

RESULTS FROM THREE SURVEYS OF TENANTS FACING EVICTION IN NEW YORK CITY HOUSING COURT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In December 2005 through May 2006, researchers from ActKnowledge at the Center for Human Environments at the CUNY Graduate Center conducted a three-part survey examining the characteristics of tenants in New York City Housing Court. This Executive Summary describes some of the researchers' key findings, and their methodology.

I. Key Findings

A. Percentage of Tenants Who Were Seniors

642 tenants surveyed who were facing eviction in New York City Housing Court provided information on their age. Approximately 6.4% of them were seniors 62 years of age or older. Here is a breakdown of seniors by borough:

Borough	Percent of tenants who are seniors
Bronx	2.7%
Brooklyn	8.5%
Manhattan	8.8%
Queens	6.7%
Staten Island	10.5%

B. Characteristics of the Tenant Population

1. Income

Of the 1,687 of tenants facing eviction who provided information on their income, 67% had annual incomes of less than \$25,000. This is a much higher percentage of low-income people than exist in the general population.

Seniors facing eviction were more likely to be low-income than tenants as a whole. Of the 195 seniors facing eviction who provided information on their income, 80% had incomes under \$25,000.

2. Children in the household

Of the 1,688 of tenants facing eviction who provided information on whether children under the age of 18 lived with them, 61% said they lived with children.

Of the 181 seniors facing eviction who provided information on whether children under the age of 18 lived with them, 22% said they did.

3. Race/ethnicity

1,779 tenants, and 203 seniors, provided information about their race or ethnicity. Compared to their prevalence in the general population of New York City, African Americans were overrepresented among tenants facing eviction. African Americans accounted for 49% of tenants facing eviction, while according to the 2000 census they are 24.5% of the population of New York City. African Americans accounted for 46% of seniors facing eviction.

Latinos accounted for approximately 27% of tenants facing eviction, which is about the same proportion that they comprise of the population of New York City. Latinos accounted for 22% of seniors facing eviction.

Asians were underrepresented among tenants facing eviction. Asians accounted for 2% of tenants facing eviction, while according to the 2000 census they are 10% of the population of New York City. Asians accounted for 3% of seniors facing eviction.

Whites were also underrepresented among tenants facing eviction. Whites accounted for 11% of tenants facing eviction, while according to the 2000 census they are 35% of the population of New York City. Whites account for 17% of seniors facing eviction.

4. Veterans

Of the 1,742 tenants facing eviction who provided information on whether they were veterans of the military, 4.2% were veterans.

Of the 197 seniors who provided information on whether they were veterans of the military, 10% were veterans.

5. Legal representation

Of the 1,767 tenants facing eviction who provided information on their legal representation, at least 76% of tenants did not have legal representation.

Of the 204 seniors facing eviction who provided information on their legal representation, 63% did not have legal representation.

Lawyers familiar with housing court believe that these figures are too low. In their report, the researchers list a number of reasons why a higher figure may be more accurate.

II. Methodology

The researchers interviewed 444 tenants in the first phase of research, in December 2005. This phase primarily served to provide the researchers with information to allow them to ensure the accuracy and usefulness of the next two phases.

In the second phase, in March, 2006, researchers stationed inside housing part courtrooms in each borough interviewed 642 tenants. The goal of this phase was to obtain information about the percentage of tenants facing eviction who are seniors.

The researchers have a high level of confidence in the results from this phase. The researchers were able to interview almost half the tenants appearing in the courtrooms in which they were stationed on the days they were there. There is no reason to believe that the courtrooms in which the researchers were stationed were atypical in any way. The chief Housing Court clerk informed the researchers that the weeks they were in the courtrooms was a typical week in terms of volume of cases and characteristics of tenants. Further, the researchers were informed that tenants are randomly assigned to courtrooms.

The data provided above in section I.A regarding the percentage of tenants who were seniors come from this second phase of the research.

Finally, in April through May 2006 the researchers interviewed 1,787 tenants in Housing Court hallways. The goal of this phase was to obtain information about seniors who are facing eviction, and also about the general population of tenants facing eviction.

The researchers interviewed 14% of the tenants with eviction cases on the days on which they conducted this phase. As with the second phase of the survey, the chief Housing Court clerk informed the researchers that the weeks they were in the courtrooms were typical weeks in terms of volume of cases.

For the third phase, the researchers collected data regarding many different characteristics of the tenant population, such as zip code, income, race/ethnicity, etc. 1,787 tenants were surveyed. The researchers caution, however, that the “results should be interpreted and applied with caution with regard to smaller subgroups of this survey, because smaller subgroups will have larger margins of error.” They also caution that results regarding characteristics of the general population of tenants facing eviction may be skewed because the researchers purposely over-sampled seniors.

The data provided above in section I.B regarding characteristics of the tenant population come from this third phase of the research.

III. Funding and Oversight

The New York City Council provided funding for the study, which was overseen by the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law and conducted by researchers from ActKnowledge at the Center for Human Environments at the CUNY Graduate Center. The law firms of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP and Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP provided significant assistance.