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Short Communication

Association of perceived physical and social attributes with neighborhood satisfaction among men and women in disadvantaged communities

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Introduction

Neighborhoods are an important unit of study because of their impact on residents' mental and physical health.¹ Neighborhood satisfaction is an important factor for an individual's overall quality of life and well-being.² Greater self-efficacy to control the direction of one's life, mental health, perceptions of safety, and residential stability has also been linked to neighborhood satisfaction.^{2–5}

Satisfaction with one's neighborhood reflects an attitudinal or emotional response to a complex set of elements and is developed when physical, social, and emotional needs are met.⁴ Both an individual's perception and aggregate contextual effects encompass neighborhood satisfaction,⁵ and

subjective variables are often more telling when predicting satisfaction than objective measurements.⁶

Numerous physical features have been connected with neighborhood satisfaction, including proximity and access to facilities and the neighborhood's general appearance.^{2,5} Likewise, various studies have reported fear of crime, or its opposite, perceived safety were important predictors of neighborhood satisfaction.^{3,5} Additionally, social factors, such as perceptions of friendliness and community spirit, social interaction, and confidence in neighbors intervening in a crisis, have demonstrated relationships with neighborhood satisfaction.^{2,4,5}

Despite reported associations between neighborhood satisfaction and certain physical and social factors, a gap exists in determining whether one category or specific physical or social attributes are more strongly related to greater satisfaction. Neighborhood satisfaction studies have also been criticized for overemphasizing sociodemographic correlates and not including more perceived neighborhood characteristics.^{2,6} Finally, research suggests that differences exist by gender in determining neighborhood satisfaction.² Therefore, the purposes of this study were to (1) better understand which category, physical or social attributes, was a stronger predictor of neighborhood satisfaction in disadvantaged communities, (2) identify which specific physical and social attributes appear most important, and (3) determine if these relationships differed by gender.

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Methods

Data collection

The Greenville Healthy Neighborhoods Project (GHNP) was conducted between September and December 2014 in eight historically disadvantaged neighborhoods in Greenville, South Carolina. The purpose of the GHNP was to evaluate how residents' health behaviors and outcomes were influenced by neighborhood built and social environments. The communities reflected diversity in attributes and resources, with the median household income ranging from \$15,550–\$19,316 and the percentage of African American residents ranging from 34.0% to 82.6%. The University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board approved this study.

Respondent-driven sampling was used, starting with 10 'seed' residents in each neighborhood.⁷ Once a participant completed the survey, they were given three 'coupons' to recruit other neighbors, which stated the times and locations of future surveys and also served as a raffle ticket to incentivize the recruitment process. Four waves were completed and supplemented with additional word-of-mouth for a total of 430 participants.

Measures

The GHNP survey gathered information on overall neighborhood satisfaction, perceptions of physical and social neighborhood characteristics, and respondent demographics. Neighborhood satisfaction was measured on a five-point scale asking how one rates their neighborhood as a place to live and was then dichotomized as low (poor/fair/good) vs high (very good/excellent).⁶

Physical neighborhood characteristics measured included safety (six items), aesthetics (seven items), and walkability (six items), all captured on a five-point scale (1 = 'Strongly Disagree', 5 = 'Strongly Agree') using dimensions from the Neighborhood Environment Walkability Scale.⁸ A mean score was calculated to reflect greater perceived safety, aesthetics, and walkability, and the three characteristics were combined to provide a total physical attributes score.

Social characteristics included social cohesion (five items), collective efficacy (five items), and social support (four items), each measured with a five-point scale (1 = 'Strongly Disagree', 5 = 'Strongly Agree'). Social cohesion evaluated perceived trust and shared values using a validated scale.⁹ Collective efficacy assessed a participant's perceptions about the willingness of their neighbors to intervene on behalf of the common good.⁹ Finally, social support from neighbors assessed perceptions of instrumental, informational, and emotional support. A mean score was calculated for each construct so that higher scores reflected greater perceived social features. These three variables were also aggregated to provide a total social attributes score.

Analysis

Using SPSS 22.0, logistic regression analyzed associations between each of the six neighborhood characteristics, as well as

the total physical and social attributes scores, and the odds of reporting higher neighborhood satisfaction, with significance set at $P < 0.05$. These tests were conducted for the total sample and for males and females independently, all while controlling for several sociodemographic characteristics.

Results

A total of 430 participants completed the GHNP survey. However, 15 were removed due to missing scores for key variables. The mean age of participants was 55.4 years (standard deviation [SD] = 15.0) with a majority being African American (89.3%) and female (70.9%). Two-thirds (66.6%) of participants had an annual household income less than \$30,000, one-third were employed full-time or part-time (34.7%), and most had completed a high school education (83.0%). The average length of residence in their current neighborhood was 14.4 years and about one-third of participants owned their homes (35.9%).

Over half of participants reported low (poor/fair/good) neighborhood satisfaction (55.6%), with the rest reporting high (very good/excellent) neighborhood satisfaction (44.4%). The mean scores for the physical features of aesthetics, safety, and walkability were 3.30 (SD = 0.72), 3.33 (SD = 0.75), and 3.07 (SD = 0.71), respectively, with the mean total physical attributes score being 3.23 (SD = 0.53) (all out of 5). For the social features, the respective mean scores for social cohesion, collective efficacy, and social support were 3.32 (SD = 0.72), 3.10 (SD = 1.08), and 3.43 (SD = 0.91), with the mean total social attributes score at 3.28 (SD = 0.68) (all out of 5).

As shown in Table 1, higher ratings of all perceived neighborhood characteristics were associated with higher overall neighborhood satisfaction. Among the social attributes, social cohesion (odds ratio [OR] = 3.23) followed by social support (OR = 2.31) and collective efficacy (OR = 1.40) were all significant predictors of reporting high neighborhood satisfaction. Likewise, the physical features of safety (OR = 2.79), aesthetics (OR = 2.42), and walkability (OR = 1.33) were associated with greater satisfaction. When comparing the categories of total physical vs total social attributes, both were significant predictors of neighborhood satisfaction, with physical attributes having a slightly stronger relationship (OR = 4.32) than social (OR = 3.67).

Finally, when examining these relationships by gender, no differences from the total sample were found in the association between perceived neighborhood attributes and neighborhood satisfaction. For men, the association between both total physical (OR = 5.35) and total social attributes (OR = 4.73) and greater neighborhood satisfaction was slightly stronger than for women (OR = 4.19 and OR = 3.93, respectively). However, walkability, for males, was the only attribute not significantly associated with reporting higher neighborhood satisfaction.

Discussion

This study adds to the existing literature by providing information regarding the significance of specific factors to

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