6-9-2015

Place Matters: new social indicators

Mimi Abramovitz  
*CUNY Hunter College*

Jochen Albrecht  
*CUNY Hunter College*

---

**How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!**

Follow this and additional works at: [http://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc_pubs](http://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc_pubs)

Part of the [Geographic Information Sciences Commons](http://academicworks.cuny.edu/geo/), [Human Geography Commons](http://academicworks.cuny.edu/hum/), and the [Social Work Commons](http://academicworks.cuny.edu/socialwork/)

---

**Recommended Citation**


---

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Hunter College at CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications and Research by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu).
Place Matters: New Social Indicators

Mimi Abramovitz
Bertha Capen Reynolds Professor of Social Policy,
Silberman School of Social Work, Hunter College, CUNY

Jochen Albrecht,
Associate Professor of Geography,
Department of Geography, Hunter College, CUNY

The Hunter College Neighborhood Stress Project
Our Interests

- The relationship between people and place
- From a focus on individual behavior to the community conditions that can shape behavior
- GIS allow us to explore and visualize what happens to communities when large numbers of people living in close proximity regularly suffer multiple, persistent losses at the same time.”
Unpacking Poverty

1. Health and social problems are concentrated in some but not other neighborhoods? The Question is Why?
   - Behavior of Residents
   - High Poverty Rates

2. What about poverty leads people to harm themselves or others?

3. Is there a pathway between adverse neighborhood conditions (community based risk factors) and the spatial concentration of health and social problems?
Stress as a Pathway

**Well Known:** Exposure to severe stress > health and social problems for individuals

**Less Well Known:** What happens to **communities** in which large numbers of people living in close proximity regularly suffer multiple stressors at the same time

**Corrective** Aggregation of individual experiences sheds light on community level phenomenon
Theory-informed: Conservation of Resources Theory (COR)*

- **COR analyzes**: Individual stress in the context of community

- **Basic Premise**: Humans seek to obtain, retain, foster and protect valued resources; act to minimize resources loss and to maximize resource gain. Stress results when resources are threatened or actually lost or when resource investments do not lead to resource gain

* Stevan E. Hobfoll, PhD Rush University Medical Center
Useful for Low-Income Communities

- Regards resource loss as key to individual stress

- Defines stress as based on actual or threatened resource loss rather than subjective personal perceptions

- Understands stress as having social as well as individual causes and consequences

- Allows us to look into the community not just individual loss
Hobfoll’s Downward Spiral

- Low income people and communities are especially vulnerable to resource loss and neighborhood risk and to what Hobfoll refers to as a “downward loss spiral”
- If resource reserves to cope with stress are depleted, can lead to physical and emotional problems that can undermine effective individual functioning
- Given interdependence of neighborhood residents, catastrophic downward spiral can ripple through the community and effect its functioning
- Intervention must promote resource cultivation and protection for individuals and communities
## Indicators of Accumulated Disadvantage

Independent variables > Stress > Dependent variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions/Stressor</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Lack of self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Mental health problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Criminal activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Interpersonal violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Community violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mediators/Protective Factors

- Self-advocacy
- Civic Participation
- Essential resources
A Different Approach

- Why Accumulative?
- Standard Approach
  - Tautological
  - Often ignores or downplays the wider context
## Community Loss Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Missing People</strong></th>
<th><strong>Missing Assets</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incarceration</td>
<td>Loss of jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster care placement</td>
<td>Loss of homes (foreclosure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premature death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term hospitalization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community Loss as a Stressor:

- Unpredictable and uncontrollable
- Appears at the high end of the stress spectrum
- No known measures of loss at the community level
Akin to Displacement

- A community version of Hobsfoll’s downward spiral
- Loss depletes community of
  - Productive individuals
  - Community economic viability
  - Social cohesion and
  - Trust in government—while fueling the rise of social problems
- Fullilove: “Root Shock”
Spatial Analysis

- US Census and NYC administrative data
- When possible used the smallest available geographic unit
  - Addresses, census tracks, ZIP codes
- Analysis of three increasingly smaller geographic levels:
  - Citywide
  - Neighborhoods
  - ZIP code areas
- Uncovered more precise information and revealed considerable local variation that was not otherwise visible
Community Loss

The Maps: Commonalities and Variations
Citywide: Accumulated Community Loss

The sum of

- Foster care placements
- Incarcerations
- Long-term hospitalizations
- Premature Deaths
- Foreclosures
- Unemployment

(see next slide)
A Tale of Two Cities

Taken together all seven maps show NYC to be sharply divided by the experience of loss
Losses in Low Loss Areas

F = Foster care
I = Incarceration
U = Unemployment
H = Hospitalization
D = (prem.) Deaths
C = Foreclosures
Losses in High Loss Areas Citywide

F = Fostercare  
I = Incarceration  
U = Unemployment  
H = Hospitalization  
D = (prem.) Deaths  
C = ForeClosures
Low Loss Neighborhoods

Loss Types of Low Loss Areas

Manhattan
- Fostercare
- Incarceration
- Unemployment
- Hospitalization

Flushing
- Fostercare
- Incarceration
- Unemployment
- Hospitalization
- Deaths
- Foreclosures
High Loss Neighborhoods

Loss Types of High Loss Areas

Bronx | Brooklyn | Harlem | Jamaica | Staten Island

- **Fostercare**
- **Incarceration**
- **Unemployment**
- **Hospitalization**
- **Deaths**
- **Foreclosures**
People in Place – Low Loss Neighborhoods
People in Place - High Loss Neighborhoods
People in Place Low Low Loss Neighborhoods

![Bar Chart]

- Central Manhattan
- Flushing

Legend:
- Below Poverty
- White
- Hispanic
- Black
- Asian
- Recent Immigrant
- Under Age 5
- Over Age 64
People in Place by High Loss Neighborhoods
Applications

- Captures a previously unrecognized and unmeasured components of community life and poverty
- Can help communities and public officials to
  - Unpack poverty in the context of place
  - Understand how community experiences vary by geography & demographics
  - Allows for selection of specific neighborhoods to work in but also to compare NYC neighborhoods with each other
  - Work together to fine-tune interventions based on community needs
  - Encourage civic engagement
A Proviso

- Silo mentality

- Advantages: Feasibility

- Risks: Lose sight of
  - Interaction among individual losses
  - Role and impact of wider context
  - Punitive policy climate
¿ QUESTIONS ?