

# Study finds neighborhood apps increase perceptions of crime rates

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How often do you glance at your neighborhood app, like Nextdoor or others, and learn about some crime in your area? Surely, it was not the intention of the app developers, but every time you hear of a crime

nearby, you might think that crime in your area is rampant. A new study by a University of Houston psychologist indicates that is exactly how the mind works—those helpful and popular neighborhood apps are actually increasing perceptions of crime rates that may not be as high as you think.

"Neighborhood apps are a great way to keep up with and build one's community. However, the constant notifications regarding crime might cultivate an availability bias which impacts perceptions of local crime rates," reports Adam Fetterman in *Psychology of Popular Media*. Fetterman is an assistant professor of psychology at University of Houston. "In two studies, we confirmed our hypothesis that those who use neighborhood apps would perceive local crime rates to be higher in their communities than those who do not, independent of the actual crime rates."

It has been long theorized that the media people consume can have important impacts on their cognition, attitudes, emotion and even behavior. For example, those who consume large amounts of crime dramas will be more likely to believe that the world is a dangerous place than those who do not consume this media.

"Seeing is believing. Personal experience is easier to process than statistical information, so we often rely too heavily on our experiences and anecdotes," said Fetterman. "When the science does not match our personal experience, we will be more likely to deny the science."

Fetterman's research was preceded and prompted by his prior work on science denial in which he found that personal experience is preferred over [statistical information](#).

In the current study, Fetterman surveyed 400 U.S. citizens, across 43 different states, regarding neighborhood app use and crime perceptions.

"The findings suggest that while actual crime rates are significantly associated with perceptions of crime rates, the use of neighborhood apps or websites led to higher biased perceptions of crime rates when controlling for actual [crime rates](#)," said Fetterman. "The frequent use of such services by a large portion of the population suggests that the findings, if robust, could have important implications for perceptions and behaviors related to people's [neighborhoods](#)."

**More information:** Adam Fetterman et al, Crime in your area: Use of neighborhood apps is associated with inaccurate perceptions of higher local crime rates, *Psychology of Popular Media* (2023). [DOI: 10.1037/ppm0000466](#)

Provided by University of Houston

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