

February 13, 2019

New University of Chicago study finds that LGBTQ service providers in Chicago are concentrated in white, wealthier neighborhoods

Chicago – The journal of *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* recently published a study by researchers at the University of Chicago’s Center for Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Innovation (Ci3) in Sexual and Reproductive Health. The study found that LGBTQ services in Chicago were mostly concentrated in white, wealthier neighborhoods, potentially limiting access for vulnerable populations of the LGBTQ community who may need these services the most.

Previous research has found that, due to overlapping forms of marginalization, LGBTQ people of color and low-income LGBTQ people often face worse outcomes in health, employment, education, housing, and the criminal-legal system. Nevertheless, many LGBTQ organizations have historically prioritized white, wealthier LGBTQ people while overlooking communities of color and low-income people. Researchers from Ci3 at the University of Chicago examined whether this misalignment in LGBTQ services extended to the geographic locations of these organizations as well.

The article, “[Racial and Socioeconomic Inequity in the Spatial Distribution of LGBTQ Human Services: An Exploratory Analysis of LGBTQ Services in Chicago](#),” describes the methods, results, and implications of a spatial analysis of LGBTQ service organizations in Chicago.

Between November 2015 and January 2016, researchers compiled a dataset of LGBTQ service providers using two online directories. Next, they used geographic information system (GIS) technology to create maps highlighting the distribution of these services in relation to neighborhood race and income. Using GIS tools, they also examined the racial and socioeconomic make-up of services’ surrounding areas. Finally, researchers used GIS technology to construct LGBTQ service deserts—areas more than three miles from any LGBTQ service organization—and examined the racial and socioeconomic make-up of these deserts.

Overall, analyses demonstrated that LGBTQ services were disproportionately concentrated in majority white and upper-income areas. The research also highlighted that Chicago’s black and Latinx residents are around three times as likely to live in an LGBTQ service desert as the city’s white and Asian residents. Poor and low-income people were also more likely to live in LGBTQ service deserts than middle and upper-income people.

The research study found that:

- LGBTQ service providers were disproportionately located in majority white (71.0%) and upper-income areas (63.7%) but underrepresented in majority black (9.8%), majority Latinx (6.2%), middle-income (12.4%), and lower-income areas (16.1%).

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- Black (28.7%) and Latinx (31.9%) residents in Chicago are more likely to live in LGBTQ service deserts than white (9.9%) and Asian residents (7.7%).
- Poor to lower-income residents (26.8%) are more likely to live in LGBTQ service deserts than middle- to upper-income residents (18.9%).
- Racial and class differences in access were most pronounced for legal services, recreational and arts programs, career services, and mental health services.

These patterns in the spatial distribution of LGBTQ services may impede efforts to address inequities in health and other aspects of social well-being among the LGBTQ community. First, the landscape of services may prevent many LGBTQ people of color and low-income individuals from accessing resources they need. Second, it may necessitate that some individuals of color and lower socioeconomic status travel to white, wealthier neighborhoods that have a high number of LGBTQ service providers. This includes neighborhoods such as Boystown and Andersonville, Chicago's two gayborhoods, where many individuals report experiencing racial and class discrimination from residents, business owners, and police. Ultimately, developing city-wide strategies to create a more equitable distribution of LGBTQ services and improve the inclusivity of existing services' surrounding communities may be of the utmost importance.

“Our analysis suggests that we need to more meaningfully invest in LGBTQ services in black, Latinx, and lower to middle-income communities,” said Kris Rosentel, MSW, Ci3 researcher and principal investigator of the study. “In doing so, we must also ensure that we are uplifting the leadership of individuals in these communities who have already been caring for and supporting the LGBTQ community—often without many resources or the institutional support of a social service organization.”

To review the full publication, click [here](#).

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About Ci3 at the University of Chicago

Established in 2012, Ci3 is a research center the University of Chicago addressing the social and structural determinants of adolescent sexual and reproductive health. At Ci3, we envision a world in which all youth emerge into adulthood with agency over their bodies and futures. Ci3 houses three labs: The Game Changer Chicago Design Lab; The Transmedia Story Lab; and The Design Thinking Lab. Within these labs, we create games and digital narratives, and design interventions with and for youth. Ci3 is committed to empowering young people, conducting innovative research, and uncovering opportunities for policy and systemic change.

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