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Community Trust and Household Health: A Spatially-BAsed Approach with Evidence from Rural Honduras

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# COMMUNITY TRUST AND HOUSEHOLD HEALTH: A SPATIALLY-BASED APPROACH WITH EVIDENCE FROM RURAL HONDURAS

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## Abstract

What is the relationship between community trust and household health? Scholars working to understand the effects of trust and social capital on human health tend to focus on individual characteristics or social environments, frequently without integrating these two dimensions. In light of this, the present paper makes contributions in both conceptualization and measurement. First, I develop a spatially-based approach for operationalizing community trust as the product of individual orientation and social environment. This approach highlights the need for a household to trust its neighbors and for those neighbors to reciprocate trust in order to constitute the psychological and material mechanisms critical for linking social context to individual health. Second, I illustrate the utility of this measure by evaluating the relationship between community trust and self-rated health status using an original population census survey from 2009-2010 for two municipalities in western Honduras (approximately 2,800 households with a response rate of 94.9%). I implement spatial regression analysis and show that there is a positive and substantively meaningful relationship between community trust and household health; households that are trusting and surrounded by similarly trusting neighbors report better health status, while those in uncertain or mutually distrusting environments report worse health. The theory and results presented here suggest an important link between trust and social capital at the community level, which is particularly salient for rural regions in developing countries where health resources are scarce and community-based interventions are common.

## Research Highlights:

- Combines individual orientation and social environment in defining community trust.
- Develops a spatially-based approach for operationalizing community trust.
- Finds a positive relationship between community trust and household health.

**Keywords:** trust, health, social capital, Honduras, self-rated health status, social context

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