

AFFORDABLE HOUSING, CRIME AND SOCIAL DISORDER

MYTH VS FACT

Myth: Affordable housing developments cause a rise in crime rates and social disorder.

FACT

Overall, research shows that affordable housing has **no significant impact on neighbourhood crime rates.**

Example: In a study of supportive housing sites in Denver, Colorado, researchers found that there was no statistically significant increase in crime rates within 2,000 feet of the development. Where crime does occur after the development of affordable housing, it may be that the tenants themselves are victims of crime rather than perpetrating crimes.¹

Example: In a study of supportive housing in Toronto, the researchers found there was no increase in crime rates around the supportive housing sites and that instead, the developments and tenants were targeted as victims.²

Example: An analysis of the number of police calls before and after the opening of supportive housing sites in BC found that calls decreased in most of the neighbourhoods in the six months after the sites opened.³



FACT

Concerns about **increases in crime and social disorder are often due to misconceptions** that are:

- Racially motivated and informed by stereotypes based on race and class.⁴
- Motivated by the belief that renters in general are more transient and deviant than homeowners.⁵

FACT

Crime statistics are not objective and are influenced and shaped by more than just crime.

- Crime rates are shaped by the regulatory framework and what is considered a crime can change.

Example: in Canada, the decriminalization of cannabis in 2018 changed what are reportable offences, which impacted crime rates.

- Official crime statistics **rely on the incident to be reported to the police**, either by people or by police activities. This means that there can be **variation in the crimes reported**.⁶

Some crimes are less likely to be reported to or investigated by police so these crimes are under-represented (e.g., sexual assault).

Decisions about police enforcement or a focus on certain crimes or areas can mean that some crimes are over-represented (e.g., targeted traffic enforcement campaigns).

FACT

Official crime statistics **do not capture perceived safety and feelings of safety**.⁷ This includes the feelings of safety and belonging of affordable housing tenants themselves.



FACT

Marginalized groups, who are over-represented in social and affordable housing and have complicated historical and contemporary relationships with police, are more likely to be:

- Over-policed (e.g., use of excessive force; disproportionate arrest rates and justice system involvement).
- Under-policed (e.g., racial harassment and hate crimes are taken less seriously; slower or lower response from police).⁸

FACT

Tenants in social and affordable housing are **over-surveilled** compared to other households which contributes to stereotypes that affordable housing developments are unsafe and with have more crime.⁹



FACT

Research by the City of Edmonton found **no connection between affordable housing and crime rates or social disorder**.¹⁰



Non-market housing, police events, and bylaw complaints by neighbourhood, City Edmonton 2011-2018



- Non-market housing accounts for approximately 12% of the housing stock in the five core neighbourhoods but much smaller proportions of all police calls and all bylaw complaints in the neighbourhood.
- Between 2011 and 2018, only 4.2% of police calls and 1.3% of bylaw complaints were attributed to non-market housing.

¹ Galster et al., "The Impact of Supportive Housing on Neighborhood Crime Rates."

² Dream Team Research Group, "We Are Neighbours: The Impact of Supportive Housing on Community, Social, Economic, and Attitude Changes."

³ BC Housing, "Overview of Strategies from Case Studies of Supportive Housing Sites in BC."

⁴ Nguyen, Basolo, and Tiwari, "Opposition to Affordable Housing in the USA"; Tighe, "How Race and Class Stereotyping Shapes Attitudes Toward Affordable Housing."

⁵ Rollwagen, "Constructing Renters as a Threat to Neighbourhood Safety."

⁶ Moreau, "Police-Reported Crime Statistics in Canada, 2018."

⁷ Perreault, "Canadians' Perceptions of Personal Safety and Crime, 2014."

⁸ Ben-Porat, "Policing Multicultural States."

⁹ Flint, "The Responsible Tenant"; Hughes, "A House but Not a Home."

¹⁰ City of Edmonton, "Analysis of Non-Market Housing, Crime, and Social Disorder."