

Community resources: How equitable is access across a city?

Adrian Field and Karen Witten

Centre for Social and Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation (SHORE),
Massey University, PO Box 6137
Wellesley St, Auckland
Phone +64 9-366-6136
Email a.field@massey.ac.nz; k.witten@massey.ac.nz

**Presented at GeoHealth 2002
Victoria University of Wellington
December 3-5th 2002**

Is the relationship between health and socio-economic status mediated by differential access to community resources such as public transport, parks and recreational facilities, shops, educational, cultural and health facilities? Potential pathways by which community resource access could influence health include the direct opportunities they provide for healthy behaviours (e.g. exercise, cheap and nutritious food), the psychosocial benefits of positive perceptions of the physical and social aspects of where you live and the financial advantages of easy access to public transport and other amenities needed for the routines of daily life.

The study on which this paper is based developed a small area index of community resource accessibility as a contextual measure of place. The paper reports on the mapping (using GIS), of amenities, facilities and services of importance to the daily lives of parents and children, across two cities, with differing socio-economic profiles, in the wider metropolitan region of Auckland. A Community Resource Accessibility Index was constructed that takes into account the relative importance placed on access to thirty-six specific types of community resources. Accessibility was calculated and mapped at meshblock level using the meshblock centroid as a proxy for home.

Community resource accessibility differed widely both between and within the two cities. The city with a less deprived population profile tended to have higher overall levels of access. However, within each city, increasing levels of resource access was associated with increasing levels of deprivation, independent of other population characteristics such as population density, median age, and ethnicity. The data indicates both cities in the study tended to distribute resources to their populations equitably, but the city that displayed greater wealth in terms of the population characteristics also had greater overall wealth in community resources.

The geographic location of most public resources is determined by resource allocation decisions based on central and local government conventions, equity and efficiency considerations, and lobbying. From a policy and planning perspective the spatial distribution of public services and facilities is one area where social inequities can be mitigated or at least offset by compensatory distribution. Access or lack of access to such environments and facilities could potentially have greater impact on the health and well-being of residents in low socio-economic neighbourhoods because of cost and mobility barriers to the use of private or non local services and facilities.