

Diversity or deprivation -- what makes a 'bad' neighborhood

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What people think about their neighborhood is much more strongly influenced by deprivation than by the degree of ethnic mixing in the area, according to new research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, carried out by researchers from Portsmouth and Southampton Universities. The study says that while initiatives to promote cohesion are valuable, policy should prioritize on improving disadvantaged areas.

"People's views of their [neighbourhood](#) can influence major decisions such as moving house and choice of school. A neighbourhood can also acquire a reputation as a 'good' or 'bad' area. It is therefore important to understand what these views are based on," says Dr Liz Twigg, University of Portsmouth, who led the research.

"Previous research has suggested that diverse communities are less cohesive and suffer from problems associated with anti-social behaviour, crime and lack of trust," she explains. "Our research suggests that this is not true. In general, what people think of their neighbourhood as a place to live is not strongly influenced by the level of ethnic mixing. What is more important are material circumstances - the level of deprivation or prosperity in the area."

Drawing on multiple sources of data to model the relationship between ethnic diversity and the way people see their neighbourhood. The researchers found no link between the degree of ethnic mixing and high levels of perceived [antisocial behaviour](#), such as spraying graffiti on

local buildings, truancy and hooliganism. They also found that people who lived in the most ethnically diverse areas were less likely to think that the national crime rate was increasing.

This research challenges the view of earlier work on social cohesion, which found that groups responded to immigration by 'hunkering down' or 'keeping themselves to themselves'. Dr Twigg comments: "Although our measures of [ethnic diversity](#) cannot show the effect of the most recent waves of immigration, our findings do not suggest that we intrinsically distrust those who are different from ourselves. Where there is a negative effect it is small and always outweighed by deprivation."

"Although we found that residents of very mixed neighbourhoods were slightly less likely to say that their local community was 'close knit' or that 'people are willing to help their neighbours', there was a far stronger association between perceived low levels of social cohesion and poor everyday living conditions," she says. "In addition there was no difference between mixed and non-mixed neighbourhoods on a number of other measures of [social cohesion](#)."

Dr Twigg stresses that perceptions can be as important as actual experiences because they influence people's behaviour. "People are less likely to move into a neighbourhood which is perceived to have rising crime and anti-social behaviour, even if the statistics do not bear this out. So if governments and local authorities want to improve the ways neighbourhoods are viewed by people, they are likely to have more impact if they focus not on the mix of people in an area but on the social and economic circumstances facing communities."

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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