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What is the relationship between neighborhoods and health living?

Exploring the case of Hempstead, New York

This project investigates how the social and physical characteristics of neighborhoods shape parents' ability to provide healthy living for their children. The relationship between health and neighborhood characteristics will be explored via a case study of Hempstead, NY, and through interviews and focus groups with parents of children in the Hempstead Union Free School District. This district's student population is 99.6% African American or Hispanic, and 64.3% of the students in this district are eligible for free lunch. The underlying premise of the study is that racial and class segregation is a fundamental factor in the production of health disparities. The quantitative evidence for this relationship is quite robust—we know from epidemiological studies that there is a social pattern to disease, and that neighborhoods exert an independent effect on health. What we do not understand yet is the “how and why” by which these relationships get realized. What are the specific mechanisms involved? How are individuals' opportunities for healthy living bounded by their communities and the social networks within these communities?