

Depressive Symptoms in an Impoverished African American Community Sample

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Abstract: This study explored the extent that neighborhood of residence was associated with depressive symptoms in an impoverished community sample. From July 2010 - June 2011, interviews were conducted with 170 African Americans from two groups: public housing residents in the most impoverished zip code in Memphis, Tennessee and non-residents who commuted to the area to attend church. Depressive symptoms were measured using the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale. Risk behaviors were assessed using the Healthier People Network Health Risk Appraisal Version 6.0. Almost one-third (32%) of public housing residents and only 4% of non-residents reported major depressive symptomology. Regression analysis indicated that a 4.3 unit lower CES-D score was associated with not living in the study zip code. An 8 unit lower CES-D score was associated with not experiencing a high likelihood of job loss, disability, separation, jail terms, or death of someone close. Individual and neighborhood resources were both associated with depressive symptoms. Multi-level interventions, including those that address neighborhood disorder and enhance economic earnings opportunities, as well as provide individual social support and counseling resources to promote emotional health, may improve mental health outcomes for African Americans living in the poorest zip code.

Keywords: African American; depressive symptoms; neighborhoods; vulnerable populations; poverty; public housing; health disparities
