The home foreclosure and vacancy epidemic has affected all regions of the United States, but there has been limited empirical study into how these empty buildings affect the remaining neighboring residents. 125 residents of an urban Midwest neighborhood were surveyed about their perceptions of several community-related theories and safety concerns. The four groupings were created by comparing residents who lived adjacent to a registered vacant house or not, and/or on a block with a low (zero or one) or high (two or more) densities of vacancies.

Only safety concerns were found to be affected by the number of vacancies on a residents’ block. The mixed findings showed having two or more vacancies on a block negatively affected perception of social incivilities and overall sense of safety. The physical condition of the vacant homes did not seem to play a role in this study sample. Based on the findings, future interventions should target blocks with more than two vacant homes to improve the sense of safety for local residents.

SURVEY COMPONENTS

- 8-item Psychological Sense of Community Scale (PSC) provided from Perkins & Long, (2003)
- 4-item Place Attachment (PA) scale provided from Brown, Perkins, and Brown (2003)
- 18-item Incivilities Scale provided from Pitner, Yu, & Brown, (2012)
- 3-item Community Engagement scale developed by this research team
- Several external questions relating to living situation and demographics
- 2 open-ended qualitative questions about the effects of vacant homes

GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proximity</th>
<th>Vacancy Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjacent</td>
<td>Low density and adjacent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High density and adjacent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distant</td>
<td>Low density and distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High density and distant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS

- ANCOVA results showed differences based upon density of vacancies
- High density blocks felt more unsafe and were more concerned about social incivilities than low-density blocks.
  - Overall safety: F(1, 106) = 4.7, p = .03, η² = 4.2
  - Social Incivilities: F(1, 106) = 4.7, p = .03, η² = 4.3

CONCLUSIONS

- Density of vacant houses impacted residents, but adjacency made no difference.
- Both quantitative and qualitative data depicted safety as a top concern.
- Whether a resident was a homeowner or a renter had no significant effect.
- A caveat found some residents were relieved to have a problem property vacant. The city seems to keep these vacant properties secure enough to keep them from being of concern to those living next to them. Blocks with two or more vacancies should be targeted for interventions to help increase the sense of safety. The city could consider increasing the annual vacant building fee (currently $1400) to bolster interventions. Current residents were more resilient as hypothesized. Less resilient residents may have already moved out of this neighborhood. Future research could add the element of property maintenance and crime reports to get a more dynamic view of the block environment.