

Study Guide: Neighborhoods - Social Environment

Issues and Questions

Researchers continue to question the pathways through which neighborhoods impact health. Notable questions persist regarding the direction of causality – does the physical environment impact health or is health primarily shaped by community members' social economic status?

Class 10 will examine neighborhood effects, including community change, displacement and social capital. **Ellen's** piece presents evidence of the independent impact of the built environment on health outcomes, highlighting the most promising findings. **Freudenberg et al.** also discuss approaches to understanding the impacts that cities have on health. They view neighborhoods as one component of many (e.g., household, workplace, municipality, metropolitan region) that comprise the urban living conditions that influence health. **Freudenberg et al.** propose a model that moves beyond describing health related characteristics of urban populations towards identifying opportunities for intervention.

Considering housing policy, **McLaughlin et al.** and **Desmond** examine the health impacts of displacement. The United States' housing market crash of 2008 resulted in an unprecedented number of home foreclosures caused by increases in monthly mortgage payments, rising expenses, and/or reductions in family income. **McLaughlin et al.**'s longitudinal study of adults in Detroit, Michigan provides the first prospective evidence linking foreclosure to the onset of mental illness, including major depression and generalized anxiety. Furthermore, an increasingly competitive rental market is resulting in higher housing costs for renters; in fact, one in five households devote at least half of its income to housing costs. It is no surprise that evictions are largely the result of non-payment of rent. This type of displacement can have lasting impacts on peoples' health, something that **Desmond** examines by looking at the consequences of involuntary housing displacement on low-income urban mothers.

Tuesday's readings provide great information for the Just Cause Eviction HIA group. Readings are a framework for beginning to think about the health impacts of displacement.

Questions

1. Neighborhoods may influence health through short-term effects on behaviors, attitudes, and healthcare utilization and through the longer-term process of "weathering." Pathway models help us understand what neighborhood variables influence health outcomes. What are the four pathways that Ellen lists? Although ultimately inconclusive, what evidence exists documenting the way that neighborhoods affect health? What does Ellen suggest provides the strongest evidence?
2. What is the difference between foreclosure and eviction? And, what are the characteristic of the population that each affects? Why might foreclosure be a significant stressor leading to the onset of mental illness?



3. What does the process of eviction look like? How does eviction affect mothers' and children' health? Are health consequences short-term or long-term? How does eviction affect a person's future housing and employment outcomes?
4. The residential affordable housing crisis means that low-income individuals and families are unstably housed. What implications does housing instability have for individual's psychological stability? How does this affect social capital and people's investment to place?
5. What are the two dominant approaches that Freudenberg et al. list for understanding the impact of cities on health? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? What is the alternative model that Freudenberg et al. suggest?

Key Terms

Weathering

Eviction

Foreclosure

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