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| **What is the role for community capacity building in economically marginal communities? Findings from a small town experiencing industry closure** |
| **Background/Objectives**Community capacity building is used by health promoters to achieve their programme goals, yet the wider benefits are not well understood. Previous research has found limited evidence that community capacity leads to higher self-rated health. We undertook a natural experiment to understand whether community capacity can mediate the negative effects of industry closure on the wellbeing of a community. Primary and secondary industries are in decline in many OECD countries reshaping rural and ‘blue collar’ towns. In NZ the closure of a major industry led to a relative decline in community capacity in the study town. We extend these findings by examining associations between income and perceptions of community capacity to understand the role for health promoters in declining communities. **Methods**Community capacity and self-rated health were measured using a cross-sectional survey disseminated to residents of a small New Zealand town both one year prior and subsequent to the partial-closure of its freezing works. Individuals were matched with residents of three control towns. We received 295 responses; response rates were 56% and 70% at baseline and follow-up, respectively. A scale to measure community capacity was developed and validated. Linear regression models controlled for a range of plausible confounders. **Results**We examined associations between income and community capacity at the individual level, finding positive, largely non-significant trends suggesting an association between higher community capacity and higher income. Unpacking dimensions of community capacity further, we identify a sense of place (p=0.018) and participating in one’s community (p=0.015) were positively associated with income. This builds on previous findings that positive associations between income and self-rated health were slightly attenuated by adjusting for community capacity. **Discussion**Our findings add further weight to the role of civic participation as a key element of both social capital and community capacity. For health promoters, community capacity building remains important for health promotion programs but the benefits are likely to be borne out at the individual rather than community level. However, these findings suggest that civic participation is a tool for supporting the economic wellbeing of communities. **Keywords**Community capacity, industry closure, self-rated health |