

# Geography of Opportunity: Psychiatric Housing and Social Interaction

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# Geography of opportunity

- The ways in which place – including neighborhoods – affect life prospects

Galster, G., & Killen, S. (1995). The geography of metropolitan opportunity: A reconnaissance and conceptual framework. *Housing Policy Debate*, 6(1), 7-43.

Gallagher, M. (1994). HUD's geography of opportunity. *Planning*, 60(7), 12-14.

# NIMBY: Not in My Backyard

- Goals of community-based psychiatric housing include: community and social integration
- Up to 50% of neighborhoods protest local siting of psychiatric housing

# Psychiatric housing: location

- No comprehensive national or state lists of the locations of community-based houses and apartments
- Sited across a variety of cities and small towns and socio-economic settings
- Disproportionate number in lower-income communities
- Recent geographic dispersal strategies

# Research questions

- To what degree do psychiatric residents participate in community life and interact with neighbors?
- Can neighborhood geography or demographics – density, poverty, diversity, commercial mix - promote or inhibit interaction?

# Method

- Multi-phased project
- Sampling frame: public and private agencies receiving state funds to provide psychiatric housing in seven states:
  - Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas

# Method

- 169 administrators interviewed regarding the siting strategy for most recently established group residence
- Interviews conducted with 137 on-site supervisors at those residences
- Census demographics collected for each neighborhood

# Findings: Locations of psychiatric residences

- Range of urban, suburban, rural settings:

33% in cities or urban areas (100,000+)

29% mid-range (25,000-99,999)

38% small towns, rural (1,000-24,999)



## Findings: neighborhood demographics of psychiatric residences

- Range of block level poverty rates: 3% to 60%
- Mean 18%
- 33% had poverty rates  $\leq$  10%  
67% had poverty rates  $>$  10%

# Findings: neighborhood demographics

- Ethnicity of neighborhood  
Mean nonwhite = 29%
- Renter occupied units in neighborhood  
Mean = 46%
- 89% within walking distance of commercial district

# Neighbors' attitudes

- On-site supervisors reported:
  - 10% very friendly
  - 28% somewhat friendly
  - 40% indifferent
  - 2% hostile
  
- 7% don't know

# Social interaction with neighbors

On-site supervisors reported:

- Few substantive exchanges with neighbors
- Visits by residents to neighbors in their homes were rare
- 65% of the psychiatric residences had never had a visit from any of their neighbors
- Most residents exchange greetings or share casual conversation with neighbors on street

# Neighbors' attitudes

- No significant associations between neighbors' attitudes and demographic variables
- "very" and "somewhat" friendly associated with purposeful engagement by on-site supervisors:  
example - staff introduce neighbors and residents (chi square 6.11, df 1,  $p < .013$ ).

# Promoting interaction with neighbors

- None of the demographic variables were significantly associated with greater *interaction* with neighbors
- Interaction with neighbors was significantly associated with purposeful staff engagement with neighbors: introducing residents and neighbors (chi square 10.16, df 1,  $p < .00$ ); initiating social activities (chi square 11.49, df 1,  $p < .001$ ).

# Interaction with community

On-site staff report:

- 97% of residents shop in neighborhood stores
- 95% take walks in neighborhood
- 94% frequent local coffee shops
- 85% visit local library

# Social interaction

- 88% interact regularly with local business owners and clerks
- 40% have acquaintances with local business personnel



# Social interaction

- 89% attend a day program or other mental health program
- 90% have friends and acquaintances through these programs
- 98% have interaction with family members

# Community participation

- Participation in community life was not significantly associated with demographic variables including poverty, neighborhood ethnicity, median income
- Participation in community life was associated with mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods with access to commercial district

# Practice implications

- Most community and social interaction did not involve immediate neighbors
- Interactions with individual neighbors may be increased by purposeful engagement from staff
- Key elements of community participation: accessible public spaces and business districts; local mental health programs
- Locational choice in walkable, mixed use neighborhoods may be a primary means for enhancing opportunities for social integration