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The Benefits and Limitations of Tenant Rights Education: A Case Study of Eviction Prevention Workshops in San Diego, California

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This study demonstrates the value, and limitations, of an educational workshop which aimed to reduce residential displacement by educating low-income tenants about their rights. We show that The Eviction Prevention Workshop had a strong positive effect on participants' understanding of their rights and awareness of available legal resources and mixed effects on tenants' self-reported stress. We argue that capacity-building programming should be part of displacement prevention efforts because it improves tenants' understanding of legal processes, knowledge of how to respond to housing crises, and what resources to pursue, and communicates this information upstream from crises that lead to housing loss. Because low-income tenants' rights are very limited, information about tenant empowerment through advocacy is a critical part of the intervention. Successful tenant education programs should model the outreach approach used for the Eviction Prevention Workshop, which relied on trusted community-based organizations to register members of highly disadvantaged communities. Encouraging attendance at the workshops was a challenge, and we suggest ways it could be increased.

Keywords: eviction prevention, tenant education, housing affordability

Introduction

Residential displacements, including eviction, take a tremendous toll on tenants and their families as they stem from, deepen, or lead to housing precarity, financial instability, and/or negative health outcomes (DeLuca & Jang-Trettien, 2020; Desmond, 2012; Desmond & Shollenberger, 2015; Hatch & Yun, 2021; Hoke & Boen, 2021;

Kang, 2022; Tsai et al., 2021). Concerns about a wave of evictions due to COVID-19 job loss and income reductions prompted federal, state, and local governments to pass eviction moratoria and provide funding for eviction prevention measures (Benfer et al., 2023; Parrott & Zandi, 2021). Legal assistance nonprofits, community-based organizations, and courts created or expanded their legal defense and other eviction prevention programming in response (Trekson et al., 2021). Despite the creation of pandemic-era assistance, researchers found that tenants were often unaware of their rights and missed available assistance or engaged with support too late in the eviction process.

In this paper, we describe the findings of our evaluative study of a tenant education initiative in San Diego, California which aimed to teach tenants about their rights and the eviction process to reduce preventable displacement. The study was conceived, designed, and executed in collaboration with a collaborative, made up of community-based organizations (CBOs), which created and oversaw the Eviction Prevention Workshops.¹ We sought to understand how to increase workshop participation, and whether workshops led to increased rights awareness, reduced stress for tenants, and greater short-term housing retention for those who participated.

With our insights, the collaborative recruited workshop participants in areas of the city where early-stage displacement prevention could be especially impactful: neighborhoods with higher rates of evictions, greater concentrations of low-income renters, and where racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities were concentrated. In other words, neighborhoods with many of the characteristics that researchers have found are most correlated with displacement (Lens et al., 2020). We used a mixed-method study

¹ This collaborative was formerly called the Eviction Prevention Collaborative but has rebranded as the Housing Justice Collaborative. In this paper, we refer to it as the collaborative.

design to collect and analyze data between April, 2022 and June, 2023. We report on findings from workshop observation field notes, matched surveys from about 200 tenant workshop participants, in-depth interviews with 98 tenants, interviews with CBO staff, and group interviews with 100 tenants.

Survey and interview responses show knowledge gains after workshop attendance, suggesting that workshops achieved a primary goal of increasing tenants' understanding of their housing rights and responsibilities. Tenants who attended workshops knew more about their rights than participants who did not and had clearer ideas about how to access legal support. Tenants who had not participated in workshops understood less about their rights overall, were more likely to report incorrect information, and were less likely to know how to directly access legal assistance. Problems with matching workshop participant data between our survey and the workshop creators' registration tool seriously limits our ability to understand whether workshop impacts vary by participant demographic or housing characteristics.

Surveys suggest no statistically discernible decrease in self-reported stress, on average, after workshop attendance, although stress scale wording may have affected the validity of this finding. Interviews suggest that the lack of statistical significance is due to multi-directional impacts of workshops on stress: 46 interviewed tenants described a reduction in stress after workshops and 24 described increases or no change in stress after workshops, either because the workshop did not address their problem, they felt discouraged about their lack of rights as tenants, or they did not sense impact beyond tenants' rights knowledge gains. However, nearly all tenants who participated in group and individual interviews expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn about their rights and many attributed improvements in their sense of resilience to the workshops. Refugee and immigrant tenants overwhelmingly reported gaining critical

new insights and receiving emotional benefits through their workshop participation. A minority of participants joined tenant advocacy efforts through the workshops and described positive emotional benefits.

The diverse reasons that motivated workshop attendance (e.g., a desire for general information, an impending eviction threat, seeking information on behalf of another person) meant that a minority of workshop participants were facing imminent housing displacement. As such, we were unable to systematically track whether rights awareness prevented displacement in the three-month period participants were enrolled in our study. In the few instances when our contact with tenants coincided with displacement threats, we found that tenant education delayed displacement but could not prevent it.

To be successful, we argue that eviction prevention educational efforts must incorporate the expertise of the communities most impacted by residential displacement, by working with and through community-based organizations (CBOs). Educational programming should also be used alongside legal assistance and advocacy efforts to keep rent affordable and increase tenants' rights. Despite limitations, educational programming fills a gap in eviction prevention efforts by moving upstream from both formal eviction and other types of displacement.

We estimate that just 10-15 percent of people who registered for workshops attended them. Attendance could have been increased if workshops, especially those held in-person, addressed logistical barriers to attendance, such as scheduling challenges and childcare or child enrichment needs. Attendance could have been increased if workshops had addressed other challenges faced by low-income tenants, such as food insecurity and high utility costs. Funding for the workshops was insufficient to do this. We suggest eviction prevention education be combined with

resource fairs and other programs to reach more people and that on-site supports be consistently offered.

Most displacement prevention work targets tenants for whom eviction processes have already begun, so it cannot address displacement that happens outside of formal channels or before a property owner files an eviction in court. For example, tenants faced with an eviction threat may “self-evict,” or leave without contest, before legal defense support can be of use (Abraham et al., 2023; Desmond, 2016). For tenants that remain, a lack of knowledge limits their ability to resolve issues with a landlord before a court eviction is filed. When tenants do appear in court, they often appear without legal representations, which can contribute to poor outcomes (Ellen et al., 2021).

Researchers acknowledge that tenant education is a critical component of eviction prevention efforts, yet descriptions and evaluations of tenant educational programming are rare, resulting in very little understanding about whether this type of programming supports tenant learning and other outcomes (Trekson et al., 2021). Other disciplines have shown positive outcomes from capability-expanding and community-empowering educational investments (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2023; Nussbaum, 2002; Sen, 1993), but such interventions have rarely been explored by housing scholars (Kimhur, 2020, 2023). Our description of one program and assessment of its benefits are the start for new developments in this area.

Residential Displacement and Prevention Efforts

Residential displacement refers to reactive, or involuntary, moves (Hartman & Robinson, 2003). Displacement can occur when tenants are told explicitly to leave by property owners, or when they leave due to real or perceived threats to their health and safety in their housing or in their neighborhoods. Formal eviction is just one form of

displacement and occurs when tenants are forced to move after a property owner initiates a formal court process called an unlawful detainer action. Residents may self-evict when they know they cannot afford rent or have a reason to believe the landlord wants them out and leave before a formal eviction process begins (Gromis & Desmond, 2021). Displacement can also be caused by poor housing or neighborhood conditions, requiring tenants to make housing decisions on short timelines and resulting in little to no improvement in their housing situation (DeLuca et al., 2019; DeLuca & Jang–Trettien, 2020; Desmond & Shollenberger, 2015; Harvey et al., 2020). Eviction and other types of displacement are driven by the conditions of poverty but can also lead to extreme financial instability as the likelihood that a person loses their job or misses other life-sustaining activities rises when they experience housing loss. Involuntary displacement thereby exacerbates already existing inequities in housing and poverty, striking women and families of color disproportionately (Desmond, 2012; Desmond et al., 2013).

The health and housing consequences of displacement can be severe. Access to medical care decreases following evictions (Biederman et al., 2022) and correlates with higher likelihood of emergency department use one year after an eviction event (Smith et al., 2022). Reports of child abuse and neglect may rise in areas with higher eviction rates, as suggested by an analysis of administrative data in Connecticut (Bullinger & Fong, 2021). People who have experienced eviction or other forms of displacement are more likely to report poor physical and mental health in both short- and medium-terms, compared to people who have not experienced displacement (Hatch & Yun, 2021). Young people who have experienced an eviction are at increased risk of depression, a condition aggravated for low-income youth and youth of color who experience housing

displacement at higher rates (Hoke & Boen, 2021). In addition, repeated exposure to housing instability worsens mental health conditions over time (Kang, 2022).

Reports suggest that eviction filing rates, or eviction filings divided by renter households, were declining in many states prior to 2020 (Gromis & Desmond, 2021). In California, eviction court filing data suggests annual declines between 2014 and 2019 (Herrera & Paluch, 2023). Organizers have worked with tenants and community based organizations to draw attention to the issue and provide tenants with legal and community support in eviction processes for years.² Tenant advocates and community organizations have generally focused on providing services that support tenants' ability to exercise their rights, such as free legal counsel and mediation when tenants receive an eviction notice, since most tenants who are taken to court are unrepresented, which often leads to tenants losing their cases and their housing (Ellen et al., 2021).

The eviction landscape changed drastically in 2020. Formal evictions dropped precipitously that year when governments enacted tenant protections to prevent what many believed would be a wave of residential evictions (Aurand et al., 2020; Kochhar, 2020; National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2021; Parrott & Zandi, 2021).

Community organizations and local housing authorities played a central role in disseminating information about eviction moratoria and rent stabilization funds, like emergency rental assistance, during the pandemic. Existing organizations often filled this role and new organizations were created to address programmatic gaps. The Urban Institute completed a national scan of eviction diversion and prevention programs and

² See older programs such as City of Fremont tenant legal assistance and education <https://baylegal.org/event/city-of-fremont-free-tenant-education-workshop/> and a list of organizations that partner with the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project <https://antievictionmap.com/community-partners>

studied four programs in-depth (Trekson et al., 2021). All the programs Trekson and co-authors reviewed were created or modified to address pandemic-related policy contexts and needs. They note that some demonstrated high effectiveness in avoiding imminent eviction, but that programs rarely addressed tenants' needs holistically and had to grapple with tenants' lack of understanding about their rights on a client-by-client basis. In other words, a lack of comprehensive tenant education meant that tenants were accessing prevention services late in the process and were unaware of their rights. Another Urban Institute study of a Minnesota program noted the importance of moving eviction prevention work further upstream by supporting tenants financially, before tenants have had an eviction filed against them (Cohen & Noble, 2020).

Legal services and mediation catered toward tenants provided better access to eviction-prevention resources and leveled the information playing field between tenants and property owners, especially in the shifting policy context brought on by government responses to the pandemic. However, most services continue to provide aid late in the eviction process and often do not reach tenants who self-evict before a legal process can be initiated. A lack of rights awareness may lead tenants to improperly withhold rent, comply with landlords' requests even when inappropriate or illegal, or not appear in eviction court because they do not understand the eviction process (Desmond, 2016). As Urban Institute reports make plain, most eviction prevention work focuses on the final and most traumatic aspect of housing instability: the point at which tenants are being sued in court for possession of a property by landlords (Cohen & Noble, 2020; Trekson et al., 2021).

The educational components of such interventions have not been systematically described, although a tenant education program in Arizona assessed the effectiveness of a program and found that 87 percent of participants reported housing stability and 100

percent reported increased understanding of their rights 6 months later (Innovation for Justice & Step Up to Justice, 2020). Little has otherwise been written about tenant educational programming as an up-stream eviction prevention measure. Educational programming is a human capital investment that can build tenant capacity for a diversified set of responses when they face displacement threats or other housing challenges. Researchers have shown the value of educational approaches in other domains where knowledge and skill development, coupled with access to resources, enhance the ability of disadvantaged people and communities to thrive (Johnson & Sherraden, 2007; Nussbaum, 2002; Sen, 1993).

This paper fills a gap by describing a tenant eviction prevention educational program, presenting findings from our evaluation of that program, and offering an example of how housing outcomes for low-income, disadvantaged tenants can be improved by educational investments. Before providing details about the workshops, we review our study scope, methodology, and participants.

Study Scope & Methodology

Eviction Prevention Workshops began in February of 2022; we collected data between April, 2022 and June, 2023. This was a mixed-methods study including survey, observation, and interview methods.

Surveys

To assess the impact of workshops on tenant participants, we designed a two-part survey that workshop attendees voluntarily took prior to and after the workshop content was delivered. This pre-test/post-test design allowed us to treat the workshops as an intervention: we assumed that tenants came to workshops to learn new information and that by assessing their self-reported stress and knowledge of tenants' rights prior to the workshop and after, we could measure the impact of workshops on

stress and knowledge. Tenants answered questions that assessed seven learning outcomes. The survey needed to measure stress and knowledge impacts in a short period of time so that workshop participants could reserve most of their time for the intervention itself. To do this, we did not use our survey to collect data on participants' personal characteristics, opting instead to link our workshop survey to the collaborative's registration database. Due to underreporting of information in the registration database, we have demographic information for less than half of the survey sample.

Stress was measured with a four-item questionnaire that used five-point Likert scales, ranging from zero to four. The scale was meant to capture the frequency that a person has felt a certain way in the last month with 0 indicating "Never" and 4 indicating "Very Often." An example item is *In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?* (see Appendix A for the full set of questions) (Karam et al., 2012; Vallejo et al., 2018). We modeled our Spanish translation off the work of Eduardo Remor.³ Studies are mixed on the validity of the four-item scale across sociodemographic subgroups, but research confirms its reliability in assessing stress across ethnic, racial, and cultural groups (Stawski et al., 2008; Warttig et al., 2013), which is critical given the diversity of our survey sample. We address limitations in question wording below in the findings section.

We adapted the knowledge survey questions from an educational tool used to assess student learning and alignment with course goals (Clauss & Geedey, 2010). We used a knowledge assessment method rather than quizzing workshop attendees on learning outcomes to reduce the time required for tenants to complete the survey. This

³ https://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/psychology/stress-immunity-disease-lab/scales/.doc/pss_14_europeanspanish_dr_remor_version_2_0.doc

approach to measuring knowledge gains is well-established in the literature on teaching and learning (Goering, 2022; Goodson et al., 2014; Stapleton, 2020). Our team, which includes bi-lingual and bi-cultural researchers, consulted with CBO staff on the translation of the knowledge survey questions, prior to deploying the survey. We identified seven learning outcomes with workshop providers and designed test questions on these topics, then asked participants to rate their ability to answer these questions using a five-point Likert scale where "0" meant they could not answer the question, "1" meant they could attempt to answer it but would probably get it wrong, "2" meant they are somewhat certain they could answer the question correctly, "3" meant they were fairly certain they could answer the question correctly, and "4" meant they could definitely answer the question correctly. A higher score indicated a higher sense of confidence in their ability to answer the question correctly.

In keeping with educators who have demonstrated the effectiveness of this tool, we also asked interview participants to give us complete answers to the questions which we then compared to survey results (Clauss & Geedey, 2010). This allowed us to identify the questions on which tenants over- or underestimated their ability to give correct answers. To compare the confidence scores from the post-survey with the percent correct for interview participants, we standardized the averages for both measures by subtracting the average by the minimum possible score and dividing the result by the difference between the minimum and maximum scores. The knowledge survey questions reflect tenant confidence in knowing an answer while the interview questions reflect their ability to answer the questions correctly.⁴

⁴ The correct answers to the knowledge survey questions are 1. "Yes, 10% for most units." 2. "Provide the tenant with a written notice." 3. "False." 4. "True." 5. "Yes." 6. "Put your request in writing and document all interactions." 7. Tenant needed to list legal services

The post-survey was distributed by workshop hosts after the formal presentation ended, but before the question-and-answer period. It asked tenants to answer the stress and knowledge survey questions again. It also asked tenants to enter contact information if they were interested in participating in an individual interview. Both the pre- and post-surveys were available in English and Spanish. For virtual workshops, they were distributed as a link and QR code which led to a Qualtrics online survey tool. In-person workshop attendees also had a QR option or could complete a paper-based survey. We do not have survey data from all workshops because sometimes there was insufficient time to deploy surveys, workshop hosts did not provide attendees with sufficient time to complete surveys, and we did not collect surveys at workshops done in languages other than English and Spanish. Members of our team attended 82 of the 155 workshops conducted during the period of this study to track information related to survey deployment.⁵ We did not attend workshops where no survey data would be collected due to language barriers, unless a group interview was planned. We collected 246 matched surveys during the study period. Responses with incomplete answers were dropped, as were duplicate records.⁶ We also dropped cases where workshop participants lived outside of our study area [geographic boundary redacted].

organizations or specify that they had them written down and could reference them when needed. Tenants did not have to answer these questions verbatim to be considered correct, but their understanding needed to reflect the correct answers.

⁵ We confirmed that workshop attendees were given the opportunity complete both the pre- and post-surveys at 62 of the 155 workshops.

⁶ Time allotted for workshop attendees to complete the survey fluctuated across workshops. Even though we had asked that 5 minutes be given for the pre-survey and a minimum of 3 minutes be given for the post-survey, workshop providers sometimes—often by circumstances outside of their control—cut that time short or did not introduce the surveys at all. Participants sometimes began asking questions before the allotted time for the post-survey ended and possibly led to lower participation in the survey. Additionally, it would be unclear if the participants' answers to the knowledge questions were influenced by the presentation content or the question and answers. We controlled for this wide variation in outcomes by creating two distinct samples of survey data: the sample reported here includes all non-duplicated survey responses where a person completed both pre- and post-surveys. We ran the same statistical tests on a sample that excludes survey data from workshops when

Interviews

Individual Interviews. Our team recruited tenants for in-depth interviews through the post-survey administered at workshops, verbally by research team members at about one-fourth of workshops, and through flyers and by word-of-mouth with the assistance of community organizations and people who had already completed an interview (i.e., “snowball sampling”). We screened tenants by income to include people whose incomes were in the ranges for extremely and very low-income households, according to the area median income. Lower incomes are associated with higher incidence of eviction and displacement, and we sought to learn more about how the lowest-income renters in the region strategize to maintain their housing, in addition to detailed information on workshop experiences. Recruiting low-income renters also reflects the community members served by the CBOs who recruited for workshops. Participants retook the workshop survey and were asked to provide demographic information related to income, gender, race, ethnicity, household size, and more. We recorded interviews for transcription and detailed analysis. Interview questions covered topics on the workshop’s impact on tenants, their housing and eviction history, rent, changes in employment, relationship with their landlord, and rights and resource awareness.

We engaged in two rounds of review and analysis of the transcribed interviews using Dedoose software. First, we applied broad, thematic codes related to workshop attendance, answers to the seven knowledge questions, and the emotional impacts of workshops. We also wrote memos for each interview transcript, where we summarized the themes that emerged and noted the themes we had not yet anticipated prior to or

insufficient time was given for participants to finish the survey before the question-and-answer period began and found no difference..

during data collection. Second, we applied detailed codes based on the learning outcomes workshop providers had hoped to achieve. Through coding, we identified the various ways that tenants answered the standard knowledge questions and labeled answers correct when they accurately and completely address the question asked, demonstrating accurate understanding of workshop content. We labeled them incorrect when they were factually inaccurate or unrelated to the question posed. Somewhat correct answers contained elements of accuracy but may also include inaccuracies or missing details. These responses partially addressed the question but fall short of being entirely accurate or comprehensive. We also organized descriptions of the emotional impact of workshops into detailed categories, which we report below.

Group Interviews. We organized group interviews with CBOs to speak with harder-to-reach tenant populations, in particular tenants who spoke languages other than English or Spanish, people who were busy juggling work and parenthood, and refugee participants who were especially wary of individual interviews. We designed group interviews with insight from CBOs so that we did not collect any individual data from participants and did not audio record group interviews. These strategies allowed us to include participants who would likely have not participated in our study. We conducted thirteen group interviews. Group sizes varied, ranging from two to sixteen participants for a total of 100 participants. We led group interviews in English and Spanish. For group interviews in Karen, Burmese, Somali and Arabic, we relied on interpreters provided by CBOs who translated our questions and tenants' responses. Interview topics included tenant feedback on workshops, ongoing housing challenges for participants and people in their community, experiences with eviction, resource awareness, rent increases and other expenses, and COVID-era job loss and residential displacement.

At each group interview, we had a minimum of two researchers present to take notes. We compiled notes from each group interview together and coded these in the same way we coded individual interviews, as described above.

Workshop Observation and CBO Staff Interviews

Members of our research team attended 82 workshops and documented the questions and answers workshop attendees asked at 65 of them. This proved to be a valuable data source since people often attended workshops because they were facing immediate displacement, but participants facing immediate displacement did not always complete the survey and rarely volunteered for an interview. The concerns and questions of workshop attendees to the workshop providers allowed us to understand what was driving people to attend and hear a range of challenges we did not always capture through interviews. To extend our ability to capture the diversity of housing issues faced by tenants, we checked in with CBO staff periodically for insights into what they were seeing and hearing in their communities. We also completed formal interviews with staff which we reviewed and coded to report on how staff recruited participants and what they believed could support increased attendance.

Overview of Eviction Prevention “Know Your Rights” Workshops

The Eviction Prevention Workshops were the product of a collaborative of CBOs and legal aid organizations. The collaborative was initiated to circulate information about the rapidly changing eviction moratoria and rental assistance programs during the Covid-19 pandemic and included a local chapter of the statewide organization Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), which had developed online tenant education workshops focused on state law and tenant advocacy. The collaborative, with Legal Aid Society of San Diego as lead organization,

raised funds to adapt this educational programming to the local, regional context and undertake efforts to recruit participants from San Diego's diverse communities. The goals of the collaborative's program differed from ACCE's program, in that it covered both city and state law, discussed navigating landlord-tenant relationships, and reduced some of the emphasis on community organizing.

During a typical workshop, an instructor would provide an overview of general laws and policies that govern the tenant-property owner exchange including tenant and property owner responsibilities, the typical steps to apply for a rental, the typical steps for moving out of a unit, changes to rental agreements, habitability, common defenses to an unlawful detainer, laws related to retaliation, the process of terminating a tenancy, and tenant remedies if the landlord fails to do repairs. The presentation also included a list of organizations tenants could contact, including legal services and the local ACCE chapter. Tenants were encouraged to contact relevant organizations if they had questions the presenters could not answer or if they wished to become involved in advocacy efforts to expand tenant rights in their local jurisdiction or the state.

Workshops provided attendees with some information about rental assistance, depending on availability. Emergency rental assistance programs for the city and county ended in March of 2022, just as workshops were beginning, so information about this program was only provided in the first few months of the program and was only beneficial for people who had missed rent payments due to Covid-19 related job loss or illness prior to March of 2022. Other rental support programs were very limited, but were mentioned when available.

The general workshops entailed presentation slides and a verbal presentation which lasted an average of 30 minutes. This was followed by a question-and-answer portion where tenants could ask for clarification of how general principles might apply

to them and workshop providers could further clarify general policies or suggest referrals to legal services for specific needs. Tenants also had access to a pre-recorded, 10-minute video that covered the same material and was typically shown to them by CBO staff. All workshop types were created in English and translated into Spanish, Karen, Burmese, Somali, Arabic, Haitian Creole, and ASL.

Presentation information varied over time in response to changes in relevant laws and programs, including emergency rental assistance and eviction moratoriums. The educational goals for the workshops did not vary significantly over time for the standard presentation.⁷

The Eviction Prevention Workshops reached immigrant and refugee communities by hiring CBOs run by representatives of those communities to coordinate workshops. CBOs leaned into the assets of their communities, such as their dedication to maintaining community ethnic identity, by scheduling workshops to align with religious observances so that community members could attend a workshop and then gather for worship, or by providing foods native to community members' country of origin. In this way, CBOs united community members' desires to improve housing dignity with their ongoing investment in preserving ethnic and religious heritage and building community. The collaborative contracted with the CBOs who recruited members of their community to learn more about their rights as tenants but also listened to CBO staff to design programming that fit the communities' educational, cultural, geographic, and health needs. The CBOs helped the collaborative identify days, times,

⁷ Beginning in August of 2022, CBOs were given the option to choose between the standard Eviction Prevention Workshop presentation or a targeted workshop covering three select topics of their choosing. A total of twenty-five targeted workshops were hosted between August 2022 to June 2023. We did not collect surveys at the targeted workshops due to language barriers (they were often chosen by refugee organizations who required translation into languages other than Spanish and English) and dissimilarity with the remainder of the workshops in the study.

locations, and workshop formats that would be most suitable for those communities.

The result was workshops held outdoors in parks when community members were fearful of COVID-19 spread, virtual workshops, workshops held at community centers or libraries, workshops held before or after other community events, workshops translated into multiple languages, workshops where food or raffle tickets were provided, and workshops held after school drop off.

Survey and Interview Participant Characteristics

The collaborative nature of this project meant that we prioritized methods that would support robust data collection but would be minimally invasive as to not affect workshop timing, attendance, and participation. It was critical to our community partners that data collection did not place undue time burdens on attendees, since delivering the workshop content was the priority. We therefore did not include demographic questions on the workshop surveys. This exclusion was made with the understanding that we would have access to the workshop registration data collected by CBO staff. However, CBOs were often unable to gather this information during registration because many community members were wary about providing personal information, even to organizations they trust.⁸ We report demographic information for the limited sample for which we have the information and note that workshop participant demographics generally reflected the communities in which CBOs recruited, or low-income communities of color. Our analyses of survey responses include no reference to personal characteristics.

⁸ The Eviction Prevention Workshop registration form requested participants' racial, ethnic, gender, and linguistic identities, as well as their income, family size, ZIP codes, name, and email address or phone number. CBO staff discussed the role of stigma as a particular reason people may not report income and family size.

Of the individuals who were willing to answer demographic questions, survey workshop participants overwhelmingly identified as women and as Hispanic or Latino/a, and half spoke Spanish. Eight percent of registrants who completed a workshop survey identified as Black or African American, 63 percent as White, and over 8 percent as multi- or bi-ethnic. Nearly 18 percent identified themselves as racially “other.”

Table 1. General Demographic of Survey Participants (N=246).

Variable	Indicated by Tenant	Percentage	Percentage*
Gender Identity			<i>n=92</i>
Female	79	32.1%	85.9%
Male	12	4.9%	13.0%
Nonbinary	1	0.4%	1.1%
No Response	154	62.6%	
Language Spoken			<i>n=88</i>
English	44	17.9%	50.0%
Spanish	43	17.5%	48.9%
Oromo	1	0.4%	1.1%
No Response	158	64.2%	
Ethnic Identity			<i>n=84</i>
Hispanic/Latino	46	18.7%	54.8%
Not Hispanic/Latino	38	15.4%	45.2%
No Response	162	65.9%	
Racial Identity			<i>n=84</i>
White	53	21.5%	63.1%
Black/African American	7	2.8%	8.3%
American Indian/Native American	1	0.4%	1.2%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1	0.4%	1.2%
Bi-ethnic	5	2.0%	6.0%
Multi-ethnic	2	0.8%	2.4%
Other	15	6.1%	17.9%
No Response	162	65.9%	
Type of Rental			<i>n=240</i>
Apartment	141	57.3%	58.8%
Single Family Home	43	17.5%	17.9%
Condo or Townhome	18	7.3%	7.5%
Room or Rooms in Someone else's Home	13	5.3%	5.4%
Converted Garage, RV, or Similar	9	3.7%	3.8%
Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)	2	0.8%	0.8%
Single-Room Occupancy Hotel	1	0.4%	0.4%
No Response	6	2.4%	
Other	13	5.3%	5.4%
Income Level			<i>n=86</i>
Extremely Low	60	24.4%	69.8%
Very Low	16	6.5%	18.6%
Low-Moderate	4	1.6%	4.7%
Moderate	6	2.4%	7.0%
No Response	160	65.0%	

Note: Not all percentages will add up to 100% due to rounding.

*Percentage excluding no response data.

Of the 86 participants who reported their income during the registration process, 88 percent (76 of 86) are considered extremely or very low-income, based on their earnings and size of household. Tenant participants overwhelmingly rented apartments, a smaller number rented single family homes or condos or townhomes.

We note that in the statistical tests we run below, the sample size of respondents with matching surveys varies. Rather than limit the dataset to respondents for whom we have complete demographic information and matched surveys, which would leave us with a sample size smaller than 25 percent of the total, we run each test on slightly varied sample sizes.

Interview participants provided nearly complete demographic information. A majority of the 98 tenants who completed individual interviews identified as female, Latina/o or Hispanic, and as single heads of households. Black identified respondents made up 21 percent of the sample, 31 percent identified as White, and 24 percent as “other.” During interviews, 36 percent of the 98 participants identified themselves as undocumented. It is possible that this number is higher - we did not explicitly ask tenants to report their documentation status.

Table 2. Demographic Information for Individual Tenant Participant Interviews (N=98).

Variable	Indicated by Tenants	Percentage
Gender Identity		
Female	79	84%
Male	11	12%
Nonbinary	1	1%
Other	1	1%
No Response	2	2%
Primary Language Spoken at Home		
English only	19	20%
English and Spanish Equally	5	5%
Spanish only	63	67%
Haitian Creole	14	14%
Amharic	1	1%
Creole, Spanish, French	1	1%
Ethnic Identity		
Hispanic/Latino(a)	51	54%
Not Hispanic/Latino(a)	20	21%
No Response	23	24%
Racial Identity		
Black or African American	20	21%

White or Caucasian	31	33%
Multiracial	2	2%
Other	24	26%
Choose not to Answer	10	11%
Single-Head of Household		
Yes	51	54%
No	42	45%
No Response	1	1%
Legal Status*		
Undocumented Tenants	32	33%
Mixed-Status Households	3	3%

Note: Tenant participants indicated whether their primary language was English and could fill in a second question in case it was a different language. Spanish speakers could complete the survey in Spanish and Haitian Creole speakers filled out the survey with assistance of an interpreter.

**The survey did not ask tenants about their legal status. Instead, this information was volunteered during interviews.*

The tenants in our interview sample rented housing priced well-below the average price for a one-bedroom apartment, estimated to be above \$2,400 (Kolomatsky, 2023). Most rented in the private market and lived in apartments, a room or rooms in someone else's house, or in a single-family home. Sixty-nine percent of interviewees would be considered extremely low income by area median income standards for the region.

Table 3. Income and Housing for Tenant Participants in Individual Interviews (N=98).

Variable	Indicated by Tenant	Percentage
Type of Rental		
Apartment	44	47%
Room or Room in Someone Else's Home	13	14%
Single-Family Home	16	17%
Converted Garage, RV, or Similar	9	10%
Townhome or Condo (Garage Included)	9	10%
Other	3	3%
Monthly Rent		
Under \$1,000	26	28%
\$1,000-\$1,999	62	66%
\$2,000 and above	6	6%
Annual Income		
Below \$27,350	65	69%
Between \$27,351-\$35,150	19	20%
Between \$35,151-\$42,200	5	5%
Between \$42,201-\$48,450	2	2%
Above \$48,000	2	2%
No Response	1	1%
Housing Support		
Designated Affordable Housing	11	12%
Section 8 Voucher	10	11%
Other	12	13%
None Reported	61	65%
Number of People in Household		
1 (just me)	8	9%

2-4	56	60%
5-8	26	28%
9+	3	3%
No Response	1	1%

Note: *Tenant participants could indicate multiple sources of income and characteristics of household members.* Not all percentages will add up to 100% due to rounding.

In interviews, we focused on three types of residential displacement. A formal eviction occurs when a landlord forces the tenant to move out through an order obtained in Superior Court, a process which begins with an official notice. Informal evictions are when a tenant is asked to vacate their rental verbally or in writing, but outside of the designated legal process established by law. A forced move refers to unanticipated moves that happened for other reasons, such as severe habitability issues. Across multiple studies, researchers estimate that about 7 percent of renters will be threatened with a formal eviction in a given year with many more facing a formal eviction in their lifetime (DeLuca et al., 2019; Desmond & Shollenberger, 2015; Lab, n.d.). These rates are higher for Black families and families with children. Informal evictions affect many more families. A nationally representative, survey-based study estimated that informal evictions were 5.5 times more likely than formal evictions (Gromis et al., 2022).

In the population of 98 tenants we interviewed, over half (60) reported ever having experienced a formal or informal eviction or a forced move. Every tenant who indicated that they were White, non-Hispanic had experienced either a formal, informal, or forced move, with none reporting no displacement. All tenants who marked Black/African American, and who were not immigrants, reported some form of displacement. Among individuals who indicated they were Hispanic or Latino(a), about sixty percent indicated displacement. The Black immigrants in our sample, 9 from Haiti and one from Ethiopia, had arrived in the United States in the past 5 years and were the least likely to have experienced displacement: 38 percent reported displacement of some kind; none reported a formal eviction.

We did not request personally identifying information from group interview participants. The exception is that we know nearly every attendee had dependent children at home and approximately 90 percent lived in an apartment or rooms in someone else's home. Table 4 includes the organizations that hosted groups, number of attendees, and languages spoken for the group interviews. Refugees who participated in group interviews said that eviction was not particularly common in their communities.

Table 4. Group Interview Details (N=100).

Organization Name	Number of Participants Total	Languages Spoken	Number of Interviews Held with Group
Casa Familiar	8	English & Spanish	1
Horn of Africa	11	Somali	1
Karen Organization of San Diego	34	Burmese & Karen	3
Neighborhood House Association Head Start	39	English & Spanish	7
United Women of East Africa	16	Arabic	1

Results

Tenants' Experiences Indicate a Need for Educational Programming

Tenants' previous experiences and questions about their rights suggest a need for educational programming. Across group and individual interviews and workshops, tenants described suspicions of illegal behavior by landlords, experiences with displacement, and confusion over how they should act in a range of situations.

Most of the individual interview participants who had experienced displacement did not attempt to resist it and vacated their rental units without seeking legal assistance.

Tenants reported that they accepted displacement to avoid further problems or stressors for themselves and their families, or because they could not pay owed rent or could not negotiate with the property owner.

For example, one single mother explained that she lost her job at a hospital during the pandemic because her children's schools closed and she had no one to watch them. Soon after, the landlord sent her an eviction notice for missing rent payments. Despite her efforts to work something out with the property owner, she was unable to stay. She did not know if the case had gone through the court system or not, but before vacating, she paid the past due rent to maintain good credit. She wound up homeless for four months before receiving assistance from a county program. Like many other tenants in our study, this tenant did not fully understand the eviction process, did not wait to be summoned to court, and was therefore unsure of what happened. Tenants who received informal requests to vacate properties typically did not want the property owner to go through the formal eviction process for fear of the consequences, so they left voluntarily.

Tenants also described problems with housing, health, and safety that had gone unaddressed by property owners. This included pest infestations, mold, plumbing problems, and broken windows. Group interview participants described similar issues. In an interview with community members from Burma, or Myanmar, tenants described (through a translator) holes in the floor which invite rodents, snakes, and cockroaches; feeling like the property is not livable, but they do not have other options; and being blamed for 'not living in a sanitary way' and inviting pests.

Another group interview participant claimed that it took months for the landlord to fix problems, or if they sent someone, they did not follow through to see if it was done correctly. Another said that when workers do come to repair things, they leave a mess behind, including leaving holes and trash. Thirty-six of the 98 tenants who completed individual interviews also described physical problems with their homes and 31 attributed allergies, asthma, or coughing to these issues.

The most common topic for questions asked during workshop question-and-answer periods was related to rent and rent increases. The state law that governs rent increases includes exceptions for a variety of property types, making it difficult to determine which properties are covered (California Civil Code 1947.12). Tenants asked whether landlords could increase rent as often as they did, asked what to do when the rent was increased over the legally allowable limit, and sought insight into how to react to potentially illegal rent increases. In rare instances, workshop participants and interviewees described resisting rent increases. In general, tenants moved when rent rose or cut expenses in other areas to prioritize their rent.

Sometimes tenants held all these concerns, such as tenants who said they did not report habitability concerns due to a fear that their property owner would retaliate by increasing their rent. A promotora (or community health worker) from a participating CBO said tenants “don’t speak up because they are afraid of what will happen,” for fear that their rent will increase or they will be forced to move somewhere with higher rent. Promotoras, who spoke from experience working with a largely Mexican immigrant population, also described illegal subletting as a common tactic for affording rent, especially for undocumented immigrants.

Misunderstandings about rent increases, the risks of renting without a contract, tenant rights for undocumented immigrants, property owner responsibilities for maintenance and repairs, and other salient topics were addressed at the workshops in response to these needs. Participants were also exposed to other information and resources that could expand their ability to negotiate with property owners, communicate more effectively, and take preventive action to guard against overcharging or losing security deposits.

Converting Workshop Registrations into Attendance

The CBOs registering participants for workshops contacted about 14,300 people between February 2022 and June 2023. The workshop registration form they used show 11,789 registrants for full-length workshops, although there is no way of knowing how many registrants registered multiple times—through interviews we know that some people attended workshops more than once. Attendance at workshops was much lower, we estimate approximately 14 percent of the number of registrants (it is difficult to be precise as attendance was not routinely taken because the program grant did not require it as a metric). At the 82 workshops we observed, average attendance was 11, with a range of 4-30 attendees. If that average was consistent across the 155 workshops that would about 1,705 attendees, 14 percent of the 11,789 people who registered for full-length workshops. These numbers exclude 2,513 people who engaged with workshops through the 10-minute video administered by CBO staff, outside of an observable workshop setting.

Regional CBOs were vital for workshop registration, attendance, and engagement with the workshop material. A minority of people learned about the workshops through internet searches or word of mouth. The majority attended after learning about it while seeking assistance through a CBO, recruitment by a CBO at their child's school, or contact initiated when a CBO staff person knocked on their door or contacted them at an event. CBOs had specific ideas about what could boost attendance, and when they had the funds, they implemented their ideas, such as serving food, holding gift card raffles, holding workshops concurrently or consecutively with other events, offering childcare, and shifting locations and modalities to accommodate schedules. Had CBOs had more resources through the grant program, these efforts may have been more extensive, and more registrants converted into attendees.

CBO staff explained that members of their communities were often struggling to meet their daily needs. Unless they believed a workshop could stop impending displacement, they may not attend with no other benefit or incentive. One staff person explained that attendance would increase if they could address multiple needs, such as services for children, help paying rent or utilities, or healthcare support. Limitations in funding for the workshops made this impossible, but future programs could consider how tenants’ rights information could be shared in conjunction with service fairs or other opportunities.

Workshops Increase Tenants’ Rights Awareness

The Eviction Prevention Workshop had a measurable impact on tenants’ understanding of their rights, the eviction process, and the legal resources available to them. Survey results point to clear areas for improvement.

Survey results indicate gains in rights awareness

The results from our knowledge survey suggest a significant increase in tenants’ confidence that they could correctly answer seven learning outcome questions. Table 5 shows a comparison of knowledge question answer averages measured before and after the workshops. An increase in the average score shows an increase in tenants’ confidence that they could correctly answer a question. For all seven questions combined, tenants indicated a higher rating on the post-survey than the pre-survey, this is reported as the last row in Table 5. This increase of 1.29 points is statistically significant ($t(133)=1.29$, $p<.001$), suggesting a measurable change in participants’ ability to answer the knowledge questions after the workshops.

Table 5 Change in Confidence Scores on Knowledge Survey Questions, Paired T-test

95% Confidence Interval

Variable	N	df	Pre-survey Mean (SD)	Post-survey Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper	<i>t</i>
Limitations Rent	200	199	1.87 (1.39)	3.23 (1.17)	1.36***	1.13	1.59	11.63
Step to End Tenancy	211	210	1.67 (1.42)	3.13 (1.10)	1.46***	1.26	1.66	14.32
Change Locks	189	188	1.88 (1.58)	3.08 (1.30)	1.20***	0.95	1.46	9.26
Respond Five Days	194	193	1.81 (1.53)	3.23 (1.15)	1.42***	1.18	1.65	11.88
Landlord Needs Reason	202	201	2.28 (1.50)	3.30 (1.10)	1.02***	0.80	1.23	9.29
Landlord Refuse	197	196	1.79 (1.42)	2.91 (1.24)	1.12***	0.89	1.35	9.53
Help Organizations	189	188	1.62 (1.54)	3.18 (1.25)	1.56***	1.31	1.80	12.75
<i>Combined Confidence Score for 7 Questions</i>	134	133	1.86 (1.51)	3.15 (1.22)	1.29***	1.18	1.40	23.30

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Standard Deviation in parenthesis

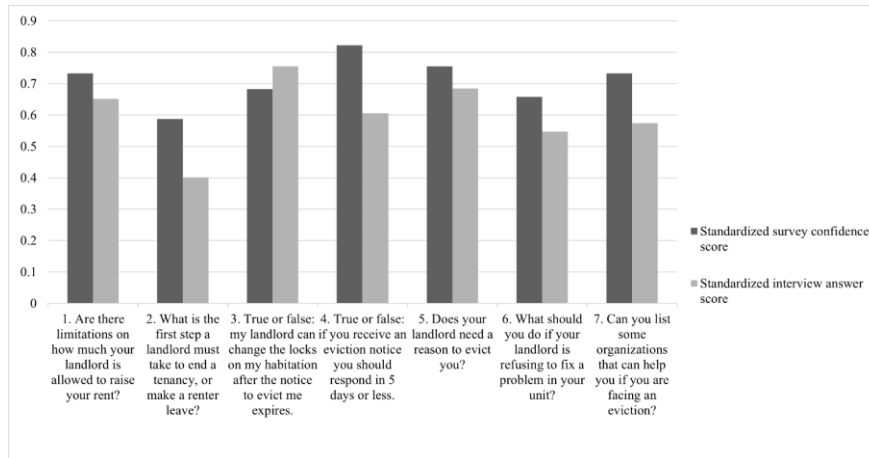
Tenants' response to each of the seven knowledge questions independently showed a significant increase in their confidence to correctly answer the underlying question, as well.

Limits to rights awareness for workshop attendees

In general, tenants' estimation of their ability to answer the knowledge survey questions was proximate to their actual ability to answer the questions correctly. Figure 1 shows standardized scores from the knowledge survey responses, on which tenants were asked to rate their confidence to answer questions correctly, and the interviews, when tenants were asked to provide answers to the questions. This figure should not be read as the percentage of participants who answered questions correctly, the columns

represent standardized values that show the gap between confidence in answering a question correctly and direct measurement of correct answers.

Figure 1. Comparison of Survey Results Reporting Confidence in Knowledge and Demonstration of Knowledge



The biggest gaps between confidence and measured knowledge were in two areas (Figure 1). The first area was how quickly a tenant needs to respond to an eviction order. Survey respondents were confident they could answer this question correctly, but interviewees' answers suggest that their confidence was higher than it should be based on their ability to answer correctly. Interviewed tenants who answered incorrectly did not know they needed to file a response to an eviction notice within 5 days. Many said other periods of time or said they did not know the answer. This is concerning, because when tenants do not file a response with the court the property owner can request a default judgement for eviction without any input from the tenant. The second largest gap between confidence and measured knowledge was for the first step a property owner is meant to take to end a tenancy. A written notice that includes criteria specified by state law is the first step a landlord should take; a property owner who dismisses a tenant without cause or proper notice is acting illegally. Unless that is known to a tenant, they could lose their housing unnecessarily. The gaps between confidence and

ability to answer correctly suggest a need for clarification about these particular legal requirements. However, a look at the percentage of correct and incorrect answers given by interviewees shows that it is other topics that were least understood by tenants.

Figure 2. Comparison of Percentage Correct Answers for Workshop Attendees and Non-Attendees

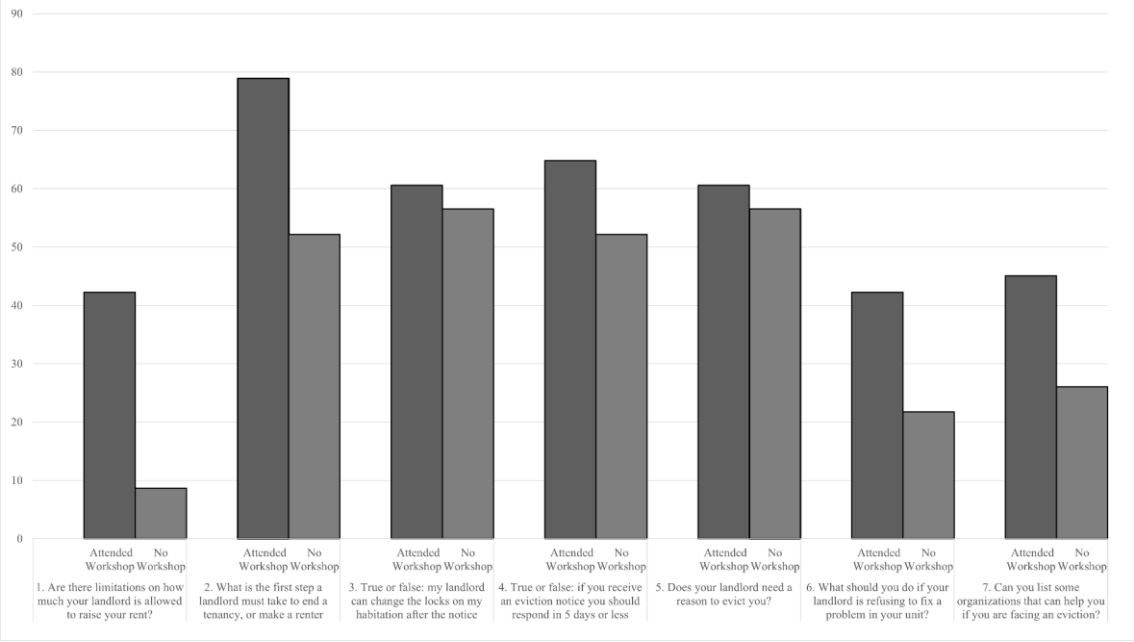


Figure 2 shows the percentage of interviewed tenants who answered each question correctly, compared to interviewees who did not attend workshops. It shows that 65 percent of tenants who attended workshops answered the question about responding to a notice correctly (see Figure 2, “attended workshop” column for question 4). For the first steps a landlord should take to end a tenancy, nearly 80 percent of interviewed tenants who attended workshops knew the correct answer (see Figure 2, “attended workshop” column for question 2).

Among interviewees who attended workshops, the questions answered incorrectly most often were whether there were limitations on rent increases, what to do if a landlord refuses to fix a problem in their unit, and the names of organizations that can help in case of an eviction (see the “attended workshop” columns in Figure 2). Based on workshop observations and interview coding, we reflect on why these three

questions were difficult for participants to answer correctly. For the question on rent increases, California's rent increase limitation law is complicated and difficult to understand because properties that meet a variety of specifications are exempted from the 10 percent annual limit and some California jurisdictions have adopted other rent limits. For question 6 on landlord refusal to fix problems, over half of interviewees did not remember that the workshop curriculum suggested they put repair requests in writing. This may have gotten lost in the general recommendation that tenants communicate with property owners in writing, although we also think we could have worded the question more clearly. And for question 7 on organizations that can help, about 45 percent recalled legal organizations by name or had them written down. Another 30 percent of interviewees who attended workshops could not remember these organizations but said they would contact the CBO who registered them for a workshop or would seek help at a courthouse – both of which are courses of action that should lead to legal assistance. Providing attendees with an informational handout that summarizes key points and lists resources could improve this particular outcome.

Workshop attendees understand rights and resources more than non-attendees

Tenants who attended workshops were more likely to answer questions correctly than tenants who did not attend, as shown in Figure 2. Only 9 percent of tenants who did not attend workshops answered the question about rent increases correctly. Although our sample is not representative of the population in our region or the state, this does suggest that absent tenant education, it is unlikely that many low-income renters could identify an illegal rent increase.

Among workshop attendees, roughly one-fourth of interviewees (19 individuals) reported having done their own research outside of workshops or having had past experiences with displacement that provided them with insights. Among non-attendees,

nearly half had done their own research (13 individuals). Initiative to learn about tenant rights is commendable but can be problematic when tenants are given incorrect information by friends, family, or other sources. For example, when asked about legal limits on rent increases one tenant said: “I read some stuff. As far as I think it was 17 percent plus inflation and inflation is from last November to this November,” which is incorrect.

Registration records suggest that most workshop attendees only participated in one workshop. Researchers studying other types of educational interventions show that repeated opportunities to engage with material are more likely to result in long-lasting, measurable learning objectives (Lusardi et al., 2020). It is likely that additional exposure to the legal principles, strategies, and resources presented during the workshops would result in even larger learning gains.

Workshops Benefit New Immigrants and People Not Facing Imminent Evictions

Educational programming like the Eviction Prevention Workshops may be especially beneficial to newer immigrants to the United States and for people who are not threatened with displacement. In individual and group interviews with Somali and Myanmar refugees, as well as newly arrived Mexican immigrants, tenants found the workshop material helpful. For many of them, this was the first time they had learned about their rights as renters.

For example, we asked group interview participants to tell us what, if anything, they had learned from workshops. Most participants reported learning more about legal resources and the need to document communication with their property owners. For example, one Somali refugee explained that they learned what to do in case of an eviction and a Burmese participant said they learned to document communication with

the landlord, including taking pictures of the unit before and after renting to have evidence of the condition of the unit. The need to document repair requests and other communication was especially salient for the immigrants and refugees in our sample, who reported mold, pests, and plumbing issues more often than other interviewees.

Tenants described similar benefits in individual interviews. A Latino participant who has been in the United States for seven years said they “didn't know that they should notify you before an eviction,” that the landlord needs to provide written notice for a rent increase, or that “if something is broken, or something is not working in the apartment you can complain.” A Haitian refugee who had been informally evicted when subleasing from a master tenant said, “...I learned a lot and before I didn't know when the landlord asked me to leave it had to be a formal process.”

Native born participants were less likely to describe learning substantial new information. Many had navigated displacement processes before and reported having learned a lot of information from prior experience.

Workshops Steer Tenants Toward Legal Assistance

Workshops provided tenants with information about local, legal resources, including free legal representation, attorneys who could review rental contracts, and support for improving communication with property owners. Workshop attendees (47 percent) were more likely than those who did not attend workshops (22 percent) to identify legal organizations they could turn to for help. Workshop attendees who could not recall the information from the workshops had not taken notes or received any physical materials that could help them remember.⁹ One participant commented: “I didn’t pay attention about where to go when we came to listen, because this is what I

⁹ Workshop organizers were hesitant to hand out printed materials since the legal context was in flux during the program, particularly in relation to eviction moratoriums.

did, I listened, and I forgot.” Others could not recall the information but could identify a starting point for a legal housing matter, such as one participant who said she would go to the courthouse.

Interviewees who attended workshops were generally more connected to CBOs and legal services than those who did not attend workshops. Interviewees who had not attended workshops were more likely to reference school and government organizations as sources of support than were workshop attendees, suggesting that they were connected to assistance, just not the programs dedicated to tenant rights education. While this difference is partially due to our sampling method, it does highlight the fact that many low-income tenants are not connected to CBOs and that campaigns to prevent evictions need to expand outreach beyond CBOs as well as support CBOs in expanding their outreach capacity.

Table 6. Tenant Interviewee Answers to Question, “Do you know of organizations that can help you if threatened with eviction or related housing problem” (N=98).

	Correct	Incorrect	Somewhat Correct	Question Not Asked	Total
All Tenant Interviewees	40	33	12	13	98
Perc %	40.8%	33.7%	11.2%	13.3%	
Tenants Attended	34	20	7	10	71
Perc %	46.6%	28.8%	9.6%	15.1%	
Tenant Did Not Attend	6	13	5	3	27
Perc %	22.2%	48.1%	18.5%	11.1%	

Group interview participants from refugee communities affiliated with CBOs almost uniformly said they would turn to the organization that had registered them for the workshop if they were threatened with an eviction. Because these CBOs were part of the larger collaborative led by Legal Aid Society, their staff had training in how to get community members the legal help they need and even advise them about first steps.

Spanish-speaking tenants affiliated with a preschool program where the collaborative held workshops were generally less aware of legal services and had very

little understanding of their rights, prior to the workshop presentation. The parent liaisons of the preschool had not undergone the same training that CBO staff underwent and were less connected with legal services. Growing the number of non-governmental entities that are aware of legal resources and know when a tenant may need such support could improve resource awareness for all low-income tenants.

Workshops Have Mixed Emotional Benefits

We anticipated that one possible benefit of tenant rights education could be reductions in reported stress levels. This assumption was correct for only a portion of participants. We employ t-test statistics which show no statistically meaningful impact of the workshops on our standardized stress scale from before to after workshops, although this could be attributable to the wording of the scale questions, which we discuss below. Interview data suggests mixed emotional benefits from the workshops, which may explain the negligible impact of workshops on the standard stress instrument. This analysis supports the conclusion that workshops are not a sufficiently impactful intervention to improve most tenants' emotional health from before to after being informed about their rights. However, it does show that rights awareness can have emotional benefits when renters are newer to the United States, and/or when it provides tenants with community and opportunities for advocacy.

Survey results suggest no clear emotional benefit

The stress assessment measured whether the Eviction Prevention Workshops have a discernible impact on self-rated stress; a lower score indicates a decrease in stress. Results for the combined score across all four stress measures show that the workshop intervention had an indeterminate impact on stress levels. On average, tenants indicated a slightly lower rating on the post-survey than the pre-survey, or a slight reduction in stress levels. This difference, shown as the last row of Table 7, was not

statistically significant ($t(210)=-1.47, p>0.05$), suggesting that the workshop may have a positive impact on participants' stress, but we cannot be certain.

Table 7. Change in Self-Reported Stress Scale Averages, Paired T-test

Variable	N	df	Pre-survey Mean (SD)	Post-survey Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval		<i>t</i>
						Lower	Upper	
Control	229	228	1.75 (1.09)	1.61 (0.99)	-0.14*	-0.25	-0.02	-2.40
Confident	222	210	1.30 (0.88)	1.39 (0.93)	0.09	-0.03	0.22	1.45
Going Your Way	220	219	1.63 (0.87)	1.49 (0.85)	-0.14*	-0.25	-0.02	-2.40
Piling Up	220	219	1.73 (1.04)	1.74 (1.05)	0.01	-0.10	0.12	0.17
<i>Combined Stress Score</i>	211	210	1.61 (0.99)	1.56 (0.97)	-0.05	-0.11	0.02	-1.47

*** $p<.001$, ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$

Standard Deviation in parenthesis

This lack of statistical difference may be attributable to a flaw in question wording. The stress scale asked participants to consider their emotional wellbeing during the past month. Thus, participants who may have felt less stress after the workshop may not have reported a decrease because they were instructed to consider their feelings over a longer time period. Responses to open-ended interview questions about stress and wellbeing before and after workshops may more accurately reflect the impact of workshops on stress.

Our analysis of interview data shows the multiple directional effects on stress for workshop participants, which was related to the tenants' motive for attending, pre-existing rights awareness, and the length of time they had been a tenant in the United States.

Empowerment and the emotional benefits of workshops

Forty-six of the 71 tenant participants who attended a workshop expressed that what they learned alleviated some of their stress related to housing. They attributed this to learning about their rights, and learning about resources and tools they could use to deal with housing problems, including tenant organizing. Tenants who had arrived as

adults in the United States shared positive emotional reactions to the workshop, expressing gratitude to presenters for sharing introductory tenant knowledge. One Latina participant explained, “I thought that anything could put me in the street. That's what I thought about a lot of things, but once I learned about my duty, I felt lighter.”

Workshops also expanded tenants' knowledge and capacity to act in ways that could improve their housing. One tenant reported gaining the confidence to communicate with their property management.

For me, I feel that it is something where you learn a lot when you take it. Once you take that workshop, your way of looking at things as a renter changes completely. [...] For me, that change that I saw, was the power to be better informed. When I went to make a request- it happened that two days passed [after the request], and I asked that they come to fix something. [...] I told them ‘No, I paid my rent and I have the right that you come and give maintenance to what I need.’ [...] About half an hour later they came. [...] Once I realized that in reality, I do have a right and that I can do it, it changed my confidence in asking for things.

A tenant shared that the Eviction Prevention Workshop information helped them manage their stress by feeling more equipped to address their issues. They said, “Yes, it got better [the stress], because now you know more things, you are not going to worry for what isn't and for what is.”

Both quotations suggest that workshops had the intended effect of engaging participants in problem-solving education, in the tradition of educational models that seek to liberate learners or, at the very least, equip learners with the capacity to change something about their circumstances (Freire, 2005; Nussbaum, 2002; Sen, 1993). Over half of tenant interview participants attended the workshops to learn their rights and

how to deal with hypothetical housing issues. These tenants were more likely to report feeling reassured after the workshop than tenants experiencing a housing crisis.

These positive feelings about the workshop did not preclude sometimes desperate needs for help in relation to displacement, unaffordable rents, and other serious housing challenges.

Disempowerment after workshop participation

Tenants who had lived in the United States for a longer time did not perceive the workshops to have the same reductive effect on their stress levels. This difference in perception was primarily due to their more extensive, lived experience as a renter in the United States and overall disillusionment with tenants' rights.

Six participants reported that they experienced increased stress or frustration after attending a workshop, largely because they left with the impression that property owners had expansive rights and tenants very few. When asked what they remembered about the workshop, a tenant shared, "Can I tell you the truth? I do remember, but it made me sad, because there is not a lot of help. That is what stuck with me the most." Another tenant expressed growing feelings of frustration as they believed they had little recourse to stop property owners from taking advantage of them.

Interviewer: Since learning about your rights as a renter, has that changed the amount of stress you feel in relation to your housing?

Interviewee: Yeah, it does. It's like the more I know, the more I get angry...The more I know the more it's stressful to know because I don't know what [to do] to fix it. I don't know what to do, and I don't know how much he's [property owner] gonna take advantage.

A tenant renting a garage described the unequal power between themselves and their landlord this way:

There's all these little things that I know a lot of landlords take advantage of because fighting it means there's an unequal playing field. If I lose, I'm homeless. There's an eviction on my record. If the landlord loses, he goes home and goes to bed and maybe complains to his wife or partner about what a bad day he had. The downside for the tenants really gives a lot of leverage to landlords to take advantage of the legal system in a lot of ways.

An African American participant explained that they had experienced racial discrimination in their housing and felt that while the workshop information may provide insights or tools for White or Hispanic tenants, it could not benefit them because exercising their rights could expose them to additional, discriminatory practices by property owners

Feelings of frustration with the existing system often reflected tenants' deeper understanding of state law. One tenant described facing an eviction notice due to non-payment of rent and feeling uncertain if they should fight it. They explained they did in fact pay their rent but had thrown away the receipts. Following the workshop, they felt increased frustration because they would not be able to prove they had paid rent in court and could be legally evicted. They felt going to court would be too risky and instead, decided to pay the rent again to maintain their housing.

... when I saw that they [landlords] also have valid arguments [...] I said, 'No, I have too much to lose.' It guided me a lot, that is why I took the decision to stay [out of court].

Proponents of education that promotes a critical consciousness would be unsurprised by this finding and might encourage additional emphasis on the processes tenants can engage to change the structural conditions of their disadvantage (Freire, 2005; Grain & Lund, 2016). Since an invitation to advocacy was part of the workshop content, we

know that some participants turned to advocacy out of frustration with this system, but some participants were unable to fully engage due to their undocumented status or family circumstances.

The workshop experiences of five tenants motivated them to take on activism roles within tenant advocacy organizations or in their communities. One tenant shared that although their housing issue was not covered in the workshop, they found it helped create a sense of community to know they were not alone in their struggles: “I think being in community with other people who were standing up for themselves helped, the unity.” Another tenant was driven by a no-fault eviction¹⁰ to take on an activist role and help prevent negative experiences for other tenants.

The [eviction] notice is extremely threatening, it's extremely scary and terrifying, and you know, I can't say that it's been easy trying to turn, you know, complete despair and trauma into leadership. But I don't have much of a choice. Even tenants without personal housing struggles felt motivated to get involved and support other tenants in their communities: “I have been able to guide other people who are actually left without a house, or are on the streets, or having problems.”

The Limitations of Legal Support in a Workshop Format

Frustration about the inability of workshops to address tenants' unique needs was also driven by the limitations inherent to this type of educational format: presenters could not provide tenants with advice, legal or other, in a group setting. The workshops were designed to provide general information about the eviction process and tenants' rights. For this reason, people who came in with ongoing crises would be directed to a specific resource, rather than getting answers they needed in that moment. Workshop

¹⁰More information on eviction types can be found here: <https://oag.ca.gov/consumers/general/landlord-tenant-issues>.

providers took time to guide these individuals to the next step with a warm handoff, but for tenants in crisis, this felt like one more delay. Some felt that the workshop was inapplicable to their situation and that the only benefit they derived was a list of phone numbers for legal assistance. For example, four workshop attendees felt that nearly all the information in the workshop was irrelevant to their unique situation, although they could see how others might benefit. One participant explained that “a lot of people do not know these things. Nobody knows them until they have to deal with them,” but having dealt with threatened eviction themselves, most of the workshop content was already known.

Workshops Should be Combined with Other Displacement Prevention Strategies

Educational programming can be more effective when combined with other prevention measures, like legal assistance and tenant organizing. Given that most evictions are due to non-payment of rent, however, extensive eviction prevention also requires attention to the challenges of affordability. Tenants overwhelmingly and repeatedly talked about the cost of rent and the many ways that unaffordability and a lack of affordable or available units contributed to their stress and personal or family hardship. Many people described being at a tipping point: if their rent rose again, they were not sure what they would do because they already paid well over half of their income to rent. A minority of tenants paid a rent at or below 50 percent of their income. These rent burdens are often unavoidable given the low wages most participants can earn or the benefits levels people receive from social welfare programs.

We highlight the experiences of one tenant, an undocumented mother of three we call Leti. She explained:

We would like to [move] because where we live it's just one bedroom and we have three children. The two oldest sleep in the living room, on a bunk bed, and we're in the bedroom. We know the space is limited. If we found an opportunity where the rent wasn't so high and everyone could be a little more comfortable, we would do it... The oldest is 17 now. I know it's a tight squeeze here, but we can't pay more.

There are various problems in their apartment, including humidity in the rooms and problems with the carpet, but Leti expressed fear in telling her property manager about these issues because of the repercussions. Above all, she feared that if she 'complained' about the issues with her apartment, they would raise her rent. As a result, she preferred to stay silent than to address the issues.

It's better if we say nothing because rents are rising, rising, and rising, and we know that our rent isn't as high as other costs we know of, so we prefer to live with the damages that we talked about for fear that they will raise our rent.

All of Leti's income checks go to rent and bills: one biweekly check goes to rent and the other pays the bills. She emphasized that paying her rent has become even more difficult as the price of everything else has also increased. In fact, she states that it's almost to the point where they have to decide whether to buy food or pay rent. Leti uses their overcrowded conditions as a way to motivate her sons to strive for something better.

Tenants overwhelmingly said that rent stabilization, rent caps, or other methods of lowering the rent were their highest need to avoid displacement. In every group interview we conducted, tenants voiced strong support for the need for rent limitations. Even tenants who thought a rent increase might be illegal feared challenging their property owner due to the threat of eviction. As Leti's story makes clear, high rents and

an uneven balance of power between tenants and property owners makes pushing for better living conditions a difficult choice for many tenants. Another interviewee explained that they were fairly certain a recent rent increase was illegal, but asked themselves, “Do I want to risk saving some money every month or again becoming homeless because I fight it?”

Because emergency rental assistance programs had largely ended when the workshops were offered, CBOs did not have many financial resources to offer attendees. The city and county where this study was completed provide very limited rental support and largely to residents at risk of homelessness.

Conclusion

Eviction and other forms of displacement have risen to pre-pandemic levels in many U.S. cities, reinforcing the ongoing need for eviction and displacement prevention work.¹¹ Our research supports the continuation and expansion of Eviction Prevention Workshops and similar programming. For most of the tenants we surveyed and interviewed, this educational intervention had clear benefits, especially in providing tenants with a deeper understanding of their rights. Tenants came away with a more thorough understanding of eviction processes, what behaviors by landlords are illegal under state and city law, and the most advisable ways to navigate landlord disagreements. Tenants who attended workshops were more likely to know about legal resources and be able to identify a means to access them, when compared with tenants who had not attended.

¹¹ See comparison of recent year averages to pre-pandemic averages here:

<https://evictionlab.org/eviction-tracking/>

The impact of workshops on tenant stress was more difficult to measure. Tenants attended workshops with different motivations and under varied levels of emotional strain: some came without any particular housing concerns while others attended because they had received an eviction notice and were searching for help. Attendees searching for general knowledge typically found it but did not always report a change in stress levels. Attendees who faced possible displacement sometimes found the assistance they needed to challenge or slow an eviction, while others learned they were powerless to stop the loss of their housing. The outcome was that a workshop could affect two people in stressful situations very differently. Survey results indicate a non-statistically significant change in self-reported stress from before workshops to after. Interviews with tenants revealed the intricacies of this complicated relationship.

Although we hoped to determine whether Eviction Prevention Workshops reduced displacement among participants, this became difficult to track. As mentioned above, the varied reasons that motivated tenant attendance meant that many tenants did not attend workshops under an imminent eviction threat. Those who did attend in a state of crisis were unlikely to sign up for an in-depth interview with our study team. For those we did interview, the timeline of our study and sampling method made it difficult for us to determine the long-term impacts of workshops, given that a housing threat was unlikely to surface within the 3-month period they participated in our study. A longitudinal study with a longer timeframe could determine any lasting impacts.

We point to a strength of the Eviction Prevention Workshops, which was the reliance on CBOs to recruit workshop participants and host workshops. Involving the CBOs in many aspects of workshop planning and execution contributed to a meaningful intervention that addressed community members' needs. CBO engagement, when done well, can ensure that workshop content addresses the needs of a given community and is

shared in ways that are linguistically, culturally, and technologically accessible to diverse audiences. Research participants who were disconnected from CBOs were less likely to attend a workshop or have a starting point for accessing legal assistance.

Education programs should collaborate with CBOs to recruit participants and ensure linguistic and cultural accessibility of workshop content. We also recommend that programs, including the Eviction Prevention Workshop we studied, be expansive in their engagement with CBOs and other community entities. Some CBOs in our study worked through school programs and churches to reach tenants who were not involved in CBOs. This was a positive model for contacting tenants who may be less engaged.

Deep engagement with CBOs is also vital for improving participation in educational interventions. To be effective, anti-displacement programming should occur prior to the initiation of a housing crisis, yet recruiting class participants is a challenge – most people have higher priorities than a workshop on general landlord-tenant law. CBOs had the local knowledge necessary to incentivize attendees who otherwise may have delayed tenant rights education. They did this by holding workshops immediately after well-attended community events, serving food and/or holding raffles, adapting the workshop delivery method, and more. These adaptations could have been more extensive with additional support for CBOs.

While workshops have clear benefits for tenant rights awareness, we note that other tools are needed to address housing instability because educational initiatives are not a panacea for displacement. The actions a tenant should take in a given situation cannot always be addressed in an informational workshop. The information given there does not, and cannot, constitute legal advice, because a tenants' rights in each situation are shaped by individual circumstances, such as the nature of the rental agreement, the previous actions of the tenant and property owner, and more. Providing educational

programming in conjunction with on-site, individualized legal counsel could address this gap, as could a better system for triaging tenants so that legal services are prioritized for cases when tenants are facing immediate displacement and education is provided for tenants with less immediate needs.

The most common reason tenants lose their housing is non-payment of rent. Tenant education and legal services can help tenants to maintain their housing by supporting their efforts to enter a repayment plan with landlords. However, the pace of rent increases relative to income during the past several years has resulted in large rent burdens, especially for very low-income renters. Even legal rent increases can be significantly higher than the income increases most low-income people receive. A Somali refugee who participated in our study put it bluntly: people in their community are prepared to deal with a host of housing challenges (e.g., habitability, contentious relationships with property management, and even racial discrimination), but none of that matters if rent increases continue to outpace income gains. Thus, in addition to expanding workshop reach and legal assistance, rental limits or rental supports are necessary to support stability for low-income tenants.

Educational programming fills an important gap in tenant awareness far upstream from destabilizing events, which may help them avoid eviction court and know when property managers are engaging in illegal behavior (Innovation for Justice & Step Up to Justice, 2020). The workshops were largely successful in expanding tenants' knowledge of how to address conflicts with property owners and respond to displacement threats. As researchers in economics have argued, this type of capability-enhancing, human capital investment is vital for human flourishing and the creation of equitable societies (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2023; Sen, 1993). Documenting and evaluating

educational programs in the housing space can promote their use as a tool in efforts to reduce eviction and other forms of displacement for low-income tenants.

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