

Section 8 Housing & Crime: Screwed or Skewed?

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IS SECTION 8 A PROBLEM?

Claim: Section 8 residents are consuming too many police resources in the research city, Feropolis.

Some merit because:

1. Feropolis has a disproportionate number of Section 8 voucher holders living in the city:
 - 8.9% of all residential properties in the city have Section 8 tenants
 - 2/3 of Section 8 residences have one or more call for service to the police.
 - In the early 2000s the city maintained a policy of proactively acquiring housing vouchers, in order to fill vacant rental units.
2. Based on previous research regarding public housing projects and perceptions of public housing and crime, the city has become concerned that the level of police services that are dedicated to residents with housing vouchers is in excess of the average residential tenant. (Fagan, Dumanovsky, Thomspson, & Davies; 1998; Farley, 1982; Holzman & Piper, 1998; Roncek, Bell, & Francik, 1981).

The city is now concerned that this policy may have had a detrimental effect on the community, because of their increased need for city services, including police services.

About the Research City, Feropolis:

- Small Midwestern city, population just under 50,000
- 84% Caucasian and 12% African-American
- City covers almost 26 square miles
- 15,174 residential addresses in the city
- 1,348 residential addresses with tenants receiving Section 8 vouchers

Properties with Section 8 Tenants in Feropolis



HOW BAD IS SECTION 8?

CALLS FOR SERVICE ANALYSIS

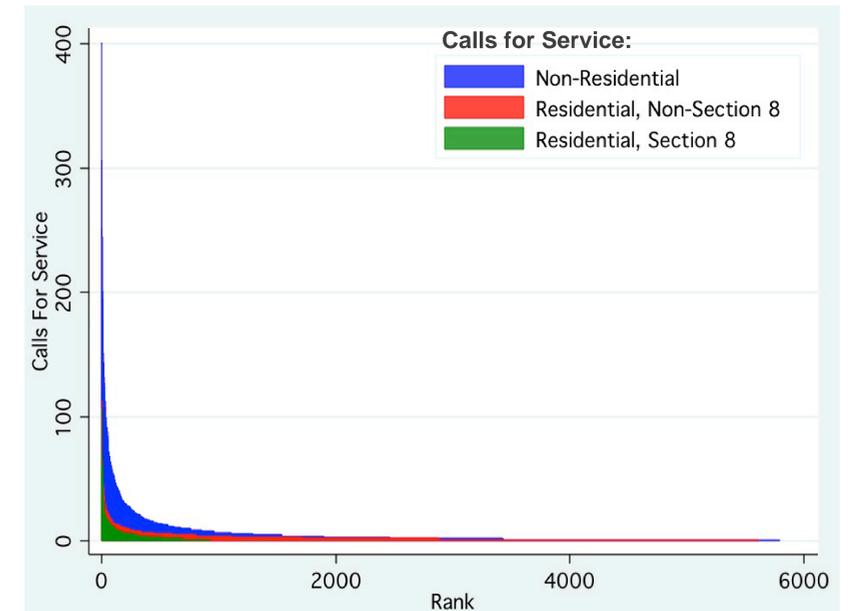
Section 8 properties are more likely to produce calls for service than non-Section 8 properties...

	Addresses	CFS
Sect 8	8.9% (1,348)	23.1% (4,806)
Non-Sect 8	91.1% (13,826)	76.87% (15,969)
All Residential	100% (15,174)	100% (20,775)

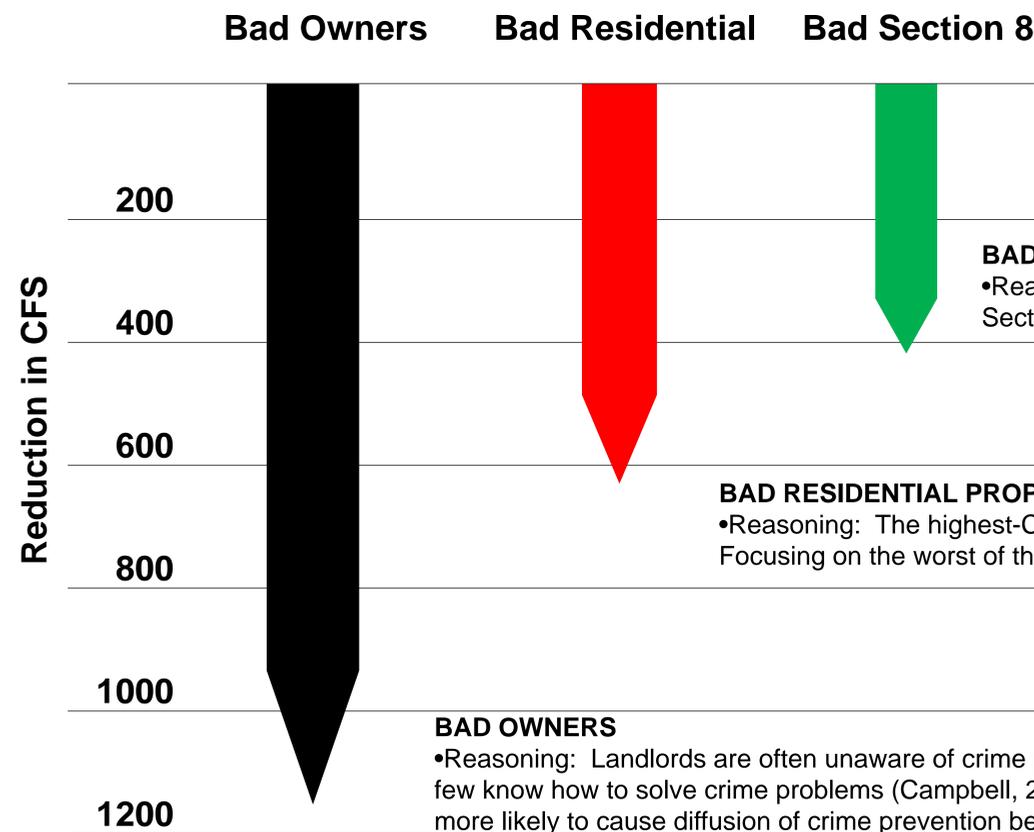
... but regardless of Section 8 status, calling the police is a rare event; the most common number of calls for service at a property is zero

Section 8 is not the city's biggest problem – but some properties that have Section 8 subsidies are problems. Over half of the calls for service at Section 8 properties occurred at the worst 10% of Section 8 properties.

High numbers of calls for service are not merely a result of high numbers of units in a building. Several owners hold dozens of units with very few calls for service



WHAT'S WORSE THAN SECTION 8?



Calls for service reduction efforts should focus on the worst of the worst places for maximum impact (Eck, Clarke, & Guerette, 2007) – but the worst of what? We examined three possible categories of targets for reduction, under the assumption that police could reduce calls for service by 50% at the worst 20 in each category:

BAD SECTION 8 PROPERTIES

•Reasoning: Section 8 residents have higher levels of calls for service than non-Section 8 and should therefore be the focus of the department response.

BAD RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES, REGARDLESS OF SECTION 8 STATUS

•Reasoning: The highest-CFS places are not Section 8 voucher holders. Focusing on the worst of the worst therefore does not mean restricting interventions to Section 8.

BAD OWNERS

•Reasoning: Landlords are often unaware of crime problems on their properties. Of those landlords that are aware of problems, few know how to solve crime problems (Campbell, 2000). Intervening with property owners instead of individual properties will be more likely to cause diffusion of crime prevention benefits.

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IT'S NOT SECTION 8.

RECOMMENDATION: Target owners who have properties with high levels of calls for service.

Advantages of this response include:

- Making owners more aware of criminal activity on their properties;
- Forging partnerships among landlords and between landlords and police;
- Interaction with and education of property owners in community;
- Greater levels of improvement in several locations can be realized at once; and
- Overall high level of diffusion of benefits and the greatest potential reduction in calls for service.

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