



Community Report

FALL 2019

Justice, Housing & Health Study



About JustHouHS and the New Haven case study

The Justice, Housing, and Health Study (JustHouHS) is a research project investigating how mass incarceration, housing instability, and housing policies are related to health and sexual risk. New Haven is the site of a case study to better understand these issues. We are conducting a survey of 400, and interviews with 54, low-income New Haven residents, half of whom were released from prison or jail within a year of study enrollment. Participants come in every six months for two years to give us their input. In October we will launch our fifth and final survey. We are happy to report that more than 85% of participants have come back to the office for a follow up survey. We wish to offer our heartfelt gratitude to all those that have taken the time to share their experiences through the surveys and interviews. If you think you might be due for a survey or an interview, please call the office at **203-764-7335**. You can also text us at **475-209-3506**.

We are conducting interviews with community experts:

We interview people in New Haven and Connecticut that are knowledgeable about policies and systems of housing, health, and criminal justice. We have interviewed lawyers, people who work at halfway houses, health advocates, landlords, and service providers. They share their views about how these systems work, giving us a more complex understanding of the challenges participants face. If you know someone that has expertise on these issues, let us know!

Meet our Community Advisory Board (CAB)

Two or three times a year, we meet with dedicated community members and professionals who volunteer their time and expertise to help with the study. We share information and get their views on methods, data collection, and ongoing analyses of the data. Members of the CAB report on happenings within their organizations or in New Haven and share their expert opinion on issues of relevance to JustHouHS. Here are a few organizations with staff represented on our CAB: Columbus House, Liberty Community Services, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Elm City Communities, Connecticut Fair Housing Center, Fair Haven Community Health Clinic, Cornell Scott Hill Health Center, the Community Foundation of New Haven, Fresh Start, the New Haven Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Parole within the Department of Corrections. We also have community members on the Board with relevant lived experience. Thank you to all Board members! If you are interested in attending a Community Advisory Board meeting, let us know.

FINDINGS: While data collection is ongoing, we have begun analyzing JustHouHS data from both the surveys and interviews. Here is a description of some of our analysis projects. Some have been completed and others are still ongoing.

Mass Incarceration, Housing, and HV/STI Risk: Focusing Attention on Women

Mass incarceration contributes to race, class, and gender inequality. It is recognized as a social determinant of health: an aspect of society that helps or hinders people in leading healthy lives. However, we don't understand all the specific ways mass incarceration affects health. Women are an understudied group when it comes to the impacts of the criminal justice system. We are using JustHouHS data from both surveys and interviews to consider women as individuals with their own criminal justice histories, partners and family members of those who have been incarcerated, and residents of neighborhoods deeply affected by mass incarceration. For this ongoing analysis, we are asking questions such as: how do women access housing? What role do they play in providing housing to others? How do their housing situations impact their health, relationships, and sexual risk?

How Healthy Do Participants Feel? Does this Relate to Rental Assistance?

Given the rising cost of housing, rental assistance (in the form of Section 8 vouchers and units in Housing Authority buildings) is a main source of affordable housing for low-income Americans. But since there aren't enough units available, less than one in four eligible families receives this help. Using data from our first JustHouHS survey, we looked at how people receiving rental assistance rated their health, compared to those who didn't receive rental assistance. We found that those who receive rental assistance are less likely to report having poor or fair health, and this wasn't due to differences in the characteristics of people in the two groups. These findings suggest that the health of low-income Americans may improve if more people are able to access rental assistance. Keene, D., Nicolai, L., Rosenberg, A., Schlesinger, P., Blankenship, K. (in press). Rent Assistance and Self Rated Health. *Journal of Healthcare for the Poor and Underserved*.

Restrictive Public Housing Policies for those with Criminal Records: Is Health Impacted?

JustHouHS team members wanted to better understand how housing authorities interpret policies related to public housing admissions and occupancy in making decisions about people with criminal justice histories. We analyzed the policies of 154 housing authorities in cities with populations of 100,000 or more. We found that most policies are more restrictive toward people with a criminal justice history than is required by law. We also found that the policies are very different from one housing authority to the next and the rules often allow employees at housing authorities to exercise discretion in deciding who is admitted to or forced to leave public housing. We consider these policies to be one of the many ways that criminal justice related restrictions impact the health of communities.

Finding Privacy and Peace after Incarceration

People returning from prison are re-establishing their lives in the community. Often, their living situations are temporary: most returning citizens live in halfway

houses, in other people's homes, or are homeless. These places can contribute stress to the challenge of re-entry. We are using the JustHouHS interview data to examine participants' experiences in these settings. We find that they feel watched and on guard in the places where they sleep and seek privacy, and they don't feel they receive help from residential institutions. They are burdened by punitive rules and a lack of private living space. We hope that sharing this information with people who create policies and programs related to housing for returning citizens can help them improve available options.

Evictions and Rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections

While not based on the New Haven case study data, research team members explored the impact of eviction on health, specifically, rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI). Using eviction and STI data from counties across the U.S., they found that eviction was significantly associated with chlamydia and gonorrhea rates. This association was not based on other factors that might have also predicted STI rates (such as poverty level or urban, rural, or suburban setting). These findings suggest that evictions result in residential instability in a way that may increase STI risk. Niccolai, L. M., Blankenship, K. M., & Keene, D. E. (2019). Eviction from renter-occupied households and rates of sexually transmitted infections: A county-level ecological analysis. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases, 46*(1), 63-68.

Neighborhood Reputation and Health: What is the Connection?

Research shows that neighborhood reputations can affect the health of their residents. For example, individuals who reside in neighborhoods with poor reputations may face discrimination based on where they live, or they may find it more difficult to receive the services they need in a timely manner. Neighborhood reputations may also affect how residents feel about themselves and how they relate to each other. In the JustHouHS survey we asked how much people agreed with the statement: "Generally, my neighborhood has a good reputation." Initial findings show that people who believe that they live in a neighborhood with a poor

reputation are 4.5 times more likely to feel they don't trust or feel close with their neighbors compared to participants who believe their neighborhood has a good reputation. We also found that participants who felt that their neighborhood had a poor reputation were slightly more likely to report serious psychological distress compared to those who felt good about their neighborhood's reputation.

What's Next?

While JustHouHS data collection will conclude in early 2020, we are exploring new research questions and available funding opportunities. If you are a current JustHouHS research participant and would like to be contacted if we start a new research project, please let us know and keep your contact information up to date. See our contact information below.

Funding

JustHouHS is funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (R01 MH110192, Kim Blankenship, Principal Investigator) and facilitated by services and resources provided by the District of Columbia Center for AIDS Research (National Institutes of Health grant AI117970) and the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS at Yale University (National Institute of Mental Health Grant No. P30MH062294, Paul D. Cleary, Ph.D., Principal Investigator).

Research Team

American University: Kim Blankenship, Akiv Dawson, Cherie Saulter, Erdal Tekin

Drexel University: Ali Groves, Jonathan Purtle

Yale University: Lexi Grimaldi, Danya Keene, Trace Kershaw, Linda Niccolai, Anna Preston, Alana Rosenberg, Penelope Schlesinger, Emma Tran

Contact Us

129 Church Street, #813 | New Haven, CT 06510

Phone: (203) 764-7335

Email: justhouhs@yale.edu

If you are interested in other research opportunities at Yale, please call:

The Stress Center: 888-978-7377

Yale Studies: 877-978-8343

Stop Smoking Studies: 978-822-6522