Community Action Guide:

Neighborhood and Residential Segregation and its Health Effects

Health Equity Council 2011
Health Effects of Neighborhood and Residential Segregation

Look at the environment around you. How many trees are there? Do you see any sidewalks? Parks? How about a grocery store? The ‘built’ environment that includes these trees, sidewalks, parks, and grocery stores is a health indicator for its residents, without which individuals are likely to suffer from obesity, asthma, diabetes, heart disease or a number of other illnesses.\(^1\) Unfortunately, low socioeconomic and minority neighborhoods are less likely to have access to such community amenities; this segregation between low and high socioeconomic populations and minority and white populations contributes to health disparities.\(^2\)

Gautreaux Assisted Housing Program

In 1966 Chicago residents filed a lawsuit against the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) because of unfair housing practices. Chicago residents claimed the CHA segregated African American families through their tenant selection and other policies, while HUD continued to fund CHA despite the civil rights violations. The case was settled in 1976 and called for the housing authorities to use resources for new construction and rent subsidies. After moving 7,100 families, the program ended in 1998.\(^3\) The Gautreaux families participated in a number of longitudinal studies, of which several looked at the health of individuals in their new neighborhoods.

Residents who moved into the more affluent areas of the city were still living in those neighborhoods 10 and 20 years later. The children’s attitudes about school improved and their grades stayed consistent or improved. When the children grew up and started their own families, they were more likely to live in similarly affluent and safe neighborhoods.\(^4\) In addition to improvements in living condition and academic performance, families who moved to more affluent neighborhoods experienced a significant improvement in mental health.\(^5\)
Background and Case for Action

Neighborhood Segregation Defined:

Neighborhood, or residential segregation measures the difference and degree to which certain groups or populations are concentrated in particular areas. Racial residential segregation is the physical separation of racial populations across neighborhoods of a metropolitan area.  

In the United States, the Census Bureau calculates an index of dissimilarity as a measure of racial residential segregation, based on the Census data. The Bureau measures residential segregation based on five factors:

- Evenness: The differential distribution of the subject population
- Exposure: Potential contact
- Concentration: Relative amount of physical space occupied
- Centralization: Degree to which a group is located near the center of an urban area
- Clustering: Degree to which minority group members live disproportionately in contiguous areas

Racial residential segregation refers to the idea that ethnic minority groups are concentrated in certain geographic areas or neighborhoods. The concept of racial residential segregation is not rooted in minority groups’ choice to live among each other. Research shows that minority populations are more willing than white populations to live in racially integrated neighborhoods. Evidence also shows that racial residential segregation exists based on race and ethnicity rather than socioeconomic status. The most recent statistics, which date back to the year 2000, show that 66% of minority populations would have to move to eliminate segregation. Residential segregation exists more on racial and ethnic lines than on socioeconomic lines: white Americans have higher rates of poverty than African Americans, yet they live in better conditions. Poor whites are more likely to live in poor neighborhoods near affluent neighborhoods, whereas poor African American populations are more likely to live in poor neighborhoods surrounded by other poor neighborhoods. The segregation has impacts beyond where an individual lives; it can lead to concentrated poverty, joblessness, educational failure, crime and social and economic isolation.

A Case for Action:

Residential segregation has both social and health implications. Residential segregation can indirectly impact health by creating differences in economic, social, and physical environments, which then shape health behaviors. Segregation also indirectly impacts health through lower housing quality, concentrated poverty, and lack of access to resources. These community factors can be either detrimental or protective of health. When neighborhoods do not have grocery stores, residents cannot access fresh fruits and vegetables, contributing to health problems from inadequate nutrition. Neighborhoods can also provide protective factors such as safe playgrounds for children to play and get the recommended daily exercise.
Women living in lower socioeconomic status (SES) neighborhoods, or disadvantaged neighborhoods, were more likely to have low birth-weight babies. Similarly, children in disadvantaged neighborhoods were more likely to exhibit behavioral problems than children in more advantaged neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{15}

Social climate can have a significant direct effect on birth weight. One study cited that for every one standard deviation increase in violent crime rate there was a 10.4 gram decrease in average birth weight.\textsuperscript{16}

Researchers struggle to establish direct relationships between residential segregation and health outcomes because of the lack of consistency in measuring segregation and neighborhood factors.\textsuperscript{17}
Step 1: Identify Residential Segregation and Bring Awareness to the Issue

The following sources provide statistics to determine the extent of residential segregation in various regions around the country. The articles further establish the association between neighborhoods and health.

Residential and Racial Residential Segregation by Region:

Population Studies Center, University of Michigan
Racial Residential Segregation Measurement Project
http://enceladus isr umich edu/race/racestart asp
• Provides a detailed description of how segregation is measured in the United States
• Lists segregation and dissimilarity indices based on counties, metropolitan areas or cities
• Explains how to calculate segregation measures

CensusScope:
Social Science Data Analysis Network (SSDAN)
• Presents segregation charts based on exposure by race or dissimilarity index
• Lists rankings and comparisons of exposure by race or dissimilarity index
• Provides state racial profiles by chart or map
• Presents charts and trends based on race, age, household and family structure, educational attainment and income
• Analyzes and presents U.S. Census data by metropolitan areas or city within a specific state
Contact information: http://www.censusscope org/contact.html

Schematic Representation of Neighborhood Environment Impact on Health Inequities

Diez Roux and Mair (2010)
Neighborhood Segregation and Health: The Evidence


Step 2: Identify Resources and Potential Partners

Existing Frameworks for Neighborhood Desegregation:

Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing Demonstration Program: Interim Impacts Evaluation
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research
• Studied the effect of moving families from high poverty public housing neighborhoods to a similar residence in a low poverty neighborhood
• Found a statistically significant reduction in obesity incidence, psychological distress, and depression
Contact Information: HUD Main Office (202)-708-1112

Community of Opportunity Framework: A Framework for a More Equitable and Sustainable Future For All
Kirwin Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, Ohio State University
• Takes a spatial approach in analyzing access to resources for people living in different regions
• Is a model for new community development which considers access to housing, health care, employment, and transportation
• Goal involves investment in all of a region’s people and neighborhoods to improve life outcomes and health of all citizens
Contact Information: Kirwin Institute Main Office (614)-688-5429

Identifying Potential Partners:


Step 3: Action- Policy Changes to Eliminate Segregation

Policies and programs to prevent housing discrimination, such as the Housing and Urban Development Fair Housing Act, exist to prevent housing discrimination. In other parts of the United States, such as Montgomery County, Maryland and San Francisco, California, local governments have taken steps to ensure there is integrated housing through inclusionary zoning practices.

Housing and Urban Development: Fair Housing Act
Can be found online: [http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/FHLaws/index.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/FHLaws/index.cfm)
- Prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, and housing related transactions based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, disability etc.
- Prohibits discrimination in the Community Development and Block Grant Programs
- Includes a number of Executive Orders associated with fair housing such as the Order for federal agencies to further fair housing in their programs and activities
Contact Information: HUD Main Office (202)-708-1112

Montgomery County, Maryland Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) Program
Can be found online: [http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dhctmpl.asp?url=/content/dhca/housing/housing_P/mpdu/history.asp](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dhctmpl.asp?url=/content/dhca/housing/housing_P/mpdu/history.asp)
- Includes a mandatory inclusionary zoning law that requires any subdivision with 50 or more units set aside 12.5-15% of the units for moderate-income households
- Goal is to increase the production of moderately priced housing and to distribute the housing across the county
- Over 12,000 affordable housing units produced through 2005
Contact Information: Department of Housing and Community Affairs (240)-777-3600

Why Place Matters, The California Endowment and Policy Link
Can be found online at: [http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97c6d565-bb43-406d-a6d5-eca3bbf35af0%7D/WHYPLACEMATTERS_FINAL.PDF](http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97c6d565-bb43-406d-a6d5-eca3bbf35af0%7D/WHYPLACEMATTERS_FINAL.PDF)
- Outlines steps to improve the built environment as a way to improve health with the goal of eliminating health disparities
- Steps involve using the community’s residents and resources to affect a platform for change
- Suggests using research to approach government officials and health departments to foster collaborations and alliances.
Recommended Reading:


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