

HUD housing report shows same-sex couples experience unequal treatment

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A new study commissioned by HUD found same-sex couples face discrimination when inquiring about rental housing.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) today released the first-ever national study examining housing discrimination against same-sex couples in the private rental market. The study, led by University at Albany Associate Professor of Sociology Samantha Friedman and conducted by M. Davis and Company (MDAC), measures the treatment same-sex couples receive compared to otherwise similar heterosexual couples from rental agents when inquiring about rental units advertised online.

According to HUD's [study](#), "An Estimate of [Housing](#) Discrimination Against Same-Sex [Couples](#)," unequal treatment is more prevalent among same-sex couples than [heterosexual couples](#) when responding to Internet advertisements for rental units, and findings show that gay men experience more discrimination than [lesbian couples](#).

"President Obama and this administration have been unmatched in our efforts to ensure equal and fair treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons and communities," said HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan. "Following the President's lead, HUD has taken historic steps in the area of fair housing to ensure that we fulfill our nation's commitment to equality. As this study shows, we need to continue our efforts to ensure that everyone is treated the same when it comes to finding a home to call their own, regardless of their [sexual orientation](#) or gender identity."

The study is based on nearly 7,000 e-mail tests conducted in 50 metropolitan markets across the country between June and October 2011. For each paired test, two e-mails were sent to the housing provider regarding the unit advertised online. The only difference between the e-mails was whether the couple was same-sex or heterosexual. Unfavorable treatment was measured by whether the tester was told the unit was available, asked to contact the landlord, invited to see the apartment, received a response, or received more than one response.

"This study is important because it shows that differential treatment exists between same-sex and heterosexual couples in their access to rental housing opportunities. HUD has already taken important steps to combat such discrimination, and we hope this study serves as a springboard for more research," said Friedman, who also serves as associate director of the Lewis Mumford Center at UAlbany's College of Arts and Sciences.

Overall findings of the study include:

- Same-sex couples experience discrimination in the online rental housing market, relative to heterosexual couples;
- Adverse treatment is found primarily in the form of same-sex couples receiving fewer responses to email inquiries than heterosexual couples;
- States with legislative protections show slightly more adverse treatment for gays and lesbians than in states without protections; and
- Discrimination of [same-sex couples](#) is present in every metropolitan area where tests were conducted, but no clear-cut pattern exists in the magnitude of adverse [treatment](#) by metropolitan size.

The Fair Housing Act makes it illegal to discriminate in rental, sales and lending on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability and familial status, however it does not include sexual orientation or gender identity as protected classes. Nonetheless, 20 states and the District of Columbia, and more than 150 cities, towns and counties across the nation have laws that specifically prohibit discrimination against LGBT individuals.

Recently, HUD issued new guidance that treats discrimination based on gender non-conformity or sex stereotyping as sex discrimination under the Fair Housing Act, and instructs HUD staff to inform individuals filing complaints about state and local agencies that have LGBT-inclusive nondiscrimination laws. In addition, on February 3, 2012, HUD published a final rule, "Equal Access to Housing in HUD Programs Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity", which requires HUD-funded and HUD-insured housing providers and FHA-approved lenders to provide equal access without regard to sexual orientation, [gender identity](#), and marital status.

More information: [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#)

Provided by University at Albany

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