



University of
New Hampshire

Carsey School of
Public Policy

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Regional Fact Sheet #10

Fall 2014

Social Connections, Safety, and Local Environment in Three Manchester, New Hampshire, Neighborhoods

Survey of Residents' Perceptions

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As part of its Neighborhood Health Improvement Strategy, the Manchester Health Department is implementing the Manchester Community Schools Project (MCSP) in the Bakersville, Beech Street, and Gossler Park neighborhoods. The community-school model recognizes that schools are vital neighborhood institutions for all residents. This collaborative effort will strengthen links between local government, schools, nonprofit service agencies, and residents. The holistic approach intends to improve a variety of outcomes using numerous strategies. In particular, the Health Department and its partners seek to improve outcomes related to: educational achievement, economic wellbeing, access to health services, health-related behaviors, supportive living environments, and social connectedness/safety. Elementary schools in Bakersville, Beech Street, and Gossler Park will play a key role by providing after-school programming and serving as sites where residents can find information about programs and services through care coordinators. Schools might also host events like block parties and neighborhood watch groups, thereby better connecting residents to one another. This fact sheet uses data from a survey of Bakersville, Beech Street, and Gossler Park residents to draw attention to the current state of connectedness, trust, and perceptions of the local environment in these three neighborhoods. This survey is a mechanism for residents to provide input; data also set benchmarks to measure the MCSP's success when residents are surveyed after the project's implementation.

Findings are presented in Table 1.¹ Responses suggest that residents in all three neighborhoods generally feel safe during the day and are comfortable calling the police

KEY FINDINGS

Residents of Bakersville, Beech Street, and Gossler Park neighborhoods report that they generally feel safe during the day, that they are comfortable reporting crimes to the police, and that they are hopeful that if a child was hurt or scared, there would be a trustworthy adult nearby to help.

There is some variation between neighborhoods. Only about half of respondents in these neighborhoods felt there was anything they could do to prevent crime. A majority in all neighborhoods feel that residents help each other out, especially in the Bakersville neighborhood.

In general, perceptions of the local environment were most positive in Bakersville, and lowest in Beech Street.

to report a crime. Also, most residents said they are confident that an adult would intervene if a child needed help, and a majority said that community members help one another and that people in their neighborhood are treated with respect. Responses to this survey also help inform where the MCSP's efforts should be focused. For example, while most had a positive outlook on the local environment, there was some variation between neighborhoods. Increasing access to local recreational opportunities (such as improving the quality of local parks) will be especially critical in Beech Street. Access to such facilities could foster increased connectedness while also helping to improve outcomes related to physical health.

In all three neighborhoods, respondents reported feeling less safe at night. Moreover, only about half of residents in these neighborhoods said they were confident that they could help to reduce local crime.

TABLE 1. PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS IN MANCHESTER'S BAKERSVILLE, BEECH STREET, AND GOSSLER PARK NEIGHBORHOODS (FIGURES SHOWN ARE PERCENTAGES)

	BAKERSVILLE	BEECH STREET	GOSSLER PARK	TOTAL
NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE
I FEEL SAFE WALKING IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD DURING THE DAY	89	89	94	90
I FEEL SAFE WALKING IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD AT NIGHT	61	43	33	50
I FEEL COMFORTABLE CALLING THE POLICE TO REPORT SUSPICIOUS OR CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR	91	73	81	83
THERE IS LITTLE I CAN DO TO PREVENT OR REDUCE CRIME IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD	46	51	39	47
VIOLENCE IS NOT A PROBLEM IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD	69	41	36	53
CRIME IS NOT A PROBLEM IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD	58	38	19	45
TRUST & SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE
IF A CHILD GOT HURT OR SCARED WHILE PLAYING OUTSIDE, THERE ARE ADULTS NEARBY I TRUST WOULD HELP	91	69	84	77
PEOPLE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD HELP EACH OTHER OUT	81	58	58	69
PEOPLE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD CAN BE TRUSTED	63	42	48	53
PEOPLE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD ARE TREATED RESPECTFULLY	77	60	57	68
PEOPLE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD ARE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST	22	45	38	33
LOCAL ENVIRONMENT	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE
THERE IS A LOT OF TRASH AND/OR LITTER ON THE STREETS	43	66	76	56
GRAFFITI IS AN ISSUE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD	22	47	53	35
HOMES AND OTHER BUILDINGS ARE WELL-MAINTAINED	83	54	65	69
PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS ARE WELL-MAINTAINED AND SAFE	74	54	77	67
IT IS PLEASANT TO WALK OR RUN IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD	84	57	72	72

Note: Bolded figures indicate statistical significance between neighborhoods.

Neighborhood watch groups and violence prevention programs might help in this regard, particularly in the Beech Street and Gossler Park neighborhoods, where residents were more likely to report that crime and violence are problematic. Programs and groups such as these might also help to improve trust and connectedness, as these were lower in Beech Street and Gossler Park. Improving access to recreation areas might have a similar effect. When residents trust and are better connected to one another, they also have a greater chance of combating local crime and improving safety.² The findings presented here will be compared to a second round of surveys that will be conducted in the coming years after the community schools project is fully implemented.

Data

In the summer and fall of 2013, the Manchester Health Department went door-to-door in the Bakersville, Beech Street, and Gossler Park neighborhoods, conducting a survey about trust, social connectedness, and perceptions of the local environment. Within the sample of 253 respondents, 121 (48 percent) were from Bakersville, 95 (38 percent) from Beech Street, and 37 (15 percent) from Gossler Park. In addition, 63 percent of respondents were non-Hispanic White, 14 percent were Black, 5 percent were Asian, 14 percent were Hispanic (of any race) and 3 percent reported their race/ethnicity as Other or Multiracial.

To conserve space, the percent who “disagree” or responded “neither/neutral” are not shown.³

Endnotes

1. “Agree” refers to respondents who either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with each statement.
2. See “Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy,” by Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls, in *Science* (Volume 277, No. 5328, pages 918–924).
3. Neither/neutral comprised a small portion of respondents, ranging from as low as zero to as high as 13 percent. The most common questions to garner “Neither/Neutral” responses were those regarding children, as well as “whether people in this neighborhood could be trusted” and whether “There is little in my neighborhood I can do to prevent crime.”

About the Author

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Acknowledgments

The author thanks Jaime Hoebeke and Anna Thomas at the Manchester Health Department and Curt Grimm, Eleanor Jaffee, Michele Dillon, Michael Ettlenger, Amy Sterndale, and Laurel Lloyd at the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.