

Your neighborhood can affect your health

April 9 2008

Research carried out at the Peninsula Medical School, South West England, has found strong links between neighbourhood deprivation and the physical and intellectual health of older people.

Two studies were conducted, both using data on participants in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA).

The first study investigated over 7,000 individuals aged 52 and older who lived in urban areas across England. The study found that even when individual differences in education and income were taken into account, people who lived in the most deprived areas were significantly more likely to have poorer cognitive function than those living in the least deprived areas. These findings represent a cause for concern because poor cognitive function in older people is closely linked to the risk of developing dementia.

Meanwhile, the second study, which involved 4,148 individuals aged 60 and over, assessed whether mobility disability and neighbourhood deprivation are linked. Over a two-year period, 13.6% of those in the most deprived areas developed problems with mobility compared to 4.0% of those in the least deprived areas. As with the first studies, these figures took into account individual differences in income, education, and health.

Dr. Iain Lang from the Peninsula Medical School, who led the research for both studies, commented: “These findings show the first direct links between the state of a neighbourhood and levels of functioning among

its middle-aged and older residents. For both men and women, those living in deprived areas have poorer cognitive function and higher rates of mobility problems than their counterparts in ‘better’ areas.”

He added: “Clearly the type of neighbourhood you live in has an important effect on your health in later life. This underlines how important it is for local and central government to provide adequate levels of health and social care where they are most needed – in our poorest communities.”

Source: The Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry

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