Community Well-Being in Impoverished, Urban Areas: A Case Study of Camden, New Jersey

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Research Questions
1. How do residents understand and experience community well-being?
2. How are impoverished communities being supported through resources and services?
3. What is the city government’s role in maintaining the well-being of impoverished communities?

Background
- Residents’ perceptions of their community’s conditions and resources is a critical measure of community well-being (Sirgy, Widgery, Lee, & Yu, 2009).
- “Determining the importance of changes in people’s neighborhood environments for their life outcomes is a central issue for the social and medical sciences and social policy” (Ludwig, Duncan, Gennetian, Katz, Kessler, Kling, & Sanbonmatsu, 2013).
- Revitalization efforts in urban areas are criticized for not incorporating resident voice and intensifying the fear of gentrification (Villanueva, Gonzalez, Son, Moreno, Liu, & Ball-Rokeach, 2017).

A Snapshot of Camden, NJ
In the wake of its industrial decline and population loss, Camden transitioned from a city of opportunity to being portrayed as one of the worst cities in America.
- 1900-1950
  - Camden was known for its top three businesses: New York Ship, RCA Victor, Campbell Soup
- 1960s
  - Businesses decline (New York Ship shuts down)
  - Population decrease: 61,000 to 26,000 people
  - Shift in demographics (White flight)
- 1980
  - State aquarium built on Camden waterfront
- 2019
  - Waterfront re-development
  - Population: 74,000 people
  - 37.4% live below the poverty line

Discussion
By capturing narratives from stakeholders of Camden, this research may give voice to residents, who experience inequalities on a daily basis and can potentially influence the way future leaders establish social and urban policies in Camden and other impoverished communities alike.

Selected References

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