

Key messages:

- A social gradient of adverse neighbourhood environment was observed using Cy-NOTes.
- Audit tools provide supplementary information about community environment not captured in census-based indices.

Observer rating of neighborhood environment: the Cyprus Neighbourhood Observation Tool (Cy-NOTes)

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Background

Census indicators describe area sociodemographic characteristics but do not capture important health-related features of the built and social environment. Observer-based ratings have been proposed as an alternative.

Methods

Three groups of neighbourhoods (<15%, ~20% and >30% of adult population with tertiary education) were audited using Cy-NOTes (126 items based on tools elsewhere). The prevalence, variability and observed differences of audited features were investigated, organised in 17 domains based on a previous typology. Validity was further assessed in terms of the observed correlation with census-based indicators, reflecting the sociodemographic composition or built environment.

Results

Neighborhoods with lower educational attainment scored statistically lower in over half the domains, mainly reflecting resident (e.g. condition of housing, grounds) rather than infrastructure features (i.e. street quality, pedestrian environment). Differences were apparent in domains with generally high (e.g. lack of physical disorder) or generally low scores (e.g. existence of recreational and public spaces). Interestingly, security-related features were more prevalent in higher education neighborhoods. Safety correlated negatively with newly built houses, population younger than 15 and household size, likely reflecting perceived concern. There were negative correlations (spearman's rho -0.3 to -0.5, p-value<0.05) between several domains and population over 65 and non-Cypriot population, but not single parent families. The strongest correlations (-0.6 to -0.7, p-value<0.01) were observed with older built (pre-1980) and vacant/for demolition houses.

Conclusions

Cy-NOTes captured variability in neighbourhood environment reflecting the socioeconomic disadvantage continuum. Further development will offer the potential to record neighborhood features in the context of community needs assessment as well as investigating place effects on health and quality of life.