

Gentrification, Housing Costs, & Healthcare Accessibility

Morgan Smithey, UNC Charlotte
Dr. Erin Banks & Dr. Nhi Cao, Office of Undergraduate Research



Introduction

Rapidly rising home values often accompany gentrification, leading to increased property taxes for homeowners (Ding & Hwang, 2020). Higher property taxes increase the risk of becoming cost-burdened. In Mecklenburg County, 75% of homeowners earning under \$20,000 are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their monthly income on housing-related expenses (UNCC Urban Institute, 2021). As a result, these families may not be able to spend as much money on healthcare, potentially harming their health (Drabo et al., 2021; Shamsuddin & Campbell, 2021).

Additionally, health insurance, which is strongly connected to access to care, is often unaffordable and therefore inaccessible to low-income people (Hoffman & Paradise, 2008). Uninsured adults are also more likely to delay or forgo care: they are more likely to not see a physician, skip medical treatment, cut back on medication, or not fill a prescription because of cost (Hoffman & Paradise, 2008).

With rising housing costs and an economy experiencing inflation, further research needs to be conducted to examine the impact that rapidly rising property values and taxes have on individuals' ability to meet essential needs.

Objectives

Purpose

Gentrification leads to increased housing costs through home price appreciation and rising property taxes. The purpose of this study is to understand the impact that rising housing costs and lower income levels have on residents' ability to access healthcare.

Hypothesis

Respondents who reported lower income will be more likely to express a need for access to healthcare in their neighborhood.

Methods

This study is based on pre- and post-surveys given to residents in the Charlotte region. The pre- and post-surveys consist of the same questions. The survey includes Likert scale questions and open-ended response questions. Focus groups were also conducted to gather qualitative data. Themes are identified from the data. The post-surveys will be conducted after a resource guide has been administered to the residents.

The questions in the survey asks participants to rate their confidence in their homeownership skills such as financial literacy and home repair. It also asks participants about gentrification, home price appreciation, and services they need in their community, such as healthcare.

Data was collected from the Optimist Park and West Davidson neighborhoods. The surveys consisted of 15 questions. A subset of questions were used for this project. The demographic data included: biological sex, ethnicity, age range, educational level, employment status, annual income bracket, and the number of people in their household. Other examples of questions included home value increase and the impact of gentrification, and priority areas and programs needed in the community.



Photo from Optimist Park showing an older, smaller house next to a newer, larger house.

Preliminary Results

The sample consists of Optimist Park (OP) and West Davidson (WD) respondents. In both OP and WD, respondents were majority female and African American, although there were some White respondents in WD. In OP, 92% of respondents were African American. Most of the respondents in OP and WD were aged 65 years or older. In OP, 53% of respondents were aged 65 years or older. Generally, the WD respondents were more highly educated with more college degrees compared to high school diplomas in OP respondents. WD respondents had higher incomes reported compared to OP respondents. As shown in Figure 2, 75% of OP respondents reported annual incomes of \$34,999 or less. Most of the respondents in both OP and WD were retired. Both OP and WD respondents had 3 or less people in their household.

For this project, only survey responses from OP were used. Seventy-six percent of respondents felt that the value of their home has increased. Thirty-eight percent of respondents agreed and 41% strongly agreed that the value of their home increased due to gentrification. As shown in Figure 1, 38% of respondents reported healthcare as a priority area for their community. Thirty-five percent of respondents reported healthcare as a beneficial service that could be provided to their community.

Optimist Park Responses to "Other than gentrification, what other priority areas could be the main focus right now for your community?"

- Affordable housing
- College/career development
- Community safety
- Early childhood development
- Employment
- Financial stability
- Food security
- Healthcare
- Legal advocacy
- Prenatal care
- Youth development

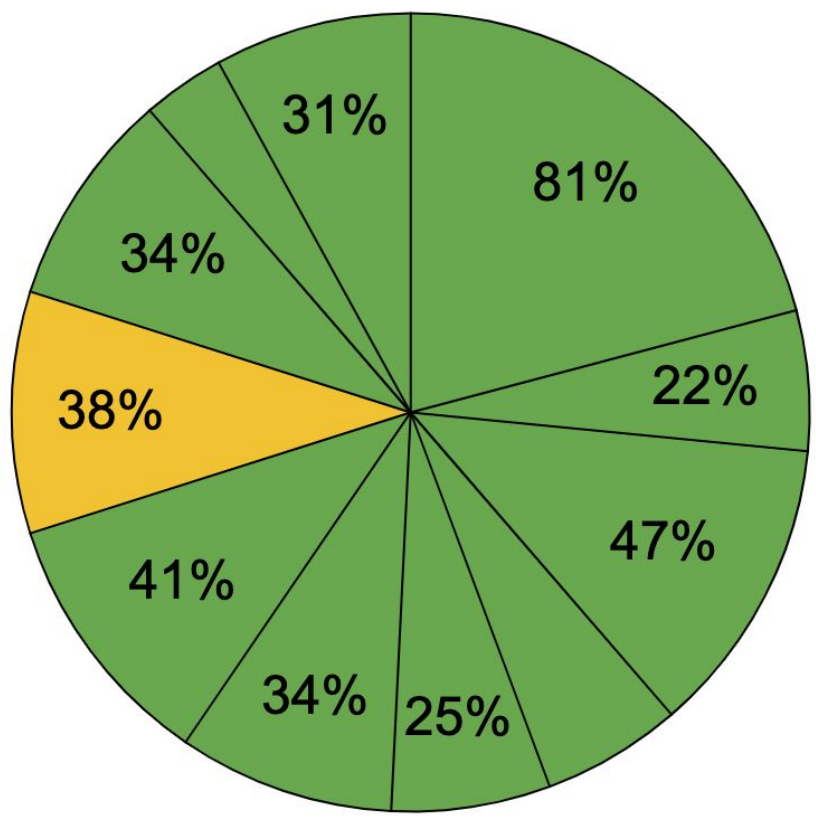


Figure 1 – Thirty-eight percent of OP respondents reported healthcare as a priority area for their community.

Optimist Park Respondents' Annual Incomes

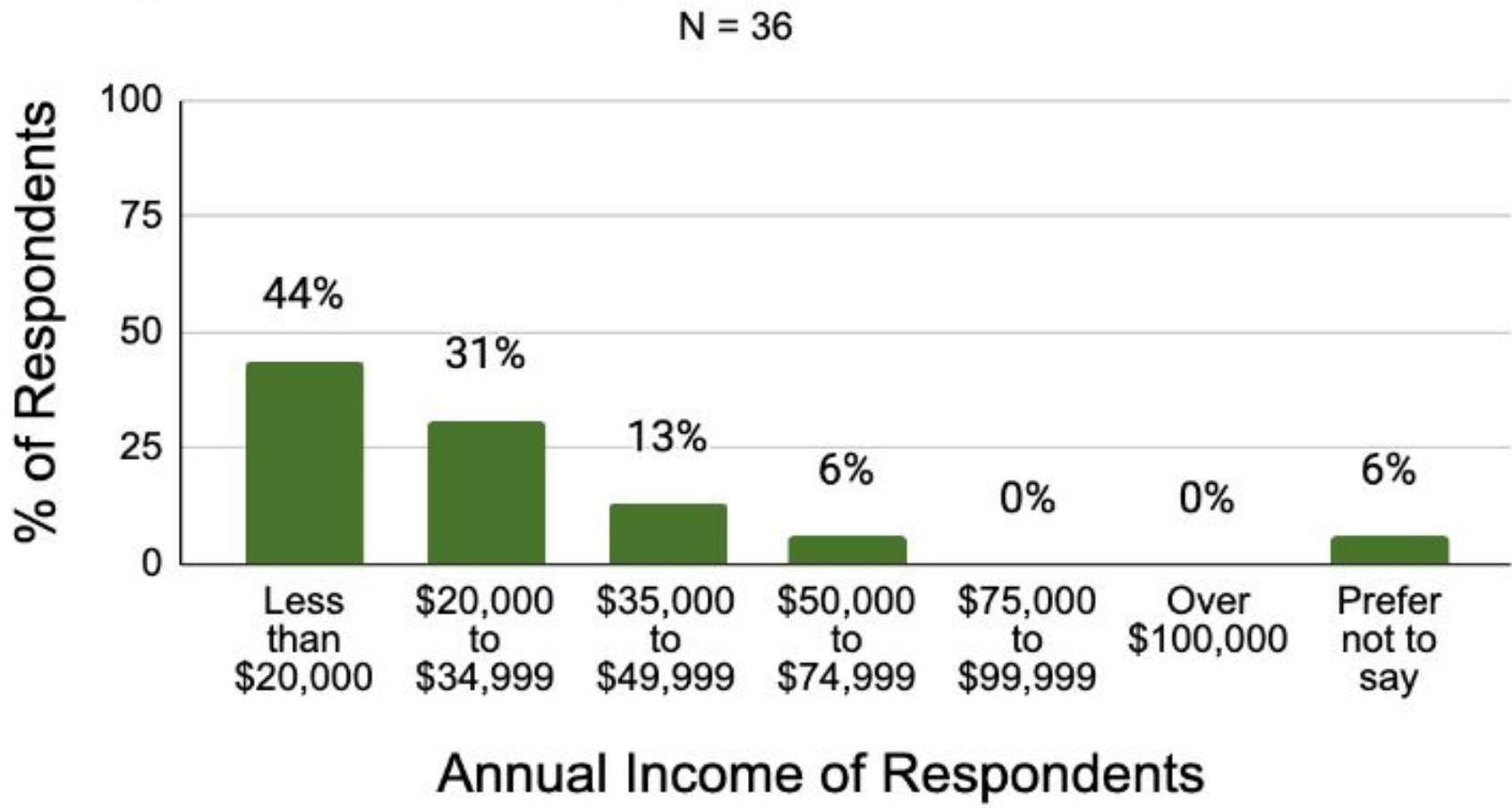


Figure 2 – Seventy-five percent of OP respondents reported annual incomes of \$34,999 or less.

Discussion

There is likely a connection between age, race, and income status compounded with gentrification-related housing costs that can inhibit a person's ability to access healthcare services.

In terms of income, OP respondents reported lower income levels which has also been found to have a negative impact on access to healthcare. Respondents reported higher home values due to gentrification, increasing their housing cost burden and likely decreasing discretionary income. Respondents also stated that access to healthcare was a community need.

The majority of the respondents in this sample were African Americans. This is important because compared to white people, Black people fare worse in measures of health coverage, access and use, health status, outcomes, and behaviors; and social determinants of health (Hill et al., 2022).

Age is also a factor. The majority of OP respondents were over the age of 65 which makes them eligible for Medicare. However, one-fifth of adults age 65 years or older reported that cost negatively affected their access to and use of healthcare (Commonwealth Fund, 2014). If a person relies on Medicare and it is not sufficient to cover costs, adding rising housing costs can further impact their access to healthcare.

More research is needed to examine these factors and how they affect access to healthcare.