2 FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD MEASUREMENT

The community and neighborhood measures included in this book represent indicators for different levels of influence across the ecological spectrum. Our focus on measuring multiple levels of influence is underpinned in ecological perspectives that contextualize human choices and behaviors within diverse settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Lewin, 1935; Stokols, 1996). Ecological perspectives draw attention to the ways that communities and neighborhoods shape opportunity and emphasize different contexts of influence within individual, collective, community, and societal settings. Applications of ecological perspectives are widespread in community and neighborhood research addressing a range of issues, such as bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2012), sexual health (Baral, Logie, Grosso, Wirtz, & Beyrer, 2013), and physical activity (Fluery & Lee, 2006).

Measures described throughout each chapter of this book represent four ecological settings (individual, collective, community, and societal) that are important for research, policy, and practice focused on communities and neighborhoods. These settings build on prior research highlighting different spheres of influence that have direct and indirect effects on individual and collective well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Given interactions between settings, researchers and practitioners are encouraged to select measures representing more than one ecological setting. In Chapter 2, we introduce topics that are covered in greater detail in subsequent chapters. These other chapters are denoted throughout to promote linkages for further examination of the topic.

Measures targeting the *individual-level* focus on attitudes, cognitions, skills, and community participation and engagement among adults and youth. These measures may be used to evaluate community engagement initiatives aimed at preparing residents for change (Chapter 4), increasing empowerment among residents to engage in change (Chapter 7), or sociopolitical skills necessary to lead neighborhood change (Chapter 6). Measures targeting the *collective level* provide tools for evaluating actions of collectives, such as coalitions, community organizing groups, neighborhood associations, and grassroots organizations. Collective action is a key strategy in initiating community change, and these measures offer tools for evaluating factors that may facilitate successful coalition functioning and significant indicators of collaboration (Chapter 5).

Within this book, readers will find measures representing *community-level* indicators focusing on four aspects of communities and neighborhoods. First, there are community-level measures of inclusivity that reflect the ways that residents feel connected to both people and places within community boundaries. These indicators may be useful in evaluating how a sense of community (Chapter 6) among residents affects interventions aimed at promoting greater connection. Second, community-level measures assess the availability of resources and amenities accessible to residents. Such observation-based measures are discussed in Chapter 8, which provides

methods for assessing resources, such as recreation facilities, stores, and parks. In addition, these measures also assess satisfaction with community resources, therefore offering opportunities to evaluate factors influencing resource utilization and identify targeted approaches for improvement. Third, community-level measures may be used to examine built and natural environments that shape communities and neighborhoods. Built environments include human-made infrastructures, such as housing (Chapter 10) and grocery stores (Chapter 9), while natural environments include green space for recreation (Chapter 9). Fourth, community-level measures assess community safety and security, including indicators about crime and violence within communities and neighborhoods (Chapter 11) as well as exposure to community violence (Chapter 11). Also included in this book are measures of community well-being (Chapter 13).

The fourth setting represents *societal-level* factors that support or hinder communities and neighborhoods. Measures focused on this setting assess the implications of local, state, and federal policies that systematically limit investment and opportunity within certain communities, often along lines defined by social hierarchy. These measures, for instance, may be used to inform and evaluate policy interventions aimed at promoting equitable opportunities for housing and/or employment (Chapter 12).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual foundation for this book is based on seven domains (individual engagement and efficacy in the community, collective engagement and efficacy in the community, community amenities and resources, community economics, community safety and security, built/natural environment, community inclusivity) that provide a way to organize compatible measures and differentiate those measures to examine interactional processes at multiple levels.

The first domain, *individual engagement and efficacy in the community,* includes a range of activities and involvement in the community that are meant to bolster personal empowerment and skills as a method to shift power and influence from formal or traditional sources to citizens or residents. These measures assess individual-level participation, perceptions, and behaviors related to the processes and/or outcomes of citizen engagement in their neighborhood and/or community.

Collective engagement and efficacy in the community captures processes involving groups, organizations, associations, coalitions, and partnerships, who work together to solve common problems or issues. It includes measures that assess a collective units' (e.g., community, organization, coalition, and partnership) perceptions and behaviors related to the processes and/or outcomes of engagement in a neighborhood and/or community.

The domain of *community amenities and resources* takes a strengths-based approach to community development and can be important for identifying assets and opportunities for change, which in turn may lead to more precise community-level interventions. Instruments are included that assess perceptions and objective measures of community and neighborhood resources and public amenities and services.

Community economics is a concept that encourages the use of economic tools to analyze elements of communities that impact residents' ability to access things such as housing, employment, and public financing. These measures use data to determine economic disparities in communities and neighborhoods because of unequal access to jobs and resources, including housing market strength.

The domain of *community safety and security* represents one of the central concerns in communities and neighborhoods, with an intersection of individual, collective,

community, and social contexts as targets for intervention. Community safety measures assess perceptions and objective indicators of crime and violence and residents' fear of crime in their neighborhood.

The *built/natural community environment* refers to the human-made or natural surroundings in a community setting that impact people. Measures comprise the physical capital of neighborhoods and communities, including housing (quality, affordability, vacancy, and blight), access to health food, walkability, resources, and perceived disorder.

Community inclusivity is a concept promoting equality of access to resources, treatment, and opportunity of all people in a community. Measures assess the geospatial distribution of the population and resources across communities and neighborhoods to understand the impacts of social exclusion and segregation and unequal access to resources as well as gentrification and diversity.

Finally, measures of *overall well-being* reflect how well individuals in a neighborhood and the community as a whole are doing in terms of overall quality of life and access to resources and opportunities. This is one of the overarching concepts/emerging properties in our conceptual model, which is discussed next.

The domains reflect a broader conceptual level of thinking that can assist community researchers and practitioners to understand the main purpose behind the measures and to see how they are deeply embedded in complex social structures of community well-being, culture, and power. Our conceptual representation of these factors is presented next (see **Figure 2.1**).

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Conceptual Model for Research With Communities and Neighborhoods

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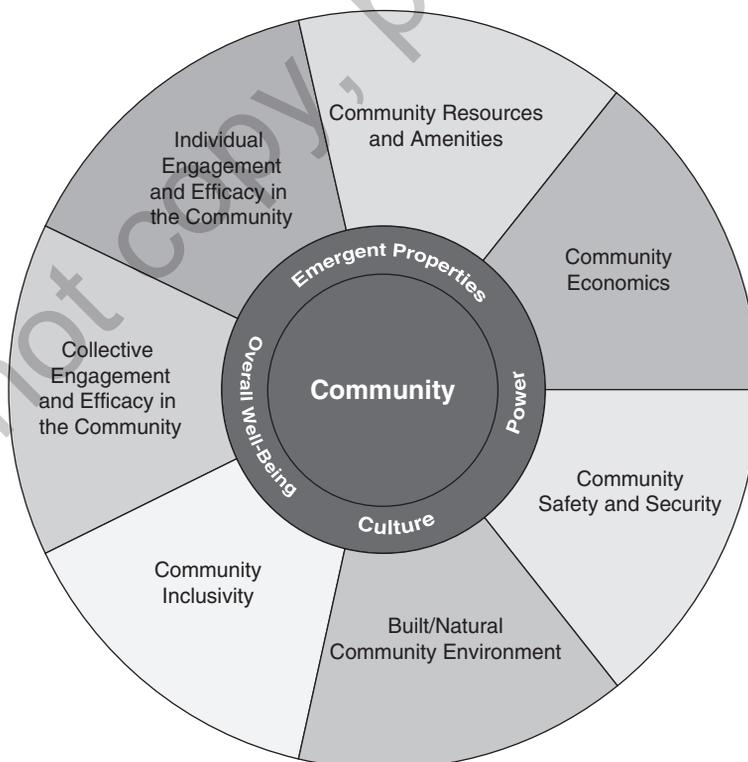
Unique to the complexity of community and neighborhood research is the idea that a set of attributes or traits that make up a community are not always additive or equal to the sum of the various components (or domains) (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). That is, when conceptual components, including individual and collective engagement, community resources, economics and built/natural environment, safety, and community inclusivity are studied together, properties emerge that cannot be predicted by observations and knowledge of these sub-components. These traits represent "emergent properties" that stem from the interaction between components and the environment (Lewin, 1935; Martin, 2001). When the community is the focus of the research, new structures, patterns, and properties, including overall community well-being, culture, and power, are likely to appear. The emergence of these structures in turn influences the various components (domains of community research), which provides a multilevel understanding of transactional causation between various domains. For example, the concept or the action of power emerges out of the complex interactions between collective engagement and community safety and security, which is supplemented by action often bolstering a greater sense of engagement in the community.

Furthermore, we can study communities and neighborhoods as complex systems by creating probes to make the patterns or potential patterns in community more visible before taking action. We can assess the relationships between community capacity and readiness and make sense of data to identify patterns of behavior, conduct analyses to identify the people and other information sources critical to the setting in order to develop the best intervention, and then we can build on what works and dampen down on patterns that are not effective. Below are key emergent properties that are likely to develop out of interactions when conducting community and neighborhood research.

Community well-being is an overarching concept and goal that many community activists and researchers seek to achieve and measure in their work. It is used interchangeably with concepts of community satisfaction, quality of life, and happiness. Research studies may ask: Is the community thriving? Are residents satisfied with their neighbors, amenities, and networks for leading a fulfilled life? Sirgy, Widgery, Lee, and Yu (2010) propose that community well-being is measured as the summation of individual levels of satisfaction with community characteristics. McCrea and colleagues (2014) think that community well-being is best conceptualized as a state, at one point in time. They argue that it is an evaluation of important aspects of community in relation to expectations or standards of comparison. Chapter 13 focuses on community well-being and quality of life and identifies several individual, social, and neighborhood/community-level features to help conceptualize well-being for research on communities and neighborhoods. For the purpose of this chapter, community well-being stems from the interaction between the other conceptual domains described above and may include social (individual and collective), economic, environment, and political processes and specific areas such as safety, health, and employment. Community researchers and practitioners are encouraged to test conceptual links using well-being as a direct outcome or one that transpires as a result of including more than one domain in their study or target of practice. Community well-being, for example, can be studied in relation to an element of community participation such that feeling satisfied with one's participation in a community event or activism (collective efficacy) relates to a positive sense of community well-being. Alternatively, a resident's satisfaction with community functions or resources may be a sufficient measurable outcome but when combined with collective efficacy, global community well-being may emerge.

Culture is a characteristic of societies, communities, and organizations that is defined and used differently in many ways. The traditional anthropological concept of culture is defined as shared assumptions, values, beliefs, rules, and customs of conduct of a group or community of people. In this definition, culture is viewed as omnipresent,

meaning culture is present in all places at all times. However, if we think of culture as a meta concept, we have more possibilities for framing neighborhood and community research in a richer context. Meta culture is a dynamic system with its own interactions of structures and patterns that can be differentiated into subcultures that may be appear to be fragmented or complementary to other structures (Patterson, 2014). In community and neighborhood research, culture, for example, embodies the process of individual engagement (collectively made, reproduced, and unevenly shared knowledge) and how that relates to building the physical capital of neighborhoods. It may include the comparison of what people perceive of neighborhood resources to what they actually use. For our framework, culture is an emergent property, interacting with structural forces in constraining and enabling human agency (Patterson, 2014).

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2015) recently launched a Culture of Health Program conceiving of culture as a meta concept. The program is based on ten underlying principles (vision statements) that are used to inspire action to mobilize a "culture of health" and achieve the outcome of improved population health. These principles acknowledge the following: how good health exists across geographic, demographic, and social sectors; how getting healthy is valued by the entire society; that individuals and families have the means and opportunity to make choices that lead to a healthy life; that multiple sectors (individual, business, government, and other organizations) collaborate to build healthy communities and lifestyles; that all of society has access to affordable, quality health care; that health care is efficient and equitable, producing less burden on the economy; that sustaining healthy citizens guides public and private decision-making; and finally, that Americans understand that everyone is in it together. These principles articulate the espoused values and beliefs important for developing a culture of health.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2015) Culture of Health Program also outlines a set of drivers for making health a shared value. These drivers include the mindset and expectations, sense of community, and civic engagement among citizens. Creating a culture also depends on the number and quality of partnerships, investment in cross-sector collaboration, and policies that support collaboration. Other drivers include the built environment/physical conditions, social and economic environment, policy, and governance. Other causes (drivers) for strengthening the integration of health services and systems focuses on access, consumer experience, quality, balance, and integration of medical treatment, public health, and social services.

Culture as a meta concept helps us to understand the many facets of conducting research with communities and neighborhoods. The assumptions and the drivers for developing a culture of health are similar to the targets when conducting research on communities and neighborhoods. It demonstrates how research and practice in one domain must adapt to new knowledge as it develops in other domains and be able to emphasize its own importance to building the knowledge of the whole. Finally, it provides direction for building hypotheses between individual engagement in community, building partnerships, the physical environment in which residents live, and their influence on community well-being.

Power is a concept that may facilitate or inhibit community development and sustainability, yet it is understudied in community research. Power has both positive and negative aspects (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). On the positive side, power aids in the ability of individuals and communities to achieve goals evidenced through a sense of mastery and control over circumstances. On the negative side, power may be used to inflict harm or maintain inequity. According to Neal and Neal (2011), power can also be conceptualized at multiple levels. At an individual level, power is understood as empowering individuals or facilitating social capital that may be leveraged to promote change. At the group level, power is conceived as the collective capacity for a

group to impact community policies and resources. At the structural level, power constructs represent the outer setting or external structure of the community, including political climate, public policies, and economic climate. These structural dimensions of power constrain opportunity and freedom. Social hierarchies shaped by race, class, and gender are a manifestation of structural dimensions of power. In community and neighborhood research, these dimensions of power combine to influence geographic distribution of both benefits, such as access to resources (e.g., supermarkets, high quality schools), and burdens, such as distribution of opportunity (e.g., employment) and well-being. Furthermore, some groups understand power as a dialectical process between the individual and organizational level of analysis (Speer & Hughey, 1995). Within the framework of community and neighborhood research, power can be studied as a process, an end state, or as an emergent property.

Conceptual Domains

The seven conceptual domains of the framework denote the various aspects of research on communities and neighborhoods. In order to encourage further research, we identified several dimensions within each domain that measure a specific element of the concept and the chapter location of each associated set of measures (see **Table 2.1: Measures for Community and Neighborhood Research Associated With Our Conceptual Model**). This table shows that measures from different chapters can fit conceptually together under one domain, demonstrating that some measures may be used for multiple purposes. For example, measures or instruments assessing walkability in a community are compatible with measures assessing housing affordability, vacancy, and abandonment. We also include in the table the measures associated with the overarching concept/emergent property of community well-being from Chapter 13.

The conceptual boundaries of each measurement domain are identifiable based on contextually and pragmatically driven frames of reference. Every research question and study implemented in communities and neighborhoods is being conducted within the context of a certain time and space, which means that the measures included here may not keep pace with the interpretation of these concepts. For example, community building has a long tradition steeped in communal labor, social support, and development of public schools, but our definition of community building has changed dramatically with increased mobility, Internet use, and divisions of status, income, and other differences. The conceptual domains are also identified by the intended use of the measures within and across the domains. Walkability, housing quality, and access to community amenities serve as indicators of the built/natural environment, and the results from these measures have multiple uses. They can help the private sector guide homebuyers on where to live. Government agencies use these measures to develop social policies for community reinvestment. Moreover, these indicators also relate to the health and development of residents and to a sense of community satisfaction and well-being. The conceptual links and multiple levels of association between the domains and among the measures demonstrate the fruitful ground for research on neighborhoods and communities. To inspire further research and methodological development for community and neighborhood research, a few examples from the authors are provided next.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY MEASURES IN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Our purpose here is to link the measures contained in this book with the practice of using them in various contexts for application, including access to healthy food, promoting community health, safety, and preventing violence and substance use disorders.
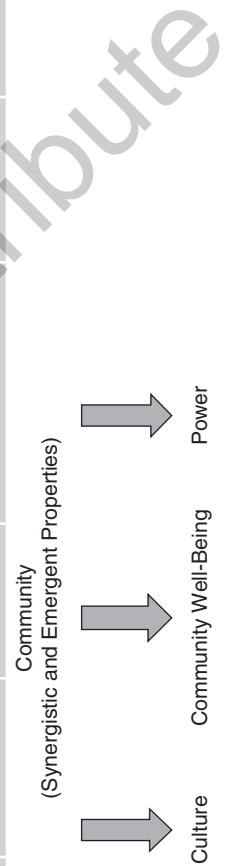
TABLE 2.1 ■ Measures for Community and Neighborhood Research Associated With Our Conceptual Framework

CONCEPTUAL DOMAINS							EMERGENT PROPERTY
Individual Engagement and Efficacy in the Community	Collective Engagement and Efficacy in the Community	Community Amenities and Resources	Community Economics	Community Safety and Security	Built/Natural Community Environment	Community Inclusivity	Community Well-Being
Citizen participation (e.g., groups, organizations, coalitions) CHAPTERS 5 & 7	Community and organizational capacity and readiness CHAPTER 4	Community organizations, services, resources, and amenities CHAPTER 8	Housing market strength CHAPTER 10	Crime indicators and levels CHAPTER 11	Home and community environment CHAPTER 8	Network assessment CHAPTER 5	Individual well-being CHAPTER 13
Civic engagement (duty, skills, connections, participation) CHAPTER 7	Community ownership and preparedness CHAPTER 4	Access to community resources and services CHAPTER 8	Housing cost burden and housing induced poverty CHAPTER 10	Exposure to community violence CHAPTER 11	Resources (parks and green space) CHAPTERS 8 & 9	Residential stability and instability CHAPTER 10	Community and neighborhood well-being CHAPTER 13
Sociopolitical control (leadership competence, policy control) CHAPTER 7	Community organizing (contexts and outcomes) CHAPTER 5	Satisfaction with services (e.g., social, government, and health services) CHAPTER 8	Deprivation and concentrated disadvantage CHAPTER 12	Perceptions of crime (fear, risk) CHAPTER 11	Healthy food environment and access to healthy food options (e.g., in neighborhoods, stores, restaurants, etc.) CHAPTER 9	Gentrification CHAPTER 10	
Psychological empowerment (cognitive, emotional, behavioral) among youth and adults CHAPTER 7	Collaboration and coalitions (characteristics, functioning, and processes) CHAPTER 5	Community satisfaction and attachment CHAPTER 8	Economic segregation CHAPTER 12		Healthy physical environment (e.g., walkability, physical activity, recreation) CHAPTER 9	Spatial and social isolation CHAPTER 12	

(*Continued*)

TABLE 2.1 ■ (Continued)

CONCEPTUAL DOMAINS							EMERGENT PROPERTY
Individual Engagement and Efficacy in the Community	Collective Engagement and Efficacy in the Community	Community Amenities and Resources	Community Economics	Community Safety and Security	Built/Natural Community Environment	Community Inclusivity	Community Well-Being
	Partnership networks, trust, power, and synergy **CHAPTER 5**	Community resource fit **CHAPTER 8**	Income diversity **CHAPTER 12**		Housing quality and affordability **CHAPTER 10**	Racial and ethnic diversity **CHAPTER 12**	
	Neighborhood social processes; collective efficacy **CHAPTER 6**				Community order and disorder (physical and social) **CHAPTER 11**		
	Social capital **CHAPTER 6**						
	Community empowerment **CHAPTER 6**						
	Sense of community **CHAPTER 6**						
	Neighborhood activism and community mobilization **CHAPTER 7**						

Community
(Synergistic and Emergent Properties)

Culture → Community Well-Being → Power

Example Application 1: Improving Access to Healthy Food

There is growing attention focused on inequitable access to healthy foods within rural and urban communities throughout the United States as well as in other countries (Beaulac, Kristjansson, & Cummins, 2009). As a result, numerous calls for action have been made for community-level changes to improve healthy food access (Institute of Medicine, 2012; Khan et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2014). Measures included in this book provide tools for evaluating the impact of healthy food access interventions, such as the development of farmers' markets or healthy corner stores that sell healthy foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables in neighborhoods with limited access to supermarkets. A first step to measurement may be the assessment of the food retail environment using measures described in Chapter 9 to determine the availability, price, and quality of healthy foods at retailers located in the community. For example, **Table 9.2, Nutrition Environment Measures Survey in Stores (NEMS-S)** assesses a variety of features of the food retail environment. Other measures in Chapter 9 could be used to assess the impact of the farmers' market or corner store interventions, especially if data were captured before and after the intervention. While this information is necessary, it may not be sufficient to mobilize support for establishing a farmers' market or transforming a corner store to include healthier food options. Therefore, the project might benefit by examining citizen participation in the healthy food access intervention planning and implementation process using tools described in Chapter 5. Given wide variability across neighborhoods, the project may also benefit by including assessments of community readiness and capacity for the intervention using measures described in Chapter 4, such as **Table 4.6, Capacity of Community-Based Health and Social Initiatives**. Together, these measures allow for examination of neighborhood change processes that catalyze or demobilize the healthy food access intervention and allow for assessment of impact.

Example Application 2: Promotion of Community Health

Health disparities and health equity issues continue to burden communities across the world. Excessive rates of diseases and death combined with a lack of access to health care create complex social, cultural, and economic conditions that may benefit from the use of multilevel measures and interventions. To demonstrate how research on communities and neighborhoods can be a dynamic community and data-driven process, we begin with a collective engagement of community agencies and resident members who coalesce together to address health issues that are critical to their own personal and community well-being. Chapter 5 contains measures that can evaluate the characteristics and functioning of a coalition (**Table 5.7, Coalition Characteristics and Impacts**) and suggests instruments that can track participation and representation of its members. Identifying factors that contribute to effective collaboration can help clarify the theoretical linkages between the collective benefit of multimember collaborations and community health. If one of the goals of the coalition is to build leadership competence around health, then measures of sociopolitical skills found in Chapter 7 (**Table 7.6, Sociopolitical Control Scale**) can assess outcomes at an individual level. The health coalition can also benefit from collecting data on the resources available in the community and resident satisfaction with services as suggested in Chapter 8 (**Table 8.6, Perceived Accessibility to Key Resources** and **Table 8.16, Access to and Satisfaction With School and Community Health Services**). Measuring access to resources and services can indicate the services currently being used and can also identify gaps or services that need to be developed. Emerging from these various approaches to health, measures of community well-being (**Chapter 13,**

Table 13.3, Overall Community Well-Being) and general satisfaction (**Chapter 8, Table 8.11, Community Satisfaction**) can aid in assessing the potential impact and outcomes of collaborative work.

Example Application 3: Promoting Community Safety and Preventing Violence

Strategies to promote community safety and prevent violence may focus on community building and organizing with the goal of increasing community engagement. These connections may result in increased collective efficacy and decreased fear among residents, with the ultimate goal of reducing neighborhood crime (Sampson, 2004; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). This community engaged model for crime prevention—such as the approaches used by Ohmer and colleagues (2016), Beck, Ohmer, and Warner (2012), Smallwood and colleagues (2015), and Zeldin (2004)—may be informed and evaluated using measures described in this book. Efforts may begin by collecting and analyzing data about levels of crime and exposure to violence across different communities. Measures described in Chapter 11 may be used to provide evidence for targeting interventions in a specific context by understanding current crime levels and residents' perceptions of crime and disorder (see measures contained in **Table 11.1**, **Community Disorder and Fear of Crime**). After one or more communities are identified, then additional information may be collected to better understand existing levels of collective efficacy and engagement within the community by utilizing measures described in Chapters 5 and 6. This type of information may reveal the differences in organizational and community capacity across different communities to mobilize around crime and violence prevention and thus lead to more tailored strategies to build their capacity to achieve the same goals. Within these collectives, information may be gathered to assess resident capacity for leading community change or levels of civic participation among residents. For example, strategies that engage youth can use the measures in Chapter 7 to examine the impact of their efforts on empowering and building their capacity (e.g., leadership and political skills) to prevent youth violence (see **Tables 7.3 and 7.4, Psychological Empowerment Among Urban Youth**). You can also use the measures in this book to examine how community interventions that facilitate collective efficacy (see **Table 6.6, Neighborhood Collective Efficacy**) can prevent crime and violence and promote empowerment among both youth and adults (Beck et al., 2012; Ohmer, 2016; Ohmer et al., 2016). Taken together, these measures focused on individual, collective, and community settings that provide information that helps to identify actions and interventions aimed at curtailing crime and preventing community violence.

Example Application 4: Prevention of Substance Use Disorders

Substance use and substance use disorders, including the recent problem of opioid addiction, represents a target for research and multiple interventions at individual, collective, and community levels. The Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) developed by SAMSHA is a data-driven, dynamic process focused on population-level change intended to guide prevention efforts of diverse community partners. It uses concepts such as the risk and protective factors associated with substance use to understand the conditions in a community and the needs of a population, including the community's capacity to organize. The framework helps advocates to plan multiple strategies and establish potential outcomes for prevention efforts.

The framework is widely used across the United States. Guided by the SPF, the measures in Chapter 4 are relevant for assessing the readiness of the

community in planning prevention strategies (**Table 4.3, Community Readiness for Community-Based Prevention**). For example, collecting data on community leadership, engagement in community decision-making, and the extent of social ties may help to identify geographically based priority areas who are ready for substance abuse prevention. Measuring satisfaction with public services, including substance abuse prevention and treatment (**Chapter 8, Table 8.14, Satisfaction With Community-Based Services**) will indicate the community's preference for and evaluation of the current service network.

CONCLUSION

The measures involved in conducting research in communities and neighborhoods are based on numerous theories and models. Theories, models, or frameworks relating to research on communities and neighborhoods will propose different hypothetical causal pathways for linking concepts like psychological empowerment to indicators of community well-being. Each theory or model may identify a slightly different set of antecedents, moderators, or mediators. Ecological theory offers four different contexts or settings for research on communities and neighborhoods, and the use of any one will draw attention to those constructs and provide a different framework for measurement and intervention. However, research and practice in communities and neighborhoods reveals the need to conduct more multilevel studies, particularly in the area of linking constructs (Altman, Sebert-Kuhlmann, & Galavotti, 2015), such as the link between citizen participation, empowerment, awareness and use of community resources, collective action, and community outcomes—such as safety and community well-being. Using a conceptual model that includes the "emergent properties" of community well-being, culture, and power may yield more robust meaning around the interactions or processes studied in community and neighborhood research.

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