

Community Loss Index: A New Social Indicator

Social workers increasingly recognize that “place matters,” e.g., differences in neighborhood conditions can powerfully affect the well-being of local residents. The Community Loss Index (CLI) focuses on the understudied role of place as a source of stress and an aggregator of individual experiences. It is comprised of six losses closely associated with stress: incarceration, foster care placement, sudden death, long-term hospitalization, job loss and foreclosure.

These losses regularly occur in poor neighborhoods where large numbers of people living in close proximity routinely suffer multiple losses. Yet they are rarely recognized or measured collectively as a place-based stressor that has a community-wide impact. Building on the relationship between loss and stress, the CLI attempts to capture collective loss, defined as the chronic exposure by neighborhood residents to multiple resource losses at the same time. This is part of larger study that “unpacks poverty” by exploring the hypothesis that stress operates as a pathway between a variety of neighborhood conditions (including community loss) and the clustering of health and social problems in some but not other areas.

Using maps, this presentation will discuss the spatial distribution of six types of loss in New York City and the characteristics of people who live in high- and low-loss neighborhoods. Regionalization reveals a neighborhood-based concentration of loss, patterns of loss that are both widespread and variable by location, and that a group’s vulnerability to the adverse effects of community loss depends on where the group lives. The CLI provides a place-based context for investigating neighborhood-based collective loss and allows community members and public officials to fine-tune interventions based on actual community needs.

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