

New Arrivals, New Communities

A research report into the housing and support
needs of Tamil people in London

Tamil
Community
Housing
Association Ltd



தமிழர்
சமூக
வீட்டு வசதிக்
கழகம்

London Research Centre

The London Research Centre provided background advice on survey questionnaire design, methods of analysis and other research matters. We are pleased to be associated with this project, which we believe will contribute not only to understanding the needs of the Tamil community, but also to the needs of other refugee communities and the development of good practice in research.

Ms. Anne Page
Chief Executive

Housing Association Charitable Trust

HACT is delighted to have provided funding to enable the research and production of this report by Tamil Community Housing Association. The housing needs of the Tamil Community have largely been hidden and not considered in the wider public domain. This research demonstrates the very real and diverse housing needs of the Tamil Community in 6 London boroughs and the crucial role which a specialist housing association such as Tamil Community Housing Association can play in providing culturally sensitive and appropriate housing. HACT hopes that this report will encourage all housing providers to take account of the diverse housing needs of the Tamil community and the role of Tamil Community Housing Association in meeting these needs.

Ms. Reena Mukherji
Grants & Advice Manager, Minority Ethnic Communities

Federation of Black Housing Association

In a rapidly changing social housing environment that has much more emphasis on the meeting the economy, community as well as housing needs of tenants. TCHA have already demonstrated innovation and commitment. This report shows that much more needs to be achieved to tackle multiple deprivation that Tamil people face in London. TCHA has demonstrated that it is a conduit for the creating of new opportunities, support and advice for Tamil people. I am confident that the new Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Policy will formally recognise the importance of supporting organisations such as TCHA.

Harris Beider
Executive Director

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Research undertaken by Gera Patel and Tony Soares
Project Management Assistance by Chris Jarvis, London Research Centre
Research Commissioned by Tamil Community Housing Association

Supported by:



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Thanks are also due to Chris Jarvis at London Research Centre for his assistance in the management of this research report.

We would not be at this successful stage if it had not been for the hard work and commitment of Gera Patel and Tony Soares. Their dedication to this survey is something we are grateful for and we thank them.

Dr. (Mrs) Joy Sabanathan, Chair
On behalf of TCHA

The authors would like to give thanks to all those people from the Tamil community who took time out of their busy lives to take part in this survey, this report would not have been possible without their co-operation.

We are indebted to all our field workers whose patience and sincerity resulted in such a huge response. Our thanks also go to the agencies and organisations who provided us with much of our secondary data and assisted us in boosting our response rate. They include Tamil Information Centre, Tamil Refugee Action Group, South London Tamil Welfare Group, Tamil Welfare Association (Newham), Saiva Munetta Sangam (UK), Waltham Forest Tamil Sangam, Tamil Association of Brent, Association of Tamils - Brent North, Wimbledon Sri Ganapathy Temple, Tamil Community and Youth Centre, Tooting Sri Muthumari Amman Temple, South East London Tamil Senior Citizens Welfare Association and Tamil Carers and Elders Group, the Lewisham Sivan Temple and London Tamil Centre (North Wembley).

We would also like to show our appreciation to Chris Jarvis (LRC) for his informative and helpful comments. Our thanks also go to the Housing Corporation and HACT for funding this study.

Finally, thanks must go to Tamil Community Housing Association for commissioning this research and to all the staff for their unstinting support and assistance in particular to Mr. Arunan, Mr. Kumar and Mr. Kuhan.

Gera Patel & Tony Soares
Researchers

Foreword

Traumatised by persecution, war and flight, refugees coming to the UK are cast into a bewildering, bureaucratic and hostile world. But neither the authorities nor policy-makers have done enough to meet the needs of refugee communities.

By pooling their meagre resources and garnering their scattered expertise, groups like the Tamil Community Housing Association are fighting to ensure that new arrivals find protection not indifference and that the most vulnerable sections of the refugee communities - the elderly, the disabled, the mentally ill, the homeless - can live with greater dignity and freedom. Here are the facts. Now those in authority must act.

Dr. A. Sivanandan
Director, Institute of Race Relations

Message from The Housing Corporation

The Housing Corporation has supported the role of the Tamil Community Housing Association, both in terms of providing capital allocations to partnership housing associations for schemes managed by TCHA and providing some revenue support for works on housing needs, firstly in 1994 and subsequently in relation to this report. The Housing Corporation recognises the work done by TCHA in both identifying and seeking to meet the needs of Tamils in London. The Housing Corporation welcomes this report which provides a comprehensive and up to date survey of the housing needs and aspirations of Tamils in London. This report should inform discussions with local authorities and housing associations about appropriate responses to meeting these needs.

Mr Duncan Bowie
Assistant Regional Director (Investment)
The Housing Corporation



**THE HOUSING
CORPORATION**

Summary

- ▲ By the time they reach the UK, Tamil refugees (like all other refugees) have already experienced a significant level of displacement. However, our findings suggest that Tamils continue to encounter a level of displacement. Just over half of the sample had lived in their accommodation for less than a year, and even some of those respondents who had been in the UK for a few years, were still moving from one address to another.
- ▲ There was a significant reliance upon the private rented sector for housing, with many finding their accommodation through a Tamil letting agent. Despite many respondents describing their housing costs as expensive, expense was not always synonymous with quality. Many were sharing facilities such as the bathroom and kitchen with people other than those in their immediate household. 91% of respondents said that they wanted to move, reasons included overcrowding, too expensive, and wanting self-contained or permanent accommodation.
- ▲ Just over half of the sample said that their accommodation was unsuitable because of overcrowding. In many cases the situation was exacerbated when households that were already overcrowded, were offering accommodation to newly arrived Tamils because they had no where else to go. Respondents said that they were sleeping on sofas and on any available floor spaces in living rooms, bedrooms and sometimes in halls and on landings. In some cases respondents were sharing bedrooms with only slight acquaintances or even complete strangers.
- ▲ The head of the household was usually the sole person in the household claiming welfare benefits or earning a salary. Despite the restrictions in eligibility to benefits, we found many respondents who were not claiming all the welfare benefits to which they were entitled. Many people said that they had experienced difficulties in claiming welfare benefits. Some respondents had no personal income and were relying upon friends and family for financial support. 38% of the sample said that they were unemployed and talked about difficulties in finding employment and problems with communicating in written and/or spoken English.
- ▲ Despite the fact that so many respondents wanted to move out of their current accommodation, just over half the sample said that they had done nothing in terms of seeing new accommodation. Workers in Tamil community organisations said that respondents were realistic in their expectations and knew that without additional income, they would have to stay in their current accommodation regardless of its unsuitability.
- ▲ Even though they were in housing need many respondents had not approached the local authority or a housing association. Workers said that the main reason for this was that most were single people and therefore would not be regarded as being in priority need. Other reasons included, the fear of volunteering personal information to anyone “official”, knowing that they would have to go on a lengthy waiting list even though their housing needs were very immediate and a fear that they would be housed away from the established Tamil community.
- ▲ The majority of elderly people in our sample felt that their current accommodation was unsuitable for their needs, reasons included overcrowding, too many stairs in the accommodation and poor physical repair. Over half of the elderly sample said that they would consider living in sheltered accommodation at this moment. Elderly people talked about their desire to have more privacy and live their lives with dignity. They did not want to be reluctantly cared for by their children and said it was all too obvious that they were an extra burden within an already strained household.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Aims and Objectives

Tamil Community Housing Association (formerly known as Tamil Refugee HA) was established in 1986, and at its inception its primary aim was to address the housing needs of Tamil refugees who were fleeing persecution and seeking asylum in Britain. It was born out of the Tamil Refugee Action Group (TRAG), a group of Tamil volunteers and community leaders seeking to support Tamil people in the UK. Whilst TRAG was actively providing a range of services to its community, it was recognised that meeting housing needs required additional resources and expertise, and so Tamil Refugee Housing Association was set up as a sister organisation. TCHA is still an unregistered housing association managing housing provided by 14 different registered social landlords.

Over the last 11 years, the needs of the Tamil community have been changing. Whilst still housing and supporting recently arrived refugees, TCHA recognises that it needs to respond to the more specific needs of Tamil refugees who are settled in the UK, such as elders, people with disabilities and mental health problems, as well as the more general and growing needs of Tamil families.

In 1994 TCHA undertook a small research study to establish the housing needs of the Tamil community¹ *(see page 42)*. Although the survey was limited because of the relatively small number of respondents that took part (195 people), it did provide a useful snapshot of the housing position of the Tamil community in Greater London.

However, given the changing requirements of the Tamil community, TCHA recognised that it was essential to identify and document these needs. Not just housing needs, but also the wider support needs of the Tamil community. Since its inception, TCHA has been providing Housing Plus services to both tenants and non-tenants from the Tamil community, before the terms 'housing plus' or 'added value' had been formalised, TCHA was successfully meeting the wide ranging needs of its community, from providing translation and interpretation services on both housing and non-housing matters to doing accompanied visits to Home Office interviews, from meeting newly arrived destitute refugees at airports and other ports of entry to meeting the educational and training needs of young Tamils for whom English was not a first language.

The objective of this research has been to follow-up from the 1994 study and examine in detail the current housing circumstances of the Tamil community, and document their future housing aspirations. In addition, to provide information on the support needs of the Tamil community across a wide range of issues from advice and information on welfare benefits to the more intensive support needs of Tamil people with mental health problems.

The overall aims of the research were to:-

- * identify and assess the housing and support needs of the Tamil community across the following six London Boroughs:- Brent, Lewisham, Merton, Newham, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth
- * assist TCHA in identifying gaps in their current service provision to the Tamil community
- * equip TCHA with the necessary information so they can campaign with authority and confidence for further resources, to enable them to continue meeting the housing and support needs of its community.

¹*Survey Into the Housing Needs of the Tamil Community in Greater London, 1994: Tony Soares & Associates*

Part 1 of this report provides some background information to the research. Parts 2 - 7 present findings from the survey. Part 8 concludes and Part 9 provides some detailed recommendations for TCHA, and their local partners. Throughout the report to complement the statistical findings, we quote some of the views and comments of respondents. These were collected by fieldworkers in the interviews and they offer an incisive insight into the circumstances that most newly arrived Tamils are facing.

1.2 Research Methodology

There is a great deal of information about the experience of the Tamil community in the UK. Not all of it is formally documented or published. However, it is available, via consultations with community leaders and workers at Tamil voluntary organisations, and through conversations with Tamil people in shops and temples, and with recently arrived refugees from Sri Lanka. TCHA recognised that though this information exists, it is not necessarily accessible to outside agencies or decision makers. Neither is it in a format that is recognised as valid by various funding bodies. The aim of this research was to document the experiences of the Tamil community through coherent and reliable research methodology and sampling.

It was agreed that a quantitative approach would be most effective. However, given the direct links that TCHA had with its community, we were confident that consultation with the Tamil community would result in a high level of qualitative information as well.

TCHA works in thirteen London Boroughs, however some of the boroughs have significant numbers of Tamil residents, namely Brent, Lewisham, Merton, Newham, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth. The aim was to interview 1,000 Tamil people, residing in these 6 boroughs. We were initially aiming to interview an equal number of people in each Borough (approximately 167 people). However, as the fieldwork progressed because of limited resources the target was then to interview 175 people in these 4 boroughs (Brent, Merton, Newham and Waltham Forest) and 150 people in the two remaining boroughs. We also aimed to have an overall response rate of 10% from elderly people across the whole sample. The fieldwork eventually resulted in 1,136 completed questionnaires that would be used for analysis. We exceeded our targets in each of the 6 boroughs, and we also achieved 15% of interviews from elderly people, against a target of 10% of all interviews. (See Section 2.1 for further details). We believe that this is the first research of its kind to successfully interview such a significant number of Tamil people.

A detailed questionnaire was drafted, covering questions on current housing circumstances, household profile, household income and expenditure, future housing aspirations, support needs and additional questions on the housing and support needs of the elderly (See Part 7 for further information on Tamil elders). The questionnaire was piloted amongst a representative group of Tamil people and finalised.

TCHA have very good links with the community that it serves and with other voluntary Tamil groups. TCHA recruited approximately 25 fieldworkers through their contacts to interview respondents and complete the questionnaire. The fieldworkers were trained in research methodology and interviewing techniques. All the fieldworkers were bilingual in Tamil and English, and most of the interviews were conducted in Tamil. To aid completion and consistency, definitions were provided of terminology such as 'household', 'sheltered housing' etc.

In terms of sampling, the majority of respondents came through the implementation of non-probability snowball sampling. This involved door-to-door knocking in areas where there were high concentrations of Tamil people in residence. Some initial addresses of Tamil people were obtained through Tamil voluntary organisations, the electoral register and Tamil businesses in the area. Interviewers then asked respondents to notify them of any other Tamil people living in the locality. This type of snowball sampling proved to be extremely effective and resulted in approximately 70% of the total number of responses (796 interviews). The blend of sampling methods means that we can be confident that our sample is representative of the wider Tamil community, and had achieved the research aims at reasonable costs.

Some of the trained interviewers came as representatives of other Tamil voluntary organisations and they completed interviews with their client group. 12% of the total sample came through this source (136 interviews).

TCHA also organised a housing surgery in each of the six survey Boroughs, with the support of the relevant local authority. Tamil people were able to access housing advice and information and were invited to take part in the survey. Approximately 10% of the sample came from these local housing surgeries (114 interviews).

The final source of interviews was through public gatherings at religious and cultural festivals, at temples and in Tamil shops and schools. Areas and rooms were set aside at all of these venues and 8% of the total sample came through this source (90 interviews). TCHA also advertised the survey in the Tamil press and on Tamil community radio, encouraging people to take part in the survey by attending a local housing surgery or visiting TCHA's stall at various festivals, temples and schools.

One final point about research methodology is that when the questionnaire was piloted, it was timed as taking approximately 15 minutes to complete. However, interviewers in the field found that on average interviews were taking twice as long, approximately 30 minutes and in some cases even longer. Explanations for this included the fact that many respondents required a great deal of reassurance before the interview. Respondents were suspicious about giving personal information about themselves and their families and wanted to know in detail what would happen to the information that was collected, who would have access to it, would it be passed on to the Home Office or other 'official' organisations? etc. Incidentally a confidentiality policy had been agreed and this was reiterated and explained to all respondents before any interviews took place.

The actual interview also took longer than was anticipated because the majority of interviews were conducted in the Tamil language. The questionnaire was written in English and fieldworkers said that it took some time to read the questions in English, translate them verbally into Tamil, listen to verbal answers in Tamil and then translate responses back into written English.

Respondents also asked a number of questions after the interview was completed. They were generally seeking housing and immigration advice from the interviewers who were able to refer them on to the appropriate agency.

We feel that there are valuable lessons to be learnt here, and any future research with this client group will have to take account of their specific cultural needs. Using bi-lingual interviewers is an obvious point, but allowing sufficient time for the interview to be carried out in a supportive and flexible environment is equally important. Interview costs need to reflect the time taken to complete the actual interview but also the time required reassuring, both before and after the interview.

Despite the length of the interview and the nature of questions that were being asked, we had very few people refusing to take part in the survey. Although there was an option to not answer questions, even those of a very personal nature such as household income and expenditure resulted in very few refusals to answer. We feel this is a testament to the fieldworkers who carried out the interview sensitively but also to the time they invested in each respondent both before and after the interview.

1.3 Tamil People in the UK

The arrival of Tamil people in the UK was as a direct result of the ethnic conflict that has been raging throughout Sri Lanka for more than forty years. The conflict has devastated the country and its people.² The human rights atrocities committed by the government regime against the Tamil people have been well documented by organisations such as Amnesty International and the Refugee Council. The latter estimate that the conflict has resulted in the deaths of more than 60,000 people, many more have been injured or maimed and thousands of Tamil people have been displaced.³

In 1981 the first few Tamil refugees began to arrive in the UK. They were largely people who had been working in human rights and social work agencies. As the Sri Lankan government and its army began to close such organisations, many workers were killed and some were forced to flee. However, it was when the conflict escalated in 1983 that there were a surge of applications for asylum and approximately 2,500 Tamil people arrived in the UK.

According to the Tamil Information Centre there are now some 100,000 Tamils living in the UK, with approximately 80,000 of them living in London⁴. However, accurate figures are difficult to establish because census information and other official data do not categorise Tamils as a separate ethnic group. Instead national statistical data on Tamils and other refugee communities have used answers from the Census question asking country of birth, but this has proved to be notoriously unreliable.

Since 1995 there has been a significant decline in successful applications from Tamil people to enter the UK. The reasons for this are twofold, firstly as the war continues unabated it is getting more and more difficult for Tamil people to leave their country and flee and secondly, the policy reversal by the UK Government. Previously the majority of Tamils arriving in the UK were granted as a blanket policy 'exceptional leave to remain' (ELR). However, new arrivals now have to prove to the Home Office that they are at individual risk of persecution or torture. Whilst maintaining that decisions to grant ELR are made upon an individual basis, the Refugee Council have shown⁵ that since 1993 more than 95% of applications for asylum from Tamils have been refused and the vast majority have received standard letters of refusal.

Home Office asylum statistics⁶ indicate that there were 21,917 applications for asylum from Tamils between 1985 and 1995. The Refugee Council⁷ estimate that between 1985 and 1994 only 133 Tamils were granted refugee status, 11,930 were granted ELR and 1,617 were refused entry. It should be noted that these figures may include a few Sri Lankans of Sinhalese origin.

²*Conflict and Displacement in Sri Lanka, 1997: UN Committee for Refugees*

³*Sri Lankan Tamils, the Home Office and the Forgotten Civil War, 1997: The Refugee Council*

⁴*Figures from Tamil Information Centre*

⁵See 3

⁶*Statistical Bulletin, 1995: The Home Office*

⁷*Asylum Statistics 1986-1996, 1997: The Refugee Council*

The UK Government's justification of its reversal in policy has been that the newly established Sri Lankan Government's Human Rights Task Force ensures and enforces the safety of all Tamil people. However, Amnesty International continue to catalogue human rights abuses, and Tamil people who have been able to flee their country relate their own experiences of daily disappearances, arbitrary arrests, systematic persecution, torture and killings.

A combination of circumstances in Sri Lanka and UK Government policy, means that many Tamils are being forced down the illegal entry route. The increase in illegal transportation has resulted in perilous and for some Tamils, deadly journeys. 92 Sri Lankans were amongst a group of 280 Asylum Seekers who were drowned on Christmas Day 1996, whilst attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

Despite the perilous journey made by those fleeing Sri Lanka, either legally or illegally, life is not much easier in the UK. Changes in asylum and immigration legislation over the last decade have eroded asylum seekers entitlement to social housing and welfare benefits⁸. More recent changes have been particularly harsh as the Government aims to discourage what they describe as 'bogus claims for asylum'.

The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 has removed the limited right that asylum seekers had to local authority housing under the Asylum and Immigration (Appeals) Act 1993. Since the 1996 Act, local authorities 'as far as is practical' can only offer local authority accommodation to a specified list of people from abroad. Asylum seekers are not specified and therefore are not eligible for housing. This was further reaffirmed in the Housing Act 1996 under which asylum seekers are not included on the qualifying list of persons who can be put on a housing register or considered for allocations.

Under Section 11 of Schedule 1 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, asylum seekers who do not claim asylum at their port of entry, and asylum seekers whose subsequent asylum applications are refused, are no longer entitled to Social Security benefits. Asylum seekers have extremely limited housing rights, but people with refugee status or those granted ELR are specified in the regulations and are entitled to social housing with full homelessness rights, including eligibility to welfare benefits.

This has meant that social landlords have had to make use of other legislation (that was never intended for these purposes) to accommodate and support asylum seekers. Some refugees have been able to access food vouchers and other support under the National Assistance Act 1948, others have been able to use the Children Act 1989 to support refugees with young children. Some asylum seekers who are in 'priority need' under homelessness legislation e.g. having children, have managed to retain rights to temporary accommodation, but only if they applied for asylum at port of entry. However, this duty ceases if the subsequent application for asylum is refused.

A Home Office research study⁹ found that 80% of spontaneous refugees (e.g. those not arriving under a specified Government programme such as 'The Bosnian Project') arrive as single person households and are therefore not defined as being in 'priority need' under housing legislation. The study found that newly arrived asylum seekers were living in bed and breakfast accommodation or in a room in a shared house in the private rented sector. Findings from our research support the Home Office data.

In fact there are now a growing number of Tamil letting agencies in London, trying to meet the accommodation needs of single newly arrived asylum seekers. This is discussed further in the main body of the report where we look at the pattern of arrival and settlement of Tamil

⁸*Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Haringey, 1997: Haringey Council*

⁹*The Settlement of Refugees in Britain (H.O. Research Study 141), 1995: HMSO*

refugees. However, it has not been possible to obtain accurate figures on the dispersement of new arrivals throughout the London Boroughs. There seems to be very little official data on where Tamil new arrivals are settling.

Consultations with TCHA and other community organisations suggest that new arrivals migrate for obvious reasons, towards Boroughs where there are already established Tamil communities, with shops, schools, temples and other community organisations and services. Data collected by local authorities on local housing need, is not always broken down by identifiable ethnic groups. Tamil people are often incorporated into the 'other Asian' category. This lack of information has made it difficult for us to provide estimates of the numbers of Tamil people residing in each Borough.

Like any other refugee community living in the UK, the Tamil community face many problems and pressures, in addition to the more obvious one of housing. Many of the Tamil community and voluntary groups in London have documented the experiences of Tamil people both formally through published reports and contributions to other research that is being undertaken by various groups, and informally through their knowledge of their own community in their daily contact with them.

An analysis of the available secondary data has revealed particular issues of concern. The Refugee Training and Employment Centre¹⁰ estimate that at the time of writing in 1991, 80% of Tamils in London were of working age, but 60% were unemployed. Fewer than 1% were engaged in any kind of formal skills training.

Employment is a key element of refugee resettlement, not just for reasons of financial independence, but also to improve language skills quickly and effectively and to give people who have been destroyed by past horrors a level of confidence and dignity. However, a combination of some or all of the following:- employer prejudice, little or no skills in verbal and written English, lack of knowledge of the UK job market and a lack of work experience in the UK, results in asylum seekers and refugees continuing to face any number of barriers to employment.

Unemployment for Tamil women is exacerbated by the fact that the majority are not only the main child care providers, but also caring for the elderly, sick and disabled without access to additional support services.¹¹

Tamil groups are particularly concerned about the high level of mental health problems they are witnessing. Not surprising when you consider that most refugees have been subjected to or have witnessed unimaginable systematic horrors such as rape, persecution, torture and killings. The flight from the homeland to the UK is perilous in the extreme, and the level of isolation experienced by many recently arrived refugees means that deep rooted psychological problems are exacerbated.¹² Many Tamil voluntary groups though having strong desire to support the most vulnerable in their community, do not always have the necessary expertise or resources to deal with these extreme mental health issues.

Tamil elderly people are in a particularly difficult position. Many are forced to live with their children and grandchildren, but overcrowding and low income leads to all the usual stresses and strains of family life. The Tamil elders in contact with TCHA and other voluntary groups have expressed a desire to live more independently, with greater dignity and freedom. However, with no means of financial independence they are forced to continue to live in the extended family, feeling frustrated.

¹⁰ *Annual Report*, July 1991: The Refugee Training and Employment Centre

¹¹ *Career Planning for Tamil Women*, 1993: Tamil Information Centre

¹² *Enquiry into Mental Health Needs of Tamil Patients in the Alexandra Surgery*, 1997: Tamil Information Centre

In turn Tamil families talk about the burden of looking after elderly parents and grandparents who have very high practical and support needs. Neither party feels that there is an alternative that can be accessed so stresses and strains continue to build to crisis level.

The very latest figures from the Refugee Council¹³ show that between January and March 1998, there were 650 applications for asylum from people whose country of origin was Sri Lanka (Applications from Sri Lanka were the third largest group, only the former Yugoslavia and Somalia had a greater number of applications). At the time of writing this report and as the war escalates once again, destitute Tamil refugees with literally nothing, are arriving on the doorstep of Tamil Community Housing Association¹⁴, often in crisis and looking for support, contact with other Tamil people and a bed for a few nights.

"I got the name of this Tamil housing place from someone back at home, he said if you get to London they will be able to help you. I thank God that I found them....I am trying not to think about what I have had to leave behind, everything my family, friends, a job.....everything that I had ". (23 year old single male who arrived in January 1998).

TCHA is a small unregistered housing association, with few resources and even fewer available bedspaces. Immediate needs are being met by Tamil people in the community putting up additional families in already overcrowded situations. Having survived the horror of war, the death of family and friends and the loss of their homes, the Tamil community remain tenacious and resilient to all the challenges that are thrown at them.

¹³Quarterly Statistical Analysis (January to March 1998), 1998: The Refugee Council

¹⁴Homeless Asylum Seekers Flood in to Tamil HA Offices, February/March 1998 in *Black Housing: Federation of Black Housing Organisations* (See also *Housing Today* and *Inside Housing* for other features)

2. A Profile of the Sample

2.1 Respondent's Borough of Residence

We were aiming to interview 175 respondents in the Boroughs of Brent, Merton, Newham and Waltham Forest and 150 respondents in the Boroughs of Lewisham and Wandsworth. We were also looking for an overall elderly response rate of 10%. The fieldwork resulted in a total of 1,136 completed questionnaires. The table below details the response rate for each Borough.

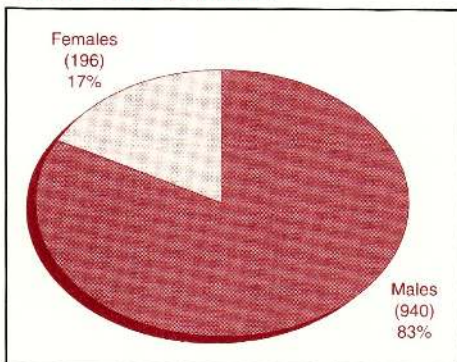
Sample Response Rate for Each London Borough

Borough	Total No. of Questionnaires	As a % of Total Sample	Elderly Questionnaires	As a % of Borough Sample
Brent	185	16.3%	28	15%
Lewisham	189	16.6%	29	15%
Merton	200	17.6%	25	12.5%
Newham	190	16.7%	43	23%
Waltham Forest	184	16.3%	20	11%
Wandsworth	188	16.5%	28	15%
Totals	1136	100%	173 (Inc. in the 1136)	15% Overall response rate

We exceeded our targets in each Borough and had an overall elderly response rate of 15%.

2.2 Gender of Respondents

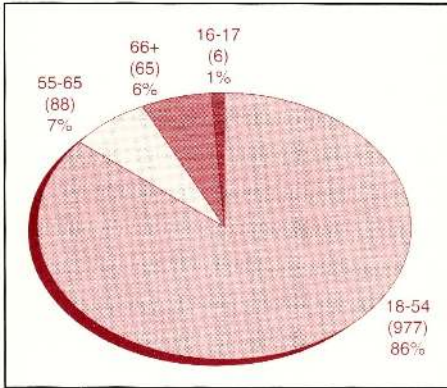
Gender of Respondents



Many of the questionnaires were completed with the head of the household. Given the gender distinctions within the Tamil community, as with other patriarchal Asian communities, it is not surprising that such a significant number of respondents (940 respondents) were male.

2.3 Age of Respondents

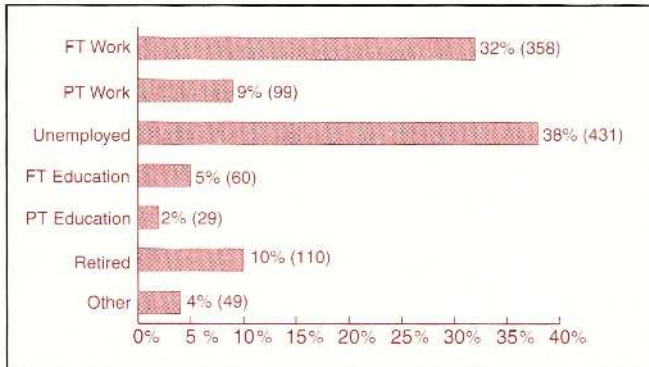
Age of Respondents



The majority of the sample were in the 18-54 year old category (86%-977 respondents). In the elderly sample, 88 respondents were aged between 55-65 and 65 respondents were aged 66 and over. Only 6 respondents were aged between 16-17.

2.4 Economic Status of Respondents

Economic Status of Respondents

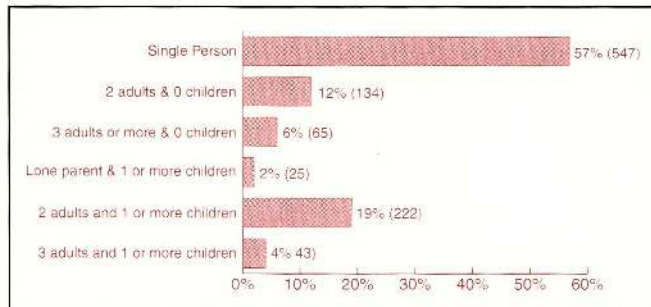


The largest category was the unemployed, 38% of the sample (431 respondents) said that they were unemployed. The next largest category were those who were in full time employment (32%-358 respondents).

Of those in the 'other category, some respondents said that they did not have work permits for this country and the remainder were 'housewives'.

2.5 Household Size and Make-Up

Household Size and Make-Up



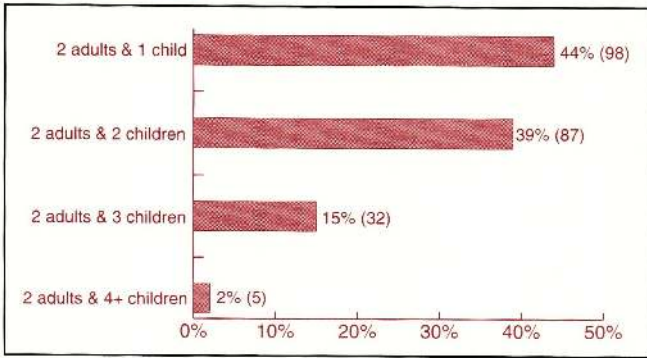
Although most of the analysis was completed on a 'head of household' basis, additional analysis was undertaken to determine the make-up of households.

The majority of the sample (57% - 647 respondents) was made up of single person households of 1 adult and no children. A further 12% were households of 2 adults and no children (134 respondents).

Only 25 respondents were lone parents (2% of the sample), and almost all of these were headed by females.

Further analysis was undertaken on those 222 households of 2 adults and children.

Households with 2 Adults and Children

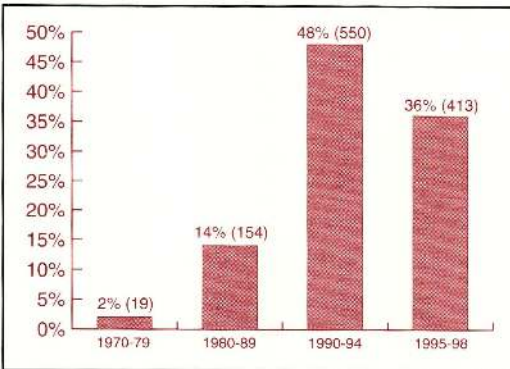


As a percentage of all households with 2 adults and children, 44% (98) respondents were in families of 2 adults and one child). 39% (87 respondents) were in households of 2 adults and 2 children. 15% (32 respondents) were in households of 2 adults and 3 children.

There were very few households of 2 adults and 4 or more children (2% - 5 respondents).

2.6 Year of Arrival

Year of Arrival



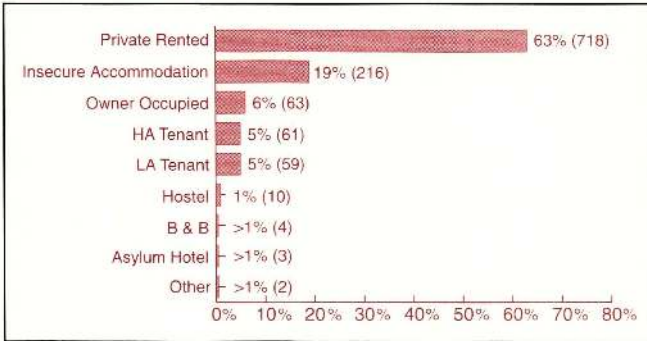
Respondents were asked what year they had arrived in the UK. None of the sample said they were born here.

84% of the sample (963 respondents) said that they arrived in the 1990s. Many were recently arrived. A total of 413 respondents (36% of the total sample) had arrived between 1995 and 1998.

3. Current Housing Circumstances

3.1 Current Housing Tenure

Current Housing Tenure



There was a significant reliance amongst the sample on the private rented sector. 718 respondents (63% of the sample) said that they were renting from a private landlord/lady. Of those who were renting privately 648 respondents were renting furnished accommodation and 517 respondents said that their private rented accommodation was shared and not self-contained. (Section 3.3 gives further information about shared accommodation.)

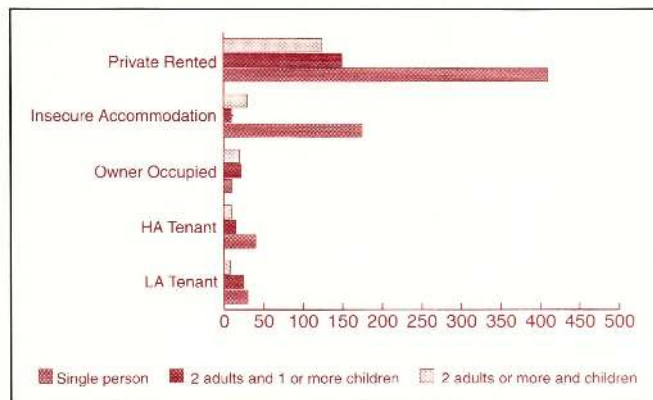
The second largest category of housing tenure were those 216 respondents who said they were living in insecure accommodation, that is temporarily staying with friends or family. There were relatively few owner occupiers (63 respondents), local authority tenants (59 respondents) and housing association tenants (61 respondents). Those in bed and breakfast, asylum hostels and other accommodation made up less than 1% of the overall sample.

3.2 Housing Tenure and Household Type

Further analysis was undertaken to examine current housing tenure by the size of the household. The graph overleaf shows the number of respondents in each category. 62% of single person households (402 respondents) were living in the private rented sector. However, there were also a significant number living in what they described as insecure accommodation. 26% of single person households were in insecure accommodation, this compared with 19% of the total sample.

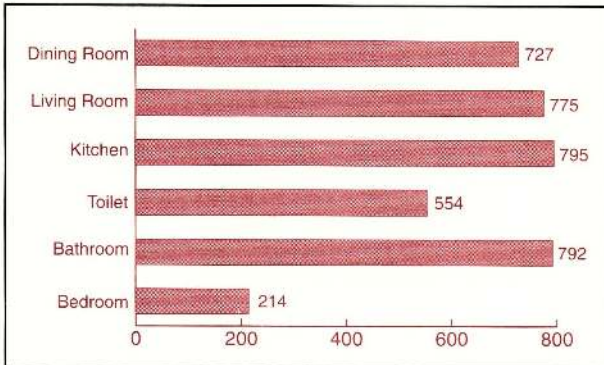
"I am staying with my friend and his wife and they have three children. I am sleeping on the floor in the sitting room. His wife is having another baby soon.....I do not know where I can go, but I cannot stay here for much longer". (29 year old single male).

Housing Tenure and Household Type



3.3 Shared Accommodation

Shared Accommodation



All respondents were asked if they were in shared accommodation, the definition being that you were sharing facilities such as bathroom, kitchen etc. with people other than those in your immediate household. Household in this context was defined as being a group of people (who may or may not be related) who are staying at the same address and sharing at least one meal a day.

70% of the total sample (796 respondents) said that they were in shared accommodation. This includes the 517 respondents who were in shared accommodation in the

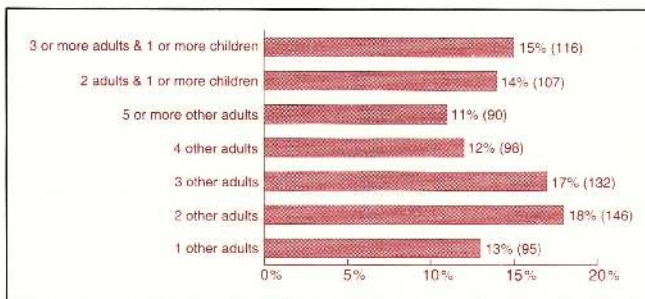
private rented sector. Respondents were asked to say which rooms they were sharing and with how many people.

The graph above shows the number of respondents who said they had to share facilities with people other than those in their household. The most significant figure in this analysis is that of those who were in shared accommodation, as many as 214 respondents said that they had to share bedrooms with people other than those in their household.

In some cases where there was severe overcrowding, this meant people were sharing bedrooms with strangers. Of the 214 respondents who were sharing bedrooms, 85 respondents were living in insecure accommodation and 111 respondents were living in the private rented sector.

Further analysis was undertaken to see how many people respondents were sharing with. Analysis was done on those 792 respondents who said they were sharing a bathroom with others.

Number of People Respondents were Sharing a Bathroom with



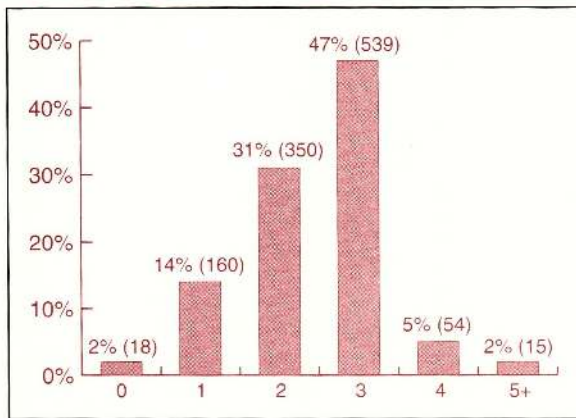
Of those 792 respondents who said they had to share a bathroom with people other than those in their household, most were sharing with other adults. 18% (146 respondents) said that they shared a bathroom with 2 other adults, 17% (132 respondents) shared with 3 other adults.

Although we did not ask a specific question about the relationship between the respondent and the other

people they were sharing with, further consultations with fieldworkers revealed that most of the single person respondents were sharing facilities with other single people whom they did not know prior to moving into the property.

3.4 Number of Bedrooms in the Property

Number of Bedrooms in Current Accommodation



The majority of people were living in two (31% - 350 respondents) and three (47% - 539 respondents) bedroomed properties.

3.5 Overcrowding

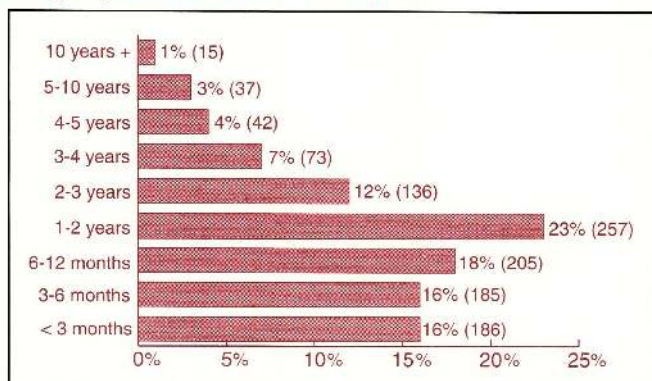
The statutory definition of overcrowding uses a concept called the bedroom standard. The bedroom standard sets a standard for the number of bedrooms a household needs depending upon its composition and the relationship of the members of the household to one another. This standard is then compared with the actual number of bedrooms available to the household. However, because we do not know the exact nature of the relationship between people living in the same accommodation, it is difficult to analyse the results using the official definition of overcrowding.

Analysis of the available information shows that 214 respondents had to share a bedroom with someone who was not a household member. This usually meant a 'friend of a friend' and other slight acquaintances, and in some cases it meant sharing a bedroom with a stranger. 52% of the sample (595 respondents) said that their current accommodation was unsuitable because of overcrowding. Interviewers said that this was exacerbated when overcrowded families were offering accommodation to new arrivals who had no other source of housing.

*"Me and my brother are staying with our cousin and his family. We sleep on the sofa and the floor because there is no other space for us."
(2 male adults staying with a couple and their 2 children in a two bedroomed property).*

3.6 Length of Time at Current Address

Length of Time at Current Address

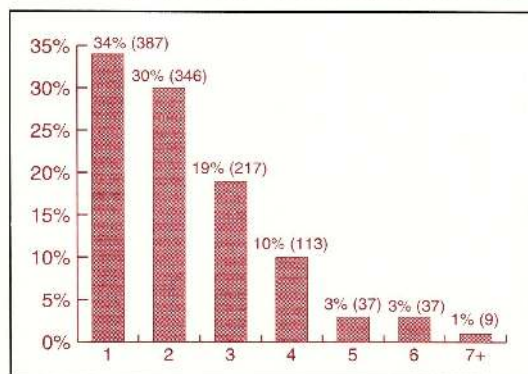


Respondents were asked how long they had been living at their current address, whatever the housing tenure.

A total of 51% of the sample had been living in their current accommodation for less than a year (576 respondents).

3.7 Number of Addresses in the Last Three Years

Number of Addresses in the Last Three Years

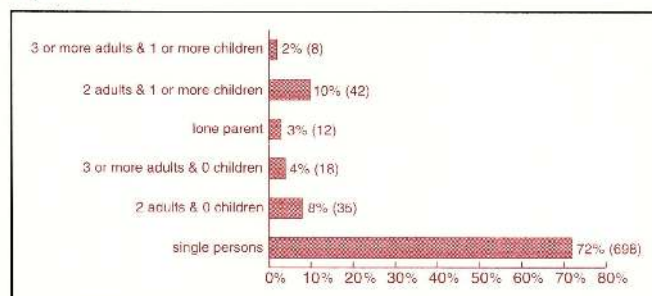


To supplement the information on how long people had been at staying at their current accommodation, respondents were also asked how many addresses they had lived at in the last three years.

34% of the sample (387 respondents) had only lived at one address. 30% (346 respondents) said they had lived at two addresses in the last three years, which meant that they had moved once. 19% (217 respondents) had lived at three addresses and had therefore moved twice in the last three years.

3.8 Household Type by Year of Arrival

Household Type of those Respondents Arriving After 1994



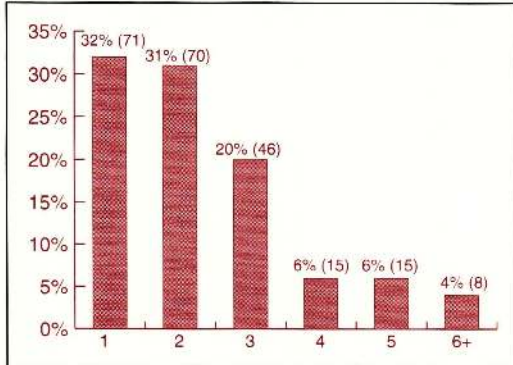
Further analysis was undertaken to look at the type of households that were the most recently arrived. Analysis was undertaken on the household type of those 413 respondents who had arrived from 1995 and onwards.

There were fewer families who were recently arrived. Only 10% of those who arrived after 1994 were in households made up of 2 adults and one or more children (42 respondents). This is in contrast to single

person households, the vast majority of recently arrived Tamils were in the single person category. 72% of those who arrived after 1994 were in single person households.

3.9 Number of Moves for Households with Children

Number of Addresses in the Last 3 Years for Households with Children

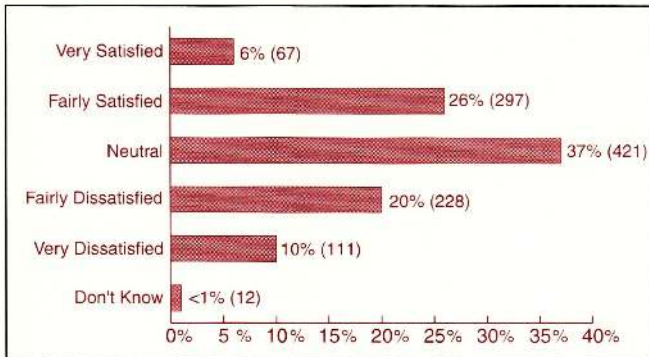


Further analysis was undertaken to look at those households who had children and had 'settled' in the UK e.g. they had arrived before 1995. The purpose of this analysis was to see if households were still moving from one address to another, even after they had been in the UK for a few years. The analysis was completed on those households with children as it was felt that disruption to children's education was a particularly pertinent issue.

There were a total of 225 households with children who had arrived in the UK before 1995. Even though 32% of the sample had only lived at one address, there was an indication that some families with children had experienced some disruption to their education. 31% of these households (70 respondents) had moved once in the last three years e.g. they had had two addresses. 20% (46 respondents) had moved twice in the last three years e.g. they had had three addresses in the last three years.

3.10 State of Repair of the Property

State of Repair of the Property



Respondents were asked to describe the state of repair of the property they were currently living in.

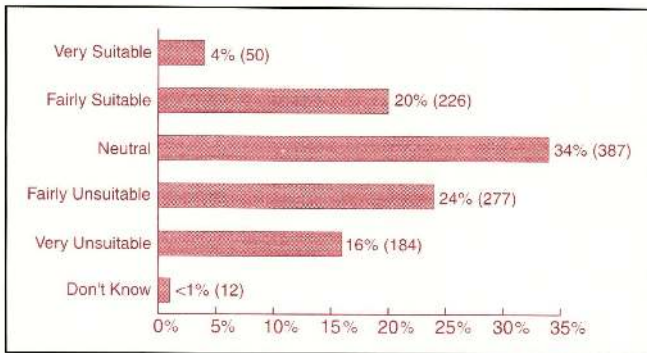
This was followed up by an open-ended question, if respondents said that they were dissatisfied with the state of repair of the property they were currently living in they were asked to say why.

37% of the sample (421 respondents) said that they felt neutrally about the state of repair of their accommodation. However, there was indication of some respondents living in poor quality accommodation. 20% (228 respondents) said they were fairly dissatisfied with the state of repair and 10% (111 respondents) were very dissatisfied.

Problems cited included damp (20% - 228 respondents), inadequate heating (21% - 233 respondents) and generally a poor level of maintenance and repairs (29% - 329 respondents).

3.11 Suitability of Accommodation

Suitability of Accommodation



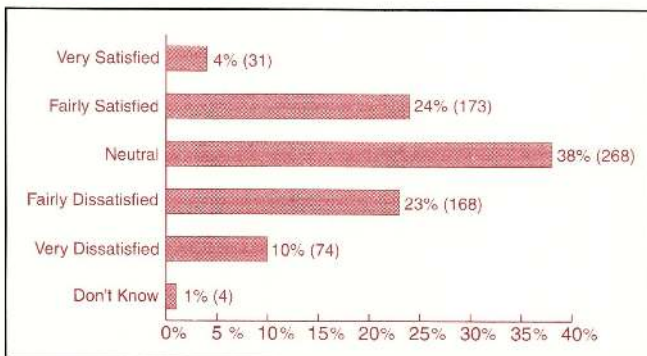
Respondents were asked how suitable they felt their accommodation was for their and their household's needs. If respondents felt the accommodation was unsuitable, they were asked to say why.

24% of the sample (277 respondents) said that their current accommodation was fairly unsuitable, a further 16% (184 respondents) described their accommodation as very unsuitable.

The reason cited was essentially overcrowding. 52% of the total sample (595 respondents) said their accommodation was overcrowded. This included respondents who were staying temporarily with family and friends as well as families living in accommodation that was too small for their needs.

3.12 Satisfaction and Suitability in the Private Rented Sector

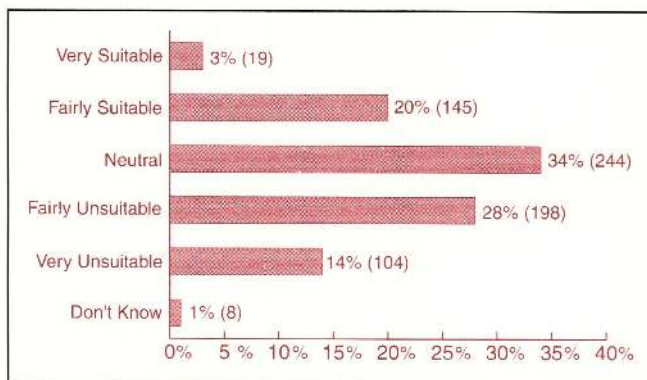
State of Repair of the Property in the Private Rented Sector



Further analysis was undertaken on the state of repair of the property and the suitability of accommodation for those 718 respondents who were living in the private rented sector.

The largest category were those who said that they felt neutrally about the state of repair of their property. However, 23% of those who were renting in the private rented sector said that they were fairly dissatisfied with the state of repair (168 respondents). A further 10% (74 respondents) said they were very dissatisfied.

Suitability of Accommodation in the Private Rented Sector

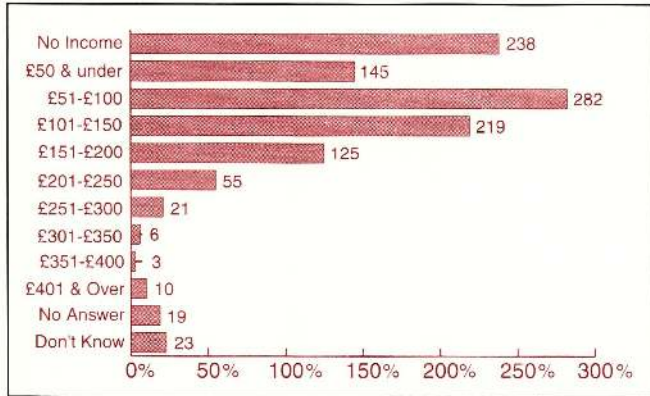


The largest category were those who felt neutrally about the suitability of their accommodation. However, 28% of those who were in the private rented sector said that their accommodation was fairly unsuitable for their and their household's needs. 14% (104 respondents) said that their accommodation was very unsuitable.

4. Respondent's Income and Housing Expenditure

4.1 Respondent's Income

Weekly Income of Respondents



Respondents were asked to state their weekly income, including benefits such as Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance etc. and their take home salary if they were employed. Income does not include any entitlement to housing benefit and analysis was undertaken on a head of household basis.

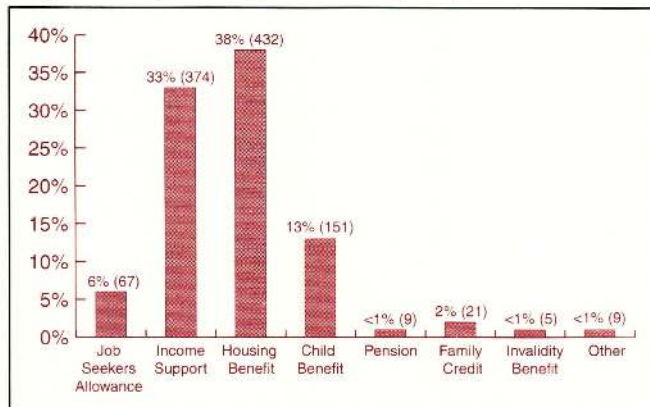
25% of the sample (282 respondents) said that their weekly income was between £51-£100. The second largest category were the 21% of the sample (238 respondents) who said they had no income. The majority of these respondents said that they had no access to

welfare benefits, and were relying on friends and family for financial support.

Further analysis was undertaken on the approximate income of the whole household. Respondents were asked to state not only their own income but that of their partner and other household members as well. The figures were virtually the same as those for individual respondents, suggesting that the head of the household (who was usually male) was the main wage earner in the family or the only household member claiming benefits.

4.2 Welfare Benefits

Welfare Benefits Being Claimed by Respondents



Respondents were asked which of the following welfare benefits they were claiming: Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Child Benefit, Pension, Family Credit and Invalidity Benefit. Respondents were asked to state if they were claiming any other benefits and what these were, once again analysis was undertaken on a head of household basis.

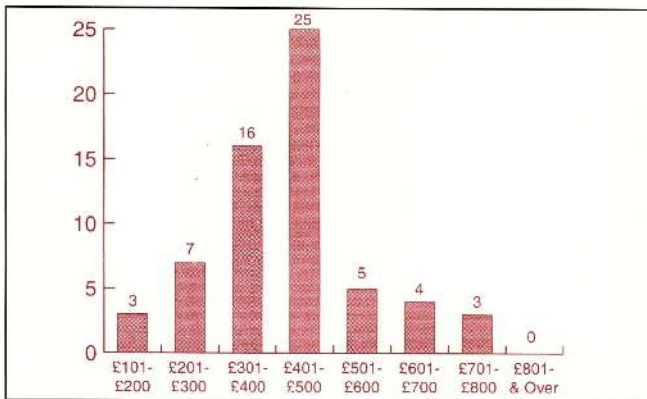
38% of the sample (432 respondents) said they were claiming Housing Benefit, 33% (374 respondents) were claiming Income Support. Of these 305 respondents were claiming both Income Support and Housing

Benefit. Those in the other category (9 respondents) were claiming under the 1948 National Assistance Act and under the 1989 Children Act. A few respondents ('other' category) said they had received food vouchers or parcels from Social Services because they were not entitled to any benefits.

Further analysis was undertaken on benefits being claimed by the whole of the household. Once again the figures were very similar to those above, suggesting that the head of the household (who was usually male) was generally the only person in the household claiming welfare benefits.

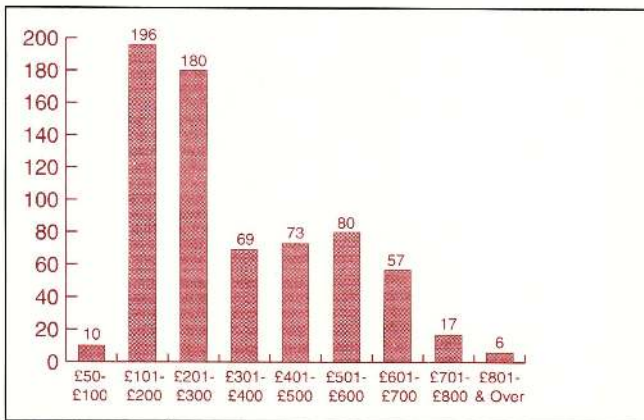
4.3 Monthly Housing Expenditure

Monthly Mortgage Payments



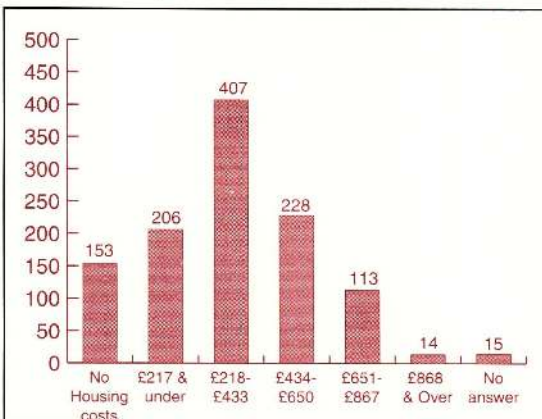
Owner occupiers (63 respondents) were asked to state how much their approximate mortgage repayments were each month. 40% (25 respondents) were paying between £401 - £500 per month.

Monthly Housing Rental Payments in the Private Rented Sector



Respondents who were paying rent in the private rented sector were asked to state what their approximate monthly rent was, and if they were eligible, to include housing benefit in this cost.

Total Monthly Housing Costs (All Tenures)



Respondents were then asked to include heating and lighting costs, service charges and other costs related to housing, to achieve a total monthly housing cost. This analysis was undertaken across all housing tenures and includes respondents who were paying rent and those paying mortgages.

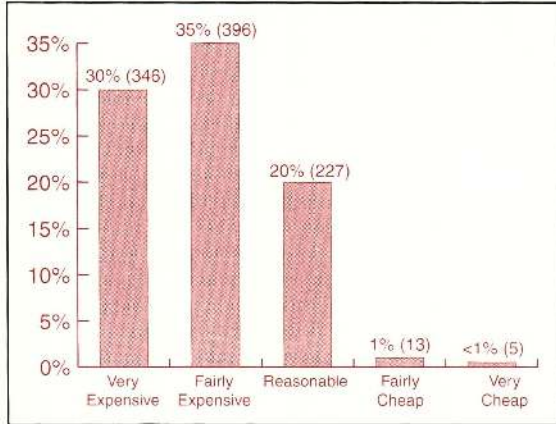
A total of 968 respondents were paying monthly housing costs. 153 respondents said that they were not paying rent or making a contribution towards housing costs. Most of these respondents said that they did not have access to welfare benefits and were relying upon friends and family for financial support.

42% of the sample across all housing tenures (407 respondents) had monthly housing costs of between £218 - £433.

The remaining 25 respondents did not provide an answer for this question. (Total of 1,136 respondents).

4.4 How do Respondents Feel about Amount Spent on Housing?

Do You Feel the Amount You Spend on Housing is.....?



Respondents were asked whether they felt the amount they spent on housing was expensive, reasonable or cheap.

30% of the sample (346 respondents) said they felt that the amount they spent on housing was 'very expensive', 35% (396 respondents) said they thought their housing costs were 'fairly expensive'. 20% of the sample (227 respondents) felt the amount was reasonable. Very few respondents felt the amount was cheap.

The remaining 13% of the sample were not paying housing costs, so they are not included in the graph.

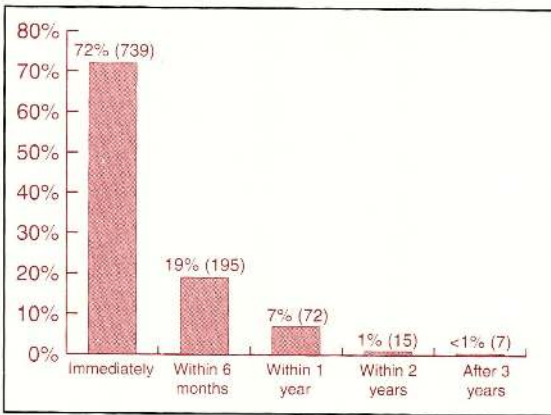
5. Future Housing Aspirations

5.1 Moving Out of Current Accommodation

All respondents were asked whether they would like to move out of their current accommodation and why. 91% of the sample (1,035 respondents) said that they would like to move. Information provided in part 5 is based upon an analysis of the 1,035 questionnaires.

5.2 How Soon Would Respondents Like to Move?

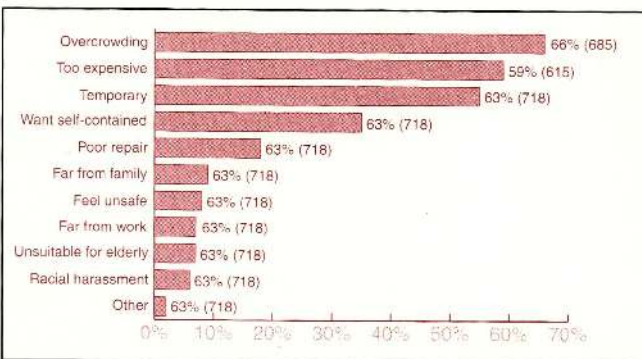
How Soon Would Respondents Like to Move Out By?



The majority of the sample, 72% (741 respondents) said that they wanted to out of their current accommodation immediately. 19% (195 respondents) said within the next 6 months and 8% (87 respondents) said they would like to move out by between 1-2 years.

5.3 Reasons for Wanting to Move

Reasons for Wanting to Move



Respondents were asked why they wanted to move out of their current accommodation. Many respondents had multiple reasons for wanting to move, and ticked more than one option.

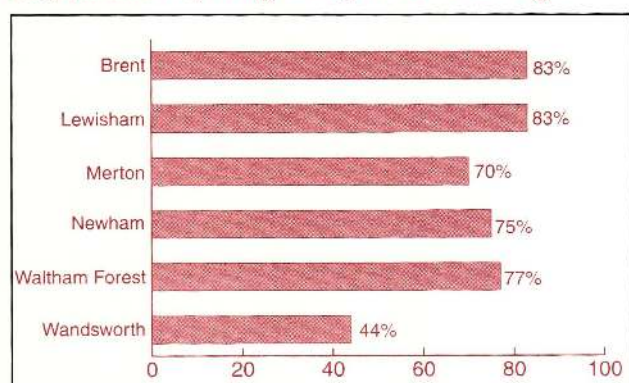
The graph shows that overcrowding was the reason most people wanted to move (66% - 685 respondents). 59% of the sample (615 respondents) said that their current accommodation was too expensive. 55% (569 respondents) were living in temporary accommodation and wanted something more permanent. 35% (359

respondents) wanted to move because they wanted to live in self-contained accommodation and not share facilities such as the bathroom with non-household members.

Those in the other category mentioned various reasons for needing to move: because they were facing imminent eviction, wanted to live in sheltered accommodation and needing to move for health reasons.

5.4 Area Respondent Would Like to Move To

Respondents Preferring to Stay in Same Borough



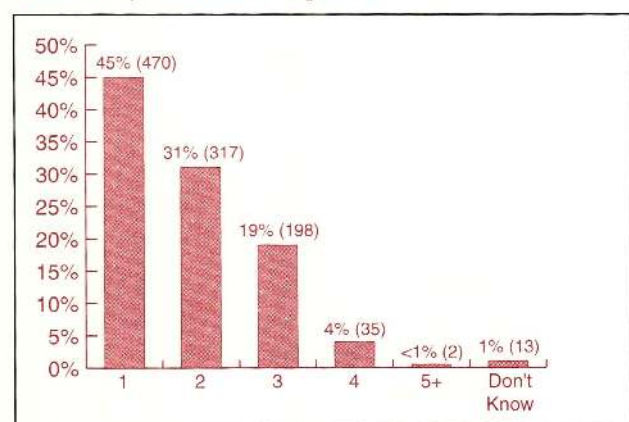
Respondents were initially asked whether they would like to stay in or move out of London. 99% of those that wanted to move, said that they wanted to stay in London.

This was followed up by a question asking which borough respondents would prefer to live in. The graph shows the percentage of respondents who wanted to stay in the same borough in which they were already residing.

The majority of respondents, between 70% - 83%, living in Brent, Lewisham, Merton, Newham and Waltham Forest wanted to stay in the same borough. Only 44% (83 respondents) of those people living in Wandsworth wanted to stay in that borough, 36% (68 respondents) of those who were living in Wandsworth said they would prefer to live in Merton. Consultations with workers in Tamil organisations suggested that Merton was regarded as a more 'supportive and sympathetic' borough in terms of listening and responding to the needs of Tamil people.

5.5 Number of Bedrooms Required

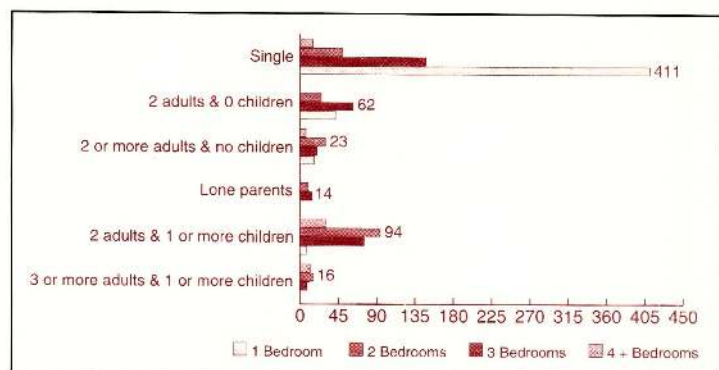
Number of Bedrooms Required



45% of the sample (470 respondents) said that they only required one bedroom. 31% (317 respondents) said that they needed two bedrooms.

5.6 Number of Bedrooms Required & Size of Household

Number of Bedrooms Required & Size of Household



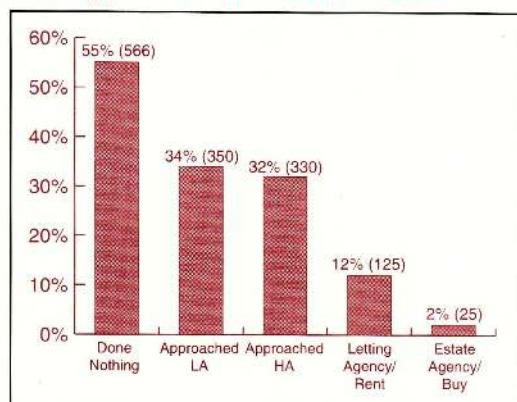
Further analysis was undertaken to examine the size and type of household and the number of bedrooms required.

The majority of single person households (69% of the sample of single person households) wanted a one bedroomed property (411 respondents). Some respondents indicated that even though they were in relatively small households now, they expected to be having children in the very near future and therefore they required more bedrooms.

There was some evidence of very large households still indicating that they would only require one or two bedroomed properties, suggesting that even this addition was better than the current level of overcrowding that they were experiencing.

5.7 Looking for Alternative Accommodation

Looking for Alternative Accommodation



Respondents who said that they wanted to move, were asked what they had done in terms of seeking alternative accommodation.

566 respondents had done nothing in terms of seeking new accommodation. The majority of respondents had approached local authorities and/or housing associations. 268 respondents had approached both a local authority and a housing association. (This is why figures do not add up to a 100%).

125 respondents had been to a letting agency or looked at adverts to rent a property in the private rented sector, and only 25 respondents had been to an estate agent or looked at adverts to buy a property.

Although such a significant number of respondents said that they wanted to move, 55% (566 respondents) said that they had done nothing in terms of seeking new accommodation. Even where respondents had approached a housing association or local authority for housing, significant numbers of people had not registered for housing with either social landlord.

Follow-up consultations were carried out with workers at Tamil community organisations to explore this phenomenon and they offered a number of explanations. The main reason was that the majority are single people (as is reflected in our sample) and they are therefore regarded as being non-priority. Workers said that most of the time they did not even bother to encourage new arrivals to approach either housing associations or local authorities because they knew it would 'be a waste of time'. Since there was little chance of being able to access housing, most people did not bother to approach a social landlord and subsequently did not register their need for housing. Workers said that other Tamil people were telling new arrivals that their only housing 'option' was the private rented sector and the easiest way to access this kind of housing would be through a Tamil letting agent.

Other reasons offered by workers include the fear of reporting to anyone 'official'. Workers said that given the circumstances, in which people had left their homeland and their subsequent arrival in this country, it was not surprising that people were fearful of approaching statutory organisations and volunteering information about themselves. Furthermore workers said that housing needs were usually immediate and people did not think it was worth registering for housing because of the amount of time spent on a waiting list.

There was also the issue of new arrivals coming into an area but not being sure whether this was an area in which they wished to stay on a permanent basis. Workers said that there was a fear that you would be offered housing away from the existing Tamil community, some workers suggested that there was a particular fear about being forced to take housing in a high rise block.

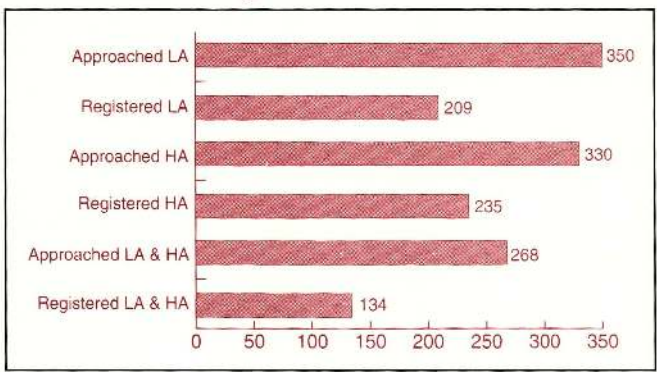
"We know that they are not in priority-need because they are single, so there is no point in sending them to the council. Anyway, we do not have time for that, we have to find them emergency accommodation". (Advice worker at a Tamil support organisation).

Finally workers said that for many people there was no real housing alternative, so although they wanted to move, respondents had taken no action because they felt they had no 'option' but to stay in their current accommodation. There were a number of reasons for this, but the main one offered by workers was a lack of income. Workers said that people on low incomes were living in barely affordable accommodation, and without any additional income their options for moving were severely limited. There was the issue of an increase in rent if people were moving into larger or better quality accommodation but also not being able to meet the actual cost of moving, such as a finding money for a deposit or rent in advance.

It is not nice here, there are too many of us in this small house.....the kitchen is very dirty and horriblebut it is OK, I know everything else will be too much money. (Single male aged 29).

5.8 Looking for Alternative Accommodation in the Social Housing Sector

Looking for Alternative Accommodation in the Social Housing Sector



Respondents who had approached a social housing landlord, were asked whether they had registered with either a local authority or a housing association. Since so many respondents had approached both social landlords a separate category was created.

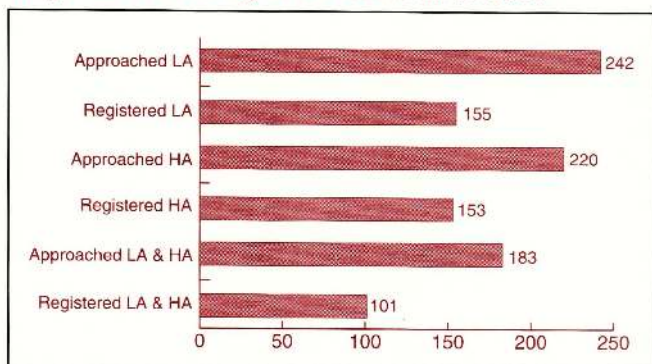
The graph shows that there were significant numbers of respondents who had approached either one or both social landlords, but were not on a waiting list for housing.

40% of those who had approached a local authority had not registered for housing, 29% of those who had approached a housing association had not registered for housing. For those respondents who had approached both social landlords, only 50% had registered for housing.

Follow-up consultations with workers suggested that again people had not registered for housing even after they had approached a social landlord because they were single people and therefore not regarded as being in priority need and also because of the length of time they would have to spend on a waiting list before being offered housing.

5.9 Registration with a Social Landlord and Length of Residence

Registration with a Social Landlord Amongst Respondents Arriving in the UK Prior to 1995



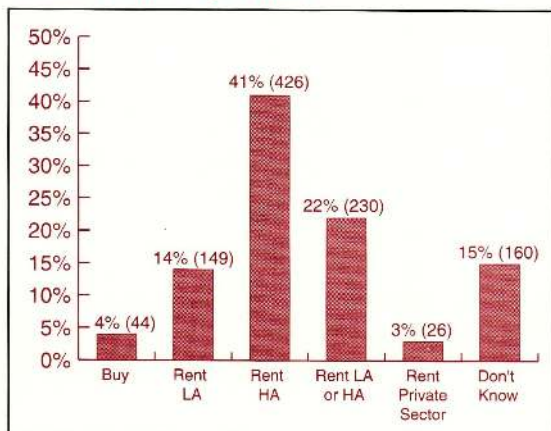
Since many in the sample had recently arrived in the UK, further analysis was undertaken to see whether there was a higher degree of registration with a social landlord, amongst those respondents who had 'settled' in the UK e.g. arrived prior to 1995. This was to counteract the argument that many respondents were unable to register for housing, simply because they had been in the UK for such a short length of time.

A total of 640 respondents had arrived in the UK before 1995 and said that they wanted to move out of their current accommodation. However, there was not much evidence that respondents had not registered for housing because they had only been in the UK for such a short period. The respondents in the graph above had arrived prior to 1995, but there was only a slightly higher level of registration.

36% of those who had approached a local authority had not registered for housing, 30% of those who had approached a housing association had not registered for housing. For those respondents who had approached both social landlords, 45% had not registered for housing.

5.10 Future Tenure Expectations

Future Tenure Expectations

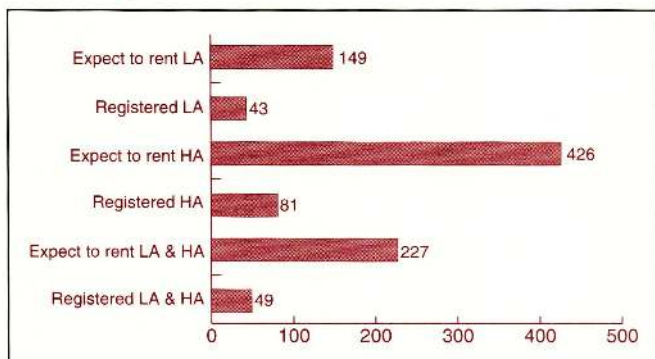


Respondents were also asked, that if they were to move, what type of housing tenure did they expect to move in to. Although respondents were asked to give only one answer, many chose renting from a local authority and renting from a housing association. This information was put into a separate category.

Renting from a housing association was the most popular option, chosen by 426 respondents. 149 respondents expected to rent from a local authority. 230 respondents expected to rent from either a housing association or a local authority.

5.11 Registering for Social Housing and Future Tenure Expectations

Registering for Social Housing and Future Tenure Expectations



Initial analysis suggested that there was an anomaly between respondents who expected to be able to rent from a social landlord but had not actually registered for housing. Further analysis was undertaken to examine this in more detail.

71% of those who expected to rent from a local authority had not registered for housing, 81% of those who expected to rent from a housing association had not registered for housing. For those respondents who expected to rent from either one of the social landlords,

78% had not registered for housing.

Further analysis was undertaken on those respondents who had arrived in the UK prior to 1995, to see whether length of residence had affected level of registration.

Once again there was not much evidence that length of residence had significantly affected the level of registration. 64% of those who expected to rent from a local authority had not registered for housing, 79% of those who expected to rent from a housing association had not registered for housing. For those respondents who expected to rent from either one of the social landlords, 74% had not registered for housing.

6. Support Needs of the Tamil Community

6.1 Support Needs

All respondents were asked if they had experienced any particular issues or difficulties in the last year, these ranged from welfare benefits, immigration, translation etc. The table below gives further details.

The information in Part 6, is based upon an analysis of all the 1,136 completed questionnaires.

Have you experienced any of the following in the last year?	Yes (as a % of 1,136 - total number of questionnaires)
Problems with attaining refugee status	43% (491 respondents)
Difficulties in claiming welfare benefits	42% (478 respondents)
Difficulties with the Immigration Department	24% (272 respondents)
Racial Harassment	7% (83 respondents)
Problems with enrolling children at school	3% (38 respondents)
Problems in finding suitable employment	23% (263 respondents)
Difficulties in communicating in written or spoken English	51% (581 respondents)

Just over half the sample (581 respondents) said that they had difficulties with communicating in written or spoken English. Problems in attaining refugee status (491 respondents) and difficulties with immigration issues (272 respondents) were also common experiences for many respondents.

Claiming welfare benefits (478 respondents) and finding suitable employment (263 respondents) also proved to be problematic for many respondents.

6.2 Knowledge of Support Services

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of any support services existing in their locality. This was followed up with questions about whether they had used any of these services and if they found them useful.

The response rate for this question was fairly poor. Many were left blank by interviewers, and the vast majority of those with answers were in the don't know category.

Follow-up consultations with the interviewers revealed that the 'don't know' responses reflected a genuine lack of knowledge of the available support services. Subsequently there was little information available on whether services had been used and whether they had been useful.

The majority of responses had been left blank and interviewers felt that this was about 'questionnaire fatigue'. Interviews had taken much longer than anticipated (as discussed in Part 1.2) and interviewers said that respondents wanted some time at the end of the interview to ask their own questions and seek advice and information on a range of topics.

Some interviewers suggested that respondents were willing and expected to answer specific questions about themselves and their experiences, but were not interested or could not understand why they were being questioned about their knowledge or judgement of support services.

6.3 Health Issues

This was actually the last but one question on the main body of the questionnaire and as with the support services question there was a very poor response, with the majority being left blank.

When interviewers were questioned about this, they said that people did not expect to answer questions about their personal health in a questionnaire of this kind. Interviewers felt that most respondents were prepared to answer questions about all aspects of housing but not about health.

The few responses to this question showed that only 4% (51 respondents) described physical illnesses, these included diabetes, heart condition, high blood pressure and asthma. Only 2% (18 respondents) said they had a disability and these were mostly elderly respondents who were experiencing mobility difficulties. 1% (9 respondents) described mental health problems and all of these were related to clinical depression.

Previous research¹⁵ on the mental health of Tamil people elicited a fairly good response. They interviewed 57 people, at a GP's surgery and interviews were conducted by specialist staff. Future research on health needs would probably be more successful if it was conducted within a medical context and by professional medical staff, particularly if the topic being researched was one as sensitive as mental health issues.

¹⁵*Enquiry into Mental Health Needs of Tamil Patients in the Alexandra Surgery, 1997: Tamil Information Centre*

7 The Elderly Sample

7.1 An Introduction to the Elderly Sample

Many of the families in contact with TCHA have relayed particular concerns about the needs of elderly people, indeed many elderly Tamils regularly approach TCHA with their own difficulties and problems. Information from TCHA and other Tamil support organisations suggests that there is an on-going issue within the Tamil community in meeting the needs of the elderly.

Elderly Tamils with little or no income of their own, are forced to stay with their extended family, particularly with their married sons and daughters, many of whom have young children of their own to cope with. There is a strong desire amongst elderly Tamils to be able to live more independently, and even if the practicalities can be sorted out there are still the age old cultural issues. The Tamil community have traditionally lived in the extended family household, and although times and people are slowly changing there is still a fear that living outside of the extended family will be frowned upon and disapproved of by others in the close-knit community.

Similar sentiments are expressed by young Tamil families who have to look after elderly parents and grandparents, but this is never communicated to the elderly. Families talk about the burden of looking after the elderly but feel that their community and culture demands that they continue to cope alone.

TCHA felt through their daily contact with the Tamil community that there were particular concerns in meeting all the practical and support needs of Tamil elders, but that these issues were not being freely communicated. Hence, it was agreed to include a special section within the questionnaire on the needs of the elderly Tamil community. All elderly people that took part in the survey, including those elders who were living with other household members, were asked to answer the additional questions.

It has been customary for some time now in Asian-led organisations when dealing with elderly Asians to include those over the age of 55 in the elderly category. The main reason for this is the declining health of many first generation immigrants. It has been argued that because of having to face issues such as discrimination, poverty, harsh working conditions and difficult life experiences, minority ethnic elders are more susceptible to ageing earlier. In order to allow for future comparative research between different minority ethnic groups, we thought it best to retain the same two classifications of 55-65 and 66 and over.^{16 & 17}

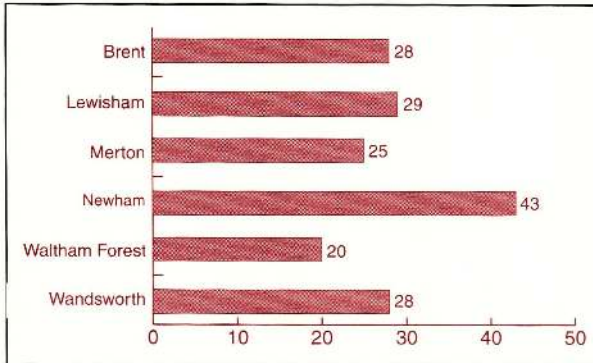
We were hoping to have an overall elderly response rate of 10%, but we actually managed to exceed our target. We collected information on 173 respondents aged 55 and over and that gave us an overall elderly response rate of 15%. Although we were able to interview a significant number of elderly people, our fieldworkers came across some elderly Tamils who were unwilling to take part in the survey for fear of upsetting their sons and/or daughters. In some interviews it was not unusual for children to speak on behalf of their elderly parents. However, when the fieldworker deemed it was appropriate they were able to interview elderly parents in an extended household separately.

¹⁶*Housing for Ethnic Elders*, 1984: Age Concern/Help the Aged Trust

¹⁷*The Numbers Game - Black and Minority Ethnic Elders and Sheltered Accommodation*, 1994: Anchor Housing Trust

7.2 A Profile of the Elderly Sample

The Number of Elderly Respondents in Each Borough



The analysis in Part 7 is based upon the response from 173 people aged 55 and over. 62% were male (107 respondents) and the remaining 38% (66 respondents) were female.

58% (101 respondents) were aged between 55-65, the remaining 42% (72 respondents) were aged 66 and over.

The majority of elderly respondents described themselves as retired (88% - 153 respondents). A small minority said they were in paid work and a few respondents said they were unemployed.

153 of the elderly questionnaires were completed directly with the elderly respondent. With the remaining 20 respondents, the questionnaire was completed with another household member, who had an elderly person living in their household.

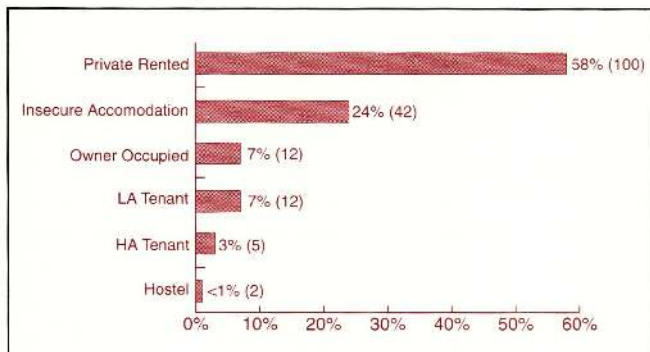
106 elderly respondents were living with family members, but when asked to describe their household the majority chose not to include other family members. The reason for this became apparent when many of these elderly respondents said that they did not want to live with their families and therefore did not include them as household members.

So even though the statistical analysis suggests that small elderly households, generally made up of single elders or elderly couples were living in large 2/3 bedroomed family accommodation, the analysis does not take account of other family members with whom they were sharing the accommodation with. Elderly respondents still talked about experiencing overcrowding, with many sharing bedrooms with their adult children and their grandchildren.

The graph above shows the number of questionnaires received from each borough. There was an overall response rate of 15% from elderly people.

7.3 Current Housing Tenure

Current Housing Tenure



As with the main sample there was a significant reliance on the private rented sector. 58% of elderly people (100 respondents) were currently renting privately from a landlord or landlady. There was a higher incidence of elderly respondents living in insecure accommodation. 24% of people in the elderly sample (42 respondents) were in insecure accommodation, that is staying temporarily with friends or family, this compared to 19% of the main sample. With regards to the private rented sector, 88 elderly respondents were in furnished accommodation, and 41 respondents were in shared

accommodation (as opposed to self-contained).

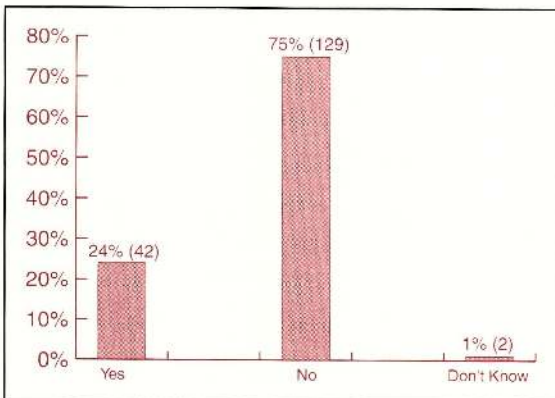
Elderly respondents across all tenures were asked if they had to share amenities such as the bathroom, kitchen etc. with people other than those in their household. 81 respondents said they had to share one or more of these rooms. Many of these were elders who were currently living with their extended families but did not want to, preferring to live independently in self-contained accommodation.

7.4 State of Repair of Property

Elderly respondents were asked to describe the state of repair of the property they were currently living in. 35% (60 respondents) said that they felt neutrally about it, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. 40% (69 respondents) said that they were satisfied (either very or fairly satisfied) with the state of repair. 25% (44 respondents) were dissatisfied with the repair of their current accommodation. Reasons for dissatisfaction included damp (32% - 55 respondents), inadequate heating (34% - 58 respondents), and a generally poor level of repairs and maintenance (22% - 38 respondents).

7.5 Suitability of Current Accommodation

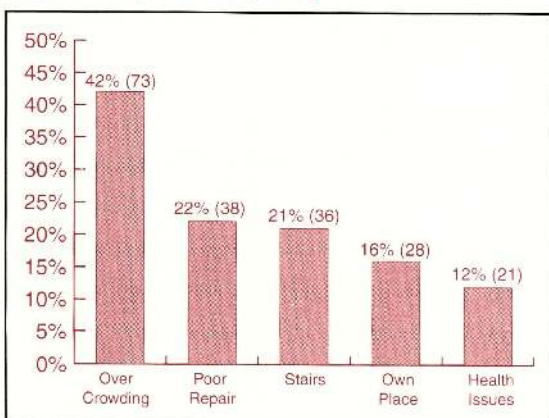
Is the Current Accommodation Suitable for the Needs of Elderly People?



Elderly respondents were asked how suitable their accommodation was for their and their household's needs. 29% (50 respondents) felt their accommodation was very unsuitable and 33% (57 respondents) said it was fairly unsuitable. This was followed up by a specific question asking how suitable the accommodation was for the needs of elderly people. The responses are shown in the graph.

75% of the sample of elderly people (129 respondents) said that the accommodation was unsuitable for the needs of elderly people. This was followed up by an open-ended question asking elderly respondents why they felt their current accommodation was deemed to be unsuitable.

Reasons for Describing Accommodation as Unsuitable for Elderly People



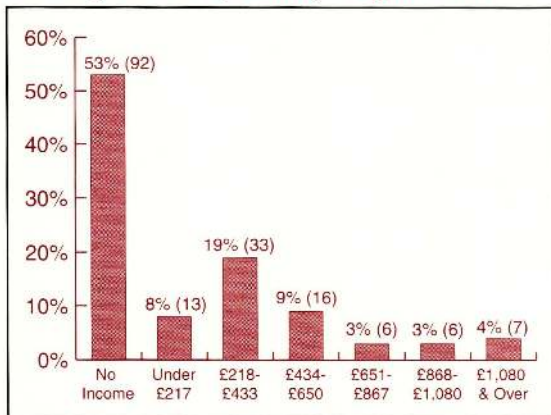
42% (73 respondents) said overcrowding was the reason why accommodation was unsuitable. 21% (36 respondents) said there were too many stairs in the property, this also included those respondents who said that bathrooms were on different floors to bedrooms. 12% (21 respondents) said that particular health problems were being exacerbated because of the physical nature of the property they were living in. This was mostly elderly people who had asthma, and other respiratory problems who were living in damp and poorly heated accommodation.

16% of elderly people (27 respondents) said that their current accommodation was unsuitable because they wanted to live in their 'own place'. They talked about wanting more independence and privacy, about not having to share bedrooms with children and grandchildren and about not wanting to be financially or otherwise dependant upon their extended families.

7.6 Elderly Income and Housing Expenditure

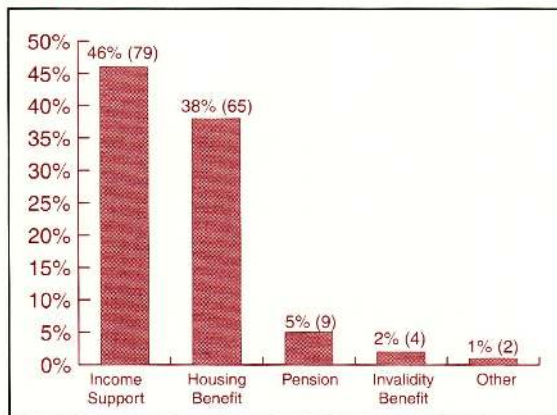
7.6.i Elderly Income and Eligibility for Welfare Benefits

Monthly Income of Elderly Respondents



53% of the elderly sample (92 respondents) said that they had no income of their own. They said that they were relying upon the financial support of their families, particularly their sons and daughters. 19% of elderly people said they had a monthly income of £218 - £433, an equivalent of £51 - £100 per week. Elderly respondents were then asked which welfare benefits they were claiming.

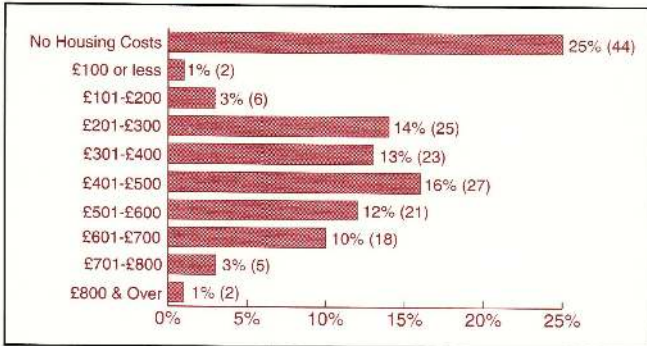
Welfare Benefits Claimed by Elderly Respondents



46% of the elderly sample (79 respondents) were claiming Income Support, 38% (65 respondents) were claiming Housing Benefit. 36% (63 respondents) were receiving both Income Support and Housing Benefit. The 2 respondents in the 'other' category were receiving food vouchers from Social Services.

7.6.ii Elderly Monthly Housing Expenditure

Monthly Housing Expenditure of Elderly Respondents



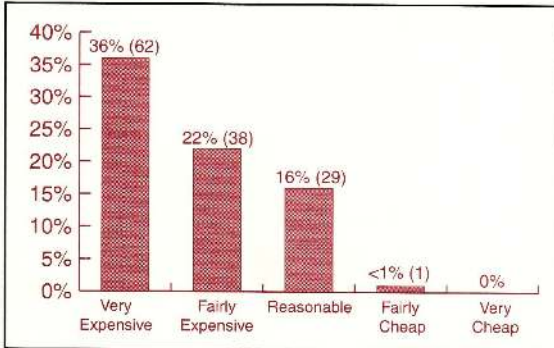
Elderly respondents were asked how much they spent in total on their housing each month. This included any mortgage payments, rent, service charges and heating and lighting costs.

The 44 elderly respondents who said they were not paying any housing costs were primarily staying with their adult children. 27 of these respondents wanted to stay with their families. The remaining 15 elderly respondents, said they wanted to live independently of their families but because they had no income of their

own, felt that they had no choice but to stay where they were.

Those elderly respondents who were incurring housing costs, were asked whether they felt the amount they spent on housing was expensive, reasonable or cheap.

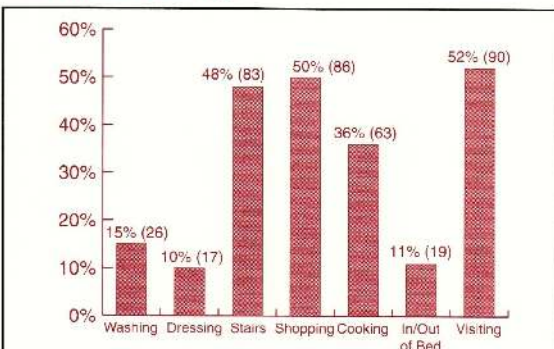
Do You Feel the Amount You Spend on Housing is...?



36% of elderly respondents felt that the amount they spent on their monthly housing was very expensive and 22% said it was fairly expensive. The 44 elderly respondents who did not pay housing costs were not included in this analysis.

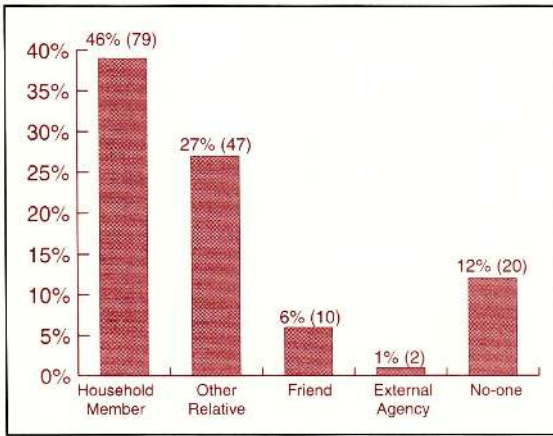
7.7 Support Needs of Elderly People

Yes, Elderly People Require Help with these Activities



Elderly respondents were asked if they needed practical help with the following activities. This was followed up by a question asking elderly respondents who provided such help.

Who Provides Such Help to Elderly People?



67 elderly respondents were being helped by a household member who was living in the same accommodation as them. 47 respondents were helped by another relative who did not live with them. Only 2 elderly respondents had help from an external agency such as Social Services.

"Since I fell and hurt my hip I cannot cook any more. My daughter-in-law comes on the bus everyday to bring food for me and my husband". (67 year old female).

20 respondents said that although they required help, they had no-one to provide it.

In terms of more general needs, (e.g. those not specific to elderly people) 110 respondents said they had difficulties with communicating in written or verbal English, 81 respondents had experienced problems in claiming welfare benefits, 51 respondents had difficulties with attaining refugee status and 32 respondents had problems in their dealings with the Immigration Department.

As with the main sample, the response rate for the question concerning knowledge of support services in the locality, was poor. The majority of elderly respondents did not provide any answers for this section. (See Part 6.2).

7.8 Moving Out of Current Accommodation

84% of elderly people (145 respondents) said that they would like to move out of their current accommodation. Reasons cited have already been discussed elsewhere in Part 7 e.g. overcrowding, too expensive, wanting 'own place', etc. The majority of elderly respondents wanted to move out immediately (98 respondents). A further 32 respondents said they would like to move out within 6 months.

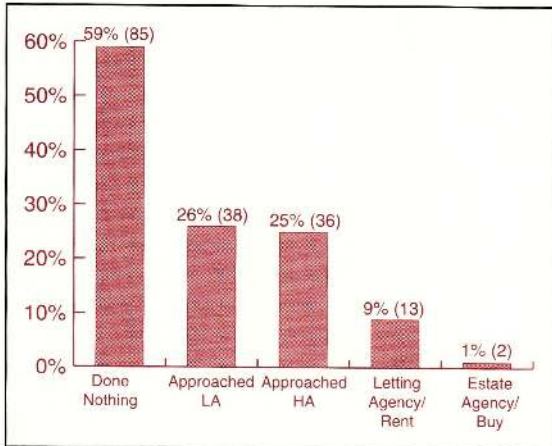
The majority of elderly respondents wanted to stay not only in London, but also within the borough in which they were currently residing.

7.9 Looking for Alternative Accommodation

Analysis in part 7.9 is based upon the responses from the 145 elderly people who said they wanted to move.

Those elderly respondents who said they wanted to move, were asked what they had done in terms of looking for other accommodation.

Looking for Alternative Accommodation



85 of elderly respondents said that they had done nothing. Of the 38 respondents that had approached a local authority 30 had registered for housing. Of the 36 respondents that had approached a housing association, 29 had registered for housing. 23 respondents said that they had registered with both a local authority and a housing association.

Only 13 of elderly respondents had approached a letting agency or looked at adverts to rent a property and only 2 had approached an estate agent or looked at adverts to purchase a property.

7.10 Future Housing Tenure

Future Tenure Expectations

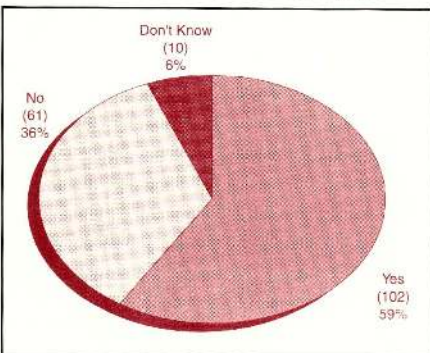


Renting from a local authority and/or a housing association was the most popular option and was chosen by 53 respondents.

81 respondents said that they would only require one bedroom if they were to move. 27 respondents said they would require two bedrooms and a further 27 respondents said they would need three bedrooms.

7.11 Sheltered Housing

Would You Consider Living in Sheltered Accommodation at this Moment?



All elderly respondents (173 people) were asked if they would consider living in sheltered accommodation, either now or in the future. A definition was provided of sheltered housing to aid understanding and consistency. This was followed up by an open-ended question asking respondents why they did or did not want to move into sheltered accommodation.

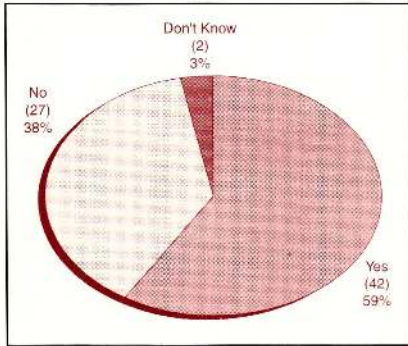
It is worth noting that all the questionnaires undertaken with Tamil elderly people were conducted in the Tamil language. Although the question referred to 'consider', interviewers had to explain the meaning of sheltered schemes, (using the definition provided) after receiving the explanation

the majority of respondents felt that they would prefer to live in sheltered accommodation.

102 elderly respondents said they would consider living in sheltered accommodation at this moment in their lives.

Those respondents who said 'no' or 'don't know' were asked if they would consider living in sheltered accommodation in the future (in approximately between 5-10 years time).

Would You Consider Living in Sheltered Accommodation in the Future?



Of the 71 respondents who said 'no' or 'don't know' to currently living in sheltered accommodation, a further 42 respondents said they would consider living in sheltered accommodation in the future.

Although the questionnaire did not ask a specific question, to clarify whether elderly people actually wanted to live in sheltered accommodation, or merely wanted to live independently of their families, we consulted both the interviewers and workers in Tamil organisations. They were united in their opinion that the majority of elderly people did specifically want to live in sheltered accommodation. Workers said that in their regular contact with elderly people this was an increasingly common request.

Looking at the whole elderly sample (173 respondents), a total of 83% (144 respondents) said they would consider living in sheltered accommodation either now or in the future.

Reasons for wanting to live in sheltered accommodation included wanting to be cared for, having a combination of independence/privacy and support, being able to interact with other elders especially Tamil elders and not having to live with the family they were currently living with.

"I have to live with my son's family, they have to help me a lot. It would be better for me and them if I could live in one of those homes for old people". (Tamil male age 74).

Most of the 27 respondents who said that they did not want to live in sheltered accommodation, either now or in the future, said that they preferred to stay with their families. However, even though we did not specify whether the sheltered accommodation was mainstream or Tamil led, a few (6 respondents) said that they did not want to live with white elders.

8. Conclusion

8.1 *Continued displacement*

By the time they reach the UK, Tamil refugees (like all other refugees) have already experienced a significant level of displacement. The flight from the homeland from the most horrific circumstances, the perilous journey to the UK and the traumatic arrival in a country with no physical possessions or mental security all contribute to the disruption experienced by refugees.

However, our findings suggest that Tamils continue to encounter a level of displacement. 49% (563 respondents) had moved between 2 and 3 times in the last three years. 51% (576 respondents) had lived in their current accommodation for less than a year. However, of these 51% (156 respondents) were newly arrived e.g. had arrived from 1997 onwards. Furthermore, 91% of the sample (1,035) said that they wanted to move out of their current accommodation.

Even those Tamils who might be described as settled, in that they had arrived prior to 1995 were still continually moving. Although all household members experience disruption, the issue was felt to be particularly pertinent for families with children, because of the obvious disruption to a child's education. 57% of households with children aged 15 and under had moved between 1 and 3 times in the last three years (128 respondents).

Workers in Tamil community organisations said that continually moving around from one address to another also created difficulties when it came to claiming welfare benefits. Duplicate forms had to be completed when people moved into a different benefit office catchment area and the time delay meant that people were losing much needed income.

8.2 *Reliance upon the private rented sector*

Low income restricts the chances of becoming an owner-occupier, and limited access to social housing means that the private rented sector is the only housing 'option' available to most Tamil new arrivals. Despite many respondents describing their housing costs as either fairly or very expensive, expense was not always synonymous with quality. 33% of those in the private rented sector (242 respondents) described the repair of the property as unsatisfactory. Furthermore, 42% of those renting privately (302 respondents) said the accommodation was unsuitable for their (and their household's) needs.

A significant proportion of respondents in the private rented sector were sharing facilities such as bathroom and kitchen with people other than those in their immediate household (72% - 517 respondents).

The pattern of housing tenure was similar to that of the 1994 research, with new arrivals staying temporarily with friends and family and then moving into the private rented sector, via a Tamil letting agent. Although we did not ask a specific question about why so many of the sample were concentrated in the private rented sector, consultations with workers at Tamil community organisations revealed the reasons for this distinct pattern of settlement. (*Please see part 8.3*).

Once people had entered the private rented sector many expected to stay there. A significant number of people said that they wanted to move of their current accommodation (91% of the sample - 1,035 respondents), and 72% (741 respondents) said they wanted to move immediately. Reasons cited included overcrowding, too expensive, and wanting self-contained or permanent accommodation.

However, 55% of the sample (566 respondents) said that they had done nothing in terms of seeing new accommodation. Workers said that respondents were realistic in their expectations and knew that without additional income, the vast majority would have to stay in the current accommodation regardless of its unsuitability.

8.3 Lack of registration with a social landlord

Our consultations with workers in Tamil community organisations suggested a number of reasons why newly arrived Tamils were not approaching social landlords, but instead were being diverted into the private rented sector. The main reason was that most were single people and therefore would not be regarded as being in priority need.

Other reasons for not approaching either a housing association or a local authority was a fear of volunteering personal information to anyone 'official', not knowing which area they would like to settle in, knowing that they would have to go on a lengthy waiting list even though their housing needs were very immediate and a fear that they would be housed away from the established Tamil community and in some cases in a high rise tower block.

All the reasons for not registering are completely valid. So whilst workers may be right in one respect to explain that realistically the chances of single Tamil new arrivals accessing social housing are exceedingly slim, this phenomenon does mean that there is also no official record kept by local authorities of the level or type of housing need amongst Tamil people.

We could be left with the situation where local authorities could assume that needs are being met by organisations with the existing resources that they have because there are so few Tamil people approaching them for housing. Our consultations with TCHA and other Tamil community organisations suggest that they being forced to stretch limited resources even further and to the point of crisis. It was not unusual for organisations to talk about staff having to offer emergency accommodation to newly arrived Tamils who had turned up on the doorstep of their offices, since there was no other alternative.

8.4 Overcrowding

Although we were not able to undertake any analysis with the official definition of overcrowding using the bedroom standard, there was a high level of overcrowding amongst our sample. 52% of the sample (595 respondents) said that their current accommodation was unsuitable because of overcrowding. Furthermore, 66% of the sample (685 respondents) said that they wanted to move out of their current accommodation because of overcrowding.

In many cases the situation was being exacerbated where households that were already overcrowded, were offering accommodation to newly arrived Tamils because they had no where else to go. 214 respondents said that they were sharing bedrooms. This usually meant sharing with a 'friend of a friend' or other slight acquaintances, but in some cases it meant sharing with a complete stranger. Interviewers said it was not unusual to find people sleeping on sofas and on any available floor spaces in living rooms, bedrooms and sometimes in halls and on landings.

8.5 Low income households

77% (274 respondents) of those in full-time work were earning less than £200 per week, but we came across even more extreme examples of financial poverty. 21% of the sample (238 respondents) said that they had no income. They were not able to claim any welfare benefits and instead were relying upon the support of friends and family for everything from accommodation to meals.

Elderly people in particular were saying that they had no income of their own. 53% of the elderly sample (92 respondents) said that they had no income, and the majority said that they were reliant upon their families, particularly sons and daughters to meet all their living costs.

38% of the sample (431 respondents) said that they were unemployed and 23% (263 respondents) said that they had experienced difficulties in finding employment. 51% of the sample (581 respondents) said that they had difficulties in communicating in written or spoken English. Some respondents had enrolled at English language classes to improve their chances of employment. Others talked to interviewers about their frustration at not having their qualifications and skills recognised and some talked about their experiences of blatant racial discrimination in the labour market.

We did not find large groups of refugee families all recklessly claiming any number of welfare benefits. Despite the restrictions in eligibility to benefits, we found many respondents who were not claiming all the welfare benefits to which they were entitled. 42% of the sample (478 respondents) said that they had experienced difficulties in claiming welfare benefits. Further analysis revealed that the head of the household was usually the sole person in the household claiming welfare benefits or earning a salary.

Poverty was widespread and in many cases extreme. However, with restricted access to even the most basic welfare benefits and limited opportunities to enter and compete in the labour market, many respondents were not hopeful of being able to move beyond their low-income status.

8.6 Meeting the needs of elderly people

The majority of elderly people in our sample (75% - 129 respondents) thought their accommodation was unsuitable for the needs of elderly people. The reasons cited included overcrowding, too many stairs in the accommodation, bathrooms being on different floors to bedrooms and poor physical repair.

We came across many elderly people, who had no income of their own and so were forced to live with their adult children and young grandchildren. A combination of low income and overcrowded households meant that stresses and strains were all too obvious. Sons and daughters with young children of their own talked about the increased burden of having to look after elderly parents.

Although we did not ask a specific question about whether elderly people wanted merely to live in independent accommodation, workers said that through their regular contact with elderly Tamils most said they wanted to live in sheltered accommodation. There was an issue about wanting to be independent of their families, but living independently was not the complete answer since many recognised that they needed care and support with day to day activities.

59% of the elderly sample (102 respondents) said that they would consider living in sheltered accommodation at this moment. A further 42 respondents said that they would consider living in sheltered accommodation in the future, in 5 to 10 years time.

Tamil elders said that they wanted sheltered accommodation to be a part of the existing Tamil community. They felt that living in sheltered accommodation should not mean that they are cut off from their families, rather that they continue to have access to Tamil temples, shops, cultural and welfare groups and live within the vicinity of their friends and family.

It is worth noting that all the questionnaires undertaken with Tamil elderly people were conducted in the Tamil language. Although the question referred to 'consider', interviewers had to explain the meaning of sheltered schemes, (using the definition provided) after receiving the explanation the majority of respondents felt that they preferred to live in sheltered accommodation.

Elderly people talked about their desire to have more privacy and live their lives with dignity. They did not want to be reluctantly cared for by their children and said it was all too obvious that they were an extra burden within an already strained household.

9. Recommendations

9.1 Recommendations for Local Authorities & Registered Social Landlords

- 9.1.1 LAs & RSLs should recognise the severity of need amongst the Tamil refugee community and look at ways in which they can support organisations like TCHA in housing and supporting Tamil refugees.
- 9.1.2 LAs & RSLs need to begin and maintain a dialogue with TCHA and other Tamil community organisations, with a view to developing a holistic strategy towards addressing both the housing and support needs of the Tamil community.
- 9.1.3 Local Authorities with a significant concentration of Tamil people should look at ways in which they can develop and expand their partner relationship with TCHA, to capitalise on TCHA's expertise in meeting the needs of the Tamil community.
- 9.1.4 LAs & RSLs need to recognise that there is a growing population of Tamil elders who require sheltered housing. For some Tamil elders this need is immediate, for others it is in the imminent future. LAs & RSLs need to ensure that they are prepared to meet the housing and support needs of Tamil elders both now and in the future.
- 9.1.5 LAs & RSLs need to ensure that they are able to collect reliable data on the size and make-up of the Tamil population in its locality, in order to know the scale and range of housing need.

9.2 Recommendations for The Housing Corporation

- 9.2.1 Given the scale of need The Housing Corporation should recognise that the Tamil community is one of *the* major refugee communities in London. This should be taken into account when they are allocating resources towards the development of refugee housing.
- 9.2.2 The Housing Corporation should discuss the findings of this research in their regular meetings with the six London Boroughs, in order to support Local Authorities in meeting the housing and support needs of the Tamil community.

9.3 Recommendations for Future Research

- 9.3.1 More detailed qualitative research on the specific needs of the elderly Tamil community, examining their perceptions of sheltered housing and to document in particular their care and support needs.
- 9.3.2 Research on the mental health problems and intensive support needs of newly arrived Tamils to identify gaps in this specialist area of service delivery.
- 9.3.3 Quantitative analysis to establish the pattern of arrival and settlement of Tamil refugees and to critically evaluate and make suggestions for the improvement of refugee data sources.
- 9.3.4 Qualitative research on the support needs of Tamil women, examining their roles as carers of children and the elderly and the implications for their education or career prospects.

Comparative Analysis with the 1994 Research

The 1994 research (Survey into the Housing Needs of the Tamil Community in Greater London by Tony Soares & Associates) was the first attempt by TCHA to systematically document the housing experiences of recently arrived Tamil refugees. The research involved three distinct sources i) a comprehensive review of the information held by TCHA on its client group via an analysis of completed application forms for housing, ii) an analysis of 195 questionnaires received from Tamil refugees and iii) consultations with workers in Tamil community organisations.

Although our sample for the 1998 research was much larger (we were able to interview 1,136 Tamil people) findings from both reports appear to be similar. The six London Boroughs in our research were identified as being primary areas of settlement for newly arrived Tamils in 1994. This pattern of settlement seems to have continued between the intervening years. In 1998 we found that newly arrived Tamils were enticed towards particular Boroughs. Having left their homeland in traumatic circumstances, it is not surprising that newly arrived Tamils want and need the support of the existing Tamil community in London. Furthermore, in these particular Boroughs there is now an established community network through Tamil temples, schools, food shops and other Tamil run businesses.

One type of Tamil business that has taken off in the last few years is the emergence of Tamil owned and run letting agencies. The 1994 survey found that there was a distinct pattern of housing tenure amongst newly arrived Tamil refugees, and in 1998 we found this pattern continuing.

As destitute Tamil refugees arrive in this country with no personal income and with no access to social housing, they turn to their community for support and are housed temporarily by friends and family. Subsequently they move to the private rented sector, with most finding their accommodation through a Tamil letting agent. The majority of new arrivals are single men and most move into shared housing within the private rented sector. However, as families grow with marriages and children, and new arrivals continue to seek emergency housing amongst their friends, there is a strong tendency for overcrowding.

Since the 1994 research, TCHA and other Tamil community organisations have become more strategic and effective in terms of delivering a comprehensive range of services to the Tamil community. On the recommendations of the 1994 research, TCHA have; revised their housing application form; introduced a range of housing management policies and procedures; and have trained staff to provide an advice and information service on a range of relevant topics.

However, limited financial resources and restricted development opportunities have meant that in 1998 Tamil refugee housing and support needs are not being fully met. The 1998 research has confirmed the 'snapshot' view provided by the 1994 research, Newly arrived Tamils are still settling in specific London Boroughs and are concentrated in the expensive private rented sector, often in shared and poor quality accommodation. Unfortunately a lack of quality and affordable accommodation and significant levels of overcrowding, continue to be the common experience of new Tamil arrivals in 1998.

Tamil Community Housing Association - A model for self help

The ethnic war in Sri Lanka has led to the arrival of thousands of Tamil people in this country. Escaping from harassment, torture and death, they have arrived deeply traumatised and never in more need for safety and security.

TCHA was born out of Tamil Refugee Action Group, a coalition of Tamil volunteers and community leaders that were meeting the needs of newly arrived Tamils. In 1986 TCHA established itself as a distinct organisation specialising in housing and was called Tamil (Refugee Action Group) Housing Association.

Whilst continuing to serve the needs of vulnerable newly arrived refugees, we wanted to make sure that no-one in the community was excluded. So we changed our name to Tamil Community Housing Association in July 1997.

We know that merely providing houses for people in need is insufficient, and this is particularly true for refugees. They require ongoing reassurance and support as they go about the mammoth task of rebuilding their lives. Support in finding their way around a complex legal system in order to establish their status; support in finding employment so families can be financially secure; support in enrolling children at schools and colleges; and intensive support so they can begin to put behind some of the appalling horrors they have witnessed and even directly experienced.

The list of housing and support needs of our community is very wide ranging and at times seems to be endless. However, as an organisation we have proved our tenacity and these challenges have only strengthened our determination to continue meeting those needs as efficiently and as effectively as possible.

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London Borough of Waltham Forest

The London Borough of Waltham Forest, as part of its Black and Ethnic Minority Housing Association Strategy, has been pleased to support the Tamil Community Housing Association in its research into the housing needs of Tamil people in London. The first research of its kind, this report provides an illuminating insight into some of the difficulties experienced by the Tamil Community.

Mr. Tony Brown
Director of Housing

London Borough of Newham

I welcome this important piece of research. Newham has a significant Tamil community and the insights in the report can only aid our decision-making processes.

Mr. Colin Mayhead
Director of Housing

London Borough of Lewisham

I am pleased to welcome this important contribution to identifying the diverse housing needs of the people of Lewisham. It will allow Lewisham to make even better informed decisions about the use of its scarce housing resources in the future.

Mr. Trevor Cook
Director of Housing

London Borough of Brent

The Council has supported the New Arrivals, New Communities Research Report as there was a lack of detailed information regarding the housing needs of the Tamil community within Brent. This report will provide valuable data relating to the community within Brent. This will help the Council to focus on the real needs of BME communities within the borough.

Ms. Debbie Ward
Director of Housing

London Borough of Merton

The London Borough of Merton is pleased to have supported this significant piece of research. The detailed findings will be invaluable in our work to improve yet further our planning to meet the housing needs of the significant Tamil community in the borough.

Mr. Peter Walters
Director of Housing and Social Services

London Borough of Wandsworth

I welcome this important piece of research into the needs of the local Tamil community. It provides us with a better understanding of their housing circumstances as well as their expectations and will inform our assessment of housing needs in the borough.

Mr. Richard Sheppard
Director of Housing