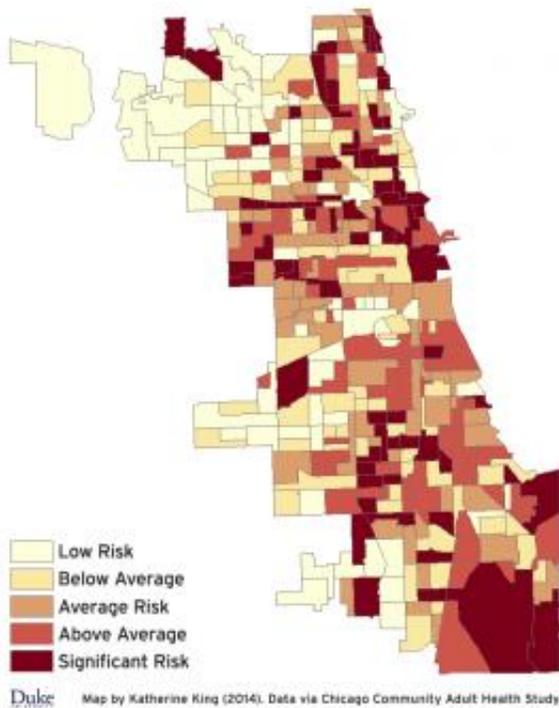


Poor neighborhoods create misfortune, ill health

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MAPPING HARDSHIP AND HEALTH

Duke University studied connections between how likely residents of 343 Chicago neighborhoods would be to experience adverse life events such as robbery, divorce and job loss and what happened to their health as a result.



Duke University studied connections between how likely residents of 343 Chicago neighborhoods would be to experience adverse life events such as robbery, divorce and job loss and what happened to their health as a result. Credit: Jonathan Lee, Duke University

Residents of poorer Chicago neighborhoods are more likely to suffer terrible life events—and their health suffers as a result, according to a new Duke University study.

The misfortunes they face can come in many forms—from mugging to job loss to the death of a loved one—and the stress involved often leads to anxiety, depression and other illnesses, according to the study, released April 8 in *PLoS ONE*, an open access, peer-reviewed journal.

"If you live in a poor Chicago neighborhood, bad things are more likely to happen to you," said sociologist Katherine King, a visiting assistant professor of community and family medicine at Duke. "Small, everyday stresses have long been linked to poverty. But our findings suggest that huge, life-altering traumas, while infrequent, affect the poor to an inordinate degree and lead to a lot of health problems."

King co-authored the study with Christin Ogle, a postdoctoral fellow in Duke's psychology and neuroscience department.

The findings build on previous research that connects poverty with bad health by linking illnesses and a collection of life-changing negative events.

The study, based on the surveys of 3,105 Chicagoans in 343 city [neighborhoods](#), examined data on 15 life-changing events like being assaulted or robbed, getting divorced, getting into legal trouble and having a child die.

"These are major life events, different than every-day stresses," King said. "It's bigger than having your car towed. These are life-changes that could lead to anxiety or depression."

The study found that residents of poorer neighborhoods who reported

one or more of these life-changing events were more likely to also have serious [health](#) issues. The reasons are complex, King said. Many of the traumatic events involve exposure to risk, like burglary, legal trouble or an ill or dying child.

Other events involve a lack of resources, like a lost job or long-term illness. And when an entire neighborhood is poor, the risks are more concentrated and resources are harder to access, which is why people struggle to find a new job or get treatment for an illness, King said.

Chicago was chosen for this study because a great deal of neighborhood research has been conducted there and the city has significant pockets of immigrants to draw data from, King said. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish and Polish to reflect the city's diversity.

"It's a Midwestern Ellis Island," she said.

More information: "Negative Life Events Vary By Neighborhood and Confound the Relationship Between Neighborhood Context and Psychological Well-Being," Katherine King and Christin Ogle. *PLoS ONE*, April 8, 2014. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0093539](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0093539)

Provided by Duke University

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