



Challenges Associated with Community Development in Apartment Buildings

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Executive Summary

Preventing crime and building safer communities is a complex process and involves the participation of community members in order to make it effective. Apartment buildings often present a number of challenges to community participation in crime prevention programs. These challenges are based in existing social and economic conditions and, in some cases, the physical design of buildings.

Although there is limited research at the scale of the apartment building, some of the findings that related to community development at the community scale can be modified to fit the specific circumstances present in apartment buildings. Of course, community development cannot happen in apartment buildings with a high level of crime or fear of crime, so crime prevention programs such as Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) should be implemented by building managers as soon as possible. These measures will help to limit the opportunities for crime and will help to make residents feel safer in their buildings. In turn, these changes to the physical building form may help to engage residents in more participatory crime prevention and community building initiatives.

It has been found that residents who live in close proximity have a better chance of creating and maintaining friendships. This is a characteristic of apartment living, and community builders should find ways to build on this relationship. Building owners and property managers can play a role in building community by creating and maintaining attractive common areas where residents are more likely to encounter other residents and become acquainted. These areas are often more inviting when natural elements such as trees and grass are part of the design plan. Community development plans for apartment buildings need to invest a significant amount of time and effort in the creation of community networks and communications before any headway is noticeable in participation rates.

Introduction

Effective crime prevention cannot take place without the support of the community and this requires community organization and cohesion. Unfortunately, community development and cohesion cannot take place in a community with a high level of crime and disorder. In order to combat crime, the community – along with outside resources and organizations, must come together to help prevent and report criminal activity. Apartment buildings have a range of features that are not present in other types of communities and these provide a number of challenges with respect to community development. Some of these challenges are structural (i.e. building design), some are environmental (i.e. lack of natural elements), and some are socioeconomic (i.e. poverty, transient population). In order to provide a safe and healthy environment where apartment dwellers can interact on a social level, these problems need to be addressed.

Of course, some apartment dwellers chose to live in apartments and condominiums and their crime prevention needs are not the same. In general, apartment buildings targeted to middle-class residents located in good neighbourhoods tend to have fewer problems with crime and a higher report of satisfaction with apartment-living. It is the apartment buildings with higher reported crime rates, and less desirable locations that this review is intending to address.

Traditional crime prevention strategies focus on removing the opportunities for crime and protecting personal property from crime through better lighting or better surveillance of areas. These strategies may not prove effective in apartment buildings because the residents themselves have little control over the public or common areas of the building and surveillance is made difficult as a result of building design. It is important to engage the building owners and maintenance staff as well as residents if these types of crime prevention strategies are to be effective and sustainable. Effective surveillance is also difficult in an apartment setting because with so many residents, and such a transient population, it is difficult to know who belongs and who does not. This can be mitigated through community building techniques as residents begin to interact and develop relationships with other residents.

This literature review was intended to answer the following question: what are the barriers to community development in apartment buildings? Community crime prevention is a necessary part of the development of strong and organized communities. High levels of crime and fear of crime, in apartments, can limit the social interactions amongst residents and can lead to lower

community cohesion. Community building can only happen if residents feel safe and secure in their apartments and neighbourhoods. Drug dealing, prostitution, crime and violence must be addressed in order to make apartment buildings safer, decrease resident's fear of crime and encourage social interaction. One way to do this is to get residents to participate in crime prevention programs on an ongoing basis. This cannot happen when there is the potential fear of retribution if residents speak out against the criminal element. The focus must be on both crime prevention and community building as the two issues are interlinked.

In order to develop a response to the initial question, this review will draw on an array of literature covering topics as varied as crime and fear of crime, individual participation in community organizations, building design and social relationships. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of such data and research at the scale of the individual apartment building. Research exists at the community level relating to crime prevention and community development as well as research dealing with apartment living. As a result, this literature review will relate the experiences of community building and crime prevention in more traditional communities to the potential for community building in apartment buildings.

Crime Prevention and Community Development

Traditional crime prevention initiatives have often focused on limiting opportunities for criminal activity thereby reducing crime rates. This approach is not always appropriate for communities that are plagued by social problems (i.e. poverty, racism and unemployment) that lead to criminal activity in the first place. Because these traditional crime prevention techniques don't solve the underlying social problems, they may not be able to attract residents from socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Schneider, 2000). These neighbourhoods need a social development or community building approach to crime prevention rather than the opportunity reduction approach often undertaken (Kelly, Caputo & Jamieson, 2005; Schneider, 2000). Finding solutions that emphasize community asset building, collective action and community outreach will have a greater impact on community development and may result in creating long-term solutions to crime prevention in poorer neighbourhoods.

Crime Prevention through Social Development (CPSD) recognizes that solid investment in individuals, families, and communities is necessary to create safe and healthy neighbourhoods. It also recognizes that there exists a link between "crime and the social, environmental, political and economic context within

which it occurs" (Kelly, Caputo & Jamieson, 2005). The social factors that contribute to crime such as: poverty, racism, unemployment, and the absence of appropriate forms of recreational and social activity must be identified and addressed in order to be able to prevent crime in any sustainable way (Ibid). It is this link between the social and physical aspects of community that brings together crime prevention and community development. It is impossible to create and maintain effective crime prevention strategies in communities that are weakened by socioeconomic factors. Building and encouraging the strengthening of community bonds amongst residents and with neighbourhood institutions is a necessary part of targeting crime in many high-crime neighbourhoods.

Strengthening social networks and fostering resident interaction are a necessary part of creating safe and healthy families and communities, and addressing crime and social disorder (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997; Farkas & Jones, 2007). Community cohesion can be defined as the level of interaction and friendship that residents maintain with other residents (Kerley & Benson, 2000). These bonds of friendship provide support but also facilitate social control and increase their sense of protection and guardianship over their neighbours and neighbourhood (Ibid). Social control is an effective means of defining what types of behaviour are appropriate and what types of behaviour will not be tolerated (Ganapati, 2008). Community organization refers to the level of interaction between residents and community institutions as well as the level of resident involvement in community groups (Kerley & Benson, 2000). The most challenging communities, in terms of organization, are those "low-income, heterogeneous, transient, high-crime, inner-city neighbourhoods" (Schneider, 2000). It is these communities that will benefit most from community building initiatives that help to build and maintain networks amongst various members of the community – not just residents. Participation in tenant associations and other community organizations has been found to be valuable in preventing crime in many low-income neighbourhoods (Ganapati, 2008).

The existence of numerous interactions and networks amongst residents and between residents and community institutions shows the health and strength of a community. Many researchers have concluded that organized and socially cohesive communities are better able to prevent crime and instill some measure of social control (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997; Farkas & Jones, 2007; Kerley & Benson, 2000). Evaluations of community strength and involvement also measure the degree of communication, trust, mutual assistance and reciprocity amongst individuals, neighbours and community groups and institutions (Ganapati, 2008; Lovrich, 1999). However, research has shown that these networks are often lacking in areas of low socioeconomic capacity (Lovrich, 1999). These areas need resources that focus on strengthening community ties

in order to build community capacity and develop crime prevention programs that will work for that community (Ibid).

Community Organizations

The creation and support of community organizations can have a positive role in both community development and crime prevention strategies (Bennett, 1995). Community organizations can act as the unifying voice for the community and can advocate on behalf of numerous residents when dealing with building management, police or government officials. Because these organizations are based in community, they are well positioned to communicate directly with residents to determine the issues and problems facing members of the community (Ibid).

Community organizations are not limited by structural and organizational regulations to simply providing crime prevention programs and are free to provide support for the myriad social issues faced by many communities (Bennett, 1995). They can get involved in things such as: economic development, creating social programs and advocating for better building maintenance (Ibid). It is important to remember that these organizations do not always represent all members of the community but these organizations can be great partners in developing community capacity and creating crime prevention strategies that are based on community requirements.

Barriers to Engaging in Crime Prevention Programs

Research into engagement in crime prevention programs has found that the majority of participants tend to be white, well-educated, middle-class homeowners with a sense of attachment to their own neighbourhoods (Schneider, 2000). Most participants in crime prevention programs also tend to be involved in a number of other community organizations as well (Ibid). People who don't participate generally have limited social interaction with their neighbours, lower feelings of community attachment and tend to have a low socioeconomic status as well (Ibid). This observed trend in participation may be the result of crime prevention's focus on property protection; you need to have property to protect in order to be interested in this type of program (Ibid). As a result, crime prevention programs don't appeal to members of a low socioeconomic group (Ibid). Crime prevention programs that focus on obstacles to crime and property protection do not address the social issues relating to crime and violence (Kelly, Caputo & Jamieson, 2005; Schneider, 2000). A program that deals with some of these issues might be more attractive to poorer residents (Ibid). In order to encourage participation in crime prevention programs amongst a different demographic group, programs must

appeal to a broader range of residents. In the case of apartment buildings, resources must be targeted at community building to increase the sense of ownership and territoriality of their building. This will foster a sense of responsibility for increased guardianship and surveillance of the building and its common areas. The shift in focus from protection of personal property to the protection of communal property may have benefits for community development as well. Community building that fosters the development of community networks and encourages and enables involvement in community associations may help to engage residents in community crime prevention programs as well.

It has been found that it is not the issue of crime itself or increased levels of criminal activity that promote involvement in crime prevention initiatives. Many citizens are attracted to participation in crime prevention activities as a result of interaction with other residents and neighbours who are involved in the program (Bennett, 1995; Schneider, 2000). Because it is face to face contact with other participants that encourages participation, it is difficult to garner support and participation in communities that lack social cohesion as a result of limited communication. Fostering the creation of good community networks and community organization may help to build participation in programs such as crime prevention.

Many crime prevention programs are developed for communities, but fail to incorporate the actual lived experience of a wide variety of residents and community members. Programs may ignore the needs and experiences of the local community and may not take community capacity into consideration (Kerley & Benson, 2000). In many cases, residents are not consulted with respect to their perception of the community's problems and have a limited role in the development of crime prevention programs and solutions (Bennett, 1995; Kelly, Caputo & Jamieson, 2005; Kerley & Benson, 2000; Schneider, 2000). Strong community networks are necessary for effective collaborative partnerships and many communities in need of crime prevention programs are lacking this type of social cohesion (Lovrich, 1999). These structural issues can lead to friction between program developers and residents and can result in lack of participation amongst residents (Bennett, 1995; Farkas & Jones, 2007). Residents must be an integral part of the design, development and implementation of crime prevention programs if they are going to be effective and sustainable (Bennett, 1995; Kelly, Caputo & Jamieson, 2005).

Residents may not get involved in crime prevention programs because of their distrust of police or community organizers or because they do not want to be responsible for maintaining social control (Farkas & Jones, 2007; Kerley & Benson, 2000; Schneider, 2000). This presents a major challenge for developing and

maintaining crime prevention programs in many high-crime neighbourhoods as many residents are not interested in having a higher police presence in their communities. Residents may also feel intimidated to speak with police officers because of a fear of retaliation by the criminal element (Farkas & Jones, 2007). In some communities it may be necessary to install community members or some other third party to act as an intermediary between residents and police (Ibid). Having such an individual in place can be helpful not only in making residents comfortable discussing what problems are present in the community, but may also provide insight into solutions that would otherwise be missed when residents are not able to participate.

Aside from the above structural and social limitations to engagement in crime prevention programs, some of the biggest challenges in terms of participation are: transient populations, a heterogeneous mix of residents, poverty, lack of social cohesion and social control (Schneider, 2000). Although not unique to apartment buildings, these characteristics are common in many apartment buildings and present quite a challenge to community development. Adapting crime prevention strategies to emphasize community engagement and empowerment may limit these challenges.

Apartment Living

In terms of implementing crime prevention strategies and building community, the apartment building provides a number of challenges that are not present in the more traditional design of single-family and townhouse communities. With so many people living in close proximity, there is an increased perception of living amongst strangers and the resultant fear of crime and perceived loss of community. Many apartment buildings have low levels of social cohesion and social organization and there is often a resultant lack of social control. Apartment buildings lack clear ownership of common areas which leads to a lack of care and protection of these spaces. This can lead to increased opportunities for crime and disorder.

Apartment buildings often have a higher turnover rate and thus less sense of ownership, attachment and territoriality (Gifford, 2007). Apartment residents are generally more mobile (transient), and are often shorter term residents than in other types of communities. In Canada, many people aspire to live in single-detached homes located in quiet, safe, suburban neighbourhoods and view apartment living as a temporary situation. Apartment living is often viewed as the domain of students, singles, and the elderly. In some cases, residents are living in apartment buildings as a result of financial limitations that keep them from living in their desired housing type. In the case of social housing, the

residents may not have chosen apartment living but have been placed in apartments as a result of marital status, mental or physical ability, or stage in the life-cycle. This adds to the challenge of creating community since short-term residents may feel less attachment to community. Crime prevention and community development are long-term strategies with few noticeable, immediate improvements and short-term residents may not wish to participate in projects that they perceive as having no benefit for them. If they are looking to move on to other (better) living arrangements, then they will not see the benefit of participating in community building and crime prevention in their temporary home.

Research has been conducted in order to develop a better understanding of the social and health implications of apartment-living. Increased perceptions of fear, dissatisfaction, poor social relations and stress as well as increased behaviour problems and developmental delays in children have all been demonstrated in residents (Gifford, 2007). However, some of these issues have been related to socioeconomic factors beyond the scope of the apartment building and may not be related to apartment-living (Ibid). For instance, residents experience fear of crime more often if they perceive their neighbourhoods to have higher levels of crime than other neighbourhoods (Fitzgerald, 2008).

There are a number of individuals who may find living in apartment buildings a better fit for their circumstances; singles, seniors and childless couples (Gifford, 2007). In fact, seniors generally feel safer in apartment buildings and enjoy the easy social life that apartment living can provide (Ibid). This suggests that there are certain elements that can affect the perception of various different people living in apartment buildings. These are moderating factors and are defined as social factors that can affect the experience of living in an apartment building (Ibid). Moderating factors can include things such as: gender, age, stage of life, and economic status (Ibid). It has been shown that there are high levels of satisfaction in middle and high-income apartment dwellers whose apartments are located in good neighbourhoods (Ibid).

Social Interactions

Apartment buildings house a large number of people which may cause some people to withdraw from engaging in social interactions and feel even less social support and less community (Gifford, 2007). It also makes it difficult for residents to get to know other residents. Some residents feel that they are living in close proximity to, and sharing space with virtual strangers (Ibid). It has been noted that fear of strangers is associated with increased fear of crime and a perceived loss of community and social support (Ibid). On the other hand, with so many people living in close proximity, there is a higher chance of creating

and maintaining meaningful relationships (Ibid). In the case of residents with either limited mobility or little opportunity for outside friendships, making friends within the building is a necessity. Community building techniques should target these casual encounters and find ways to develop relationships and interaction amongst residents as a way to increase community cohesion and social organization.

Security

Condominium and apartment buildings in higher income areas, with middle and high income residents often have security features such as: gated perimeters, locked parking garages, security personnel and security cameras. These extra security features are not available at many lower-income apartment buildings. The sense of security in these apartment buildings adds to the satisfaction of living in apartment buildings. The lack of security features in many apartment buildings makes it hard for residents to ensure that only legitimate users are in the buildings or on the grounds. The lack of surveillance makes the commission of criminal acts more effortless since there is minimal chance of being caught. The addition of additional security features to buildings with a high crime rate may act as a deterrent to some forms of criminal activity. In order to be effective however, these features must be constantly maintained and updated by the building manager. Another aspect of security that is often overlooked in apartment buildings is proper lighting of hallways and common areas and removal of graffiti and other symptoms of social disorder. These physical reminders of crime can increase resident perception of fear of crime and can limit resident interaction and social cohesion and can lead to increased levels of crime.

Physical Design of Apartment Buildings

A range of factors affect the level of crime and the effectiveness of crime prevention programs in apartment buildings. Lack of social networks and limited community cohesion in many apartment buildings has a major impact on the ability of the community to act together in the development and implementation of effective crime prevention strategies. Researchers have found that some physical features can actually affect human behaviour (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997). There are physical aspects of apartment design that can either provide opportunities for the commission of crimes or prevent the community from effectively interacting with one another to create safe and healthy communities (Popkin et al, 1995; Fitzgerald, 2008).

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

The physical design of neighbourhoods, homes and apartment buildings can have an impact on the overall level of criminal activity. Ensuring better use of the built environment and attention to design can limit the opportunities for crime and decrease resident's fear of crime. This is the idea behind Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) and addressing the built environment is one of the tools used in many crime prevention programs (RCMP, 2011). CPTED focuses on changes to the built environment that make it more difficult to carry out illegal activities and that make it easier for residents to interact and maintain order in their communities (Ibid). These modifications can include: greater involvement of residents in maintaining social order, increased surveillance by residents, appropriate use of common or public space, better security, and defined public, private and semi-private space (Ibid).

With respect to apartment buildings in particular, CPTED advocates a number of changes to the physical design of buildings and units to prevent crime and increase tenant interactions. Minimizing the number of residents who use a shared entryway can help to increase resident awareness of who their neighbours are and thus who belongs on the property and who does not (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997; RCMP, 2011). This change can also increase resident familiarity and foster relationships amongst neighbours since there would be fewer people to engage making it easier to control social relationships. Ensuring that buildings are equipped with accessible and attractive common areas that appeal to a wide variety of tenants is another aspect of CPTED. These spaces increase resident encounters and interaction and help build a sense of community. Casual surveillance will naturally increase if residents are physically using common areas. These changes create safer environments for all tenants. Surveillance of children's play areas is an important factor in ensuring the safety of children living in the building and must be considered when play areas are created. As for the units and hallways, ensuring that locks and deadbolts are in good working order and that apartment unit doors are equipped with peep holes and maintaining sufficient hallway lighting will help to limit the opportunity for criminal activity.

As with other forms of crime prevention or community building, these changes need to be made in partnership with residents and management in order to creating safe and healthy apartment buildings. Residents must be willing to participate in programs, and building managers must be willing to maintain buildings and units to appropriate standards and implement safety features. Changes to the physical or built environment must be made in combination with increased social services that target the underlying causes of crime and disorder in order to achieve long-term and sustainable solutions to both crime prevention and community development.

Built Environment

The design of individual apartment buildings can provide opportunities for the commission of crimes. Researchers have concluded that crime is more likely to occur at apartment buildings that have multiple escape routes or are located at busy intersections (Gifford, 2007). Although these features are difficult and expensive to change and are generally beyond the scope of property managers and owners, there are adjustments that can be made to limit the negative influence of busy streets. The advocates of CPTED suggest that these streets could be made into dead-ends or could be made less accessible (RCMP, 2011). Another solution is to improve the level of lighting on the exterior of the buildings. Better lighting can encourage residents and community members to utilize the space and thus increase the public presence in these areas (Gifford, 2007). The lack of surveillance can increase the possibility of crime, so resident presence should have an impact on limiting criminal activity in these locations (Gifford, 2007).

Encouraging community use of common areas and public space can be an effective deterrent to criminal activity and can influence the building of community networks. Certain types of community design such as new urbanism and smart growth, advocate the creation of pedestrian friendly communities that encourage residents to walk. This pedestrian lifestyle helps to create a “sense of belonging” and helps develop an attitude of ownership over the immediate area. Developing these feelings of territoriality and ownership can encourage residents to actively watch over the space (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997). Walking and experiencing the neighbourhood allows time for residents to meet each other in a very casual and informal manner (Ganapati, 2008).

Semiprivate areas (areas that belong to a set of households) act as informal meeting places for residents and the lack of such spaces can make it difficult to build and maintain social networks and informal interactions (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997). Apartment buildings often lack these semiprivate spaces as well as personally owned areas that residents have ownership of (Ibid). Building owners should be encouraged to provide attractive, accessible public spaces for residents with clear indications of ownership and acceptable use (Ganapati, 2008; Gifford, 2007). Like semiprivate areas, local stores can have a positive impact on safety and community interactions (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997). Community stores are neutral territory and can encourage casual resident encounters and conversation (Ganapati, 2008). These various spaces provide opportunities for residents to encounter one another in casual and neutral environments and help build relationships (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997; Ganapati, 2008). These spaces also help foster a sense of place and community that encourages community cohesion and social control (Ganapati, 2008).

Natural Elements

Access to nature can provide a variety of positive impacts on adults and children alike. Natural features have been shown to positively influence social interactions and can decrease people's perceptions of crowdedness (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997; Ganapati, 2008). Nature can act as a calming agent by decreasing irritability and has been shown to improve mental and social functioning (Ibid). Children in particular need access to green space and nature for proper development and nature can modify children's behaviour (Gifford, 2007).

Natural elements attract people to outdoor spaces thus enabling more frequent contact with other residents. Trees provide shade, privacy and noise buffering in urban areas and it is possible to make areas more attractive by providing trees and grass. Treed areas have been shown to attract larger groups of people thus enabling more networks and more diverse associations. Ensuring that residents have access to attractive, natural outdoor spaces may encourage social interactions. These encounters with other residents lead to an increased sense of neighbourliness and territoriality and better community cohesion, making the area safer (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997).

More people spending time outdoors with other residents, in large social groups, greater number of social encounters amongst residents and community members and will increase feelings of safety as well as fostering a sense of territoriality and ownership of the area. This encourages neighbourliness and better social relations (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997). Residents will get to know who belongs and who doesn't and will feel more able to enforce certain rules of conduct. This is increased outdoor surveillance which large apartment buildings usually lack (Coley, Kuo & Sullivan, 1997).

Spaces like community gardens provide space for community events and other organized community activities. Activities like tree planting or neighbourhood cleanups can help bring residents together for a positive reason and help to build a sense of belonging to a community (Ganapati, 2008).

Conclusion

Apartment buildings create a number of barriers to community development. These challenges range from lack of community cohesion and community organization to elements in the built environment that encourage criminal activity. Apartment buildings also house a population of residents who belong to a heterogeneous mix of age, gender, and social, economic and cultural groups. However, once acknowledged and addressed, these challenges can be overcome with a variety of initiatives and strategies for building community alongside preventing crime and improving the social factors that lead to criminal activity.

Communities are diverse and may not present a united front when it comes to describing problems and identifying solutions. Residents, building managers and owners, social services employees, police, crime prevention experts and community development experts must all work together to develop plans and programs tailored to the individual needs of specific communities. This requires a level of trust, and building these networks and developing relationships amongst the various players will be a long-term project in any community. In the case of apartment buildings, the development of these networks is made more difficult by the heterogeneous mix of residents involved and the various social and economic challenges present in many apartment buildings.

Most crime prevention strategies focus on reducing the opportunities for crime and protecting personal property from crime. This presents a challenge in the design of such programs for apartment buildings, where residents do not have control over the public spaces and may own very little property of value that needs protection. Community development should be the primary goal of many initiatives and programs should engage residents as partners in the planning and implementation of programs. These programs can then be tailored to target the problems faced by residents.

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