

Single parents and gay couples face rental housing discrimination: study

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A new University of British Columbia study finds single parents and male gay couples face significant discrimination in the Metro Vancouver rental housing market, compared to straight couples.

Overall, the study finds that same-sex male [couples](#) are nearly 25 per cent more likely to be rejected by landlords seeking renters, while single parents are approximately 15 per cent more likely to be rejected.

The research, published in the August issue of the journal *Social Problems*, is the largest investigation of housing discrimination towards single parents, and the first to explore [geographic variation](#) in their discrimination.

"Vancouver has a reputation for tolerance of diversity in North America and a vibrant gay community," says lead author Nathanael Lauster, a professor in UBC's Dept. of Sociology. "This means that housing discrimination levels may even be higher in other cities."

For the study, researchers analyzed nearly 1,700 online rental inquiries in Metro Vancouver, one of Canada's largest urban centres, which has a diverse, multicultural population and strong housing laws to protect against discrimination.

The study found that discrimination rates varied significantly by neighborhood. For example, communities with greater numbers of single-parent families -- including East Vancouver, Burnaby and New

Westminster -- exhibited increased levels of discrimination towards single parents.

The opposite was true, however, in neighborhoods with large gay populations -- such as Vancouver's West End and West Side -- which exhibited significantly lower levels of discrimination towards male same-sex couples.

"This suggests that the bases for discrimination against same-sex couples and single parents may differ," says Lauster. "For [gay couples](#), the discrimination is likely based in ignorance or moral objections that lessen with contact. For single parents, the discrimination may be based more on their real economic marginalization," he says.

Metro Vancouver's liberal population and strong anti-discrimination laws make it an important "hard test case" for rental discrimination in major North American urban centres, says Lauster, who co-authored the study with graduate student Adam Easterbrook.

Lauster says more work is needed to ensure landlords and renters are aware that [discrimination](#) by sexual preference or family relationship is illegal in Canada. With many U.S. states considering new applications of anti-discrimination legislation, the findings reiterate the importance of such protections in the housing market, he adds.

The study was based on responses to e-mail inquiries about one- and two-bedroom apartments sent out to landlords advertising vacancies through popular online housing websites like Craigslist. Inquiries were identical except for minor variations by five family types: heterosexual couples, same-sex male couples, same-sex female couples, single mother with child and single father with child.

For example, e-mail inquiries were identical except for opposite- or

same-sex partner mentions and signatures such as "Matt and Kate," "Matt and Kevin" or "Melissa and Kate." Single-parent scenarios referred to a son or daughter instead of partners and the gender of the parent.

The study found no significant differences in landlord responses to female same-sex couples relative to heterosexual couples. No landlord or property manager received more than one e-mail inquiry during the study.

According to 2006 census data, there were 71,250 single-mother families and 16,870 single-father families living in the Vancouver metropolitan area, representing more than 15 per cent of families. Recent census figures also suggest Vancouver has more than 4,700 same-sex couples, approximately 10 per cent of same-sex couples in Canada.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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