

An Interpretative Paradigm for Examining Social and Contextual Determinants of Health in a Community following a Natural Disaster

Gretchen Stone, Nicole Holland, Megan Mullins, Melissa Booth
University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas, United States

Introduction: This field study was designed to capture relationships among health related quality of life and diagnoses seen in a primary care clinic in Santa Rita, Nicaragua. The most common symptoms among women included musculoskeletal aches and pains (physical status) as well as stress and anxiety, headaches and gastrointestinal issues (behavioral health.) These phenomena raised the need to document social and contextual determinants of health in the community served.

Objectives: Two questions served to focus the study: "How do people occupy their time?" and "How do the built and natural environments affect everyday life?" The intent was to capture the space people occupy, the activities in which they engage, and indicators of how the environment may or may not support health and well being. **Methods:** Photographs were taken during 26 home visits conducted by a Nicaraguan physician and an occupational therapist from the United States: The physician completed a health survey sponsored by the Ministry of Health. The occupational therapist took photographs of activities, and tools and equipment that people used to perform daily life activities. Activities included cooking, bathing, washing and drying clothing, cleaning, providing child care, transporting water and food, socializing with neighbors, and caring for ill family members. A journal documenting observations during each of the 26 home visits served as a third source of data. Categories were established via visual examination of the photographs, followed by interpretation across multiple units: the individual, the family, and the community. Photographs that represented physical surroundings were categorized in terms of space as well as distance, including both physical and social distance.

Results: Thematic analysis revealed a community fractured by new versus established housing constructed after disastrous, recurrent and pervasive flooding in the community.

Conclusion: People living in close proximity, but residing in decidedly different housing, use different tools and equipment, adopt different routines, and subsequently engage in different occupations resulting in modified social networks following natural disasters..

Contribution to occupational therapy: Changes in social networks following natural disasters are in response to changes in occupational patterns and routines within the built environment.