

As Goes the City? Older Americans' Home Upkeep in the Aftermath of the Great Recession

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Abstract:

The private home is a crucial site in the aging process, yet the upkeep of this physical space often poses a challenge for community-dwelling older adults. Previous efforts to explain variation in disorderly household conditions have relied on individual-level characteristics, but ecological perspectives propose that home environments are inescapably nested within the dynamic socioeconomic circumstances of surrounding spatial contexts, such as the metro area. We address this ecological embeddedness in the context of the Great Recession, an event in which some U.S. cities saw pronounced and persistent declines across multiple economic indicators while other areas rebounded more rapidly. Panel data (2005–6 and 2010–11) from a national survey of older adults were linked to interviewer home evaluations and city-level economic data. Results from fixed-effects regression support the hypothesis that older adults dwelling in struggling cities experienced an uptick in disorderly household conditions. Findings emphasize the importance of city-specificity when probing effects of a downturn. Observing changes in home upkeep also underscores the myriad ways in which a city's most vulnerable residents—older adults, in particular—are affected by its economic fortunes.

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