Outline

1. Non-experimental evidence: Neighborhood structure ➤ Risk behavior

2. Experimental evidence: Neighborhood structure ➤ Risk behavior

3. Theoretical models
   Mechanisms behind the links
What is a neighborhood?
Why Neighborhoods?

• Research focus on individual & family factors
• Adolescence marked by growing importance of contexts beyond family …more than peers
• Important social settings for youth
  – Venue for peer interactions
  – Major institutional basis for allocation resources
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Non-Experimental Evidence: Study Designs

- **Post-hoc approach**
  - National data sets and city/regional samples
  - US Census data
    - SES/income (high & low)
    - Racial/ethnic diversity
    - Residential instability

- **Neighborhood-based studies**
  - Generate desired variability
  - More reliable neighborhood estimates
  - Beyond census
Non-Experimental Evidence: Findings on SES

• High-SES → Higher achievement
  – Possibly stronger for males than females

• Low-SES → More behavior and emotional problems, risky behavior, and delinquency

• Low SES → More early childbearing, less contraceptive use & more frequent intercourse
Non-Experimental Evidence: Summary

- Small to modest effects
- Consistent across national and neighborhood-based studies
- Covary for extensive child and family background characteristics
- Selection problems
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Experimental Evidence: Mobility Programs

- Target low-income families in public housing in high-poverty neighborhoods
- Random or quasi-random assignment to move to lower poverty neighborhoods
- Not directly target adolescent risk behavior
Experimental Evidence: Gautreaux Program

• Desegregation of Chicago’s public housing

• Vouchers to move to private housing
  – Poor city neighborhoods
  – Middle-class suburbs

• After at least 10 years in suburbs (vs. city)…

  Achievement: ↑ high school graduation, college attendance, employment, wages

  Crime: Boys: ↓ arrests & conviction for drug offenses
        Girls: ↑ conviction for criminal offenses
Experimental Evidence: Moving to Opportunity (MTO)

- 4,600 families in public housing (5 cities)

- Randomly assigned to 1 of 3 groups:
  - Voucher for private housing in low-poverty neighborhood
  - Voucher for private housing in neighborhood of choice
  - Remain in public housing

- After 5 years in low-poverty neighborhood
  - **Substance Use:**
    - **Girls:** ↓ marijuana/alcohol use
    - **Boys:** ↑ cigarette use
  - **Crime:**
    - **Girls:** ↓ arrests for violent & property crimes
    - **Boys:** ↑ arrests for property crimes
  - **Mental Health:**
    - **Girls:** ↓ psychological distress/anxiety
  - **No effects:**
    - delinquency, sexual behaviors, achievement, physical health
Experimental Evidence: Yonkers Family & Community Project

• Desegregation order: 200 townhouses built in 8 middle-class neighborhoods
• Assigned via lottery to new public housing
• Quasi-experimental study of 315 families
  – Lottery winners
  – Lottery losers & similar families
• After 7 yrs in middle-class neighborhoods ...

  Substance Use: ↑ total use (tobacco, alcohol & marijuana)
  Behavior Problems: ↑ hyperactivity

Negative effects largely for older adolescents
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Theoretical Models

- Influence of neighborhoods direct & indirect

- Other contexts modify influence of neighborhood effects

- Three proposed models
Institutional Resources

Quantity, quality, diversity, and affordability of resources in neighborhood

- Lower-SES neighborhoods fewer and lower quality resources

- Institutional resources important to adolescents’ risk behavior:
  - Schools
  - Health and social services
  - Recreational and social programs
  - Employment
Norms and Collective Efficacy

Neighborhood-level capacity to work together towards common goals and values

- Cohesion among members reinforces norms and values regarding behavior
- When collective efficacy strong, physical threats reduced
  - Violence
  - Availability of illegal and harmful substances
- Function of neighborhood structure
Relationships and Ties

Families and social networks

• Neighborhood disadvantage affects adolescents via parents’ well-being & behavior

• Parenting modifies neighborhood influences on adolescent risk behavior
  – **Supervision/monitoring** modulates exposure to extra-familial influences
  – **Sensitivity/warmth** protects against consequences of neighborhood disadvantage
Adolescent Risk Behavior: Evidence for Theoretical Models

Institutional Resources
• Emerging support for role of social and recreational resources

Norms & Collective Efficacy
• Compelling evidence for importance of community-level supervision of youth

Relationships & Ties
• Mixed findings but highlight salience of parental monitoring and support
Percent change in odds of sexual onset w/1 SD increase in collective efficacy by gender & parental control

Conclusions

• Neighborhood context matters

• Poverty/low SES most consistent
  – Collective efficacy potential pathway

• Neighborhood effects dependent on gender and other characteristics

• Magnitude of effects

• Understanding complexities informs effective programs and policies