

The presence of sexual violence in neighborhoods erodes feelings of safety for women—but not men

January 10 2018



Dana M. Prince. Credit: CWRU

Feelings about the frequency of rape or other forms of sexual assault in a neighborhood are significantly tied to women's—but not men's—perceptions of its safety, according to new research.

However, both men and women report feeling less safe in their

[neighborhoods](#) based on the presence of other violence, including weapon-based fights, robberies, muggings and gang fights.

"Our results indicate that men can become more aware of how women feel about what contributes to and threatens their safety," said Dana M. Prince, an assistant professor at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University and a co-author of the study. "Sexual and gendered violence affects all people, and everyone can be partners in ending [sexual violence](#)."

Neighborhoods play a key role in the behavior and development of people, previous studies show, and some conditions—such as crime, segregation, poverty and disorder—can have [harmful effects](#) on health.

"Feeling unsafe, especially in and around your home, can erode physical and mental health," Prince said. "When women carry around fears of [sexual assault](#), it harms their well-being."

The study, published in the *Journal of Community Psychology*, was based on interviews with nearly 350 adults in nine neighborhoods in a major American city with high rates of poverty, unemployment and crime. Participants were asked how often particular crimes occurred in their neighborhood in the past six months.

"Our results could mean men are less aware of sexual [violence](#), or perhaps they do not feel comfortable reporting that it makes them feel less safe—perhaps both—while women tend to be socialized early on to be aware of the possibility of sexual attack," said Prince.

More information: Erin E. Hoffman et al. Neighborhood sexual violence moderates women's perceived safety in urban neighborhoods, *Journal of Community Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1002/jcop.21917](https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21917)

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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