

PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP
THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2009, 1:00 pm – 5:30 pm
HALF DAY WORKSHOP

Title

Geographic and Spatial Analysis in Social Work Research: Concepts and Tools

Presenters

Claudia Coulton, Professor, Mandel School of Applied Social Science, Case Western Reserve University

Bridget Freisthler, Assistant Professor, School of Social Welfare, University of California Los Angeles

Abstract

Social work has long been interested in how context affects the wellbeing of individuals and groups. In particular, the places where people live, work, go to school and carry out their activities have been implicated as a potential source of disadvantage, especially for people of color and for low income individuals. Researchers who are interested in these issues need to be familiar with a variety of methods of spatial and geographic analysis so that they can correctly describe and model these place-based processes. The presenters will discuss: the conceptual basis for geographic and spatial analysis in social work research, sources of geographically referenced data and geo coding methods, the uses of maps for exploring spatial patterns in data, statistical approaches to contextual and spatial analysis (including multi-level modeling with geographic units, spatial dependence, spatial regression and spatial clustering methods).

Career Level and Pre-requisites

The workshop will emphasize the practical application of geographic information system tools and spatial analysis to social work research questions. Participants do not need previous GIS experience but should be familiar with Ordinary Least Squares Regression and have a beginning appreciation for geographic data.

Methods

The workshop will present studies that represent some of the common applications of spatial and geographic analyses. The discussion will cover the GIS or statistical programs that were used to conduct the analysis, selected portions of the output and how to interpret the results. Participants will be involved in a discussion of the advantages, limitations and challenges of geographic and spatial analysis.

Presenter Bios

Claudia J. Coulton

Claudia Coulton is the Lillian F. Harris Professor of Urban Social Research, Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland OH. She also serves as Co-Director of Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development, which she founded in

1988 to conduct applied research, evaluation and policy analysis related to urban poverty and community building. She instituted the Center's comprehensive geographic information system (*NEO CANDO*) and participated in the establishment of the *National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership*. Dr. Coulton teaches courses in quantitative methods and community data analysis. She has conducted a number of studies on neighborhood effects and urban policy issues that apply geographic and spatial analysis. Her published articles relevant to this workshop include: Job Access, Employment, and Earnings: Outcomes for Welfare Leavers in an Urban Labor Market, *Urban Affairs Review*; Parental and community correlates of participation in out-of-school activities among children living in low income neighborhoods. *Children and Youth Services Review*; *Catalog of Administrative Data Sources for Neighborhood Indicators*. Washington DC: The Urban Institute; How neighborhoods influence child maltreatment: A review of the literature and alternative pathways. *Child Abuse and Neglect*; Indicators of children's wellbeing through a neighborhood lens. *Social Indicators Research*; Mapping resident perceptions of neighborhood boundaries. *American Journal of Community Psychology*; Neighborhoods and child maltreatment: A multi-level study of resources and controls. *Child Abuse & Neglect*.

Bridget Freisthler

Bridget Freisthler is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Welfare, UCLA. She is also an Affiliate Research Scientist at the Prevention Research Center, Berkeley, CA. Dr. Freisthler's research focuses the spatial ecology of problems, particularly child maltreatment, and the development of environmental interventions to prevent problems. She is an expert in incorporating cutting edge spatial analysis methods through Geographic Information Systems (GIS), spatial statistics, and spatial econometrics in 1) understanding how social problems vary across geographic areas, such as neighborhoods, 2) identifying those areas in a community which are at risk for developing or already experiencing high levels of social problems based on a growing understanding of neighborhood ecologies, and 3) examining how the location of social services may further help or hinder the development of problems in neighborhood areas. At UCLA, she teaches MSW students how to use GIS to understand and solve community problems.