Concentrated Disadvantage

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Abstract

'Concentration of disadvantage' refers to the phenomenon of spatial clustering of economically or socially disadvantaged individuals within a set of neighborhoods and the resulting feedback effects that exacerbate the problems of poverty. The central concept is the disproportionate share of disadvantaged persons in geographic neighborhoods lacking critical resources, such as access to quality healthcare and quality education. Areas of concentrated disadvantage around the world are referred to by different terms such as ghettos, barrios, slums, favelas, and banlieues, each with a different set of connotations. Concentration and its effects are a critical component in the study of poverty and disadvantage.

Introduction

'Concentration of disadvantage' refers to the phenomenon of spatial clustering of economically or socially disadvantaged individuals within a set of neighborhoods and the resulting feedback effects that exacerbate the problems of poverty. The central concept is a disproportionate share of disadvantaged persons in geographic neighborhoods lacking critical resources, such as access to quality healthcare and quality education. Such neighborhoods typically have high crime rates, in part due to a flourishing underground economy (Anderson, 1990).

To characterize areas of concentrated disadvantage, social scientists use variables that are indicators of elevated levels of neighborhood socioeconomic distress. Depending on the availability of data, these variables include the poverty rate, median income, joblessness, housing quality, and family structure. These data points are individual-level characteristics that when aggregated to the neighborhood level indicate concentrated disadvantage. In the United States, which has an officially sanctioned poverty line, concentration of disadvantage is sometimes measured by examining the spatial concentration of poor persons. Jargowsky (Jargowsky, 1997) defines the 'concentration of poverty' as the proportion of an area's poor persons residing in census tracts where the official poverty rate is 40% or more. On average, in these high-poverty neighborhoods, fewer than half of adult males are in the labor force and more than half of children live in single-parent families (Jargowsky, 2013).

Exploiting the correlation of poverty with other indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage, the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods created a multidimensional measure of concentrated disadvantage based on census tract levels of welfare receipt, poverty, unemployment, female-headed households, percentage black, and density of children (Sampson, 2012: 100). Neighborhoods with higher disadvantage are marked by lower collective efficacy and greater exposure of neighborhood residents to criminal victimization. Neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage are highly durable over time, rarely experiencing fundamental socioeconomic progress (Sampson, 2012), outside of a few well-publicized cases of gentrification. Moreover, residence in high-poverty neighborhoods is highly persistent and is transmitted intergenerationally, especially for African-Americans (Sharkey, 2008).

Concentration of poverty and disadvantage must be distinguished from poverty and disadvantage per se. A given city or metropolitan area can have a greater or lesser amount of socioeconomically disadvantaged persons. Yet if those persons are spread evenly across the landscape, there would be no concentration. An extremely poor city, therefore, could have no concentration of poverty, while a relatively affluent city in which a small number of poor persons live alone in a specific set of neighborhoods could have total concentration of poverty (Jargowsky, 1997: 17). In practice, however, the level of poverty and the concentration of poverty are frequently correlated.

Concentration of disadvantage must also be distinguished from the concept of the 'underclass' or 'underclass neighborhoods' (Ricketts and Sawhill, 1988). While no one definition of the underclass ever achieved general acceptance, the term generally refers to people who are not just poor, but fundamentally unable to access the class structure due to structural unemployment, hostility to mainstream values, criminal tendencies, or addictions that render them incapable of holding on to a job (Myrdal, 1963; Glasgow, 1980; Auletta, 1982). Such neighborhoods can develop a 'social milieu' that fosters low labor force attachment, out-of-wedlock childbearing, drug and alcohol use, and other social pathologies (Wilson, 1987: 58). However, the residents of high-poverty neighborhoods are quite diverse, and many if not most do not conform to the underclass stereotype (Jargowsky, 1996).

Areas of concentrated disadvantage are referred to by different terms, each with a different set of connotations. In the United States, segregated black neighborhoods are often referred to as *ghettos*, which, according to Wacquant (2004: 2) is constituted of four elements: stigma, constraint, spatial confinement, and institutional encasement. However, the term is disputed and many areas commonly referred to as ghettos do not strictly meet Wacquant's definition (Small, 2008). Poor neighborhoods composed primarily of persons of Hispanic descent are called *barrios* (Moore and Pinderhughes, 1993). Another term used to describe concentrated disadvantage is *slum*, which is "characterized by overcrowding, poor or informal housing, inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, and insecurity of tenure" (Davis, 2006: 23; Forman, 1971). In other nations, a variety of different terms are used,

such as favelas, banlieues, shantytowns, etc., and these terms cannot be assumed to be equivalent in either form or function (Hutchison and Haynes, 2012).

Examples of Areas of Concentrated Disadvantage around the World

In 'Planet of Slums', Mike Davis (2006) discusses the history of slums internationally, where "classic [Nineteenth Century] slums were notoriously parochial and picturesquely local places…characterized by an amalgam of dilapidated housing, overcrowding, disease, poverty, and vice" (22). He argues that the British empire in the colonization period contributed greatly to slums in the Third World, calling the British "the greatest slum-builders of all time" (52). Ostensibly, their policies in Africa forced the local labor force to "live in precarious shantytowns on the fringes of segregated and restricted cities" (52). Similarly, they provided minimal infrastructure to native neighborhoods in India, Burma, and Ceylon, which increased death tolls related to disease outbreaks such as cholera and plague. Davis asserts that state-assisted housing in the Third World is for the most part detrimental to health and safety because public services are lacking (69).

Slums have been growing since the 1970s. In fact, most urban poor now live in slum communities on the periphery of cities in developing countries (Drakakis-Smith, 2012a: 99), in edge developments that are either squatter settlements or pirate subdivisions, both generating a shantytown landscape (Davis, 2006: 37–38). With "more than 200 000 slums on earth, ranging in population from a few hundred to more than a million people" (37), "Megaslums arise when shanty-towns and squatter communities merge in continuous belts of informal housing and poverty, usually on the urban periphery" (Davis, 2006: 26). Examples include barrios in Mexico City, Mexico; condos in Lima, Peru; kampungs in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and slums in Nairobi, Africa, Cairo, Egypt, and countless cities in developing countries across the world (27). The world's highest percentage (62% of the urban population) of slum dwellers is in sub-Saharan Africa, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and the Central African Republic (UN-Habitat, 2013), Ethiopia, Chad, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bombay, Mexico City, Dhaka, Lagos, Cairo, Karachi, Kinshasa-Brazzaville, Sao Paulo, Shanghai, and Delhi. In Bombay, for instance, there are an estimated 10–12 million squatters and tenement dwellers, (Davis, 2006: 23). Millions of people live in substandard settlements 'concentrated' in each of these cities. "The fastest growing slums are in the Russian Federation and the former Soviet republics" (Davis, 2006: 24, referencing e.g., 2003 UN-HABITAT case-studies).

Areas of concentrated disadvantage have taken various forms in different parts of the world such as primitive dwellings (e.g., Mexico City), favelas (e.g., Rio, Sao Paulo), illegal slums in Beijing where rural migrants live in crowded conditions, sprawling squatter settlements in South Asia, Indian slums in Mumbai and New Delhi, fetid slums in Nairobi and Mombasa, and areas in sub-Saharan Africa where hundreds of millions of slum dwellers live devoid of universal primary education and with high infant mortality rates (Davis, 2006: 16–19). Other examples are over-crowded rooms that the poor rent in inner-city tenements in Sao Paulo, mostly prior to the favela boom of the 1980s (Davis, 2006: 34).

There is great variation in the type of dwellings people inhabit in areas of concentrated disadvantage. The *chwals* of Mumbai, according to Davis (2006), are "mostly dilapidated, one-room rental dwelling that crams a household of six people into 15 square meters" (34). Clusters of the *jhuggi-jhonpri* (hutment) squatter settlements that are inhabited by an estimated 3 million (or one-third) of New Delhi's population are typically constructed out of mud, brick, and tin-thatched roofs and are often located right next to five-star hotels or modern high-rise buildings (Dupont et al., 2000). The *callejones* of Lima that are built to be rented by the poor are unstable, substandard dwellings. Thousands of squatters live in abandoned buildings and factories of Buenos Aires. Other examples include roof dwellers in Cairo and boat dwellers (floating slums) in Southeast Asia (Davis, 2006: 34–36). Squatters are the "pioneer settlers of swamps, floodplains, volcano slopes, unstable hillsides, rubbish mountains, chemical dumps, railroad sidings, and desert fringes" (Davis, 2006: 121). Over half of Johannesburg's nonwhite population dwells on "dangerous, unstable dolomitic soil contaminated by generations of mining" (Davis, 2006: 122). Similarly, the soil upon which the favelas of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Caracas, or Manila are built is unsuitable for squatter settlements because of its flood plains.

Urban slums around the world have proliferated in conjunction with rapid urbanization in areas least able to cope with the rise in population. According to the 2009 UN Habitat Global Report on Human Settlements (UN Habitat, 2009), for the first time in history, most of the world's population lived in cities in 2008, and the majority and almost all of new global population growth is predicted to occur in cities and in the global South. With the rise of migrants in slum and squatter districts who often settle in cheap, substandard housing (Drakakis-Smith, 2012b: 16), a rise in urban concentrations of poverty and inequality is predicted and will likely exceed the 32% of the world's urban population (924 million people in 2001) that lives in slums on extremely low incomes (UN Habitat, 2009: 2263).

Marx et al. (2013) point out that contemporary slums of the developing world may constitute 'poverty traps' and 'policy traps' (Marx et al., 2013). Their argument is based on historical and contemporary facts such as surveys collected in slums of Bangladesh, India, Kenya, and Sierra Leone, as well as extensive fieldwork of the Kibera slum in Nairobi. Their findings suggest that slums have often been inhabited by several generations, and as such may constitute 'poverty traps', with it bringing a host of associated disadvantages. For example, slums lack public and private investment, and since housing is non-permanent and tenants have no ownership over the land, they are not incentivized to improve their living conditions. As a result, as more and more people settle into these substandard dwelling areas, overcrowding causes health and sanitation issues and potentially disease outbreaks.

Although slum dwelling has been characterized as intergenerational, slums continue to expand based on rural migration. Regardless, the economic and social mobility of slum dwellers is undermined by high rents to live in close proximity to the city. Ironically, urban slum dwellers often fare worse

than their rural counterparts, as the former have a higher rent burden than their rural counterparts who often do not pay rent. Failing governance, corruption, and otherwise inefficient allocation mechanisms frequently leave room for 'slumlords', local chiefs, gangs, or drug cartels to manage and control the area and financially exploit residents. To be sure, slums are areas of concentrated disadvantage and according to Marx et al. (2013) often pose a 'policy trap' (Marx et al., 2013). Indeed, slum neighborhoods exist 'in the margins' and typically do not receive public investment such as urban planning or economic development. In addition, slum populations are rarely captured by the census that leads to undersampling and other statistical problems that obfuscate reality and make even potential policy interventions difficult.

Concentration of Poverty in the United States

Neighborhoods in which more than 40% of the population have incomes below the federal poverty line are characterized by high rates of single parenthood, low levels of educational attainment, and detachment from the labor force (Jargowsky, 1996). Further, the lack of opportunities and role models in such neighborhoods contributes to a social milieu in which alcohol and drug abuse, gang membership, criminality, and other self-defeating behaviors become more prevalent (Wilson, 1987, 1996). Thus, a good measure of the concentration of the poverty is the percentage of the poor in a given area that lives in neighborhoods, defined as census tracts (Census tracts are small geographic units delineated by the US Census Bureau that contain 4000 persons on average (White, 1987).), in which 40% or more of the population is classified as poor according to the US federal poverty line (Jargowsky and Bane, 1991). (As of 2014, the federal poverty line is $24 000 per year for a family of four (Department of Health and Human Services, 2014).)

By this measure, the concentration of poverty rose dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s (Jargowsky and Bane, 1991; Jargowsky, 1997; Kasarda, 1993). The increases were fastest in the Midwest and Northeast, areas that suffered from rapid deindustrialization and rising poverty. In fact, concentration of poverty is closely correlated with overall economic conditions at the metropolitan level. Not surprisingly, therefore, the concentration of poverty declined substantially during the 1990s, a decade of rapid economic growth and low unemployment (Jargowsky, 2003; Kingsley and Pettit, 2003). The number of high-poverty census tracts – those with poverty rates of 40% or more – fell 26.5%, from 3417 in 1990 to 2510 in 2000 (Jargowsky, 2003).

Since 2000, the spatial concentration of poverty has surged again. (The results presented here draw heavily on Jargowsky (2013, 2014b).) The count of high-poverty census tracts increased by 800 (32%) between 2000 and the 2005–09 American Community Survey data to nearly the level of 1990, even though these data span more than 3 years before the financial crisis hit in late 2008. The latest data, spanning 2008–12, show that the number of high-poverty tracts has increased to 4054, a 62% since 2000 (Jargowsky, 2014b). The number of people living in high-poverty neighborhoods – census tracts with poverty rates of 40% or more – increased from 7.1 to 12.4 million, a 72% since 2000.

The racial/ethnic composition of the population of high-poverty neighborhoods has changed due to different rates of growth in among demographic subgroups. For example, while the population in high-poverty neighborhoods has risen for all racial and ethnic groups, it has grown fastest among non-Hispanic whites; the count of whites in high-poverty areas more than doubled, increasing 122% between 2000 and the most recent data. In comparison, the black and Hispanic population of those areas increased 51 and 74%, respectively. As a result, whites now make up 26% of the population of high-poverty tracts, compared to 20% in 2000. The black population share has declined from 42% in 2000 to 37% in 2008–12. The Hispanic share has remained constant at approximately 31%.

While the number of high-poverty neighborhoods has risen, it is also true that the number of poor persons has risen overall, both due to population growth and the general rise in the poverty rate since 2000. To ask whether poverty is more concentrated, we must examine the percentage of the poor living in high-poverty areas. In the average metropolitan area, the percentage of the poor living in high-poverty neighborhoods rose from 11.6 to 15% between the 2000 and 2008–12 period, although the concentration of poverty is still lower than that in 1990, when it was 16.8%. It rose for all groups, though the increase was fastest for whites – rising from 5.1 to 8.4%. Despite the recent increase in whites living in high-poverty areas, concentration of poverty still differentially affects members of minority groups. The black poor are nearly three times more likely than the white poor to live in high-poverty neighborhoods, 24.6% compared to 8.4%. The Hispanic poor are twice as likely as the white poor to be in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty.

Causes of the Concentration of Disadvantage

One of main causes of the concentration of poverty in urban centers in the United States is deindustrialization, which eroded the historic job base of many older industrial cities (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982; Gillette, 2011). Ironically, deindustrialization occurred just after a wave of building large-scale public housing projects, which anchored to the poor to areas where jobs for less well-educated workers were becoming nonexistent (Venkatesh, 2002).

Another important factor in the creation of high-poverty neighborhoods was the vast outmigration to the suburbs that began after World War II and accelerated in the 1960s when urban riots, violent crime, and racial tensions came to the fore (Mieskowski and Mills, 1993; Massey and Denton, 1988). Two factors are key to understanding the effect of the suburban explosion on central cities. First, suburban growth produced housing units much faster than needed to accommodate metropolitan population growth. Between 1970 and 1990, for example, most large central cities and some older inner-ring lost population rapidly, while successive new suburban rings gained population (Jargowsky, 2002). Second, zoning was used to prevent low-income persons and racial minorities from leaving the confines of the central city (Galster, 2012; Fischel, 2004). In effect, while discrimination on the basis of race is strictly illegal,

discrimination on the basis of income, through exclusionary zoning, is the law of the land. The result is selective outmigration, segregation by race and class, depopulation of the inner city and older suburbs, and concentration of poverty. In additions to limits on mobility, racial and class differences in neighborhood choice patterns tend to reinforce and sustain existing segregated patterns (Sampson and Sharkey, 2008).

In other nations, the causal sequence can be quite different. Some of the main contributing forces to slum expansion around the world are the rapid rate of rural to urban migration due to industrialization, the lack of neighborhood planning, and overpopulation in general (Henderson, 2010; UN Habitat, 2009). Most slum dwellers are rural residents who migrated to cities in search of employment opportunities, education for their children, and improved health and social services. The kinds of jobs that migrants seek are in manufacturing and the service sector. Although urbanization and economic development are intertwined, they are not causally related. Rapid urbanization does not necessarily lead to per capita income growth (Henderson, 2010). As a result, migrants looking for work and improvement in quality of life who move to the urban areas may wind up in similar or worse conditions of poverty then where they left.

Consequences of the Concentration of Disadvantage

Areas of concentrated disadvantage where people are subjected to adverse economic and physical conditions have negative effects on their residents, and there are also larger societal costs associated with slums. Nunes and Veloso (2012) write that the Brazilian favelas in Rio de Janeiro and other large cities "arose as a marginal space where economically and socially excluded individuals gathered – a function that has changed very little" (Hutchison and Haynes, 2012). Exclusion, it would seem, is dangerous when coupled with inequality. Gilbert (2012) points out that inequality has increased in Latin American cities where the institutions create a second-class citizenship status for the poor, and "the education that you get marks you for life, determining your occupational possibilities" (quoting Roberts, 2004: 196 in Hutchison and Haynes (2012: 212)).

Aside from the unsafe conditions of these settlements based on local geological and climatic hazards, these communities are undesirable places to live for a variety of reasons. As such, they are often marked by alcohol stores, litter, stagnant water, open sewage, etc. Such adversity often has detrimental effects. For instance, in refugee camps of Gaza and Zaire, the substandard sanitary conditions lead to cholera and other disease outbreaks. Not surprisingly, infant mortality rates are often much higher in unsanitary living areas.

Social segregation is accentuated through inequality, and rich areas are segregated from poor ones, for example, in Bogota, Rio de Janeiro, Caracas, Santiago, etc. creating spatial barriers also through gated communities. There has been a historical division into a 'two-class' society in which the well-off children attend private institutions and elite private recreational clubs. Gilbert (2012) argues that there is a different cultural, historical context in Latin America where the rich are spatially segregated (e.g., gated communities); however, settlements inhabited by the poor are not necessarily cut off from contextual educational and employment opportunities.

Relating to spatial segregation in France, Castañeda (2012) points out that the banlieues at the outskirts of Paris are comparable with the US ghettos in that they have produced a ghetto subculture inclusive of French rap and youth slang; are home to immigrants; and are marked by high unemployment rates, violence, lacking social integration and equality, and segregated, much like black ghettos in the United States (Castañeda, 2012: 177–179). He argues that relative deprivation is most important for people in ghettos and banlieues, and "long-lasting ethnic segregation is not voluntary but imposed from the outside" (Castañeda, 2012: 184).

The question of whether poor neighborhoods have independent effects on residents has been extensively studied in the United States, with mixed results (Duncan et al., 1997). Low-income neighborhoods have lower levels of education, employment, and earnings and higher rates of poverty, single-parent families, and other social problems. However, these characteristics may be compositional rather than causal; in other words, people with those characteristics may migrate into high-poverty areas to obtain cheap housing, or people who lack those characteristics may move out (Tienda, 1991). The question is whether these concentrations of poverty have negative effects on social and economic outcomes after controlling for individual and family traits. Increasing evidence suggests that it does have negative effects, particularly when studies take into account long-term and multigenerational exposure to disadvantage neighborhood contexts (Sampson et al., 2008; Sharkey and Elwert, 2011).

Concentration of disadvantage has implications for educational outcomes because schools are creatures of neighborhoods (Levy, 1995). Often, the relationship is legally encoded in school attendance zone boundaries. Even schools that draw on larger and less precise areas, such as magnet and charter schools, commuting time and transportation costs often restrict attendance to those who live relatively nearby. Schools usually closely reflect the racial and economic composition of the surrounding community. When they do differ, public schools will tend to have a greater proportion of minority and low-income children, due to life-cycle differences and differential selection into private schools and home schooling. Thus, schools are often even more segregated by race and income than is the surrounding community (Rivkin, 1994; Jargowsky, 2014a).

As a result, when poor families reside in different neighborhoods than middle- and upper-income families, their children will likely attend different schools than more affluent children. Over time, the schools themselves can become different. Schools in poorer neighborhoods have greater needs than schools with more advantaged children. Teachers and school administrators may develop lower academic expectations when they deal predominantly with poor children, many of whom who do not have resources or support in the home (Farkas, 1996). In some inner-city schools, working hard and getting good grades is derided as 'acting white' (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Fryer and Torelli, 2010). Even students who resist caving in to peer pressure

may still be impeded in learning if enough classmates are disruptive and slow the pace of instruction. These so-called peer effects on students have been documented in a number of carefully controlled studies (Hanushek et al., 2003; Summers and Wolfe, 1977; Zimmer and Toma, 2000). Over and above peer effects, neighborhood conditions have spillover effects on academic achievement (Crane, 1991; Crowder and South, 2003; Datcher, 1982; Jargowsky and El Komi, 2011).

A variety of studies have found that neighborhoods matter for child and adolescent development across a variety of developmental outcomes (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000). For example, a child's IQ at 36 months of age is related to the presence of affluent families in the child's neighborhood after controlling for family income, mother's education, family structure, and race (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993: Table 2). Children raised in families exposed to high-poverty neighborhoods for two consecutive generations score more than half a standard deviation lower on measures of cognitive ability, even after controlling for a wide range of family and individual characteristics (Sharkey and Elwert, 2011). Girls with fewer affluent neighbors initiated sexual activity earlier and were more likely to have out-of-wedlock birth, again controlling for family characteristics (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Browning et al., 2004; Crane, 1991). Children with a high proportion of poor neighbors have more behavioral problems, lower self-esteem, and more symptoms of depression (Chase-Lansdale and Gordon, 1996; Chase-Lansdale et al., 1997). The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods found that exposure to nearby homicides has an immediate and substantial effect on children's performance reading and vocabulary assessment (Sharkey, 2010).

The concentration of poverty often makes for an unhealthy environment with few parks and recreational resources, greater pollution, more alcohol outlets, more advertising for alcohol and tobacco, and less availability of healthy foods (Barbeau et al., 2005; Gordon-Larsen et al., 2006; Hackbarth et al., 2001; Lopez and Hynes, 2006; Wolch et al., 2005). Residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods suffer higher rates of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis (Acevedo-Garcia, 2000), premature birth (Osypuk and Acevedo-Garcia, 2008), self-report of poor health (Subramanian et al., 2005), diabetes (Ludwig et al., 2011), and obesity (Lopez and Hynes, 2006; Ludwig et al., 2011). Residence in economically and socially isolated census tracts increases the probability that adolescents will engage in health-risk behaviors (Frank and Bjornstrom, 2011; Frank et al., 2007).

Conclusion

Concentration of disadvantage, concentration of poverty, and related concepts are ways of thinking about the spatial dimension of disadvantage. The key insight is that the problems of poverty and other social disadvantages are magnified when disadvantage is clustered at the neighborhood level. Indeed, many of the problems associated with poverty – exposure to crime and violence, failing schools, dilapidated housing – are actually neighborhood characteristics. Hence, the study of poverty and disadvantage would be incomplete without consideration of concentration and its effects.

See also: Community Sociology; Human Ecology; Neighborhood Effects; Poverty, Culture of; Poverty, Geography of; Spatial Equity; Underclass; Urban Sociology.

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