

Community Resources & Needs Assessment Report of Regent Park

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March, 2012



Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the community needs assessment based on the community index of well-being survey. It includes demographic information, living standards, health status, democratic engagement, community vitality, time use, leisure and culture and the environment. The survey was distributed in two different ways; online and hard copy. The survey was done during the year 2011, and it was distributed among Regent Park residents and some organizations. This survey helped to identify different factors that residents encountering in the neighbourhood.

In addition, we interviewed many organizations to understand the issues and gaps of Regent Park community. To look at the bigger picture, it is important and useful to analyze the community needs assessment.

Last but not least, this report demonstrates the needs assessment of Regent Park in many different perspectives. The community resources and needs assessment identifies the gaps in the community, and raise awareness to the available community resources.

To build a healthy community, emphasis will be given to community strength and highlight the challenges that the community is facing in terms of accessibility.

Table of Contents	Page
Executive Summary	
Table of Contents	
Introduction.....	3
History of Regent Park.....	3
Revitalization.....	5
Purpose of the Survey.....	6
Report Structure.....	8
Data Analysis.....	9
Highest level of schooling (age group).....	9
Highest level of schooling (gender).....	10
Marital Status.....	10
People in your household.....	11
Children living at home.....	11
Civic/Immigration status.....	12
Length of time in Canada.....	13
Current situation.....	14
Self identity.....	15
Household Income, Financial situation.....	16
Enough money to buy food, Saving account.....	17
Most Important Financial problem.....	18
Satisfaction with accommodation.....	19
Amount Spend on Housing.....	19
Use of Support Services,.....	19
Day to Day Involvement.....	20
Changes in living standard, Looking for work.....	21
Daily living, Garbage or litter.....	22
Drugs, Ideal teenagers.....	23
Leadership, Skills building.....	24
Tutoring programs, Recreation programs.....	25
Job development, Life and stress.....	26
Key Informant Interviews.....	27
Recommendation.....	29
Conclusion.....	29
Theory of Change.....	30

Introduction

The neighbourhood index of well-being 2011-12 survey was done by Immigrant Women Integration Program (IWIP) trainees from communities across Toronto. It was also done under the supervision of The Centre for Community Learning and Development (CCL&D) staff in IWIP. The survey was done in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods in order to understand how community services and life conditions impact on people. For example, how they feel and think of the community well-being, their commitment to the community, and also how they feel about sense of belonging in their neighbourhood.

History of Regent Park

Regent Park is one of the oldest and largest social housing developments in Canada. Regent Park was developed in two sections. (North and South) North Regent Park was built from 1947 to 1957 as a low-rise and townhouse development that occupies the area north of Dundas Street to Gerrard Street. It was designed along British "Garden City", ideals to encourage low-rise development, limit car use, and provide modern living arrangement.



REGENT PARK NORTH

The South Regent Park is constructed from 1957 to 1959 in South of Dundas Street, which is composed mainly of high-rise buildings and townhouses, and both were considered slum clearance projects.



REGENT PARK SOUTH

Regent Park was originally designed as a transitional community for those who are on social assistance, or low-income workers paying rent- geared-to- income. In the last two decades, it has evolved into largely an immigrant settlement community. Immigrants or newcomers, face many barriers when coming to a new country such as Canada. Some of the barriers that immigrants face include 1) language barriers since for many immigrants English is a second language, 2) lack of recognition of foreign credentials which makes it difficult to find a job based on their professions. Many immigrants end up getting precarious jobs with no benefit and low wage. 3) It is also hard for them to get affordable housing due to their income, as a result they settle in priority neighbourhoods that offer affordable housings. It is evident that more than half of Regent Park population are being immigrant. 4) There are also many discriminations that immigrants face based on their race/ethnicity, immigration status, sex/gender, class, sexual orientations, disability, age,etc.



Regent Park was very popular with residents, politicians, and media for the first few years of its existence. Before the redevelopment, Regent Park was popularly known as Cabbagetown because mainly Irish residents often grew cabbages in their front yards to survive from poverty. After the redevelopment, the new area was called “Regent Park”, which reflects the increased green space, and the presence of Regent Park in the street in the new development. In fact, it was generally regarded as a new beginning for the residents and for the neighbourhood.

Residents and service providers have been advocating for change in Regent Park for many years. Despite some initial successes, tenants gradually faced many issues through these long-term years. They have suffered from inward-looking space of the area, which isolated them from rest of the city, and brings a number of problems such as, violence, crime, drugs, and prostitution. However people in Regent Park were building a strong community with each other, and strong ties to their neighbourhood to solve the problems, although they were facing poverty.

Revitalization

The City Council and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) have decided to fix some past mistakes and tackle these issues, rooted in poverty and social isolation by redeveloping and revitalizing the neighbourhood. After some community consultation, the Regent Park revitalization plan was launched in 2005. The entire project will cost up to \$1 billion and it might take fifteen years, and will comprise of six phases. Phase one is finished, while phase two is under construction.



The new neighbourhood is planned according to modern urban ideas, mixed-income, mixed-use neighbourhoods, mid-rise buildings studded with taller ones. The new development will include the same number as rent-geared-to- income units, but the most important change will be the reintroduction of cross-street in the area and the replacement of the regular social housing with a mix of social housing, market-priced housing and retail.

In addition, the purpose of the revitalization is that with a mix of housing and with a more visually appealing neighbourhood, residents will be less socially stigmatized. It is also hoped that the introduction of traffic and mixed uses will reduce crime. Another reason is to spread social housing out across the city, with the hope that will integrate mix-income with middle and high-income.

Purpose of the survey

- To gain a better understanding of the communities of Toronto
- To gain a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the community
- Provide an opportunity for community-based organizations to benefit from the survey results and improve their services
- Gain a better understanding about the well-beings of residents of priority neighbourhoods in Toronto

- Determine the areas of the improvements in the neighbourhood
- Make recommendations to community leaders about how to improve their services

The survey was designed based on Canadian Index of well-being. The survey includes 8 different categories:

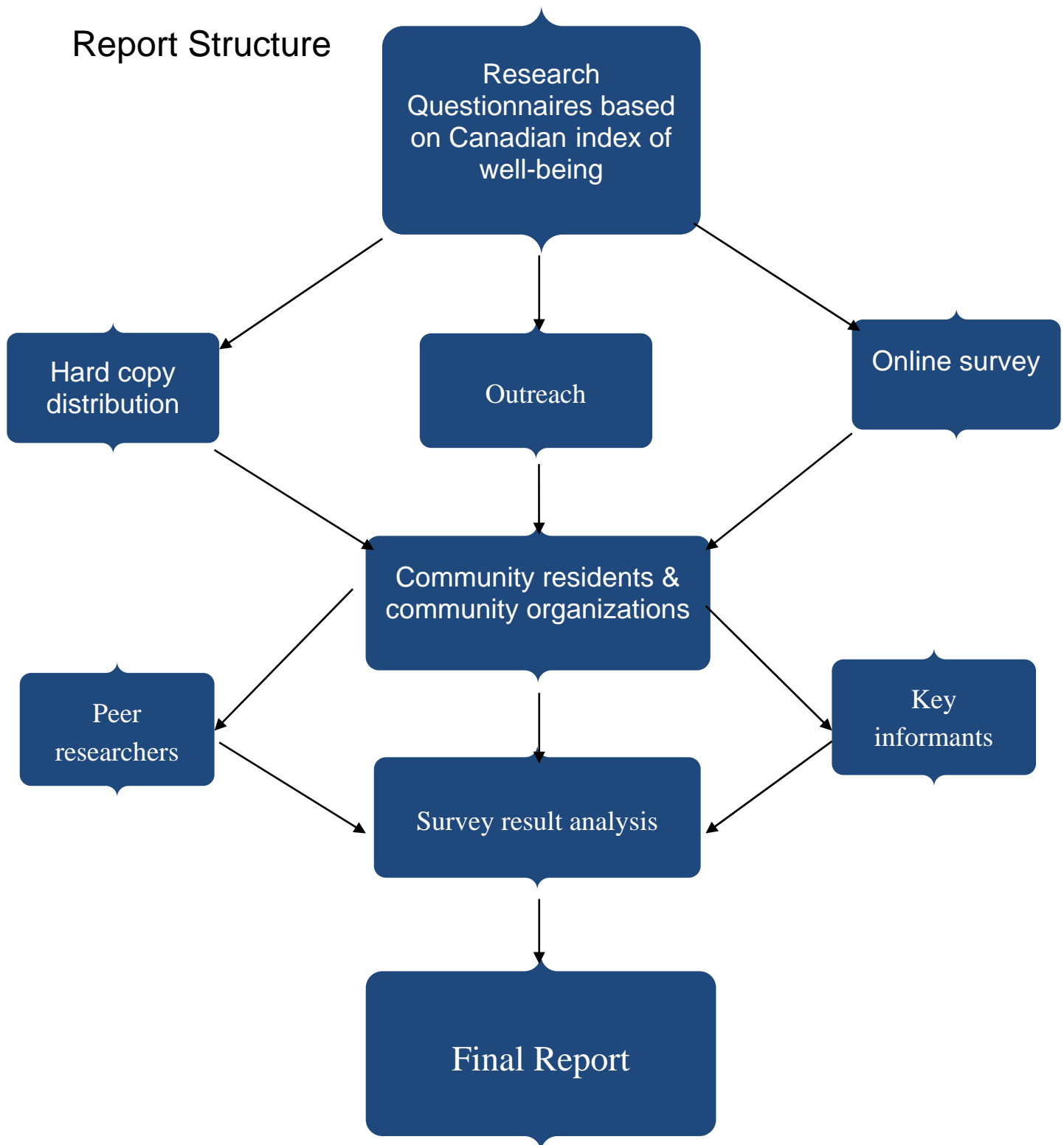
- Demographic Information
- Living Standards
- Health Status
- Democratic Engagement
- Community Vitality
- Time Use
- Leisure and Culture
- The Environment

Methodology

- Outreach (Online & Hardcopy)
- 62 responded (Regent Park)
- Current residents of Regent Park
- Employees of Community Organizations

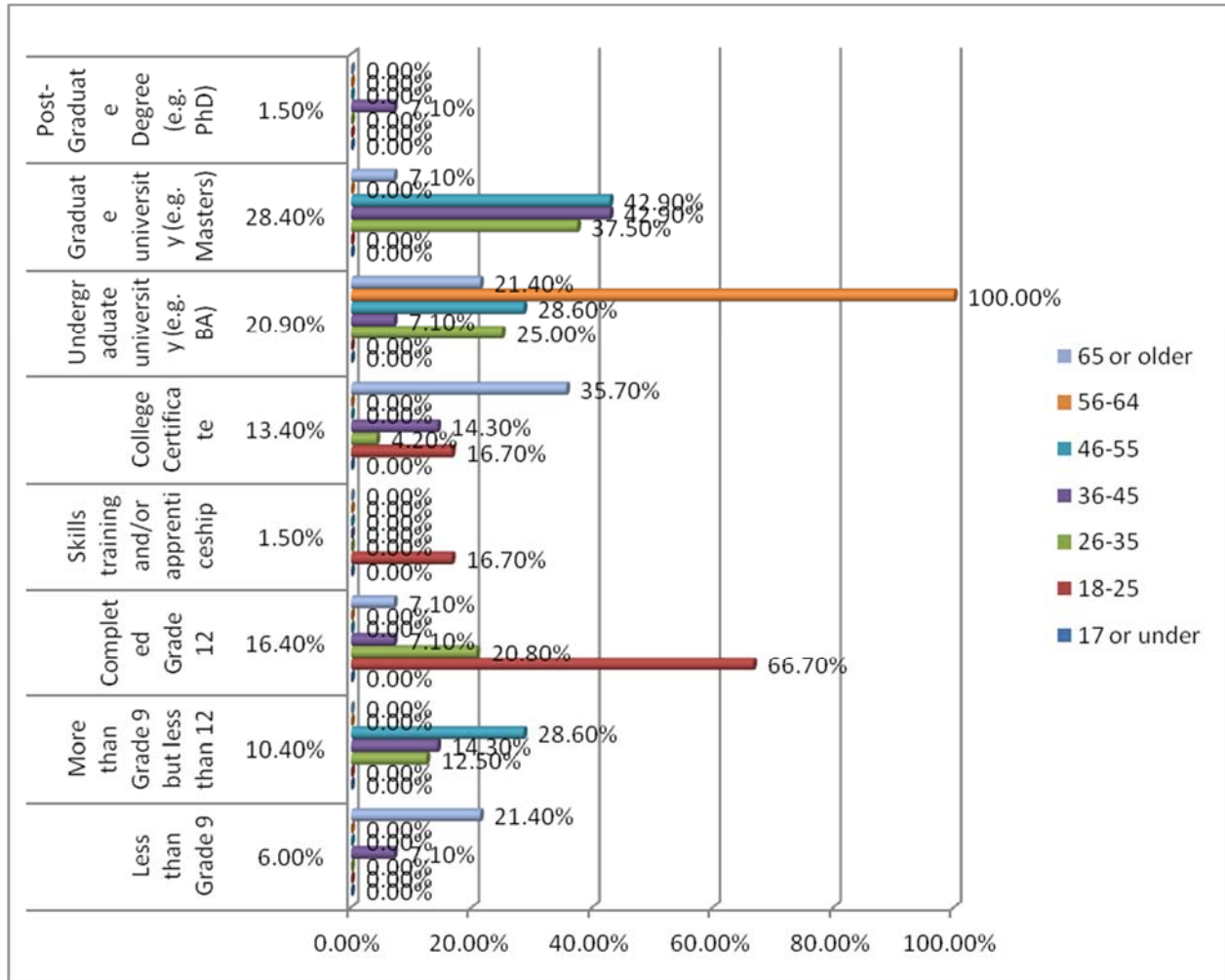
The survey was first distributed in October, 2011. The survey was also available online.

Report Structure



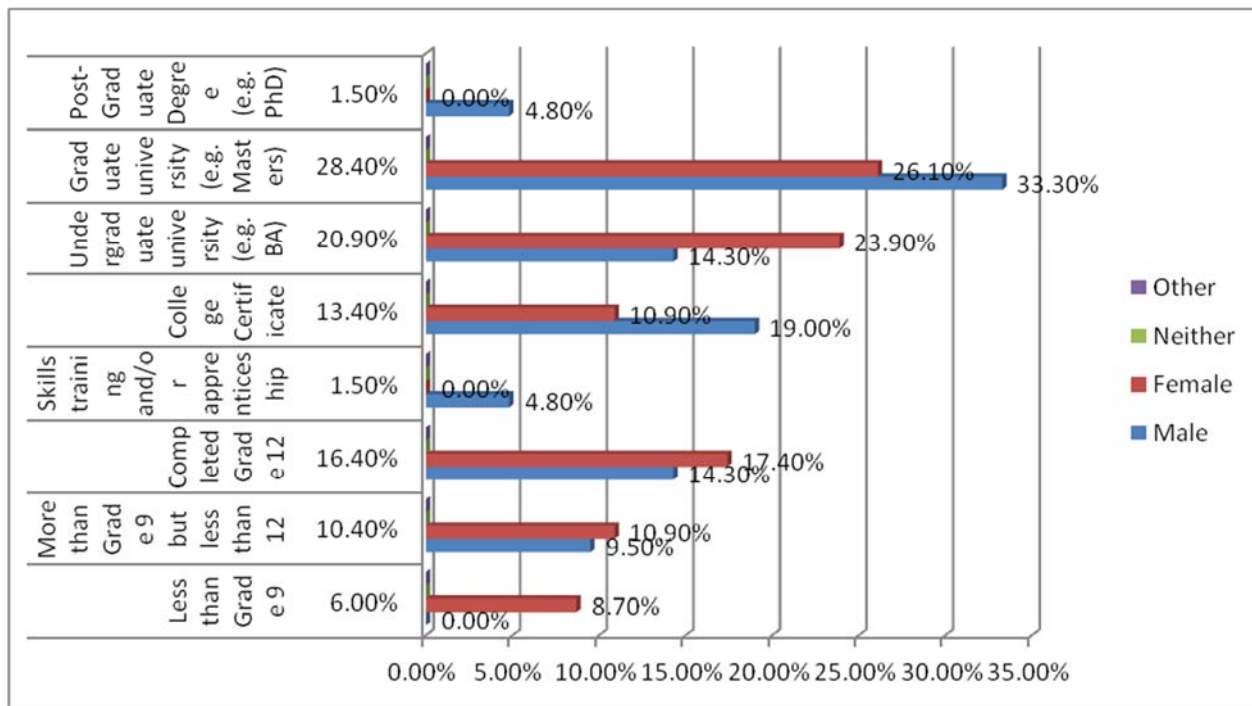
Data Analysis

Highest level of schooling (age group)



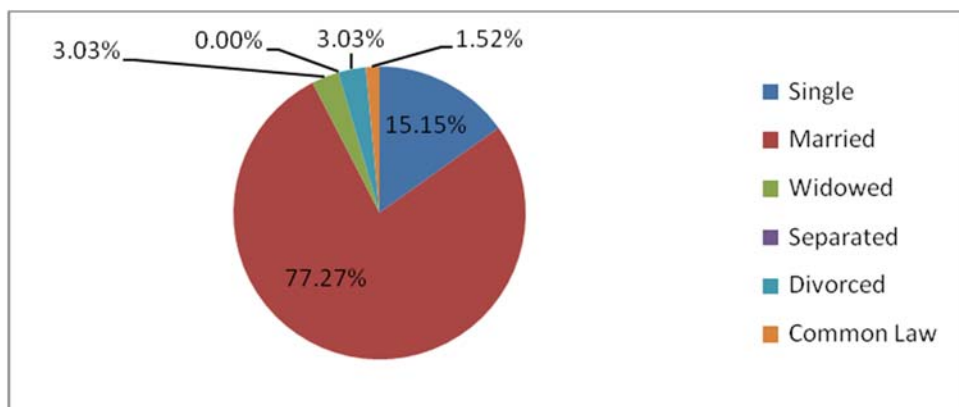
Among 62 respondents, the majority age group who finished highest level of schooling is between 56 to 64 years old. 28.40% of respondents are graduates from university (e.g. Masters).

Highest level of schooling (gender)



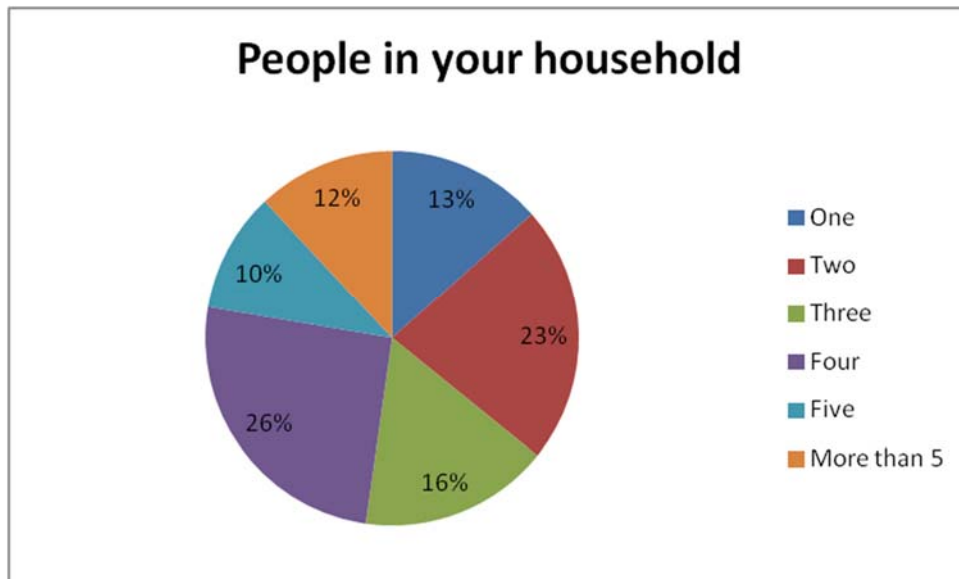
33.30% of male and 26.10% of Female were graduates (e.g. Masters) from university.

Marital Status



Most of the residents in Regent Park live in TCHC apartment sharing the apartment with their family. 77.27% respondents are married and 15.15% respondents are single.

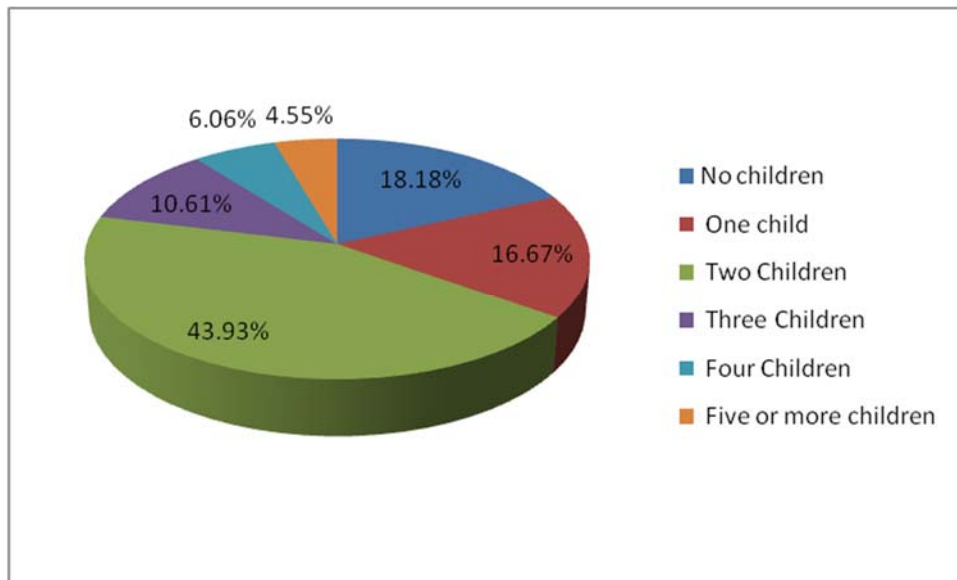
People in your household



26% respondents mentioned they have 4 family members in their household. While 10% mentioned there are 5 people currently residing in their household.

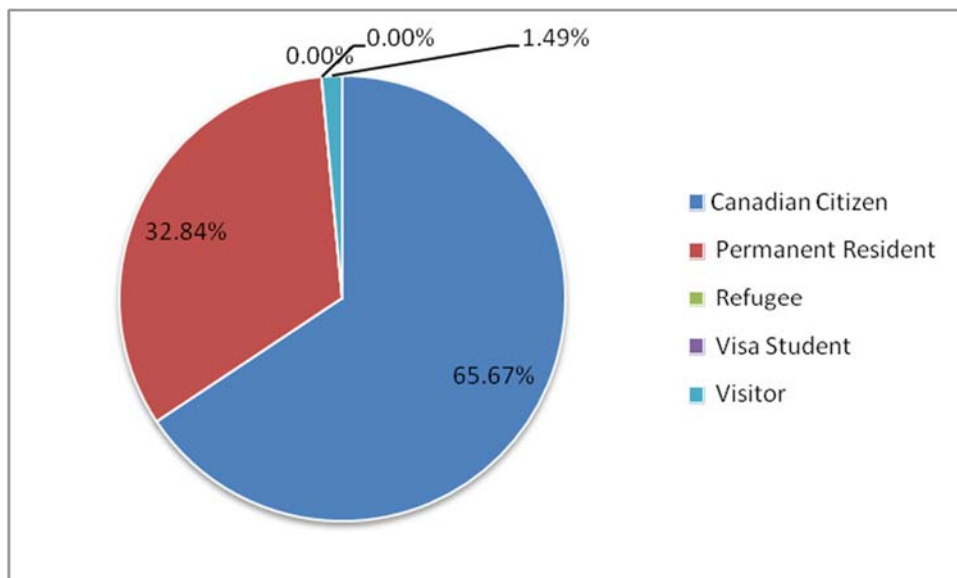
Children living at home

Regent Park has the largest concentration of social housing building in Toronto. 43.93% respondents mentioned 2 children live with them. While 4.55% said they have 5 or more children that live with them.



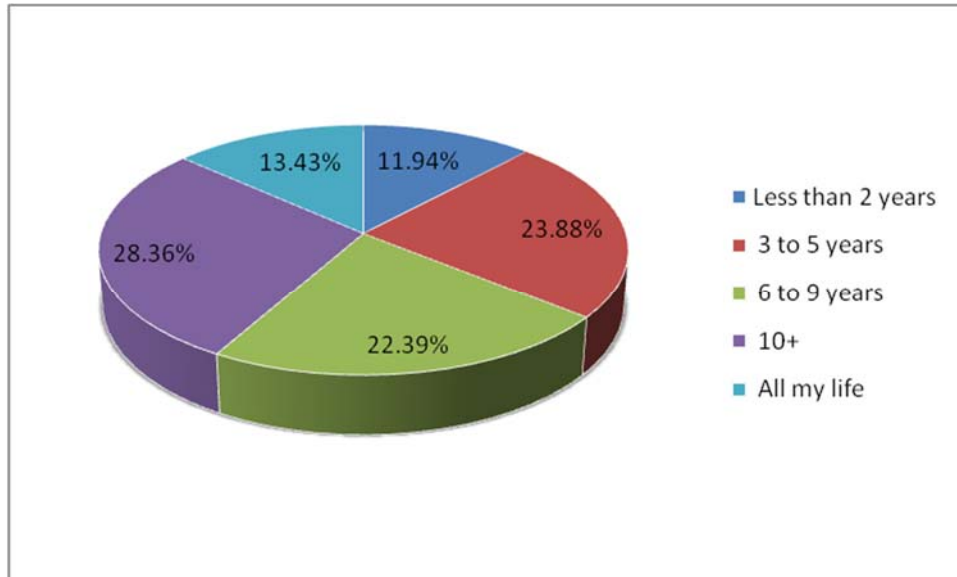
Civic/Immigration status

Most of the regent park residents are Immigrants. There are a combination of newcomer immigrants and also immigrants who are living in Canada for a long time. 65.67% respondents are Canadian citizens while 32.84% are permanent residents in Canada.

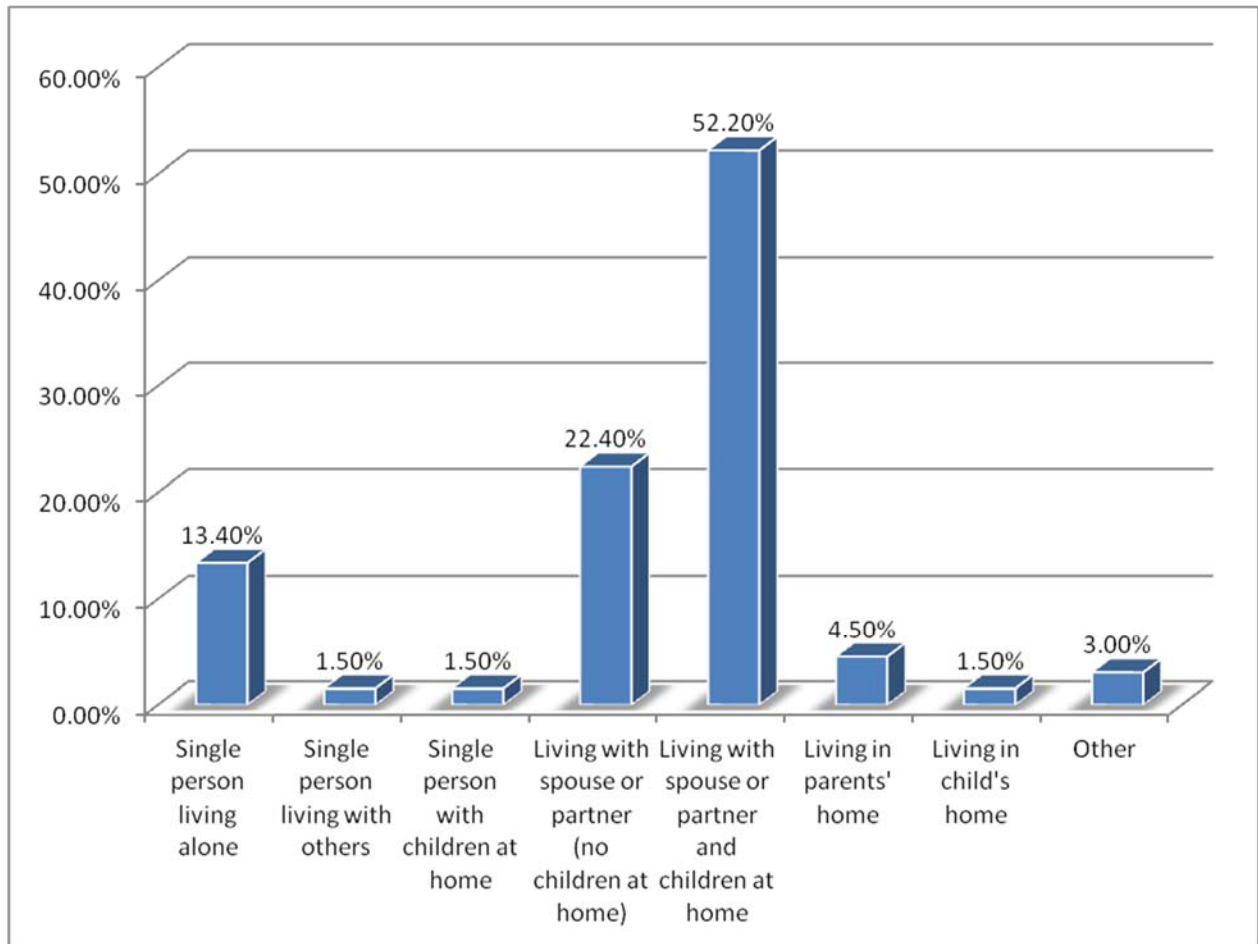


Length of time in Canada

11.94% respondents are living in Canada for less than 2 years as an immigrant, while 28.36% respondents are living in Canada for more than 10 years.

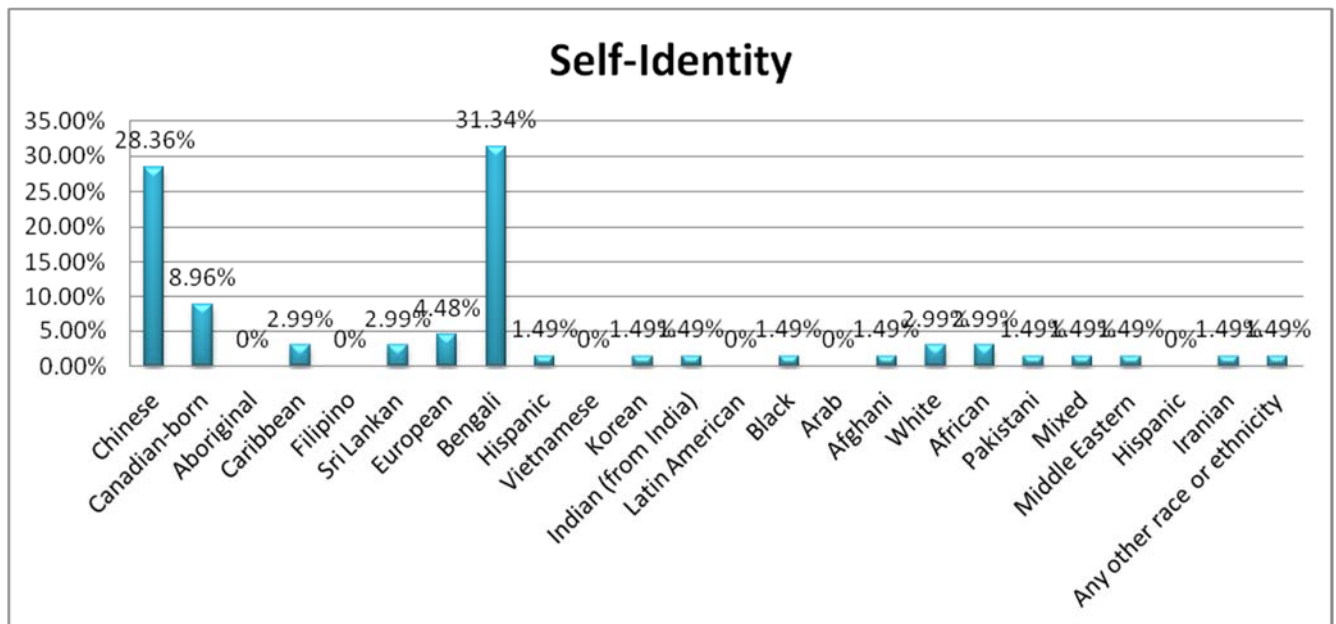


Current Situation



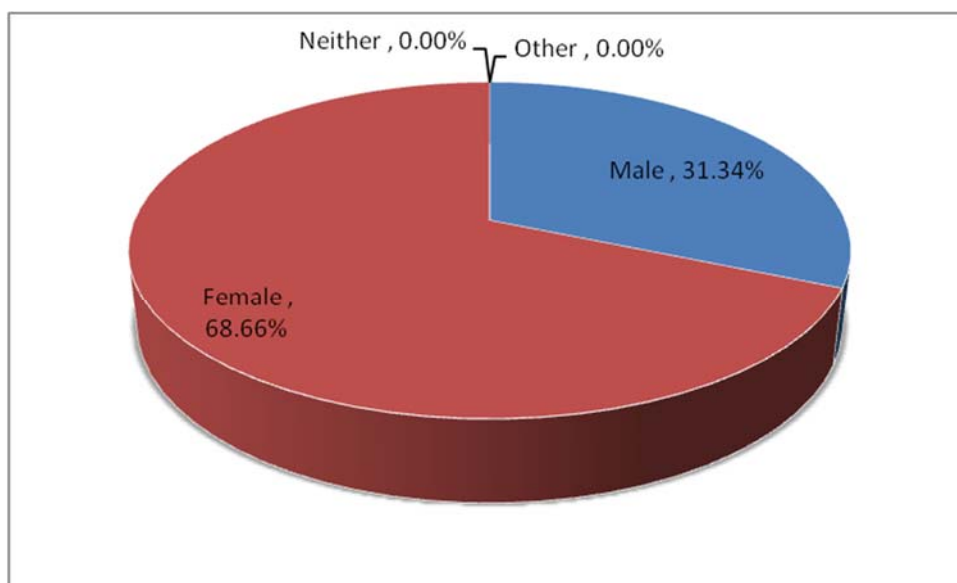
52.20% of respondents are currently living with their spouse and children and 22.40% lives with spouse or partner.

Self identify: Race/ethnicity/ and country/Region of origin



Regent Park is a densely populated area with the immigrants mostly from Asia. 31.34% participants are from Bangladesh and 28.36% participants are from China.

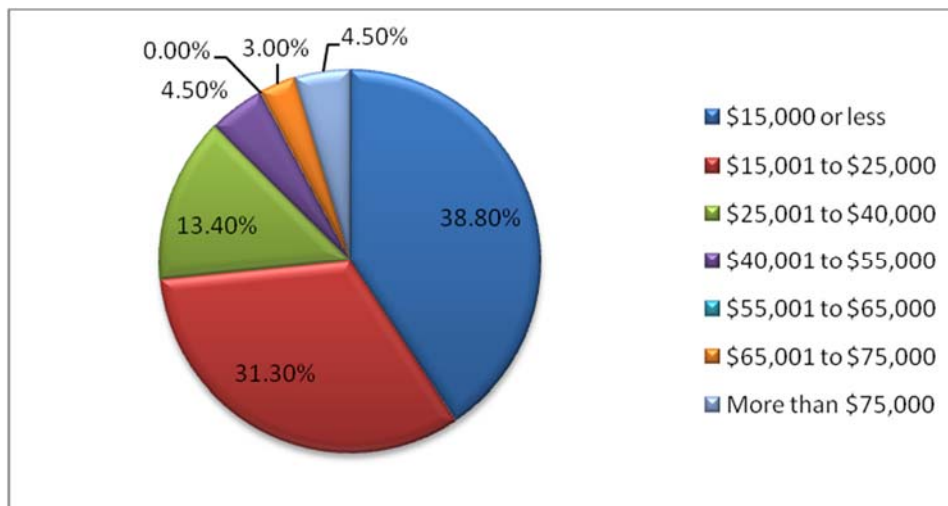
Self-Identify Gender



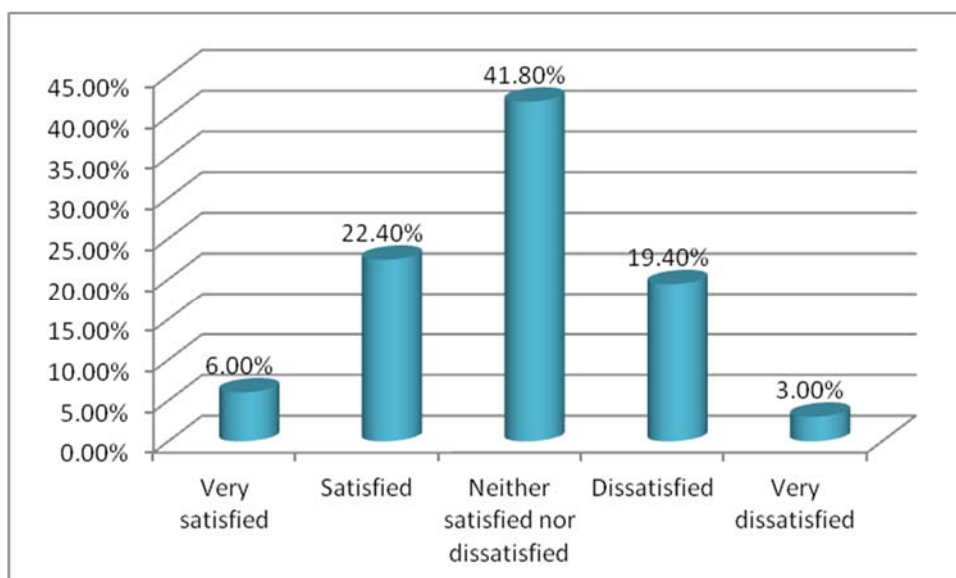
Most of the respondents are female due to their availability. 68.66% of respondents are female and 31.34% respondents are male.

Household Income

Regent Park is considered as a low-income community. The survey result indicates 38.80% of respondents earn \$15,000 or less. 4.50% respondents who earn more than \$75,000 have their own apartment as a result of revitalization.

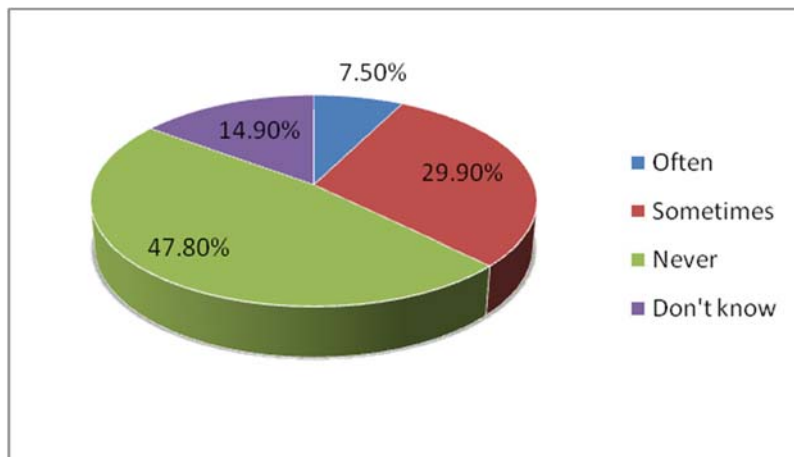


Financial Situation



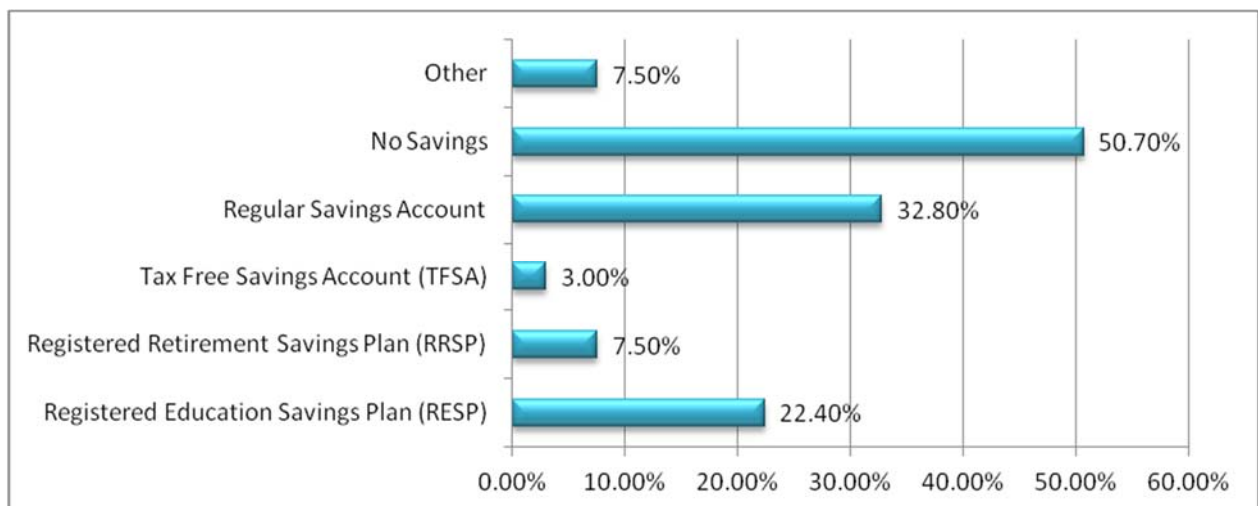
Regent Park is the area where most of the residents are immigrants. 41.80% of respondents are reluctant to disclose their financial situation while 19.40% are dissatisfied with their financial situation.

Enough Money to buy Food



Over the past 12 months, 47.80% of respondents had enough money to buy food before it ran out. 29.90% experienced shortage of food sometimes.

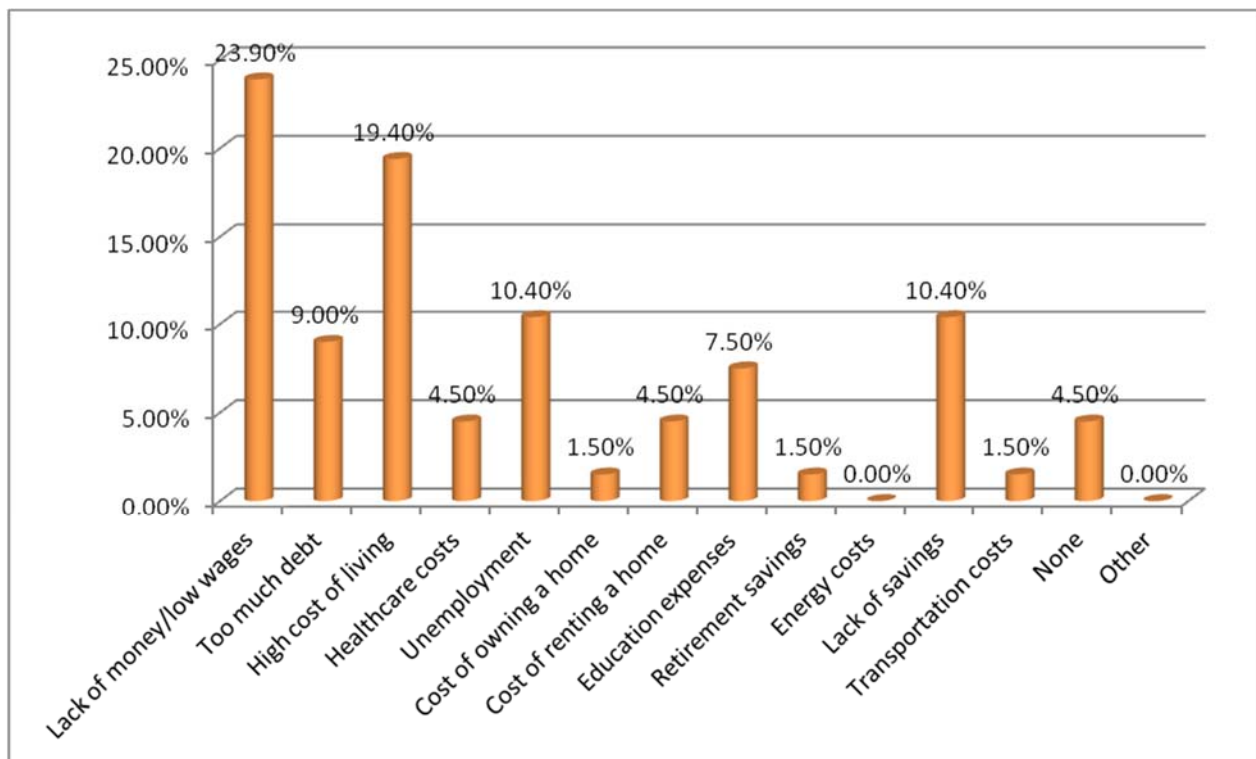
Savings Account



A large number of respondents (50.70%) have no savings that can be used for emergencies, children's education, retirement, etc. 32.80% of respondents have no regular saving account.

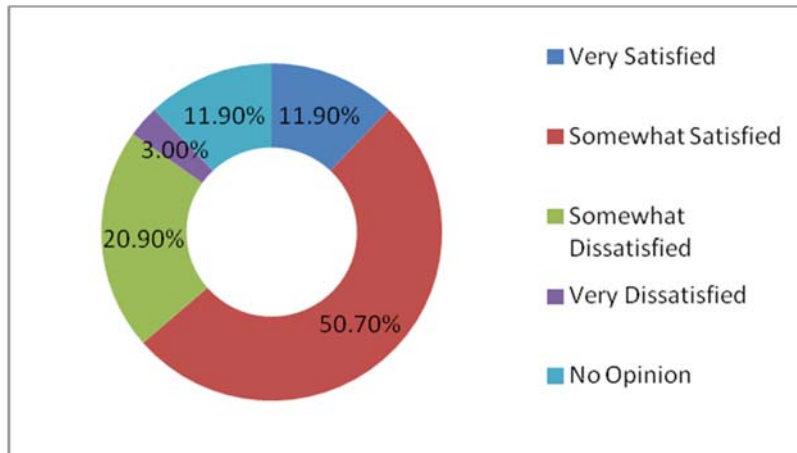
Most Important Financial problem

Most of the respondents of Regent Park are having low earnings. 23.90% of respondents are in financial problems due to the lack of adequate payment in the labour market. High cost living is considered as the second most important financial problem for 19.40% of respondents.



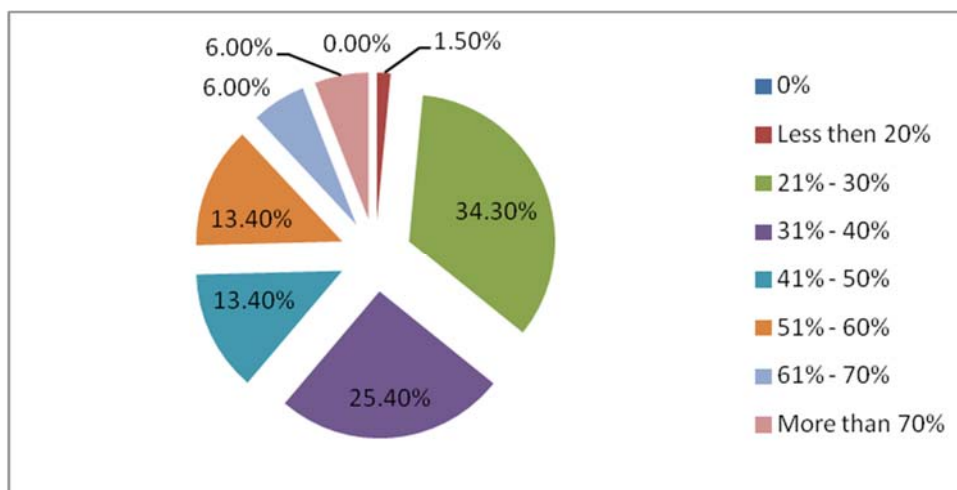
Satisfaction with accommodation

51.52% respondents are somewhat satisfied with their current accommodation while 3.03% are very dissatisfied.



Amount Spend on Housing

A large percentage of the respondents are using social housing while 34.30% respondents spend 21% to 30% of their income on housing.



Use of Support Services

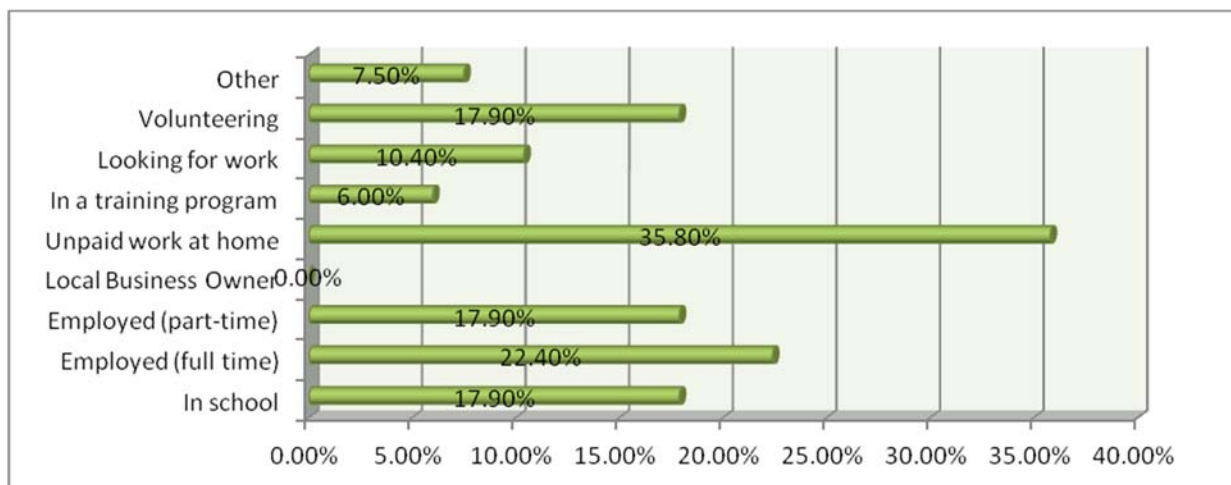
47.80% respondents said that they do not use any of the support services. 25.40% respondents are using subsidized housing. 6.00% of respondents

said they are on social assistance. Many of the residence are reluctant to expose their financial situation.

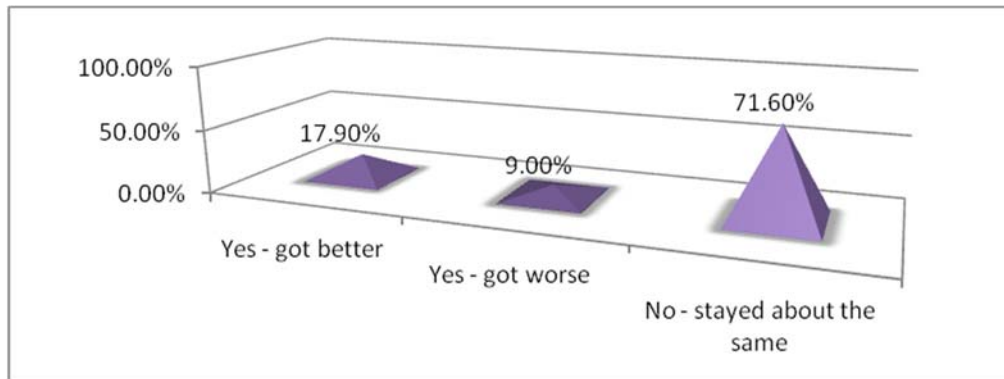


Day-to-Day Involvement

Most of the respondents that make up 35.80% are women doing unpaid work at home taking care of their children. Cultural and language barriers are also the reason why the women cannot work outside their home. 22.40% respondents are employed full time.

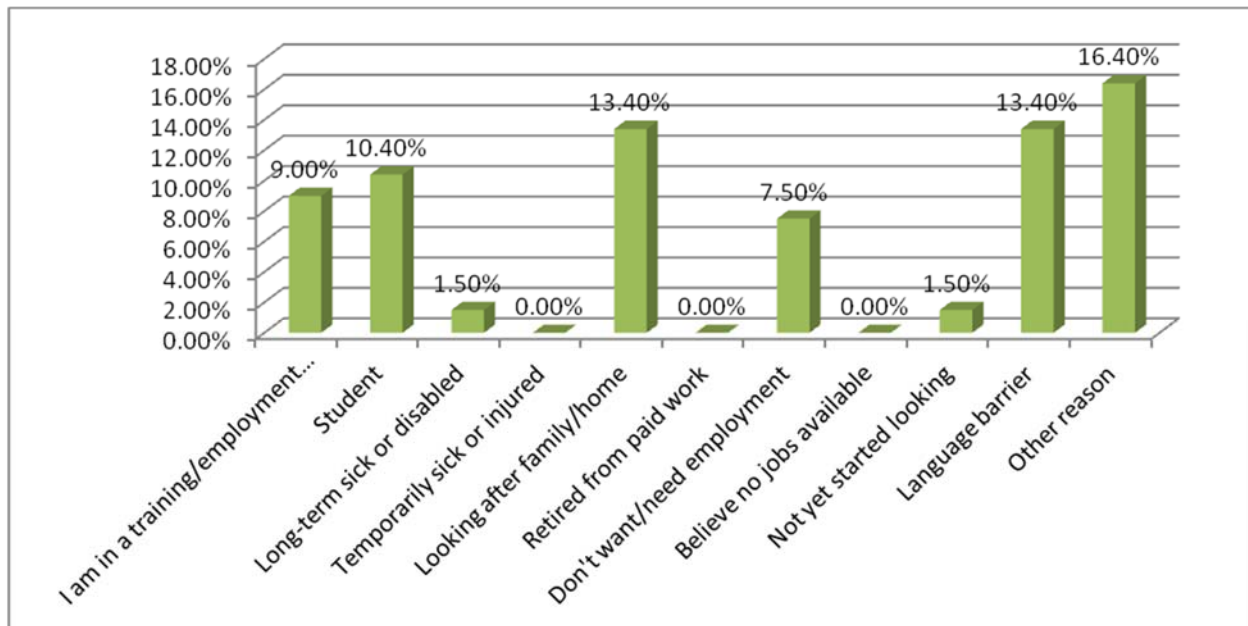


Changes in Living Standard



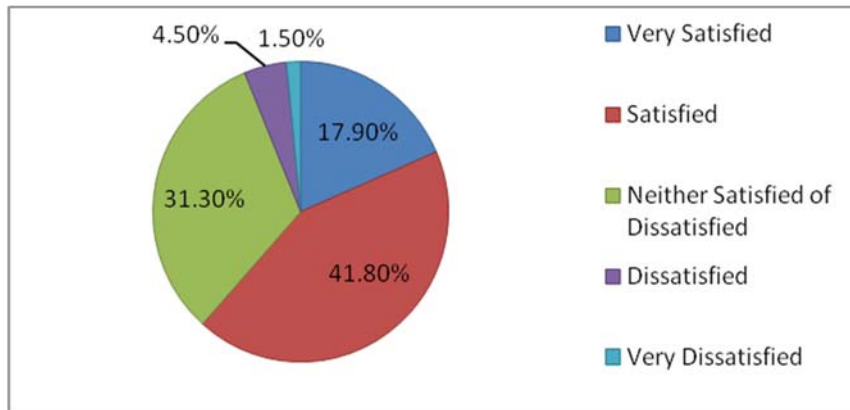
71.60% of respondents believe their household's standard of living stayed about the same over the last 12 months. Only 17.90% say it got better.

Looking for work



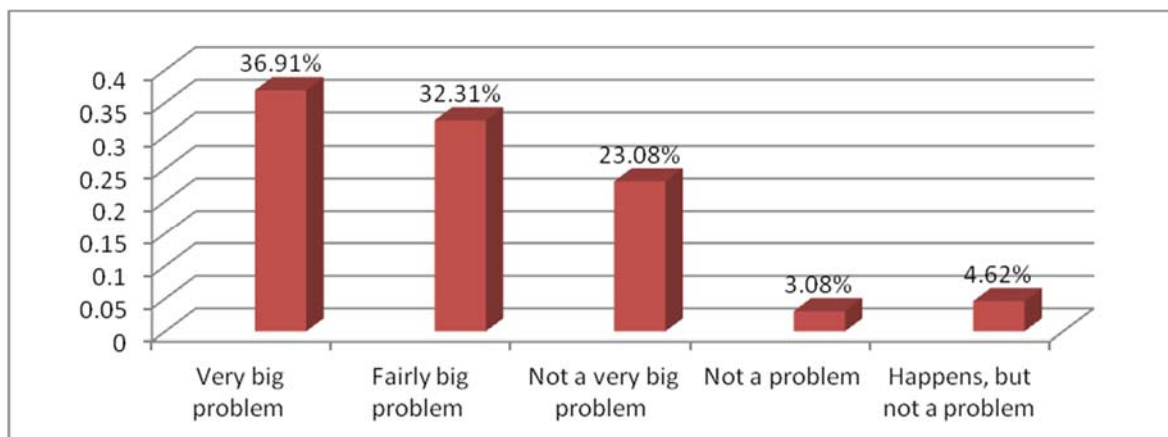
16.40% of residents showed other reason for not working right now. 13.40% are not looking for a job due to language barriers while 13.40% are looking after family and home.

Daily living



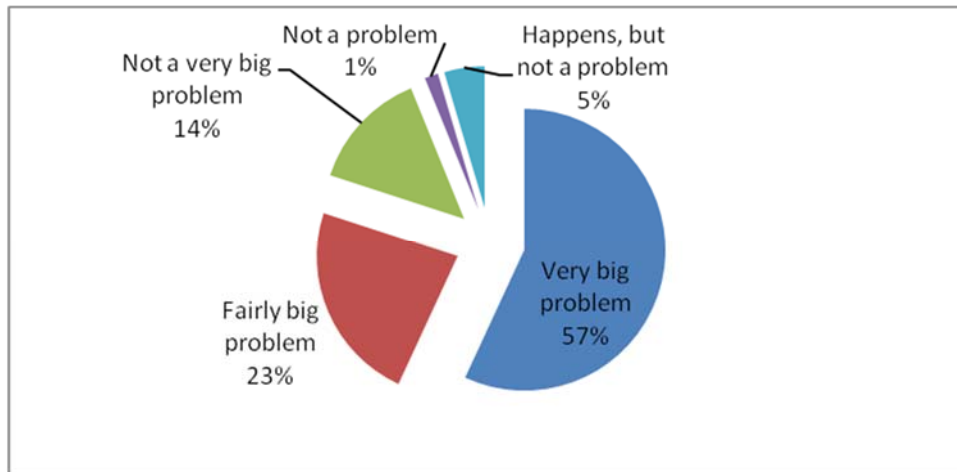
41.80% of respondents are satisfied with their ability to perform daily living activities and 31.30% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Garbage or litter



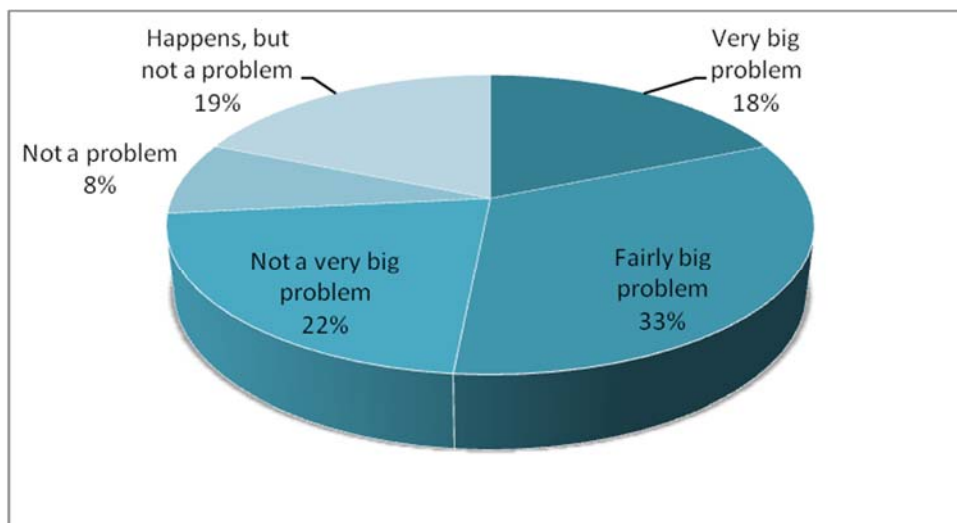
Some residents in the regent Park are not health conscious. 36.91% of respondents express their concern about garbage or litter as a big problem.

Drugs



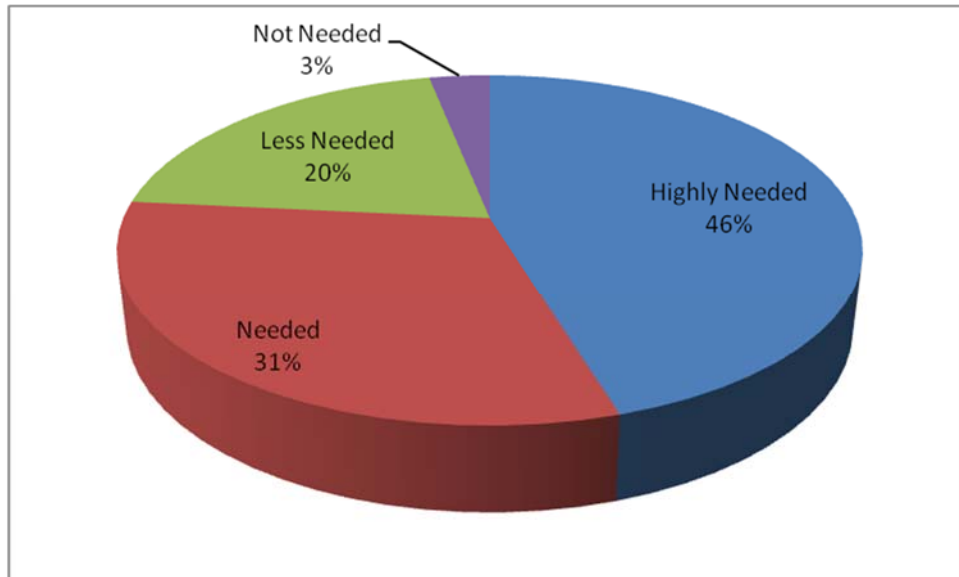
People using or selling drugs is a very big problem to 57% of respondents.

Ideal Teenagers



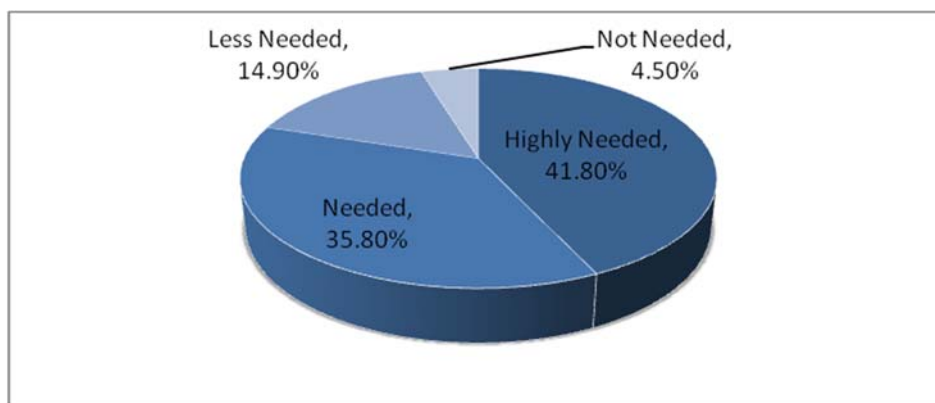
There is a lack of roll model in the community. 33% of respondents say teenagers hanging around on the street and misbehaving is fairly a big problem.

Leadership



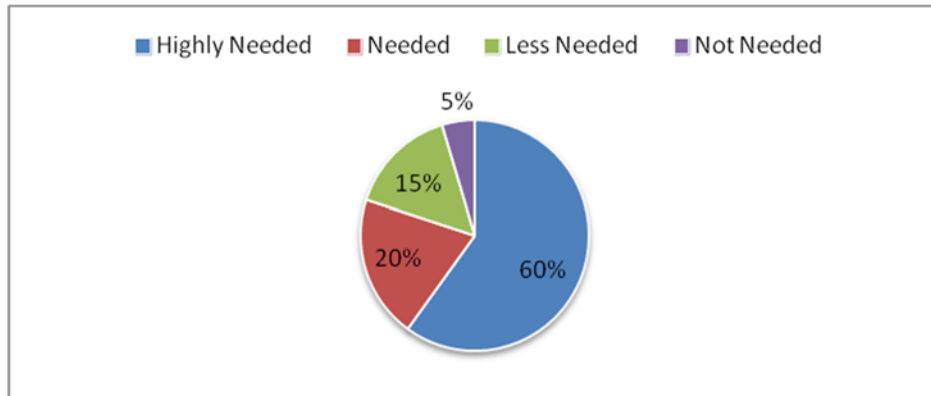
46% of respondent think leadership training program is highly needed so that residents can engage themselves in their own community. Youths also need leadership training in the community so that they can be roll models to their peers.

Skills building



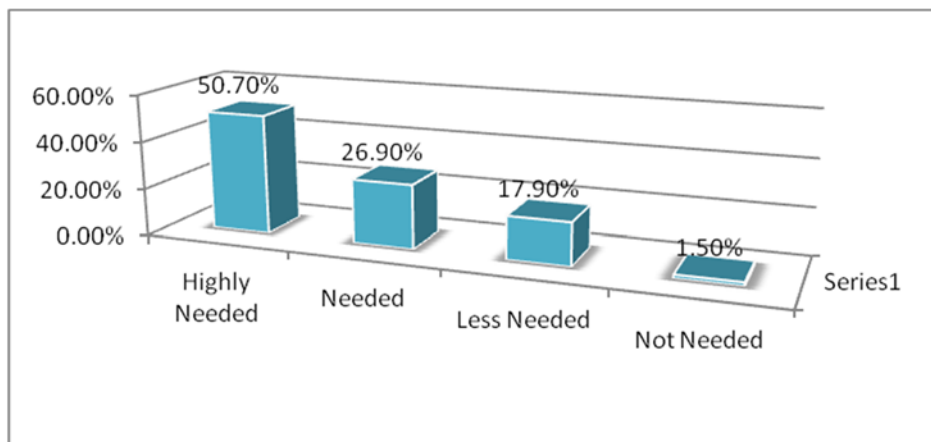
41.80% respondents feel skills building workshops is highly needed for the community people so that they can learn employable skills.

Tutoring programs



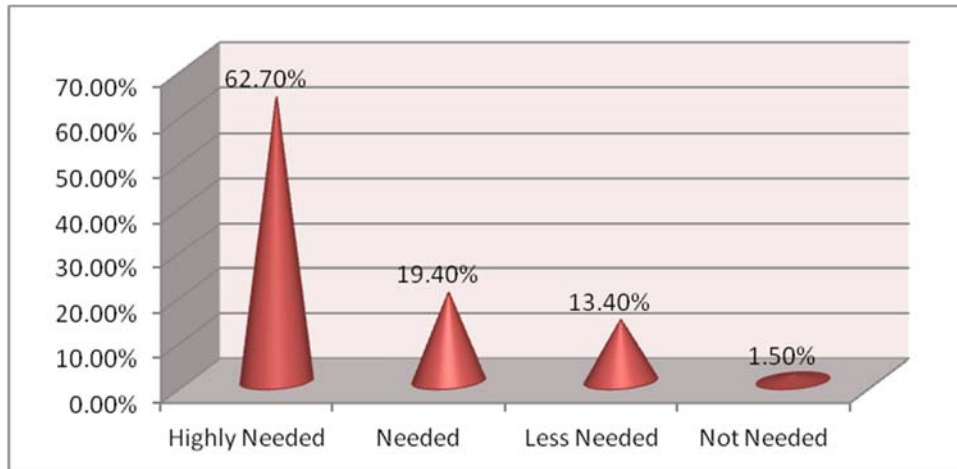
Most of the family has school going children. Some parents are not able to help their children doing homework. For example 60% of the respondents' emphasize on tutoring program.

Recreation programs



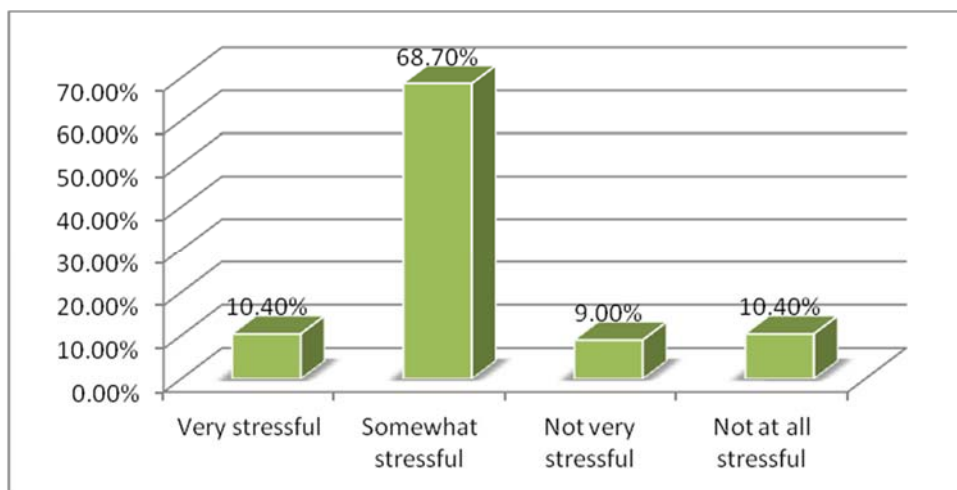
50.70% of respondents believe that after school recreation programs are highly needed.

Job development



Most of the residents are immigrants and having difficulties to find appropriate job. 62.70% of respondents think job development and employment programs are highly needed in the community.

Life and stress



There is a lack of knowledge about stress management techniques. 68.70% of respondents feel they are somewhat stressed out.

Key Informants Interview

Lancefield Morgan

Community Revitalization Consultant
Regent Park Toronto Community Housing

Mr. Lancefield Morgan believes the strongest and best qualities of this community is its location (closer to downtown), accessible public transit, development of new community facilities such as, City Park, indoor pool, arts centre, community centre, new grocery store etc.

Strong sense of pride for living in Regent Park community, lots of community events (Sunday in the Park, Last Friday, Film Festival) are good things about living in this community. He considers social, community spirit, political and economic or other aspects of life here.

He would like to address the problem such as litter/dumping of trash, vandalism and storage of parking.

He believes most important needs of this community are:

- Supports for individuals/families struggling with mental health issues for themselves or someone within their family
- Lack of decent paying work for residents
- Consistent programming/space for older teens (17-19)

He would like to addresses the main barriers to dealing with these needs and issues are:

- Funding for mental health supports is lacking, unable/unwilling to access available supports offered
- Lack of work is part of the shifting economy requiring more and more skills
- Lack of funding and lack of space for consistent supervised programming

He would recommend focusing on litter/dumping of trash, improved lighting, new community gardening/food security projects in improving the well-being of this community.

Returning to this community after 15 years in another country, Mr. Morgan would like to see -no garbage bins outside, new gardens in the park, active use of the community centre.

Haroldene (Deany)Peters

Community Development worker
Regent Park Community Health Centre

She would like to ask the family who wanted to move into this neighbourhood about the bounty of opportunity that is available in the community. She thinks people are the most important resources in this neighbourhood. Getting to know the historical time and historical neighbour of Regent Park is important to understand the community.

She also would like to address:

- Negative stigma associated with low income with public housing.
- Shift the balance of power so that people who are directly affected have a greater capacity to make decision and influence the change process.
- She would like to see the changes happening with the residence not to the residence.

Deany believes community unity is one of the most significant elements for a community. She mentioned how we need to be conscious about it to be happening. Everyone has to understand solidarity, not believe in stereotype. She believes it is important to know who is speaking on behalf of the community. She mentioned it is important to talk to the person who is suffering and talk to the residents.

She would like to see the sense of community remain the same. And also the authorities to treat and change the youth by means of respect not by frightening or making them angry.

Recommendation

Regent Park is one of the most diverse community in Toronto where there are lots of children, teenagers and adults living in poverty. Furthermore the community has a bad reputation of violence, drugs and crime.

Based on community needs assessment, we need to create better employment conditions for residents, and ensure the participation of youth in revitalization process in a positive way to remove the root of poverty. Residents should have more access to training programs in order to improve their job-related skills focusing on more permanent jobs than temporary jobs. Residents should be encouraged and assisted to run their own small businesses in the community.

We need to develop more recreational programs for youth to encourage and engage them to build up their leadership and other essential skills so that they can more actively participate in the community.

Conclusion

Since most of the residents of Regent Park are immigrants and living in poverty, initiatives should be taken to alleviate poverty through providing more job opportunities for residents. Immigrants will attain the skill necessary for Canadian work place through volunteering, job training, internship and bridging program. Almost half of the population living in this neighbourhood are children who need recreational programs, and other social activities. We need to develop more programs that built for the youth in order to help them developing self-confidence, and leadership. These skills will eventually help them in planning their future career and education such as completing university and college.

THEORY OF CHANGE

