

PUBLIC HEALTH

Painting a Truer Picture of US Socioeconomic and Racial/Ethnic Health Inequalities:

The Public Health Disparities Geocoding Project

By Nancy Krieger, Jarvis T. Chen, Pamela D. Waterman, David H. Rehkopf, and S.V. Subramanian (Department of Society, Human Development, and Health, Harvard School of Public Health)

American Journal of Public Health Vol. 95, No. 2 February 2005

http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/thegeocodingproject/webpage/pdfs/05_krieger%20et%20al%20_truer%20picture_feb_ajph.pdf

Poorer health outcomes for blacks and Hispanics relative to whites are due largely to higher rates of poverty, according to a series of papers that examine census-tract level health disparities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. While only 5 percent of the white population in Massachusetts lives in federally defined “poverty areas” where the poverty rate exceeds 20 percent, over half the state’s blacks and Hispanics live in these high-poverty census tracts. Differences in the 1990 poverty rate of census tracts accounted for approximately half the elevated risk faced by blacks and Hispanics for childhood lead poisoning, gonorrhea, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS mortality, and homicide. “Lesser but still significant reductions occurred for low birthweight, syphilis, chlamydia, non-fatal firearms-related injuries, premature mortality, lung and cervical cancer incidence, and diabetes mortality. By contrast, adjusting for [census-tract] poverty either had no impact on or else reduced the lower risk observed among Blacks and Hispanics compared with Whites for colon cancer incidence and heart disease mortality and slightly increased the Black excess risk for prostate cancer incidence.” The authors, who urge greater attention to socioeconomic differences in health data and public health policies, also note that further geocoding other health outcomes by census-tract poverty rates would allow researchers to determine the extent to which racial, ethnic, and gender health disparities are due to concentrations of poverty exacerbating harmful social interactions, proximity to both negative factors, such as environmental pollution, and positive ones, such as health clinics.

A full listing of related research on Massachusetts, including maps and detailed methodological discussions can be found at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/thegeocodingproject/webpage/monograph/publications.htm>

In This Issue

PUBLIC HEALTH

Poor Health for Non-Whites in Massachusetts Linked to Poverty

Massachusetts a Leader, but Still Behind on Immunizations

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Did Venture Capital Worsen Boston's High-Tech Downturn?

DEMOGRAPHICS

Who Lives in Downtown Boston?

Is Boston Still a Magnet for Young Adults?

ENVIRONMENT

Poor and Non-Whites Live Near More Toxic Hazards

Strategic Response to Regulatory Thresholds

Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston

Harvard University's Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston strives to improve the region's governance by attracting young people to serve the region, working with scholars to produce new ideas about important issues, and stimulating informed discussions that bring together scholars, policy-makers, and civic leaders. The Rappaport Institute was founded and funded by the Jerome Lyle Rappaport Charitable Foundation, which promotes emerging leaders in Greater Boston.

Rappaport Institute Policy Notes are edited by Phineas Baxandall and David Luberoff. An extended searchable database of recent research is also available online. Items that have appeared in previous issues of the Rappaport Institute's Policy Notes, as well as other policy-relevant scholarly articles, reports, and student theses, are available online at <http://tcdata.hmdc.harvard.edu/pndata/index.php>

Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston
Harvard University
John F. Kennedy School of Government
79 JFK Street, Cambridge, MA 02138
Telephone: (617) 495-5091
Email: rappaport_institute@ksg.harvard.edu
Web: <http://www.rappaportinstitute.org>

Timeliness of Childhood Immunizations:

A State Specific Analysis

By Elizabeth T. Luman, Lawrence E. Barker, Mary Mason McCauley (National Immunization Program, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and Carolyn Drews-Botsch (Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University)

American Journal of Public Health, Vol. 95, No. 8 June 2005
<http://www.ajph.org/cgi/content/abstract/95/8/1367>

Massachusetts leads the nation in the timeliness of vaccinating children aged 24 to 35 months, according to an analysis of the 2000-2002 National Immunization Survey. However, 24 percent of all children in Massachusetts were not completely vaccinated by 24 months and only 26 percent of children in Massachusetts had received all vaccinations at the recommended time. Mississippi showed the worst results of any state: only 2 percent of children received vaccinations at the recommended time and 35 percent had not been completely vaccinated before they were two years old. In general, vaccinations were less timely in western states than eastern states.

More reports on public health issues in Greater Boston are available in the Rappaport Institute Policy Notes Database, online at <http://tcdata.hmdc.harvard.edu/pndata/health.php>.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Technology Centers During the Economic Downturn:

What Have We Learned?

By Ross Gittell and Jeffrey Sohl (Whittemore School of Business and Economics, University of New Hampshire)

Entrepreneurship and Regional Development, Vol. 17, No. 4 March 2005
http://www.babson.edu/entrep/fer/Babson2002/IX/IX_S2/ix-s2.htm

Regions such as Greater Boston, that have high concentrations of venture investment and more narrowly focused technology sectors, experienced the steepest declines when the late 1990s technology boom ended, according to this study of the top 25 U.S. technology centers. While employment dropped on average by 2.8 percent in the top 25 high-tech regions, the venture-capital-reliant Boston region lost nearly 100,000 jobs during the downturn, a plunge in employment of 4.6 percent. The less diversified high-tech economy of Silicon Valley, however, lost 9.3 percent of its jobs while the Seattle and San Francisco areas, each lost 6.1 percent of their total jobs. According to the study, technology centers that saw larger declines during the recent recession tended to have: a poorly diversified overall economic base, limited diversity within high-technology industries, relatively high wages, and high levels of venture capital funding during the end of the 'boom' period of the late 1990s. The authors speculate that free-flowing venture capital dollars may result in an overreliance on these funds at the expense of sounder business models with sustainable growth and reasonable cash flow. Business networks associated with venture capital funds might also focus investment into a limited business sector, rather than a diversified set of entrepreneurial ventures.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Who Lives Downtown?

By Eugenie L. Birch (Department of City and Regional Planning, University of Pennsylvania)
Living Cities Census Series, Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program November 2005
http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20051115_Birch.pdf

The population of downtown Boston grew by 4.7 percent in 1990s, less than half the 10.4 percent growth rate for all cities in this review of population changes in the downtown areas of 45 major U.S. cities over the last 30 years. However, Boston, where the downtown population has grown by 1.9 percent since 1970, was one of only 15 cities where the population of downtown areas has grown since 1970 and one of only five cities where the downtown population had increased since 1970 while the population of the city as a whole had declined. In addition, Boston's downtown population in 2000 was one of the most white, least black, and most Asian within the sample, comprising 71.8 percent, 4.5 percent, and 14.3 percent respectively. Downtown Boston also had the fourth highest share of residents aged 25 to 35 (29 percent) and the fourth highest share of residents with at least a bachelor's degree (63.6 percent). Like other cities in the sample, Boston's downtown is home to some of the most and least affluent households in its city and region. Median income in Boston's poorest downtown census tract stood at \$12,165, compared to \$81,804 in the most affluent downtown tract in 2000. In contrast, median income stood at \$39,629 Boston-wide and \$55,183 within the larger metropolitan area.

Boston: Still a Magnet for Young Adults

By John Avault (Boston Redevelopment Authority)
MassBenchmarks, Vol. 7, No. 4 February 2005
<http://www.massbenchmarks.org/publications/issues/vol7i4/7.pdf>

The often-cited decline of young adults in Boston is not due to an exodus of young people to other states, but due to a national decline in birth rates 20 to 34 years ago. Census data suggests that Boston has actually increased its ability to attract 20 to 34 year-olds. This age group accounted for a third of Boston's population, compared to a 21 percent share of the national population. The decrease by 13,736 in the number of young adults between 1990 and 2000 is more than accounted for by a 57 percent decline in Boston's fertility rate between 1966 and 1980. Likewise, the fertility rate declined 54 percent in Massachusetts and a 45 percent across the country during this period. In fact, Boston can be said to have "attracted" 51,250 more 20 to 34 year-olds in 2000 than expected based on the 1990 census. This net in-migration of young adults was 44 percent greater than a similar net inflow during the 1980s.

More reports on demographics in Greater Boston are available in the Rappaport Institute Policy Notes Database, online at <http://tcdata.hmdc.harvard.edu/pndata/demographics.php>.

ENVIRONMENT**Unequal Exposure to Ecological Hazards 2005:
Environmental Injustices in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

By Daniel R. Faber (Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Northeastern University) and Eric J. Krieg (Department of Behavioral Sciences, Johnson State College, Johnson, VT)
Philanthropy and Environmental Justice Research Project, Northeastern University October 2005
<http://www.ace-ej.org/EJReport05/Final%20Unequal%20Exposure%20Report%202005%2010-12-05.pdf>

Environmentally hazardous waste sites and polluting industrial facilities in Massachusetts are disproportionately located in communities of color and lower-income communities according to this study, which examines demographics and exposure to environmental hazards in 350 Bay State cities and towns and 12 neighborhoods in the City of Boston. The authors found that communities where the average household median income was less than \$39,524 in the 2000 Census contained an average of 19.2 hazardous waste sites per square mile. By contrast, communities where the median income exceeded \$65,876 averaged 4.6 hazardous sites per square mile. Similarly, communities where over a quarter of residents were non-white contained an average of 48.3 hazardous sites per square mile, while communities where less than 5 percent of residents were non-white contained an average of 2.1 sites per square mile. The report also found slightly lower but still highly disproportionate exposure among poorer and less white communities to landfills, trash transfer stations, and incinerators, as well as to polluting industrial facilities and power plants. The study, which assigned point totals to the relative risk of facilities, also found that 24 of Massachusetts' 34 communities that were more than one-quarter non-white were on the list of the 30 communities that had the highest cumulative risk per square mile.

**Strategic Response to Regulatory Thresholds:
Evidence from the Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Act**

By Lori Snyder Benneer (Duke University)
Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences, Duke University June 2005
<http://ssrn.com/abstract=776504>

Up to 40 percent of the observed decline in reported toxic releases in Massachusetts may be due to firms' strategic responses to the reporting thresholds in the Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Act (TURA), rather than actual reductions in those releases. The law requires firms to report on their use and release of certain chemicals but allows firms to opt out of reporting if their use and emissions are less than specified thresholds. Nearly two-thirds of facilities that stopped reporting for a listed chemical did so because they used the chemical in quantities below the reporting threshold but greater than zero. Therefore, the state's data on use and release of these chemicals does not show any usage by these firms. Consequently, estimates of the decrease in toxic chemical releases in Massachusetts over the past decade may be off by as much as 40 percent.

More information on environmental issues is available in the Rappaport Institute Policy Notes Database, online at <http://tcdata.hmdc.harvard.edu/pndata/environment.php>.