

Neighborhoods and Child Development

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Overview

- I am interested in the factors that affect the health and development of children and youth in high-poverty urban neighborhoods.
- I will discuss past and present research with a particular focus on two factors:
 - Neighborhood Poverty
 - Child Saturation
- Briefly address implications

Neighborhoods and development

- There have been numerous studies on the effects of neighborhoods on cognitive development, academic achievement, and delinquency, with most of these studies converging on the conclusion that neighborhoods with high levels of poverty are less developmentally supportive than more affluent neighborhoods.

Personality: one way to look at development

- A lens to look at development
 - Pulkkinen and Caspi (2002) (p.11) suggest that personality affects development through three transactional processes:
 - Reactive transactions occur when different individuals exposed to the same environment experience it, interpret it, and react to it differently.
 - Evocative transactions occur when an individual's personality evokes different responses from others.
 - Proactive transactions occur when individuals select or create (consciously or not) environments of their own.

The good, the sad, and the bad

- The best validated typology includes three personality types: *resilient*, *over-controlled*, and *under-controlled* (Caspi, 1998).
 - Resilients tend to exhibit positive emotionality, are socially adept, and are able to regulate their emotions effectively.
 - Over-controlled internalizing behaviors, problems in peer relationships
 - Under-controlled externalizing behaviors, problems in peer relationships

Personality affects youth development

- Studies, which have measured personality in childhood and risk behaviors in adolescence and young adulthood, suggest that
 - individuals characterized by an under-controlled and over-controlled personality type in childhood are more likely to do poorly in school (Hart, Hoffman, Edelstein, and Keller, 1997)
 - and engage in antisocial (Caspi, et al., 1997) and high risk behaviors (Caspi, et al., 1997, Weir and Gjerde, 2002) later in life.

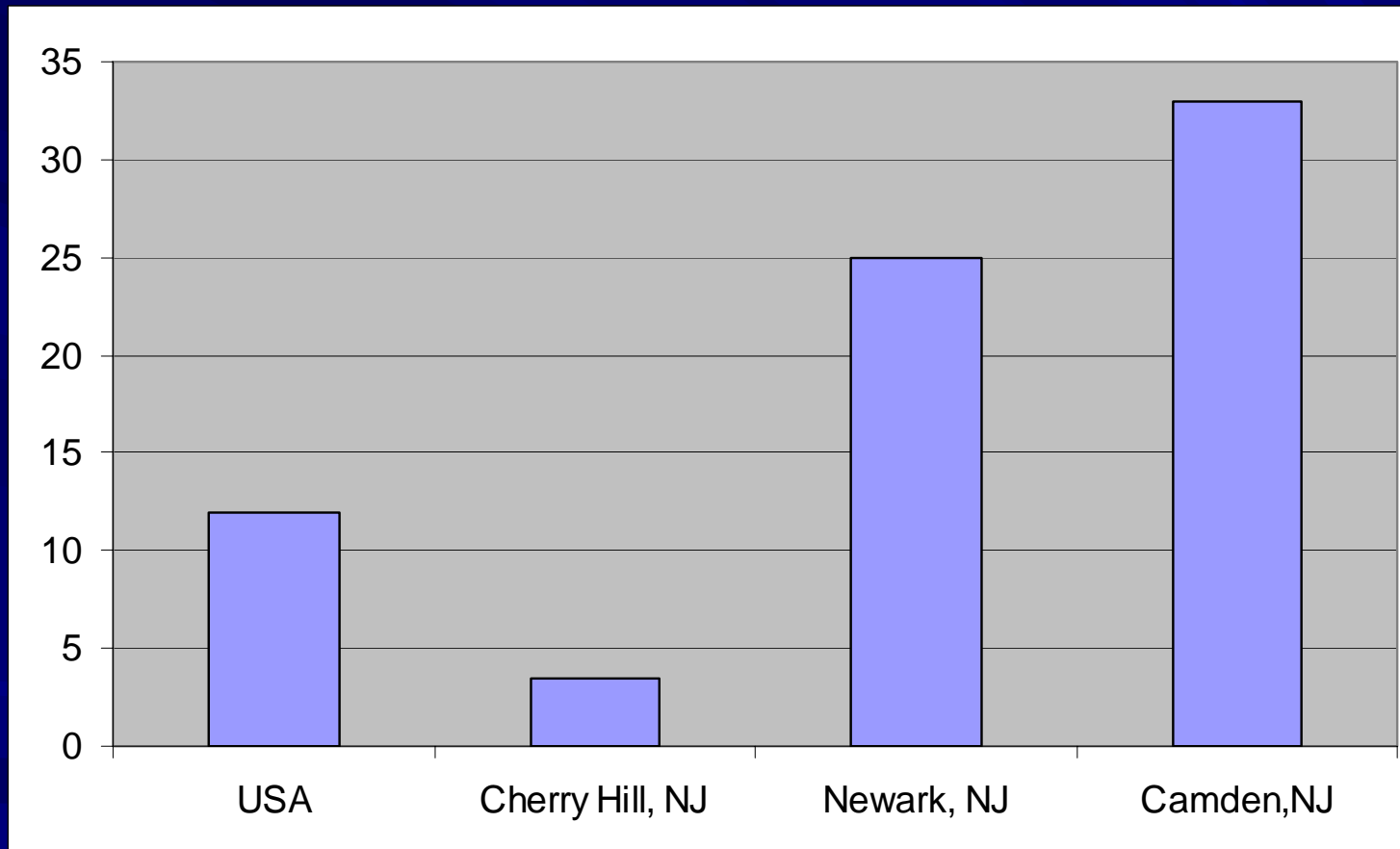
Personality Change and Household Stress

- In previous research, (Hart, Atkins, & Fegley, 2003) we demonstrated that predictors of stress within the family (poverty status, family size, parental presence, home environment) were predictive of change from the resilient personality type to the under-controlled type.
 - Specifically, children whose families were characterized by many of these predictors were more likely to change from the resilient type to the under-controlled type than children whose families had few of these characteristics.

Personality Change and Neighborhood Stress

- Analyses of a nationally representative data set (Hart & Atkins, under review) suggest that children in high poverty neighborhoods were more likely to show the maladaptive change in personality than were children in affluent neighborhoods.

Family Poverty Rates



Child Saturation

Child Density

- Proportion of youth to adults in a neighborhood.

Why would this matter?

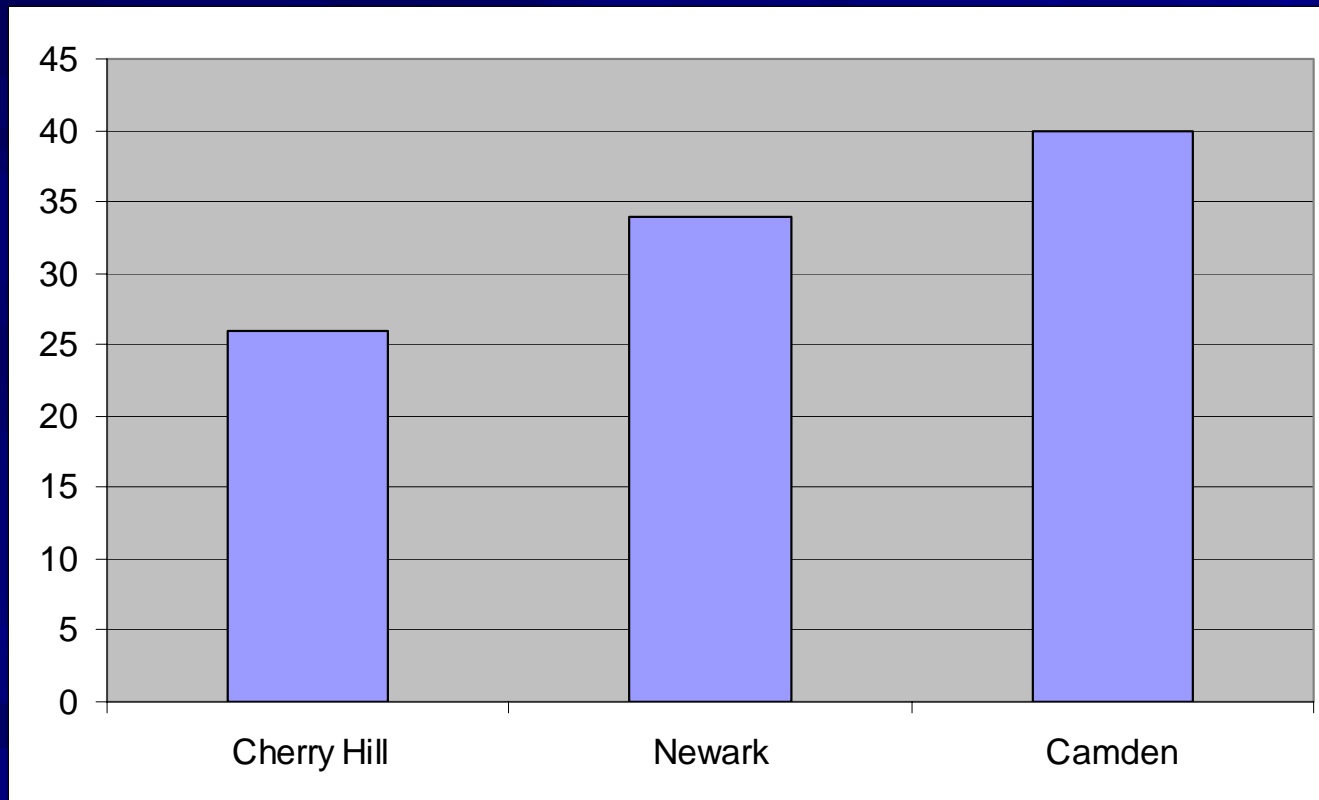
■ Social influence theory

- If you interact with kids you will be influenced by kids.
- If you interact with adults you will be influenced by adults.

Child-saturation, Poverty and Youth Development

- An adolescent living in a community in which a large fraction of the population is composed of children and adolescents, a child-saturated community, will interact more often with peers, and consequently will be more influenced by them, than will an adolescent in an adult-saturated community (Hart, Atkins, Markey, & Youniss, 2004).
 - Youth in high-poverty, child dense neighborhoods have poorer outcomes than youth in more affluent, less child-dense neighborhoods.

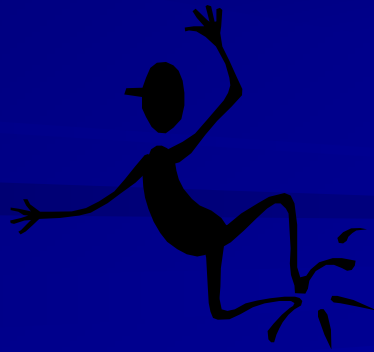
Child Density Ratios



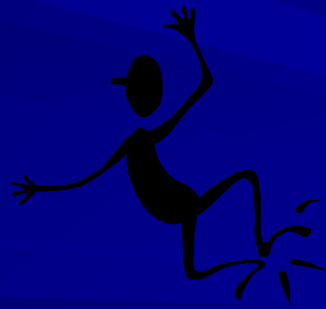
May not seem like a big difference...

- Demographic data suggest that adults in these communities differ in resources.

Cherry Hill 25%



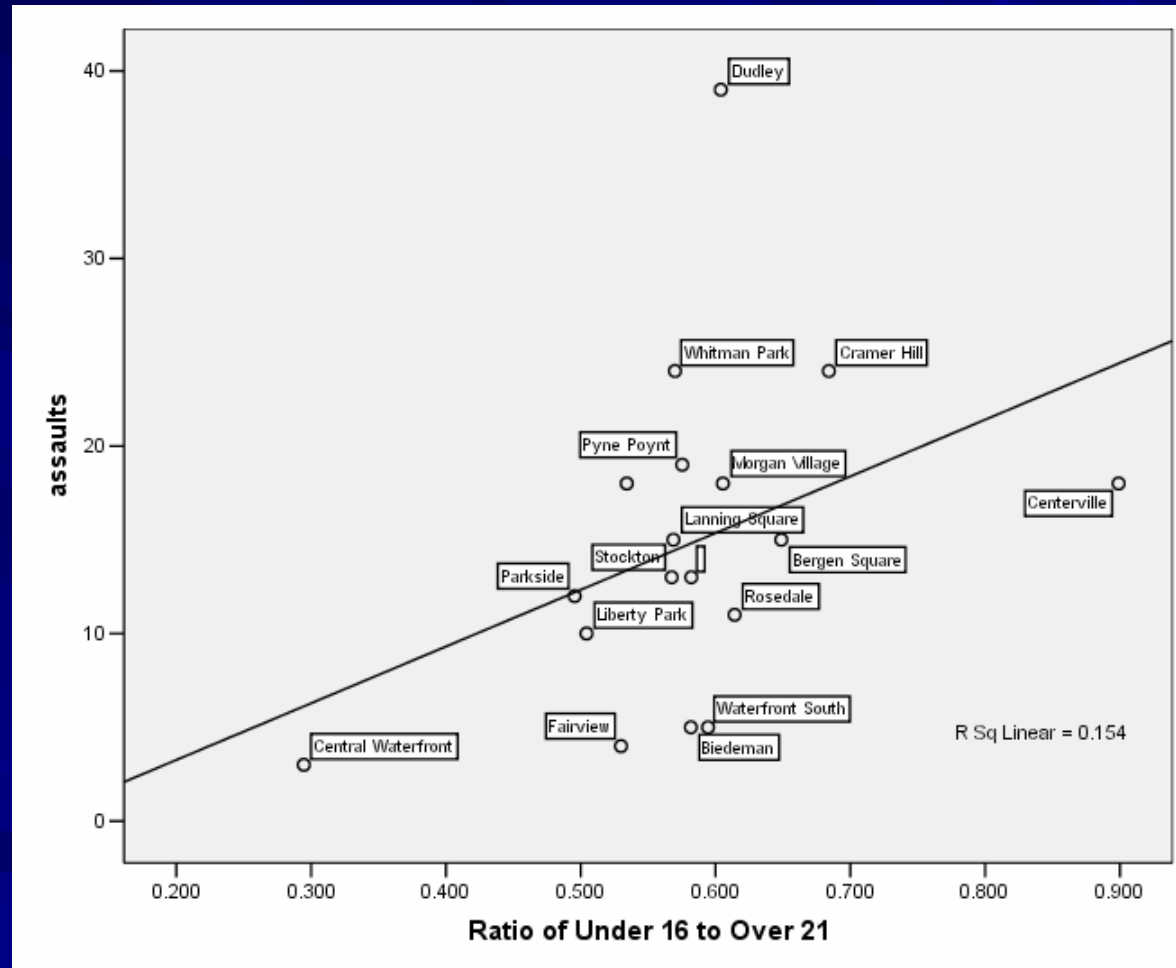
Newark 34%



Violence and child density

- Analyses of assault statistics from Camden indicate that assaults increase in neighborhoods are associated with child density.

Aggravated assaults with guns in Camden, NJ



Implications

- Act sooner rather than later
 - There is some evidence that early intervention may reduce the stress leading to personality change.

Implications

- Child-saturated census tracts particularly in need of institutions which offer opportunity to youth.
- Youthful neighborhoods are not inherently bad—but there's an energy which needs to be captured.
- This energy needs to be directed by adults and institutions.
 - Interventions in which high risk youth are placed together may *increase* problem behavior.
 - buddy system
 - groups
 - summer camps