Perceived racial concentration of current neighborhood among diverse community health center patients: Racial/ethnic differences in subjective perceptions?

Meng-Ru Cheng1, MSPH, Melody S. Goodman1, PhD, Jewel Stafford1, MSW, Christina Lachance, MPH, Kimberly Kaphingst1, ScD
1Division of Public Health Sciences, Department of Surgery, Washington University School of Medicine
2National Human Genome Research Institute, National Institutes of Health

Introduction

Race and ethnicity are crucial constructs in public health research. The development of measures to assess individuals’ perceptions of the racial/ethnic concentration of their communities is needed to evaluate the relationship between segregation experience and health. This study examined differences between self-reported racial concentration of current neighborhood and 2010 Census data.

Methods

Cross-sectional questionnaires were used to measure self-reported racial concentration and town of residence among 943 adult community health center visitors in Suffolk County, NY. Participants were asked to describe the racial concentration (e.g., mostly Whites, half Blacks, some Hispanics) of their current neighborhood, as well as their town of residence. We examined the concordance between self-reported racial concentration of current neighborhood and 2010 Census data. We stratified the analysis by race/ethnicity to examine differences by subgroup. Receiver operating characteristics (ROC) curves were created to examine diagnostic accuracy of the self-reported racial concentration measure when compared to 2010 Census data.

Results

The sample used in analysis was 36.5% Non-Hispanic White, 36.1% Non-Hispanic Black and 27.4% Hispanic. Respondents who self-reported as Non-Hispanic White (χ²=54.2, p<0.0001), had adequate health literacy (χ²=8.1, p=0.0039), or had higher household income (χ²=27.4, p=0.001), or had higher household income (χ²=19.4, p=0.0003) were more likely to self-report racial concentration of their neighborhood in concordance with 2010 Census estimates. Self-reported racial concentration had good diagnostic accuracy relative to 2010 Census data. Relative to Census estimates, 33.6% of Whites underestimated the proportion of their current neighborhood that was White, 68.5% of Blacks overestimated the proportion that was Black, and 33.3% of Hispanics overestimated the proportion that was Hispanic. Respondents had the highest concordance when reporting the perceived proportion of whites. Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to overestimate the proportion of people of their own race in their neighborhood.

Discussion

Neighborhood was not defined for survey respondents; it is likely that respondents definition of neighborhood is smaller than town as defined by census. There is the potential for neighborhoods within a town to be more segregated than the town overall. Future studies are needed to validate self-reported measures of individuals’ perceptions of the racial/ethnic concentration of their communities to study the association between segregation and health.

References

1. Suffolk County Government – Online Maps

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