

# Study shows evictions happen most in predominantly Black neighborhoods, homes with children

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Across the country, people are evicted from their homes for various reasons, but not evenly by community or by neighborhood. A new study

from the University of Kansas shows that neighborhood characteristics such as those in which renters are predominantly people of color or families with children have higher eviction rates than even gentrified neighborhoods or those with high rents.

A housing price crisis has been widely reported across the nation in recent years. And failure to pay the [rent](#) is the No. 1 listed reason for [eviction](#) proceedings. However, a study by Hye-Sung Han, assistant professor of public affairs & administration at KU, shows that in Kansas City from 2010-2016, evictions and eviction filings happened most frequently in neighborhoods that were predominantly Black and in which most renters were households with children. Neighborhoods with the highest rents or those that had been recently gentrified did not predict higher eviction rates, but neighborhoods that had a higher presence of federal rental housing assistance units did have lower rates.

Han, who studies housing policy, became interested in eviction after reading Matthew Desmond's Pulitzer-Prize-winning book "Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City" and hearing talks about evictions and reading other studies on the issue.

"At first, I was surprised at how common evictions are in the U.S., especially in low-income areas," Han said. "People who study eviction say there are a few reasons why it happens. One main reason people point out is the lack of affordable rental housing. A lack of affordable housing puts [low-income families](#) at high risk of eviction. However, the data shows that evictions do not occur only in the high cost of living or high-poverty areas."

Han's study, which analyzes evictions and evictions filings filed in Jackson County, Missouri, was published in the [Journal of Urban Affairs](#). Her study explores why evictions are more prevalent in certain neighborhoods. The findings that eviction rates were highest in

predominantly Black and neighborhoods that are majority families with children match findings from similar studies conducted in 17 midsized American cities that showed evictions happen chronically in neighborhoods with similar characteristics and are not evenly distributed throughout cities.

In Missouri, eviction records are open public records. While landlords can evict tenants for a number of reasons, including non-payment of rent, damage to property, violation of lease provisions, assault of the landlord or other tenants, and others, lack of rent payment is the leading reason. The study showed that those evictions did not happen during times of neighborhood change, such as gentrification, but most commonly in low-income areas and consistently over time. While there is not one commonly agreed-upon definition of gentrification, it is commonly thought of as a neighborhood that undergoes change that brings new tenants and businesses that, in turn, force out previous tenants who cannot afford new, higher rental rates.

"What is it about neighborhoods that make eviction levels high? I found out high rent is not necessarily the major factor," Han said. "I found that the racial makeup of a neighborhood is, unfortunately, the strongest factor. The other factor was family type. Higher percentages of rental households with children are where you see higher rates of evictions and eviction filings."

The rent burden is commonly referred to as a problem in the housing crisis. When a household spends more than one-third to one-half of its income on rent, it is considered a rent burden. Han's study examined neighborhoods with higher percentages of federal assistance programs such as Housing and Urban Development or Low Income Housing Tax Credit housing units and found that they do predict lower levels of eviction and eviction filings.

"If rent-burdened households have higher eviction rates, would not the increasing number of affordable units with rent assistance help? This study found that increasing federal rental housing assistance greatly reduces evictions and eviction filings," Han said.

That finding indicates policymakers should consider expanding federal rental housing assistance on a wider level to help reduce rates of evictions and increase [housing](#) stability, Han said. She also noted that the eviction records data only represent cases in which eviction cases were filed, or households received eviction judgments and were formally evicted. People often are "informally evicted" or leave their homes after receiving a notice or when threatened with eviction or pressured by landlords before official paperwork is filed. Landlords and property ownership and management companies often have lawyers while tenants do not or cannot afford them, according to Han, which can influence the number of people willing to fight an eviction filing in court. And even if they win their case, many renters are hesitant to have an eviction proceeding on their record because some landlords automatically deny rental applications based on eviction records regardless of the outcome.

The study argues that an increased understanding of evictions could help policymakers craft better solutions to address the [housing crisis](#) and eviction rates, such as expanding rent assistance and services for families facing eviction. It can also help dispel assumptions about why or where evictions happen and comes at a time when evictions are increasing.

"We are hearing about evictions being on the rise because of COVID-19. It is the aftermath of the pandemic, and the tenant protections and other federal emergency rental assistance that were in place are over, and we are seeing more evictions throughout the country," Han said. "Losing your home can be very traumatizing. Most evictions happen because families cannot pay the rent. Families get evicted for many other reasons, too, however. They can get evicted even if they did not miss a

rent payment. They can potentially be evicted for repeated noise violations like a noise complaint about their children. Unfortunately, so few resources exist for families at risk of eviction."

**More information:** Hye-Sung Han, What explains variation in neighborhood evictions? Investigation of neighborhood characteristics and federal rental assistance: Case study of Kansas City, Missouri, *Journal of Urban Affairs* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/07352166.2023.2198131](https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2023.2198131)

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