Finding Rental Housing Difficult for Parents

This report represents the efforts of many people. In particular, the author would like to acknowledge the work of Dr. Audrey W. Forrest, chairperson of the Goodrich Program, and her students who conducted the survey. Jack Ruff, Roger Corbin, Dr. Murray Frost, and Marian Meier of the CAUR staff contributed valuable technical and editorial advice throughout the project.

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A national survey measuring restrictive rental practices affecting families with children was prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development by the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan.

The purpose of that study was to seek data that would determine whether exclusionary policies exist that would restrict rental housing choices of tenants with children.1

In general the study demonstrated that families with children were more limited in their choice of housing as 26 percent of the apartment complexes did not allow children under any circumstances. For such families, exclusionary and restrictive policies lead to frustration, longer searches, and higher rental costs in the attempts to find decent housing in a suitable environment.

During recent years, different groups have indicated that restrictive rental practices and limited housing choices have existed in Omaha. Government projects that have caused displacement coupled with the increase in divorce rates have probably increased the need of rental units for families with children.

The Center for Applied Urban Research at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, in cooperation with the Goodrich Program and the Legal Aid Society, undertook an exploratory study to determine the degree to which families with children were limited in their housing choices.

Methodology

In order to acquire a more comprehensive view of rental policies in the Omaha metropolitan area, a survey instrument was designed to address these specific questions: 1) What percentage of apartment complexes allow children? 2) If allowed, what are the restrictions? 3) Are apartments in certain geographic locations more likely to permit children than complexes in other regions of the city? 4) Does the size of the complex or building have an influence on permitting children? 5) Have restrictions permitting children changed over a period of time? 6) Do policies remain consistent in regard to monthly rates for similar units located in different areas?

Three sources were used to compile a list of potential contacts within the city: 1) an apartment information cardex by census tract supplied by Omaha’s Housing and Community Development Department, 2) information pertaining to location and size of units within certain census tracts provided by MAPA, and 3) the Polk Directory.

The apartments were then arranged to correspond with the real estate zones that brokers use to identify a home's location. See Map 1.

In all, 564 complexes representing 28,480 individual units were available for the sample. A stratified areal procedure was used to draw a sample of 183 complexes. Table 1 depicts the results.

In December of 1981, students supervised by Dr. Audrey Forrest, Goodrich Program chairperson, conducted telephone surveys with the 183 apartment managers. This resulted in 98 (54 percent) completed surveys, representing 8,317 units.

Results from the Omaha survey showed that rental housing opportunities for families with children were even more restricted than the national average, although the findings were similar in many other respects.

The national survey was conducted in July, 1980, while the Omaha survey was in December, 1981. This could
Almost half (46 percent) of the Omaha managers who allowed children indicated that no restrictions were imposed compared to the national study where only 29 percent of those allowing children did not have any restrictions.

Another issue related to the limitations imposed upon families with children was the provision of playground facilities at the complex site. Of all the respondents, only 25 percent offered facilities for children. Among those who said they permitted children, 27 percent of those in the eastern, 18 percent of those in the central, and 63 percent of those in the western areas indicated that they provided facilities for children. This suggests that consideration not be limited to increasing acceptance of children in apartment complexes but be extended to include a concern for an environmental conducive to raising children.

The relationship between willingness to rent to families with children and cost of renting is related to many factors, including the size and age of the unit. Table 3 indicates the cost of renting is related to many factors, including the size and age of the unit. Table 3 presents the cost of renting, grouped by area, for various types of units allowing and not allowing children.

Few apartment complexes were large enough to accommodate families with children. The availability of apartments that allow children varies by geographical area. Among the complexes that did not have any restrictions, 27 percent of those allowing children were older or in a less desirable location. Table 3 shows the average monthly rents, grouped by area, for various types of units allowing and not allowing children.

Summary
The results of the survey indicate that households with children may experience difficulties in acquiring desired rental housing. More than half of the apartment complex managers interviewed said they do not permit children.

The availability of apartments that allow children varies by geographical area. Among the complexes that did not have any restrictions, 27 percent of those allowing children were older or in a less desirable location. Table 3 shows the average monthly rents, grouped by area, for various types of units allowing and not allowing children.