

Investigating the multilevel determinants of health: lessons from research on neighborhood health effects

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Over recent years there has been growing interest in neighborhood health effects. Numerous studies have documented associations of neighborhood socioeconomic characteristics with health outcomes after controlling for individual-level measures of socioeconomic position, suggesting that features of neighborhoods themselves may be important to health. However, important questions remain regarding whether these associations reflect causal processes. This presentation will present the rationale for studying neighborhoods and health, will review existing evidence, and will discuss methodological challenges in this field. Approaches to measuring neighborhood-level constructs and estimating neighborhood effects will be discussed and illustrated with empirical examples. The presentation will conclude with a discussion of the types of evidence needed to make policy recommendations focused on health-damaging or health-enhancing features of neighborhoods. Challenges in the study of neighborhood health effects will be discussed more broadly within the context of the need to study the multilevel determinants of health.