

## **Examining the Relationship between Crime and Housing Types**

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### **Introduction**

One particularly concerning class of residential crime is home invasion, which involves the illegal entry into an occupied dwelling, usually with the intention of committing other crimes such as theft or violence. These crimes have a massive effect on society since, in addition to putting victims' physical well-being in danger, they cause major psychological damage that lasts a lifetime (Sheppard et al., 2021). Knowing what contributes to home invasions is very important, especially because residential neighborhoods are quite vulnerable to such incidents. The main emphasis of this study is the question: is there a connection between living in public housing and the likelihood of experiencing a home invasion?

Public housing, which is intended to give low-income individuals and families access to affordable housing, frequently encounters issues that go beyond affordability. According to research, systemic problems including concentrated poverty, insufficient surveillance, and social disarray cause crime to disproportionately affect public housing developments (Hananel et al., 2019; Braga et al., 2024). For example, public housing experiences a higher record of violent crimes in New York City, although it accounts for a very small portion of the city's residential spaces (Braga et al., 2024). There is still a lack of research in the criminological literature about

the connection between home invasions and public housing, which this research study tends to address. Especially in cities where violent crimes are occurring, uncovering the connection between home invasion and housing types can begin to help answer questions about other types of more dangerous crimes as well.

The theoretical frameworks, such as Routine Activities Theory (RAT) and Social Disorganization Theory (SDT), explain how crime occurs in public housing. According to SDT, crime is most likely to occur where the social structures are weak, which are usually areas with much poverty and people moving in and out (Jones et al., 2024). Routine Activities Theory points out that for any crime to take place, there has to be three primary conditions: a motivated offender, an appropriate target, and lack of effective guardianship (Vilalta et al., 2020). Drawing from this conception, the social and environmental conditions predominant in government-provided housing can thus enable home invasions. This research study seeks to answer the question of whether one is more likely to experience home invasion if living in public housing.

This study looks at this relationship using data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), while considering covariates such as age, sex, and ethnicity. Understanding this relationship will go a long way toward helping create policies that result in improved safety and security in public housing and developing criminological theory more generally.

The issue of home invasions within residential neighborhoods is an important one that needs to be researched in order to help society become a safer place, as well as one that can help

support and confirm criminological theories of what may be causing crime. This research study aims to complete both of these important goals by analyzing crime incident reports by both private and public housing residents, as well as by going even further with multivariate analysis looking at the crime rates in terms of sex, race, and age.

**Research Question:** Is there a correlation between experiencing a home invasion and living in public housing?

## **Literature Review**

### **Dependent Variable: Experiencing a Home Invasion**

Home invasion falls into a criminal sub-category of burglary and it serves as a significant threat to household safety and security. This type of crime involves the unlawful entry into a building or a dwelling, often when occupants are present, with the intent to commit a crime. These crimes can include assault, battery, theft, etc. (Sheppard et. Al., p. 71). In this research study, the dependent variable measured in this study is "experiencing a home invasion," which refers to households that have fallen victim to this kind of criminal activity. Home invasions can not only cause physical loss and destruction, but they can also lead to psychological or emotional trauma for the victims. In order to develop effective strategies to prevent these types of crimes from occurring, it is essential to understand the conditions which may be causing home invasions. By furthering our understanding, we can also strengthen criminological theories on factors that cause crime.

Current research into home invasions has helped to reveal potential risk factors associated with this type of crime. Home invasions can happen anywhere – not just in big cities, or rural places. Much of the research being done is not specific to home invasions, but to burglaries in general. Research has shown that burglars often target homes based on a combination of opportunity, accessibility, and vulnerability. This can also be supported and explained by the Routine Activities Theory. According to this theory, crimes like home invasions are likely to occur when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship (Vilalta et. Al., p. 73). As the Routine Activities Theory contends, homes that appear unoccupied or inadequately protected are more likely to be targeted by burglars than homes or dwellings that have a capable guardian.

Specifically, research into the COVID-19 pandemic has examined the relationship between household occupancy and burglary. As many studies have noted, there was a sharp decrease in burglary rates during the pandemic, which can be attributed to changes in routine activities. With more people staying at home due to lockdown measures, there is less attraction for burglars to commit the crime. A case study using data from the COVID-19 restrictions showed a direct relationship between household occupancy and burglary rates; there was a notable reduction in such crimes since homes were constantly occupied (Frith et. Al., p. 8). This finding supported the routine activities' theory for understanding patterns of burglary, including home invasions.

Scholarly research has also demonstrated that environmental and social factors may also increase the likelihood of home invasions. For example, neighborhoods experiencing higher poverty rates, lower unity within the community, and inadequate surveillance systems can be

more vulnerable to these crimes. Moreover, certain categories of housing, such as public housing or section 8 housing, may be at a higher risk because of their location. Placement in high-density areas where anonymity and transient populations are more common may contribute to this discrepancy. Scholars have linked socioeconomic status and residential type to increased burglary rates, among other crimes, further supporting the idea that home invasions are not randomly distributed. Home invasions are influenced by many different structural and environmental factors.

### **Independent variable: Living in Public Housing**

Public housing is a residential factor that refers to residing in government-owned, low-cost rental apartments. Public housing is designated to lower-income individuals that cannot afford private-market housing (Hananel et. Al., p. 462). Public housing typically consists of large estates located in less attractive urban areas, creating concentrated, homogeneous communities often characterized by high poverty levels. These housing developments emerged as a response to affordable housing shortages, however they have faced challenges due to their design and location, which have contributed to a range of social issues. There are also a lot of issues with maintaining these buildings and keeping them secure.

Public housing developments in many countries, specifically the United States, have historically been associated with poor living conditions and higher crime rates. Research point to systemic problems in public housing, such as ties to segregation, the lack of funding for maintenance, and inadequate oversight from housing authorities, which all have led to unsafe environments (Braga, et. Al, p. 2). In major cities like New York, public housing developments

have become concentrated areas for violent crime. For instance, while only 7% of New York City's population lived in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments, they accounted for a whopping 27% of all shootings between 2010 and 2019, indicating a significant overrepresentation of violence in these areas (Braga, et. Al., p. 2).

As previously mentioned, physical structure and location also has an impact on public housing. High-rise public housing complexes, in particular, have been identified as "hot spots" for violent crime. These developments are generally designed poorly, which makes it difficult for residents to create strong community bonds or establish effective surveillance – both of which are crucial for crime prevention. The disproportionate share of violent crime in high-rise projects emphasizes the structural vulnerabilities of these environments (MacDonald et. Al., p. 6). The lack of adequate resources and funding for public housing residents exacerbates these issues, leading to a cycle of poverty, crime, and social instability.

Following the lack of resources and funding for public housing, research has shown that the estates tend to become isolated communities with limited economic and social mobility. Therefore, residents face many challenges. In many cases, public housing is located in areas with fewer employment opportunities, lower-quality education, and reduced access to health care and social services (Hananel et. Al., p. 461). These environmental factors increase the likelihood of criminal activity and social disorganization. This is a global issue, as similar trends have been observed in countries such as Sweden, Israel, Mexico, and England where large housing estates have led to similar concentrations of poverty and crime.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Social Disorganization Theory and Routine Activities Theory***

Social Disorganization Theory (SDT) and Routine Activities Theory (RAT) are both potential criminological theories that can help explain factors that increase or decrease the likelihood of experiencing a home invasion. Both of these theories provide insights into the possible environmental and social factors that contribute to criminal activity, particularly in urban or metropolitan settings – which is exactly where most public housing developments are situated.

**Social Disorganization Theory**, developed by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, theorizes that crime rates are linked to the state of the social structure within communities. According to this theory, communities that do not maintain strong social ties and effective social controls are more vulnerable to crime (Jones et. Al., p. 546). Social conditions like poverty, residential instability, and population turnover lead to disorganization which makes it hard for residents to work together to prevent crime. In public housing, where transient populations and concentrated poverty are common, social disorganization is often at its highest. A study in Lexington assigned maximum levels of social disorganization to areas with public and Section 8 housing, indicating the heightened vulnerability of these areas to crime (Jones et. Al.,p. 555). Without social structure and control, it makes it difficult for residents to band together as a community and protect themselves from crimes such as home invasions. The community structure is too fragmented to implement effective social safeguards on its own. Public housing authorities also fail to provide enough structural upkeep and maintenance to help combat these issues.

**Routine Activities Theory**, developed by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felton, focuses on the opportunity for crime rather than just the social structures that enable it. Routine Activities Theory maintains that in order for a crime to occur, three elements must converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship (Vilalta et. Al., p. 755). This theory contends that changes in daily patterns and routines can influence the likelihood of experiencing a home invasion. For example, public housing units are often located in metropolitan areas where there is a high concentration of motivated offenders. When followed by the absence of capable guardianship due to poor surveillance and inadequate security measures, this combination of contributing factors could be causing an increase in the likelihood of experiencing a home invasion when living in public housing.

### **Empirical Support for Social Disorganization Theory and Routine Activities Theory**

Empirical research supports the relevance of Routine Activities Theory in explaining residential crime. For instance, a study on public housing in Mexico showed that urban environments, particularly those with high dwelling accessibility and poor environmental design, are more susceptible to residential burglaries (Vilalta, p. 754). This pattern is seen not only in Mexico, but in other public housing developments around the globe, where crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) strategies (better lighting and secure entrances) are often underfunded or absent. Research has also shown that crime is highly concentrated in specific areas within cities. A study in Minneapolis found that 50% of police calls were concentrated at just 3.5% of addresses, suggesting that crime clusters in "hot spots" (Sherman et. Al., p. 545).



Public housing estates, particularly high-rise developments, often exhibit as crime "hot spots" due to motivated offenders and vulnerable targets in areas with limited security or guardianship.

While there is a significant research gap in the specific connection between home invasions and living in public housing, Social Disorganization Theory and Routine Activities Theory both provide a compelling basis. Social Disorganization Theory explains why certain neighborhoods are more prone to crime due to their fragmented social structures. Routine Activities Theory, on the other hand, explains how the design and daily patterns of life create opportunities for crime. Together, these theories can help define structural and situational factors that make residents of public housing more vulnerable to home invasions.

Interestingly, research also points to potential solutions that can be supported by the framework of these two theories. For example, a study on public health approaches to crime reduction found that increasing street lighting reduced nighttime crimes by 36%, with the effect persisting for years (MacDonald et. Al., p. 9). This supports social disorganization theory and suggests specifically that improving environmental design could help alleviate the potential risks associated with living in public housing. As mentioned, the public housing authority fails to maintain a lot of the physical aspects, like lighting, in the communities, which draws the connection to SDT. However, more research is needed to explore the specific relationship between public housing residency and the likelihood of experiencing home invasions. Current studies have focused on broader crime categories such as burglary in general, and violent crime. This study aims to address the gap in relevant and specific research needed to understand more about home invasions occurring in public housing versus private housing.

## **Current Study**

Despite the extensive research on the social and environmental factors contributing to crime, the gaps in the literature on the likelihood of experiencing a home invasion while living in public housing provides impetus for this current study. Current research studies have explored broader crime categories such as violent crime, but few have focused specifically on home invasions within the context of public housing. My study aims to minimize the gap by examining the connection between living in public housing and the likelihood of experiencing a home invasion, by including criminological frameworks like SDT and RAT.

The study will analyze data from a sample of urban residents, focusing on those living in public housing compared to those living in residential/private housing. Analyzing the National Crime Victimization Survey will provide self-reported information on participants' demographics, housing situations, victimization experiences, and crime reporting behaviors. This allows investigation of both the independent variable (living in public housing) and the dependent variable (experiencing a home invasion). The independent variable will be treated as a categorical variable, distinguishing between public housing residents and those in private or other forms of housing (i.e. "yes" to living in public housing versus "no"). The likelihood of experiencing a home invasion will be measured with data from the NCVS.

This study will contribute to the existing literature by using a targeted sample of public housing residents. It will also employ a specific measure of home invasion, rather than the broader categories of burglary or violent crime. Refining the variables will build upon previous studies and provide new insights into the risks faced by public housing residents.

**Hypothesis 1: Bivariate Hypothesis**

A person that lives in public housing will experience more home invasions than living in private/residential housing.

**Hypothesis 2: Multivariate Hypothesis**

A person that lives in public housing, controlling for sex, age, and race, will experience more home invasions than those living in private/residential housing.

**Methods****Data**

The data for this study comes from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), a large, ongoing dataset created and made publicly available by the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the NCVS is "the nation's primary source of information on criminal victimization." The NCVS is a national survey that collects information about crime victimization (on U.S. residents ages 12 and older). A stratified multistage cluster sample technique was employed, consisting of a full sample of victims and a 10 percent sample of nonvictims for up to four incidents (United States, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022). This is a longitudinal survey that provides data on both personal and property crimes, including home invasions and burglaries.

This analysis uses data from the 2022 NCVS dataset, which provides detailed information on the nature, frequency, and circumstances of criminal victimization throughout the United States. The survey variables to be utilized will include demographic characteristics, household composition, type of residence-public housing-and crime-specific details, such as time, place, and nature of offense.

The NCVS is based on the stratified multistage cluster sampling technique, providing the country's representativeness. Successive series are used to select the respondents of this research-first, the selection of geographical areas follows, and further within these selected geographical areas, a random choice of the households that will take part in the survey. This will allow researchers to gain dependable generalizable data regarding crime victimization. The personal and telephone interviews contain a series of screening questions that determine if the respondent or any household member had been victim of one or more crimes in the six-month time period prior to the survey. The data represents a complex set of information on several dimensions of victimization that can be used to examine the link between victimization and demographic, environmental, and situational factors.

## **Variable Measurement Description**

### **Dependent Variable: Home Invasion Victimization**

The dependent variable of the present study-the home invasion victimization-was measured by the responses to the question: "Has anyone ever broken into your home or tried to break into your home while you or someone else was present?" (United States Department of Justice Statistics, 2023). The question directly relates to incidents whereby an offender had

unlawfully entered or attempted to enter a residence while it was occupied. The responses were recorded as a nominal dichotomous variable. This ranged from (1) = yes, meaning that a home invasion did occur, to (0) = no, meaning no home invasion was reported.

This variable is important to represent the experience of home invasion differently from broader categories of burglary in which occupants may or may not be present at the time of the crime. This variable required no additional data manipulation since the question asked in the survey represented a clear binary outcome relevant to the research question.

### **Independent Variable: Living in Public Housing**

The independent variable, living in public housing, was analyzed with the question, "Is your current residence part of a public housing project or subsidized housing?" (United States Department of Justice Statistics, 2023). This question is used as a nominal variable: (1) = yes, respondent lives in public housing and (0) = no, which means private or non-subsidized housing. The variable distinguishes between those living in public housing and those in private forms of housing. This distinction is integral to the research question on the association between public housing residency and experiences of home invasion.

### **Control Variables**

In testing the influence of various factors that might impact the likelihood of home invasion, the study included the following control variables:

**Sex:** The original question asked: What is your sex? It was measured as a nominal variable, with the categories being: 1 = male and 2 = female.

**Age:** An exact measurement of age would be when the respondent is asked for his/her age at the time of the survey. That is treated as a continuous ratio variable, which has nuanced controls over potential age-related differences in victimization risk.

**Race:** The NCVS asked, "What is your race or ethnicity?" (United States Department of Justice Statistics, 2023). Responses were coded as a nominal multinomial variable-White, Black or African American, Asian, Native American, and Hispanic or Latino. The responses were combined into more general racial categories-for example, White = 1; Non-White = 2-to simplify the data and help to identify potential racial disparities in home invasion victimization.

**Household Income:** Respondents were asked, "What is the total annual income of your household?" (United States Department of Justice Statistics, 2023). It was measured as an ordinal variable by grouped income ranges that include less than \$20,000, \$20,000-\$49,999, \$50,000-\$99,999, and \$100,000 or more. Income was added as a control variable to account for a number of socioeconomic factors that may help explain differential risks of victimization.

The motivation for selecting these control variables comes from the literature on criminology, since they represent important demographic and socioeconomic factors that have been theorized to significantly affect crime victimization rates. The controls permit this study to isolate the effect that public housing has on the likelihood of experiencing a home invasion.

## **Data Manipulation**

We have done very little manipulation of these variables from the data. For the control variable of race, we collapsed some of the categories so that comparison would be a bit easier when conducting the multivariate analysis. To be specific, we collapse the non-White categories into one category in order to look at racial differences in home invasion victimization without any specific focus on individual racial groups.

Already, the independent and dependent variables had been clearly operationalized in the NCVS dataset. Thus, these program variables required no further manipulation. A binary dependent variable; whereas the independent variable of living in public housing was treated as a nominal variable, which required no additional recoding or collapsing.

## **Discussion**

### **Overview and Current Studies**

This research study investigated the association between public housing residency and likelihood of experiencing home invasion, intending to close a very important gap in criminological research. The study found that public housing residents were more prone to experiencing home invasions than private housing residents when controlling demographic and socioeconomic factors. In terms of the univariate hypothesis, the correlation was not definitive since there was not a significant relationship between the two variables. The study utilized data

from the 2022 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), giving important insights on how environmental and social factors may lead to this kind of victimization.

The results supported the hypothesis that public housing occupants were more likely to be victims of home invasions. The findings were significant when controlling for age, sex, race, and household income. The findings also support Social Disorganization Theory (SDT) and Routine Activities Theory (RAT). SDT postulates that the structural problems and dangers inherent in public housing—such as concentrated poverty, high residential turnover, and the lack of community cohesion—foster environments that increase crime. RAT also supports this by emphasizing the aspect of public housing design and the lack of adequate security as factors that facilitate home invasions. Analysis demonstrated that the population living in public housing is most susceptible because of the security and community support issues. It demonstrated how environmental conditions and a lack of social organization contribute to patterns of victimization.

The results are in line with the literature on residential crime and public housing. Previous investigations (for example, Braga et al. (2024) and Jones et al. (2024)) revealed that public housing experiences high crime due to poor surveillance, lack of community cohesion, and socioeconomic disadvantages. The overrepresentation of crime, which can be easily seen in public housing, corresponds to the SDT theory and also experimental evidence that RAT can be applied to urban settings (Vilalta et al., 2020). The research refers to the data developed during COVID-19 as well as to the conclusions drawn in studies when the decrease of residential crime



during lockdowns showcased the security nature of occupancy and guardianship (Crocker et al., 2022). The research, however, will be a good addition to the field as it is centered on housebreaking—a type of burglary which is usually left unchecked by broader studies.

### **Theoretical and Policy Implications**

This work improves the use of the SDT and RAT theories in the domain of residential crime. By isolating home invasions as a specific crime type, it extends the explanatory power of these theories. The evidence supporting SDT is that concentrated poverty and social differentiation in public housing sharply increases crime risk. RAT is backed by the findings on the missing or inadequate prompting/guardian roles done at these places. Future studies might further these findings by including other theoretical models, for example, Crime Pattern Theory, to explain in more detail the spatial dynamics of public housing crime. By researching specific types of crime in areas controlling demographics, we can better apply the theories.

The outcomes also reflect the fact that there are several ways of reducing crime in public housing that can be implemented. First, using targeted environmental changes such as better lighting, secured entry systems, and surveillance technologies should be one of the main measures taken to improve capable guardianship and deter offenders. This coincides with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies that have demonstrated their significance in cutting down crime in high-risk areas (MacDonald et al., 2024). A second point would be promoting community engagement programs which would in turn forge social cohesion and collective efficacy, thereby counteracting the disorganizing effects of concentrated

poverty. The policymakers should also allocate funds for the maintenance of public housing and upgrading security measures to deal with the systemic weaknesses.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

While the study is beneficial, there are limitations of validity that may affect generalizability. For instance, external validity is affected by reliance on NCVS data because it does not account for all demographics or enough respondents from both variable types. Construct validity is constrained by simplifications, including defining "public housing" as a binary variable and excluding specific details like housing type or location. Measurement validity is also impacted by self-reported data, which can suffer from recall errors, stigma, or misclassification of home invasion experiences. These restrictions point to the need for studies with longer timeframes, more variables, and improved techniques for gathering data.

Longitudinal designs should be used in future studies to distinguish between the risk of home invasion and living in public housing. For instance, after installing security cameras or community programs in the public housing buildings, researchers may keep an eye on patterns in crime. Another research recommendation example is the utilization of qualitative research methods, such as interviews with public housing residents in order to discover more about their lives and their say perceptions. By using questionnaires of the experiences of the residents, we can get more information on the safety/danger in different types of housing and connect them better to demographic variables as well.

To conclude, this study makes a compelling case that social and environmental factors have an impact on crime rates in residential neighborhoods, especially in public housing developments. By tackling structural vulnerabilities and community resilience, researchers and policymakers can significantly reduce the risk of home invasions and pave the road for safety of inhabitants of public housing.

## Resources

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