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Environmental Justice for Children in Urban Areas

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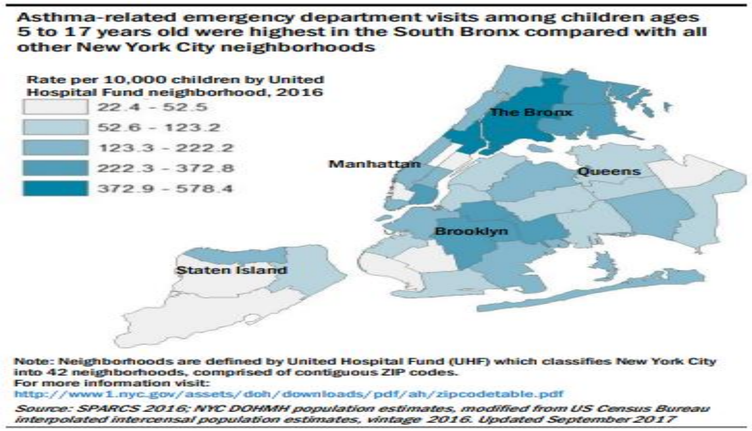
Scope of the Problem

- Environmental justice is a complicated issue that affects many aspects of our society, including our political, economic, and health institutions[1]
- Environmental justice has been a growing concern with children in urban areas specifically the Bronx in New York City.
- Urban Areas have increased effects on children because of different pollutants that are within the built environment in addition the external environment[2]

Statistics

- African Americans face a 54% higher health burden from air pollution, such as particulate matter, compared to the overall population. In 2016, asthma affected 15.7% of African American children and 12.9 %of children of Puerto Rican decent, while only affecting 7.1% of white children[3]
- The prevalence of asthma is higher in minority children living in inner cities, such as the Bronx, NY, where 20-25% have asthma[3]
- Exercise is important for children with asthma and has been associated with decreased symptom severity, improved quality of life and reduced school absenteeism
- Asthma management often relies on many factors, including medication availability, proper medication use and self efficacy. There are multiple barriers to asthma management, especially in urban minority populations [3]
- Asthma is the most common pediatric chronic respiratory disease that affects approximately 7 million children in the U.S.[4]



Themes and Access to Social Work Practice

Racism:

- People of color are more likely to be exposed to air pollution and to suffer from harm to their health than white people. This inequality is traced to the long history of systematic racism in the US, including institutionalized residential segregation.
- People of color are more likely than white people to be living with one or more chronic conditions that make them more vulnerable to the health impact of air pollution, including
- asthma, diabetes and heart disease.[5]

Poverty:

- Over the years decision makers have placed sources of pollution in economically disadvantaged communities of color.[5]

Access to health care:

- Take Care New York (TCNY) is a comprehensive health policy for New York City that aims to minimize health inequities and ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or where they live, can reach their full health potential.[6]
- Creating healthier neighborhoods, encouraging healthy childhoods, and bridging the gap between public health and health care are all priorities.[6]

Inspiring Action

Lower the number of children with asthma in urban areas that are caused by environmental factors

Micro

Provide Education on the issue, effects and solutions of air quality.

Elevate and encourage those whose voices aren't being heard[7]

Macro

Encourage conserving energy and recycling

Programs in communities to encourage healthy living

Mezzo

More access to recyclable bins in the community.

Recycling campaigns on public transportation.

Policy Change: Making recycling mandatory in communities.

Footnotes

[1] (Gibbs, 2019), [2] (NYC Health, 2021), [3] (Webber, 2003), [4] 3), [5] (Gern, 2010), [6] (NYC Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, 2022), [7] (National Association of Social Workers, n.d.)