

# Is my neighborhood healthy? Comparison of community stakeholders' perception using qualitative GIS

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The studies exploring neighborhood effects on population health are mostly quantitative, investigating the relationships between the physical, built-environment, and socioeconomic characteristics of neighborhood and health. The neighborhood characteristics, however, are often aggregated measures of an administrative unit (e.g., US census-tracts) calculated using national databases and GIS methods. While community-engagement has had a longstanding presence in public health research, there has been a limited attempt to incorporate the lived experiences of community members in identifying the nuanced effect of local neighborhoods and places on people's health. This paper analyzed qualitative data from community-stakeholders using GIS methods. We conducted individual semi-structured virtual interviews with 82 stakeholders (e.g., community and faith leaders, educators, and healthcare workers) across four states (Maryland, Connecticut, Alabama, and Missouri). Participants were asked to discuss topics around how where a person lives (or works) can impact their health. The study team individually reviewed the interview notes, which were then coded into themes describing community-stakeholders perceptions in NVivo. GIS techniques of geocoding, geotagging, and proximity analysis, further contextualized these themes into places in the neighborhoods. The participants, who were primarily African American from Maryland and Alabama expressed concerns about the burden of cancer health, diabetes, and mental health, whereas participants in Connecticut discussed cancer risk from environmental exposures. Perceptions of facilitators and barriers for maintaining a healthy lifestyle varied by local neighborhoods; participants mentioned neighborhood crime (Baltimore), poverty (Delmar divide in St. Louis), and lack of access to grocery stores (Birmingham), whereas others mentioned having social capital and support (Southington, Connecticut).

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