of residualisation on their own lives. The changing nature of public housing and anti-social behaviour in Australia has been explored (Hall and Berry, 2007; Jacobs et al., 2010; Palmer et al., 2005), but there have been no extended studies on the impact of residualisation on older tenants.

This article has three main objectives. It first considers the processes which have led to the residualisation of public housing. It then examines older tenants' narratives around the changing composition of public housing. This is followed by an analysis of how older tenants view the impact of residualisation and how they cope with its consequences. ~~...~~ The article illustrates the impact of the unravelling of the inclusive society where unemployment and exclusion were minimal, and the implications of using public housing to house a section of the population that is fundamentally excluded.

~~Loic~~ Loïc Wacquant's concept of 'advanced urban marginality' is employed to analyse the changing composition of public housing. Two key features of advanced urban marginality identified by Wacquant – 'wage labour as a vector of social instability and life insecurity' and 'functional disconnection from macroeconomic trends' are utilised (Wacquant, 2008).

The impact of residualisation on older residents is assessed by ~~exploring how~~exploring how it effects their concept of home and what is considered an age-friendly environment. The concept of home and an age-friendly environment are particularly important for older people; Oswald and Wahl (2005: 24) conclude, 'The immediate home environment is the primary living space in old age; both in terms of the time older people spend in this space and its locale as the place where many activities occur'. The quality of the

immediate surrounds in regards to neighbours, security and amenities thus becomes more crucial for older people and they have a greater need for supportive environments. Age-friendly neighbourhoods encourage '… active ageing by optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people age' (WHO, 2007: 1). The World Health Organisation, drawing on focus groups in 33 cities across the globe created a check-list that can be used to gauge how age-friendly a city or neighbourhood is. They identify a number of components – adequate, accessible, clean and safe outdoor areas are crucial as is adequate and safe housing. The ability for social participation is highlighted. This should be facilitated by the availability of venues that are conveniently located. Respect and social inclusion are viewed as important. These would involve consultation and the recognition of older people's past and present contributions. Other aspects of an age-friendly environment include access to adequate community and health services; civic participation and employment possibilities and access to information. What I illustrate in the article is that for older ~~people   residualisation~~people residualisation, in varying ~~degress~~degrees, has contributed towards the concept of home being weakened and public housing complexes ~~becoming   less~~becoming less age-friendly environments. How residents cope with the increasing residualisation is assessed by reviewing their everyday activities and social connections. The importance of social ties and safe spaces in regards to coping with residualisation is highlighted.

It is important to note that there ~~are significant~~are significant variations in the inner-city neighbourhoods and public housing complexes under review. Besides varying levels of disadvantage and challenging tenants, some public housing complexes had far more tenant movement. The fluidity encouraged a lack of trust and uneasiness in these blocks as many fellow tenants were strangers.

The residualisation of public housing in Australia

In 1945 the first Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) created the framework for Australia's federal government to loan money to the state governments for the building of public housing (Hayward, 1996). Public housing was to be restricted to low-income households and returning servicemen and up to the 1980s most of the households had at least one employed adult and were occupied by couples or nuclear families and was often a stepping stone to home ownership (Hayward, 1996). By 1985 the public housing stock had reached about 250,000, around six per cent of all housing. Between 1985 and 1995 there was a substantial push by the Labor government to increase the supply and by the mid-1990s there were just under 390,000 dwellings (McIntosh, 1997).

The early 1990s heralded a major change in government policy. The cost of the public housing building program; its failure to make a substantial dent on

the waiting-list for public housing and the dominance of a neo-liberal perspective that viewed the private market as a better solution for the housing of low-income families, contributed towards the federal government rethinking its affordable housing policy (Marston, 2004; McIntosh, 1997). Funding for public housing was cut and the emphasis shifted to helping low-income households access the private rental market. The policy shift led to the public housing stock declining from about 389,000 dwellings in June 1995 to about 335,000 in June 2005 (McIntosh, 1997; AIHW, 2005). Public housing was sold off and in some cases demolished. Even if we take community housing (housing subsidised by government but managed by NGOs rather than State Housing Authorities) into account, one estimate is that social housing (public and community housing) dropped by almost 9 per cent between 2000/01 and 2004/05 (Hall and Berry, 2007: 12). By 2010, public housing accounted for only 4.5 per cent of the total housing stock (Jacobs *et al.*, 2010).

For low-income households access to the private rental market was enhanced by increasing the scope of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). Funded by the federal government, CRA allows households who are dependent on government income support to claim rent assistance if they are renting in the private rental market. From the early 1990s the amount of rent assistance eligible households could claim increased substantially and the eligibility criteria were revised so that more households were entitled to CRA. The CRA budget increased from just under $500 million in 1985-1986 to over $1.5 billion in 1993-1994 and in the same period funding for public housing declined from about $2.5 billion to about $1.5 billion (dollar amounts are constant 2000 dollars) (Johnston, 2002). There was a rapid increase in the number of CRA recipients – from 685,000 in 1989-90 to 970,000 in 1993-1994 (Wilkinson, 2005: 26). In 1995, in his last year in office, Paul Keating, the then Labor Party prime minister, summed up his government's new affordable housing approach, when he stated that the policy's aim was to 'Reduce public housing waiting lists by improving the scope for people to choose private rental accommodation' (in Wilkinson, 2005).

The decline in the public housing stock over the last two decades has meant that accessing it has become exceptionally difficult and it is reserved for low-income households in 'greatest need' (Atkinson *et al.*, 2007; Jacobs and Arthurson, 2003; Jacobs *et al.*, 2010). Nation-wide in 2009/10, 75 per cent of newly assisted public housing tenants were those in 'greatest need' compared to 51 per cent in 2007/08 (AIHW, 2011). The end result is that a significant proportion of more recent public housing tenants are severely disadvantaged - unemployed, poor and socially excluded (Arthurson and Jacobs, 2006; Palmer *et al.*, 2004). Psychiatric disability and substance abuse are common (Dalton and Rowe, 2004).

The population of public housing in the housing complexes under review increasingly reflect what ~~Loic~~ Wacquant (2008) has called 'advanced urban marginality'. Wacquant argues that a distinguishing feature of the present period is that during the fordist phase employment provided security and solidarity, however in the present period it is a 'source of social fragmentation and precariousness for those confined to the border zones of the employment sphere' (Waquant, 2008: 234). This certainly captures the status of a large proportion of public housing tenants in Australia. A majority are either jobless or in casual, intermittent and precarious employment. In the contemporary period Waquant concludes that for a section of the population, there is a 'functional disconnection from macroeconomic trends' - the state of the economy makes little difference in regards to employment prospects. In Australia's public housing ~~estates the~~estates the proportion of the population that is unemployed has continued to rise despite consistent economic growth since the early 1990s. In 2001, 75 per cent of ~~social housing~~social housing tenants were not in the labour market; only 16 per cent were employed and eight per cent were actively looking for work (Hughes, 2006). A more recent study found that about three quarters of social housing tenants were not in the labour force and that only ten per cent were employed full-time (ABS, 2011).

Methodology

This article is based mainly on data from 22 semi-structured in-depth interviews, two of the interviews were with a married couple, thus there were 24 interviewees, all of ~~whom were~~whom were public housing tenants in inner-city neighbourhoods in Sydney. They were recruited through advertisements placed on appropriate notice boards, and seniors publications, through organisations catering for seniors ~~and word~~and word-of-mouth. The gender composition, age, longevity of residence, marital status and location are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of public housing tenants interviewed

Interview	Sex	Age	Number of years in current accommodation	Marital status	Location
1	F	68	16	Divorced	Alexandria
2	M	75	18	Divorced	Potts Point
3	F	68	20	Widow	Waterloo
4	F	72	20	Divorced	Waterloo
5	F	70	40	Widow	Waterloo
6	F	70	24	Widow	Waterloo
7	F	68	16	Widow	Waterloo
8	F	70	23	Divorced	Waterloo
9	F	84	27	Widow	The Rocks
10	F	70	26	Never married	The Rocks
11	M	70	9	Never married	Woolloomooloo
12	M	68	12	Never married	Woolloomooloo
13	F	85	27	Widow	Surry Hills

14	M	72	21	Never married	Surry Hills
15	F	85	46	Widow	Surry Hills
16	F	71	20	Widow	Surry Hills
17	couple	75 /80	12	Married	Surry Hills
18	F	77	21	Widow	Surry Hills
19	F	77	17	Married	Surry Hills
20	F	75	10	Married	Surry Hills
21	couple	76/81	18	Married	Surry Hills
22	F	78	8	Married	Surry Hills

Only two of the interviewees had been in their present accommodation for less than ten years; ~~three for~~three for 10-15 years; five for 16-19 years and the remaining 14 had been in their present dwelling for 20 years or more. Their long residential history meant that interviewees had an intimate knowledge of changes in public housing. Six of the interviewees were male and 18 were female. At the time of the interview, five were still married, four were divorced, nine had been widowed and four had never married. Nine of the interviewees were aged between 65 and 70; ten between 71 and 79 and five were 80 or older.

 As this is a qualitative study there was no attempt to ensure that it was a representative sample. However, there was certainly a diversity of interviewees and there was no obvious source of bias in the sample. The data obtained was rich and allowed for an explanation of the issues under investigation. There was a good deal of consistency in the responses. Interviewees were purposively selected on the basis of their age, housing tenure and location. The limited number of interviews means that the study must be viewed as an exploratory study.

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Older Tenants' narratives around the changing composition of public housing tenants

The arrival of 'difficult' neighbours

Almost all of the older tenants interviewed felt that their housing complex had changed fundamentally over the last decade and that a proportion of the more recent tenants were 'difficult'. A common descriptor used for the new residents was that many had 'problems'. A central shift commented on was that when they (the interviewees) entered public housing, nuclear families were dominant and most of the men were employed in stable, albeit low paid jobs, whereas in the contemporary period, many of the more recent residents are not in the labour force, live by themselves and a substantial number have mental health issues and are drug and or alcohol dependent.

In 2009-10, 47 per cent of social housing tenants lived by themselves and 20 per cent were single parents (ABS, 2011). A tenant, who had lived in public housing for over thirty years, summed up the perceived change in the following ~~way :~~way:

> Around where I live … we have a lot of people with problems … When I first came here it was more for low-income earners … My husband were still working and my son was still at home doing an apprenticeship. There were a lot of people like that (Female, 85).

Another long-standing tenant commented,

> Ah yes, when I first moved in, it was very nice. You had couples~~,~~ … elderly couples like me, but then because they moved into better places, with their family and that, and so then the other people came in … Like single people and people that have lots of problems, and they don't know where to put them so they put them in my building (Female, 72).

It is not unusual for the working classes to make significant distinctions between themselves and others (Watt, 2006). In the case of older public housing tenants interviewed, all of whom lived through the full employment fordist wage labour era, most were acutely aware of the differences between their own autobiographies and those of a substantial proportion of the newer tenants. Implicitly and often explicitly there was a perception that many of the newer arrivals had ~~an impairment~~impairment. Linked to this view, was a tendency to romanticise the earlier period of public housing and present it as devoid of difficult individuals. This resonates with Ravetz's (2001:177) study of public housing estates in the UK. She commented on how 'virtually everywhere older tenants speak of a golden age when their estate "used to be lovely"'. Noteworthy, is that unlike the United Kingdom or the United States where race is viewed as a significant factor (see Watt, 2006), none of the interviewees spoke about race, ethnicity or religion when discussing the changing social composition.

Tenants with mental health issues and the lack of support

The older residents employed what Hasting (2004) has labelled a 'pathologising discourse'. A common narrative when talking about the more recent tenants was that a substantial proportion had serious mental health problems and that this explained their anti-social behaviour.

> Yes, it used to be working families or older residents whose families have grown up, but nowadays it's people with special needs. It's families with problems, or singles with problems, or single mothers with problems. Alcoholism, drugs, disabilities, mental health is a really big problem. Public housing ... was increasingly being used to house people with serious mental health problems … The requirements to be … eligible for public housing now are very strict. Low income is not

enough you have to have other needs as well and so you're getting more and more problem tenants (Female, 68).

A tenant who had been in the same apartment for close on twenty years and was active in the local Tenants' Union saw the changes stemming from the Richmond Report which recommended deinstitutionalisation, as a key turning point:

Since the Richmond Report I think there's been a downward trend because see now there's nowhere for the people to go … So what they're doing they're putting the majority … into public housing and there's no social equilibrium as such … The … people with the drug problem they need rehabilitation as well you know which they're not getting so they just wander around aimlessly and it's like a network you know. If there's a drug dealer out there … everyone seems to know the contact. Consequently … they finish up with about half a dozen people or more sleeping on their floor … (Male, 72).

A common view was that if public housing was to be used to accommodate people with serious psychiatric and or substance abuse problems, it was essential that the State Housing Authority takes responsibility for ensuring that these tenants are given support:

A 77 year-old, long-standing female tenant commented,

It puts a lot of pressure on particularly older residents when you get tenants who don't take their medication and the mental health services can't cope and it's really, really hard at times … with tenants with mental health problems. When they're taking their medication they tend to be okay … What needs to be done is mental health patients need to be looked after a lot better and not dumped in public housing … If they're going to be in the public area for heaven's sake they need support systems.

Noteworthy, is that the narratives of older tenants in regards to these residents were generally empathetic. They did not necessarily internalise the official discourse that constructed these tenants as 'bad' and 'undeserving' (Marston, 2004). Rather, they felt that they should be given the support necessary so that they could be 'good' tenants and neighbours. Perhaps their own experience of being marginal gave them the capacity to empathise with these difficult tenants. There was a recognition that they needed affordable and adequate shelter, but there was a strong view that they should be supported so that they were able to live harmoniously with their neighbours.

Increasing fluidity

Another perceived shift is the increased fluidity of tenants. Historically, the movement of public housing tenants was minimal and this gave tenants the capacity to develop strong bonds. Interviewees spoke of how the constant movement of tenants in the contemporary period meant that it was more difficult to develop ‑relationships with their neighbours. The movement of tenants was much greater in the more residualised areas. A tenant in an apartment block where residualisation has been extensive, observed,

> People come and go in Housing Commission and you don't know who you've got, and … they come and go all the time. You wouldn't know your neighbour. In the old days you did, but not now. You wouldn't know who is at the top or at the bottom (Female, 72).

Residualisation and anti-social behaviour

A common view was that many of the new entrants, more especially the young, single men, did not adhere to what is generally accepted as acceptable, neighbourly behaviour. They did not subscribe to what Rose (2001) has called the 'grammars of living', which broadly prescribes what is 'acceptable behaviour'. All of the interviewees commented that the ~~changing composition~~changing composition had led to a substantial increase in tenant behaviour that caused them distress but in most cases it would be difficult to press criminal charges. In their classic study of Winston Parva, Elias and Scotson (1999: xviii) argue

> Exclusion and stigmatisation of the outsiders by the established group were … powerful weapons used by the latter to maintain their identity, to assert their superiority, keeping others firmly in their place.

There is ~~little doubt~~little doubt that a few interviewees perceived that they were superior and tended to stigmatise the new arrivals. However, the interviews suggested that most the older residents ~~wereaccepting~~were accepting of newly arrived ~~r~~residents who they felt respected them and the housing complex. The main anti-social behaviours identified by interviewees were excessive littering, noise, threatening behaviour and vandalism.

Previous research has shown that for public housing residents, local issues like crime, drugs and vandalism are of great concern (Arthurson and Jacobs, 2006; Dalton and Rowe, 2004; Mee, 2007; Palmer *et al.*, 2005). Anti-social behaviour certainly had an impact on the quality of older tenants' lives and their conceptualisation of home. However, there were significant variations in how residents responded and were affected and, as Arthurson and Jacobs (2006) found, to a large extent it depends on each individual's personal experience. The extent to which anti-social behaviour was a feature of the everyday experience of older tenants varied from apartment block to apartment block. In highly sought after public housing apartment blocks where residential movement was minimal, residualisation and anti-social behaviour were not significant. Interviewees who felt that their

apartment blocks had experienced marked residualisation and tenant movement were far more likely to have experienced anti-social behaviour. The anti-social behaviour had a number of impacts – a perception of not being secure; an invasion of privacy; degradation of the physical environment and the disruption of social connections and leisure. These destabilised, in varying degrees, the ability of interviewees to feel comfortable in their homes and the immediate vicinity.

A perception of not being secure

A key feature of a sense of home for older people is that it is a physical space 'where one feels secure, both psychologically and physically' (Despres and Lord, 2005: 326). Many of the interviewees had had encounters with fellow tenants that had made them anxious. In apartment blocks the issue of security extends beyond the apartment to the common areas - the lifts, corridors, foyers and the spaces around the block. The sense of not being safe and the intimidatory and unpredictable behaviour of some tenants was probably the biggest issue faced by interviewees. Many were fearful of some of their fellow tenants. Fear is defined as a sense of unease, of not being sure what will happen. The nights were especially bad.

> [Older tenants] … go down to the main entrance … The older people sit down there and these young hoodlums bang on the door, "Let me in; let me in. I've lost me key" or whatever you know … and if the older people don't get up and let them in they get all the f's's and c's bordering on physical violence you know. (Male, 72).

Interviewees were worried that they if they confronted or reported a troublesome tenant, there could be retribution:

> I'm just saying you have got to be wary. If I rile him it does make your way of life not so good because they then go out of their way to be nasty (Female, 70).

A female tenant (85) was intimidated by her next door neighbour:

> I'm not happy with the fellow next door … He's a dreadful man but there's nothing that they can do about it. They [NSW Housing employees] came here and interviewed him the other day and they came and saw me … There's nowhere to put him, see. He slams the doors and … floods his unit out. He's a man you can't help. If you offered him anything he'd swear at you … If he's coming one way I go the other.

There was a perception that many of the new tenants did not adhere to the accepted grammars of living:

> I don't have a complete feeling of safety living in the area by any means … There's so many drug addicts and drunks and the people you know

swear non-stop … They're, I guess, they're [a] very anti-social lot of people (Female, 70).

Fear that something untoward may happen meant that older tenants tended to restrict their movements, especially after dark.

You'll find people here will not venture out of a night-time. It's in your own interests not to go out unless they're escorted by somebody. You know it's bad (Male, 72).

A few interviewees were constantly fearful:

I keep my door locked and do not open it for anybody. It's so bad. I feel threatened … I have security. I have bars across the windows. … They [NSW Housing] wouldn't pay for it. [Said] if I wanted to, I could put up my own bars … And I have a security door. As soon as it starts to get dark, I'm home. I'm in with the door closed and that's it. It's scary (Female, 72).

Residualisation increased the number of unpredictable tenants. Although most of the interviewees were able to maintain their usual routine, in some instances their sense of home had been undermined. These interviewees did not feel at ease in their immediate environment. Rather, there was a constant wariness and it was no longer an age-friendly environment; 'The experience of crime and the fear of being a victim of crime can act as direct barriers to the maintenance of a 'normal daily life for many older people' (Phillipson, 2011: 284).

An invasion of privacy
An age-friendly neighbourhood implies an environment where older people feel that they are in control of their personal space both within their home and immediately outside of it: 'Home as privacy … means the possession of a certain territory with the power to exclude other persons from that territory and to prohibit surveillance of the territory by other persons' (Somerville, 1992: 532). The invasion of privacy can take various forms. Physical breaching of the home is probably the most acute form. However, this was rare. What was common, and again this can be related back to residualisation, was the invasion of privacy by excessive noise. Numerous studies have found that noise is a major contributor to dissatisfaction with the neighbourhood (Shon, 2007;). Excessive noise and disturbed sleep were often mentioned by interviewees: 'Yes, from the fights and the arguments. Yes, that kind of thing … You don't get a proper night's sleep' (Female, 70). Drug and alcohol use were seen as the main precipitator of unruly, noisy behaviour:

They tend to get up in the middle of the night, and run up and down the corridors and yell and scream then the drunks come home and they do the same thing. They bang on the security doors because they've forgotten their key or they've forgotten the flat they're trying to get into so

it can be very disturbing and also for families with young kids. (Female, 85).

A common intrusion was the screams of drug-users:
Every morning between four and six you can hear screaming and ranting and raving from people who are coming down off highs … (Male, 72).

In some apartment blocks domestic violence also contributed to the making of a noisy, unpredictable and difficult environment:
I haven't got very good neighbours and it's not a happy place. There's six floors and I'm on the fifth floor and … they fight all the time; throw their furniture over the balcony … And how would you like to be in bed and at one o'clock in the morning, someone starts throwing the furniture over the balcony from the next floor and half of it lands on your balcony … That's very scary (Female, 72).

Degradation of the physical environment
The creation of orderly and pleasant public spaces is viewed as an important component of an age-friendly environment (Phillipson, 2011). Older people who find themselves in an environment characterised by decay and neglect are more prone to depression and isolation (Scharf et al., 2002; WHO, 2007). Interviewees complained that residualisation had been accompanied by an increase in public drug use and dealing, vandalism and littering.
The fire escape is where the drug addicts go and do drugs and leave their syringes. And they urinate there and leave a terrible smell. What can we do … We talked about it … and the police come. We have many drug addicts (Female, 75).

Creating an unsightly mess in common areas was a common complaint:
And I do have someone next door to me who was throwing all his rubbish over the fence … He's throwing his rubbish and glass and everything either into the bush in front of my place … (Male, 68,).

Vandalism was a serious concern for interviewees:
You can go through those glass doors sometimes and you'll find one smashed or they've broken the gate where the cars come in. They smash that because they've got nothing better to do … (Female, 85).

Interviewees concluded that vandalism was often linked to drug and alcohol abuse.

Most interviewees were proud of their complex and were demoralised by persistent vandalism:

You're probably aware of the upgrading we're going through at the moment … but I pointed out at a meeting last week that while all this upgrading is going on the rest of the place is deteriorating. All the garbage bags disposals have had the doors pulled off and I'm saying what's the security guard doing? … What's he doing when all these things are being whipped off and graffiti is being put through our building? (Male, 72).

Well-maintained and pleasant common areas in housing complexes have been identified by the WHO as a key determinant of an age-friendly city and active ageing. The outside environment has 'a major impact on the mobility, independence and quality of life of older people' and affects their ability to age in place (WHO, 2007: 12). In some of the housing complexes excessive vandalism helped mobilise older residents and was a key focus of the tenants' associations. The large number of older residents in these organisations encouraged social connections and inclusion among the older residents and helped them cope with challenging tenants.

Disruption of social connections and leisure

The impact of anti-social behaviour on social connections and leisure was uneven. All of the interviewees said that they had friends in their housing complex and in most instances residualisation and anti-social behaviour had not seriously constrained their interaction or social networks or activity. Unlike the findings of a study in Adelaide where public housing residents were 'too fearful to even open their front door' (Palmer et al., 2005: 400), there were few instances of older tenants not interacting because of being overwhelmed by fear. Interviewees were circumspect and careful, but in most instances they were not anxious about venturing out during the day and engaging with their fellow tenants. In most complexes the public spaces were well used by older tenants. The public spaces would be gardens in the housing complex or a community hall in the larger estates. The strong social connections and the persistence of safe spaces were crucial elements in the ability of older interviewees to cope with residualisation and difficult neighbours. In Waterloo, where the level of residualisation was most advanced and anti-social behaviour most intense, the everyday lives of interviewees were seriously disrupted. Three of the interviewees resident in Waterloo coped by spending t their days in a community centre in an adjoining neighbourhood:

This is my home [the community centre] … I see more of these people than I see of my family, because my daughter lives away … They [the public housing tenants] fight all the time … It's not a very nice atmosphere, so I only go home to sleep. And I'm up bright and early in the morning. And then sometimes weekends we go out (Female, 72).

A couple of the interviewees from Waterloo commented that the reputation and condition of their housing complex meant that family and friends were reluctant to visit. This resonates with Wacquant's definition of advanced urban marginality where certain neighbourhoods become stigmatised due to a concentration of advanced urban marginality. These areas are 'perceived by both outsiders and insiders as social purgatories, leprous badlands at the heart of postindustrial metropolis where only the refuse of society would agree to dwell' (Wacquant, 2008: 237). An older Waterloo resident observed,

> It's got such a bad reputation, the place now, that you know like my relatives and that, they don't like to come now because there's graffiti everywhere and we've got damage to property all the time and it means that a lot of people don't want to come here and even I suppose myself [don't want to be here], that's why I come down here [the community centre]. You know. I'm down here [at the local community centre] five days a week (Female, 72).

Although stigma was partially due to the media representations of these housing estates (see Palmer et al., 2004), the interviewees concerned felt that the actions of some of their fellow residents certainly facilitated the ability of the media to construct these areas as 'dangerous'.

Conclusion

As illustrated advanced urban marginality as depicted by Wacquant is becoming a central feature of public housing. A growing proportion of residents are either in precarious unstable employment or permanently shut out of the formal labour market and have little possibility of formal employment whatever the economic conditions. The advanced urban marginality and resulting residualisation that characterise the public housing estates where interviewees were resident has contributed to an increase in anti-social behaviour. Older residents who historically have been 'good citizens' and who lived for a large part of their lives in an economy characterised by full employment now have to coexist with an increasing number of residents (mainly male) who besides being unemployed have minimal family and/or social connections and often have a serious mental health and/ or substance abuse problem.. As Young (1999: 12) eloquently concludes these '... young men are bereft of social position and destiny. They are cast adrift; a discarded irrelevance locked in a situation of structural unemployment ...'. It is not surprising that many of these young men engage in anti-social behaviour; 'Being denied the respect of others they create a subculture that revolves around masculine powers and 'respect'' (Young, 1999: 12).

This increasing use of public housing for the accommodation of residual individuals has, to varying degrees, altered the way interviewees perceive public housing and whether they see it as merely a place to live or home. Older residents who lived in apartment blocks where advanced marginality and residualisation were dominant features tended to view their unit merely as a place to sleep. These blocks were decidedly not age-friendly. Older tenants did not feel safe in their apartment block and they were not able to congregate in accessible public spaces in the housing complex. They did not feel respected or included. These apartment blocks tended to be characterised by high levels of tenant movement. In these blocks older residents coped by spending their days in community centres geared towards older people in neighbouring areas. In other housing complexes older residents were able to create enough space between themselves and difficult fellow tenants to lead a decent life and view their complex as home. The large number of older tenants in these blocks and well-resourced and safe community halls on the estate, made it easier for older residents in these locations to have social connections and create an age-friendly environment and nullify the impacts of difficult tenants. They had rich social networks with fellow residents and during the day were able to use the public spaces in their complex and there was a high level of place attachment. A number were active in the local Tenants' Association which gave them a sense of respect and place.

Notwithstanding residualisation and anti-social behaviour, all of the interviewees were determined to stay in public housing. A common response to the question of whether they wanted to move was, 'You would have to carry me out in a box'. This suggests that in most instances residualisation had not created an unmanageable situation. The interviewees could continue with their everyday activities and maintain social connections. Many of the interviewees had been able to adjust and cope with difficult and challenging tenants. Also, they were aware of how privileged they were in regards to the rent they paid (a maximum of 25 per cent of income) and their security of tenure (virtually guaranteed). Interviewees from the most disadvantaged neighbourhood were less enthusiastic. This was due to the higher levels of disorder in their apartment blocks and the neighbourhood. However, none of the interviewees had that terrible desperation to move out that is common in some United States and United Kingdom housing projects (Blokland, 2008; Ravetz, 2001). Also, the alternative housing tenure, the private rental market, was unthinkable due to the high rents and insecurity.

Three key issues emerge from the study. Firstly, a policy of making public housing primarily the domain of people with 'greatest need' has serious implications. For older residents there is a strong possibility that their quality of life and concept of home will be affected. Living in a housing complex with individuals who are unpredictable and threatening can be difficult and

unsettling. This is especially so if there is a prevalence of comorbidity of psychiatric disorder and substance use.

Secondly, if public housing is to become a major site for accommodating people with complex or special needs, government should do all it can to ensure the necessary support so that residents who require support are given the assistance required to improve their wellbeing and their capacity to be an 'acceptable' neighbour and tenant (see Muir et al., 2008). Thirdly, advanced urban marginality and residualisation of public housing potentially creates a challenging governance environment. Anti-social behaviour, if not dealt with in a considered and effective manner, can over time create untenable social spaces (Flint, 2006).

Ideally public housing should be available to all individuals and households who do not have the financial resources to access housing in the private housing market. The present policy, by making it a scarce resource and limiting its access overwhelmingly to people with complex/special needs, contributes to perpetuating and intensifying public housing's stigmatised and excluded status. Ideally, what is required is a major expansion of affordable housing so that all citizens have the capacity to access decent, affordable and secure housing and individuals who need support are given the support required so as to increase their ability to live amiably with their fellow tenants.

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