Empty Bedrooms and Overcrowded Rentals in Los Angeles

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Background

Los Angeles leads the nation in a **housing shortage** that results in rising numbers of homeless and increasing lack of affordability.

Not only the shortage of housing but **shortage of space within housing** may be problematic as **overcrowded housing** has recently drawn new attention for its possible linkage to the spread of the coronavirus (Harvard Pop Center 2020; LA Times 2020; NYU Furman 2020).

Despite this housing shortage, many housing units contain at least two empty bedrooms – the result is a great imbalance of housing, a **space inequality**.

**Vacant or empty space within housing** might even be a source to be utilized to alleviate the shortage problem – e.g., Junior Accessory Dwelling Units (JADUs) which is created out of a bedroom within an existing single-family unit (CA HCD 2020).
Comparing Number of *Occupants* to Number of *Bedrooms*

Method is to first compute *the number of occupants* in each housing unit, assuming two married people or partners occupy only one bedroom together.

Separately, we calculate *the number of bedrooms* in the same unit and then see how many of the housing units have extra bedrooms or fall short relative to the number of occupants.

How great is the *mismatch* between occupants and bedrooms?

Using *2018 American Community Survey (ACS) microdata*, we see how many owner units have *empty bedrooms* that can be utilized for JADUs or to shelter a homeless person, and how many rental units are *overcrowded* across regions.
Empty Bedrooms in SCAG Region
38.3% of Homeowners in SCAG Region Have at Least Two Empty Bedrooms, 2018

Sources: 2018 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2020).
**Older Homeowners Are Two Times More Likely to Have 2+ Empty Bedrooms than Young Homeowners, SCAG Region, 2018**

% of Owner Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>2+ Bedrooms Empty</th>
<th>1 Bedroom Empty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 2018 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2020).
Fewest Empty Bedrooms in NY, LA and California Metro Areas

% Owner Units with at Least One Empty Bedroom, 2018

- 2+ Bedrooms Empty
- 1 Bedroom Empty

Sources: 2018 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2020).
Overcrowded Housing in SCAG Region
15.5% of Renters in SCAG Region Live in Overcrowded Units, 2.5 Times the National Incidence

% Rental Units with More than 1.0 Person per Room, 2018

Sources: 2018 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2020).
LA and California Metro Areas *Most Overcrowded* in the Nation

% Rental Units that are Overcrowded, 2018

- **More than 1.50 Persons/Room**
- **1.01–1.50 Persons/Room**

### WEST
- Los Angeles
- San Jose
- Riverside-SB
- San Diego
- Salt Lake City
- Phoenix
- Sacramento
- Seattle
- Portland
- Denver
- Minneapolis
- Chicago
- Columbus
- Kansas City
- Milwaukee
- Detroit
- Indianapolis
- Cincinnati
- Cleveland
- St. Louis
- Houston
- Dallas
- Austin
- Washington, D.C.
- San Antonio
- Orlando
- Nashville
- New Orleans
- OK City
- Memphis
- Atlanta
- Charlotte
- Tampa
- Raleigh
- Jacksonville
- Virginia Beach
- Louisville
- Richmond
- Baltimore
- Birmingham
- New York
- Boston
- Hartford
- Philadelphia
- Buffalo
- Providence
- Pittsburgh

### MIDWEST
- Los Angeles
- San Jose
- Riverside-SB
- San Diego
- Salt Lake City
- Phoenix
- Sacramento
- Seattle
- Portland
- Denver
- Minneapolis
- Chicago
- Columbus
- Kansas City
- Milwaukee
- Detroit
- Indianapolis
- Cincinnati
- Cleveland
- St. Louis
- Houston
- Dallas
- Austin
- Washington, D.C.
- San Antonio
- Orlando
- Nashville
- New Orleans
- OK City
- Memphis
- Atlanta
- Charlotte
- Tampa
- Raleigh
- Jacksonville
- Virginia Beach
- Louisville
- Richmond
- Baltimore
- Birmingham
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Sources: 2018 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2020).
Racial Disparities in Density within Housing
**Hispanic Owners** have least empty bedrooms, while **Hispanic Renters** live in most overcrowded units, LA County, 2018.

**Empty Bedrooms**

- **2+ Bedrooms Empty**
- **1 Bedroom Empty**

**Overcrowded Rentals**

- **More than 1.50 Persons/Room**
- **1.01–1.50 Persons/Room**

Sources: 2018 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2020).
Scarce empty bedrooms and overcrowded rentals – LA worst in the nation

● LA has the most scarce owner units that have at least two empty bedrooms

● The problem of overcrowded rental housing varies a lot across regions and its worst case is LA

● Racial disparities in the density within housing are large

visit USC PopDynamics for more

https://sites.usc.edu/popdynamics/housing/

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Sources: 2018 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2020).