

Assessing Social Capital in Kansas: Findings from Quantitative and Qualitative Studies

*A Report to the Kansas Health Institute
Executive Summary*



KANSAS HEALTH INSTITUTE

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Executive Summary

Study Background

Social capital has become popular in the past 20 years with the growing appreciation for contextual influences on health (Coleman, 1990; Kawachi & Berkman, 2000; Kawachi et al, 1999; Kennedy et al, 1998; Lochner et al, 1999; Putnam, 1995). Although the construct of social capital has been defined in a variety of ways (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993; Lappe and DuBois, 1997; Potapchuk, Crocker and Schechter, 1997; Lomas, 1998), all definitions include some notion of *social connectedness*, accompanied by the premise that communities with “stronger” connections (e.g., more trusting relationships, wider networks, denser networks, more bridging across lines of difference) are in a better position to promote the well-being of their members. Social capital has been associated with a variety of important outcomes, including health, economic development, crime, and child development (e.g., Berkman, 1995; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997; Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, and Prothrow-Smith, 1997; Lomas, 1998).

Recognizing the beneficial value of social capital, an increasing number of local communities and states have become interested in enhancing social capital to improve the lives of their residents. This has been particularly true within the philanthropic sector. The Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) has had a longstanding interest in social capital, and even a longer term commitment to promoting health by affecting the social determinants of health. It has a broad-based mission that includes work in the areas of children’s health, public health, policy, and leadership. In 1995, KHF established the Kansas Health Institute (KHI) to be an information source for policy makers. KHI has recently established an area of work to help guide policy makers about the role of social capital in developing healthy communities.

KHF commissioned KHI in 2006 to carry out a study that would generate empirical measures of social capital in the context of Kansas. The stated goal of the study is “to establish a valid, methodologically rigorous, and visionary baseline measurement of social capital in Kansas.” To carry out this assignment, KHI partnered with the Saguaro Seminar at Harvard University, a group established by Robert Putnam to educate the public about the importance of social capital and to promote efforts to build social capital. Saguaro coordinated the 2000 Social Capital Benchmark Survey (SCBS), a comprehensive telephone survey on a wide variety of behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions related to trust, relationships, socializing, and involvement with civic groups. This survey was administered to 29,222 respondents throughout the country, including a nationally representative sample of 3,003 and separate samples in 40 communities where a foundation sponsored the survey. These communities (listed in Table 1-1) varied in size from portions of a city (e.g., North Minneapolis) to entire states (e.g., Montana, Indiana, New Hampshire).

In 2006, Saguaro replicated the Benchmark survey with modest revisions. The new survey (referred to as the Social Capital Community Survey, or SCCS) was administered within a representative national sample (n=2741) as well as in communities where a local foundation was willing to serve as a sponsor. KHF was one of ten foundations that chose to participate. In Kansas, Saguaro conducted the survey within a statewide sample (stratified into rural and urban Kansas) and within five Kansas communities (Abilene, Garden City, Junction City, Kansas City, and Wichita), selected to represent a diverse cross-section of towns and cities across the state.

Study Goal

The goal of this project was twofold: 1) to analyze the survey data in order to develop a baseline measure of social capital for the state and five target communities (i.e., Garden City, Junction City, Kansas City, Wichita, and Abilene); and 2) to supplement the quantitative survey analyses with a qualitative study of social capital in each of the five target communities. With this combination of quantitative and qualitative

methods, the study aimed to address the question of whether social capital provides a meaningful framework for KHI and KHF to adopt in their future programming and research.

Methods

Part I: Survey

The analysis of the 2006 Social Capital Community Survey (SCCS) was guided primarily by the following research question: **“How much social capital exists within Kansas and the five target communities?”** We address this question with a variety of approaches, ranging from simple descriptive statistics on specific survey items to more complex scaling methods that allow communities to be visually compared to one another. Appendix B presents the response distribution for 65 distinct indicators of social capital, reporting the data separately for the five Kansas communities, the rural and urban samples, the Kansas statewide sample, and the representative U.S. sample. Because it is difficult to detect larger patterns when reviewing 38 pages of tables, we created “indicator” tables that summarize the geographic differences (Kansas vs. the U.S., urban vs. rural, differences among the five target communities). We also adopted a second approach to summarizing the information in the survey items – multi-item scales. Building on the analytic work that the Saguaro Seminar performed with respect to the 2000 survey, we employed 11 scales that assess the following dimensions of social capital:

- Social Support
- Informal Social Interaction
- Social Trust
- Diversity of Friendship Set
- Inter-racial Trust
- Organized Group Interaction
- Involvement with Formal Groups
- Faith-Based Social Capital
- Giving and Volunteering
- Electoral Politics
- Protest Politics

These scales were used to further test how the five target communities differ from one another. Data from the 2000 survey were analyzed to assess how the Kansas communities compare to other U.S. communities. Factor analysis was employed to reduce the dimensionality of the comparisons.

In addition to using the survey data to assess social capital *at the community level*, we also were interested in understanding how social capital-related behavior, attitudes, relationships, etc. vary as a function of the respondents’ demographic characteristics: age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income, and political ideology, and years in the community. The final analysis made use of what we learned through the individual-level modeling analyses to better understand the differences in social capital we observed between the five target communities.

Part II: Qualitative Study

The second part of the study, the field studies in each of the five target communities, had two general purposes: to check the validity of the survey findings and to gather additional information that helps explain the findings and provide a context for the results.

Sample: We conducted individual interviews with key informants in each of the five communities. The interviewees were selected through snowball sampling, whereby the first few people, who were identified through Internet searches or referred by KHI, suggested additional contacts, who in turn suggested even more people to interview. In our initial searches we attempted to find contact information for people holding key positions in each community and for people representing important sectors (e.g., education, law enforcement, health care, housing, etc.). After our initial round of interviews we also purposefully

looked for individuals who could provide information about aspects of social capital that emerged as particularly important in that locality.

Interviews: We initially contacted potential interviewees by email, followed up with telephone calls. We asked all interviewees to designate a meeting place convenient to them for the interview. The field researcher made at least two separate trips to each of the communities and, in some cases, more. At the time the interviews were conducted, interviewees were asked to sign an informed consent form, which outlined the purpose of the study, the procedure, and the risks and benefits to the participants. The study was also discussed with them prior to these meeting (through our email exchanges and on the telephone). Interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. They were tape recorded with the permission of the interviewee and transcribed later.

We used an interview guide to structure the interviews. In general, we began the interviews by asking people to tell us about their community using maps that we had obtained from the Kansas Department of Transportation. The maps, which were large and detailed, allowed the interviewees to talk about the spatial and physical features (e.g., public facilities, transportation routes, neighborhoods) of their communities that were important to various domains of social capital. The maps were also a way to ask people about changes to their communities over time, such as where new developments were being built and who was moving there.

In the second part of the interview we showed interviewees some of the preliminary survey data, including national data, state level data, and data from their community for questions in each domain of social capital. We asked people how the survey findings reflected their experience of the community and whether they were ‘surprised’ by the findings or not. The findings that generated the most discussion were the ones that differentiated the community the most (e.g., low levels of electoral political participation in Garden City; high levels of involvement in neighborhood associations in Kansas City).

We organized some of our later interviews around specific initiatives or elements of social capital that emerged as important. For instance, in Kansas City we conducted a series of interviews around the Livable Neighborhoods initiative which was the city’s attempt to organize a network of neighborhood associations. In Abilene, as mentioned earlier, we interviewed people about issues of diversity and integration, including people who had recently moved to the community and people who might be considered ‘different’ because they were gay or were a racial or ethnic minority.

Throughout the interview process we gathered information about community assets and challenges. No specific questions were asked to generate this material; rather, the information emerged during the interviews.

In all of the communities we gathered secondary sources of information wherever possible. For instance, many of the interviewees provided us with literature about their organizations that contained information germane to a discussion of social capital. Other pointed us to websites where we found information relevant to our questions. For instance, a ‘visioneering’ task force in Wichita conducted studies and collected information that speaks about the city’s attempts to re-make itself in ways that resonate with our findings.

The information from the interviews and review of materials were summarized into case studies. These case studies are presented in Chapter 5 of the full report.

Results from the Analysis of Survey Data

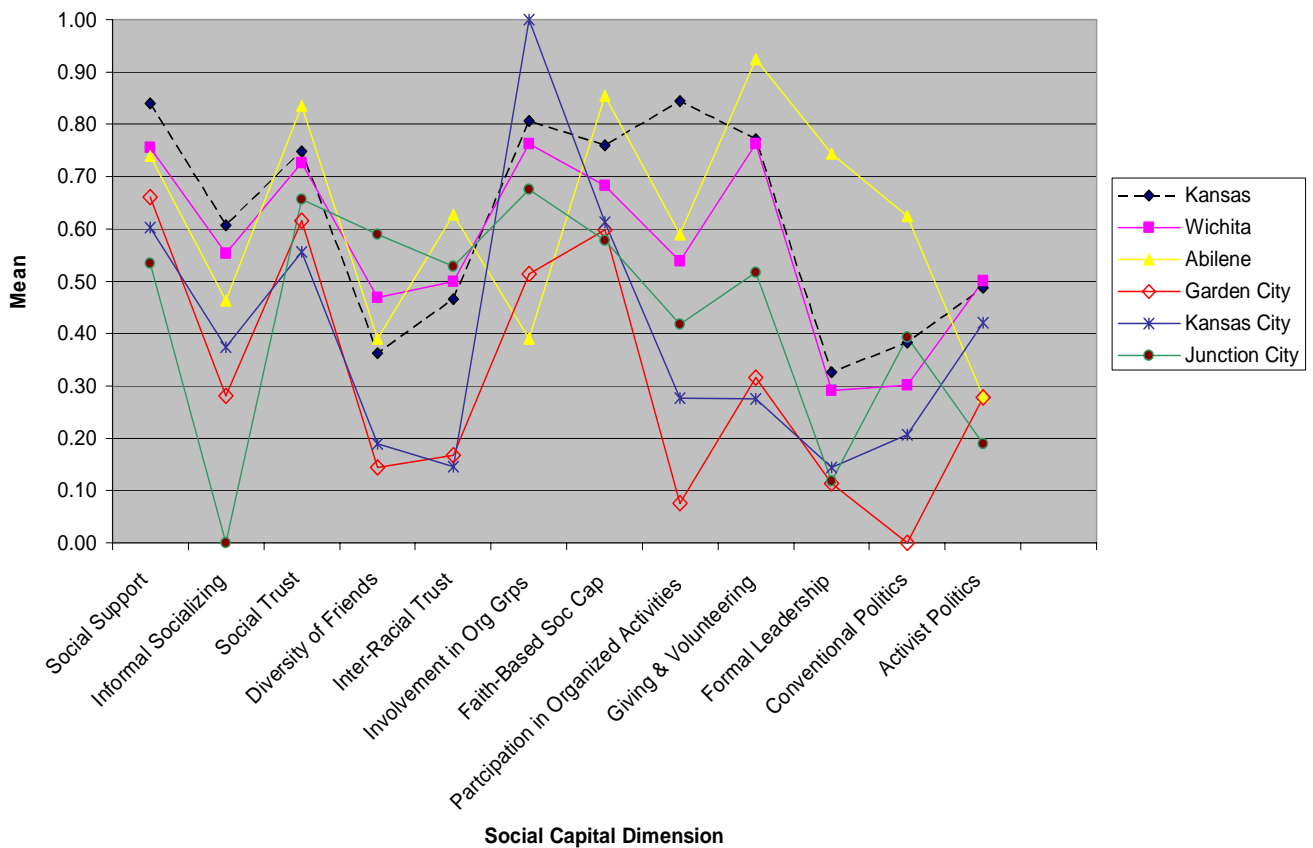
On a majority of the social capital items, the Kansas sample reported higher levels than did the national sample. The largest differences occurred among items that assess civic participation, especially involvement with formal groups. When the analysis was conducted using multi-item scales, notable differences were observed on the following scales:

- Organized Group Interaction
- Involvement with Formal Groups
- Faith-Based Social Capital
- Giving and Volunteering

In terms of urban-rural differences, the urban sample has much higher scores on the Involvement with Groups, Participation in Organized Activities, and Activist Politics scales, with a less pronounced advantage in the Social Support scale. In contrast the rural sample has more respondents who reported playing a leadership role in formal organizations and a marginally significant advantage on the Social Trust scale.

One of the most important (although perhaps unsurprising) findings to emerge from the study is that levels and types of social capital vary considerably across communities within the Kansas. The survey showed that across a variety of indicators, Abilene and Wichita had higher levels of social capital than did Garden City, Junction City, and Kansas City. This pattern is apparent from Figure 1.

Figure 1. Mean Values on Social Capital Scales for Five Target Communities
(normalized to 0-1 scales based on minimum and maximum over all communities)



Each community can point to some dimensions of social capital where it is strong and others where work is needed. For example, Abilene came out high on many of the items that one typically associates with a tight-knit, giving community (e.g., trust of neighbors, attendance at church, volunteering), but these same qualities exerted a downward effect on bridging social capital – possibly because the culture encourages residents to conform to the dominant norms and behaviors. At the other extreme, Kansas City had low scores on many dimensions (including the lowest score among the five Kansas communities on the “Giving and Volunteering” scale), but its score on “Involvement in Organized Groups” was higher than the other four Kansas communities, and in fact higher than any of the 40 communities surveyed in 2000.

The fact that communities rank inconsistently across different aspects of social capital means that it is inappropriate to assign a unitary social capital “score.” Just as health care providers use a variety of vital signs (e.g., heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, body temperature) to gauge the health of a patient, the 12 scales reported here provide a more comprehensive picture of a community’s standing on social capital. The picture can be made more complete by incorporating the contextual and explanatory data that come from qualitative interviews.

Alternatively, a simpler picture (one that allows for a large number of communities to be compared at the same time) can be created by taking advantage of the results of the factor analysis – which showed that three-fourths of information contained in the 12 scales can be distilled into three composite factors. The first factor distinguishes “socially connected” communities (i.e., places where residents help one another and work together cooperatively for common purposes) from those that are more fragmented. The second factor can be interpreted in terms of “civic engagement,” with high-scoring communities having high rates of volunteerism and involvement with formal groups. The third factor distinguishes communities where residents acknowledge, and even celebrate, differences – political, racial, religious, cultural, etc. On the first factor (social connectedness), the five Kansas communities range from “somewhat low” to “slightly above average.” On the second factor (civic engagement), the Kansas communities all score high relative to the rest of the country, although some (e.g., Abilene) are higher than others (e.g., Garden City). For the third factor (appreciation of diversity), the Kansas communities clump largely in the middle, although again here there are interesting distinctions among the five communities.

The variation in levels and types of social capital that we observed among the five target communities argues against reaching any firm conclusions about how much social capital exists in the state of Kansas. Although it is possible to assess social capital at a state level (e.g., through surveying a sample that is representative of the state population), social capital is inherently a characteristic of more micro-level communities. In aggregating to the state level, one can identify some larger (e.g., regional) forces and cultural characteristics, but a state-level assessment is essentially an average of what is occurring within many different communities within the state. Again, referring back to Figure 1, the social capital profile generated by the Kansas state sample is different than that of any of the five communities. It is probably closest to Wichita, but even here there are interesting distinctions (e.g., participation in organized activities). Similarly, there are key differences between urban Kansas and rural Kansas, especially with regard to involvement in formal groups and participation in organized activities – each of which is significantly higher in urban communities.

Community Characterizations

Table 1 presents an integrated summary of the five target communities, taking into account what the survey indicated about the community’s standing on the different dimensions of social capital and what the qualitative study learned about the factors that contribute to or detract from social capital within the community. History, demographics, politics, economy, geographical location, infrastructure, and leadership were among the characteristics that shaped the development and maintenance of social capital. What affected social capital in one city was not always a factor in another city.

**Table 1. Level of Social Capital Dimensions and Related Contextual Factors in Five Target Cities in Kansas:
Survey and Interview Findings**

	Abilene	Garden City	Junction City	Kansas City	Wichita
Social trust	Level: High. Factors: Stability of population; small size, committed leadership; city invests in residents	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: History of crime and gangs; immigrants taken advantage of.	Level: High (including among minorities). Factors: Diversity is accepted part of military life; culture of collaboration.	Level: Low (especially among minorities). Factors: History of segregation, poverty, and crime; fears of undocumented immigrants.	Level: High (lower among minorities) Factors: Decentralization of govt.; small size of city; Note: Crime and poverty hinder trust.
Inter-racial trust	Level: Survey sample too small to determine. Factors: Diversity is increasing; concerns about growth get mixed with concerns about immigrants.	Level: Low (high among whites; low among Hispanics). Factors: Language, immigrants taken advantage of; racial profiling.	Level: High. Factors: High diversity (racially and internationally); Military tolerance; interracial marriages.	Level: Low. Factors: Long history of government neglect of poor; perceived discrimination; tension btw Blacks/Hispanics; segregated neighs.	Level: Higher than KS. (higher for whites and Blacks than Hispanics). Factors: Racism; immigrants not assimilated; White flight.
Conventional politics	Level: High. Factors: Culture of citizen engagement; strong Republican base; some too busy and uninformed (mainly in poorer area in south).	Level: Low. Factors: Transience; structure of economy (low-skilled workers w/ long hours); ltd. info in Spanish; ineligibility to vote; apathy.	Level: Low. Factors: Transience; apathy. Interviewees said lower than survey. Increased involvement due to concerns about growth and diversity.	Level: Low. Factors: Lack of information; candidates not speaking to certain populations; history of machine politics; no voice in some areas.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: Ineligible felons and immigrants; discomfort with church politics; transportation and other access issues; apathy; low youth inv.
Activist politics	Level: Low. Factors: Citizens have access to officials; protesting too “public.” Letters to editor preferred.	Level: Low. Factors: People complain, but do not take action. Recent rallies on immigration, English as primary language; unionizing.	Level: Low. Factors: Quiet, relaxed town; protesting is not part of political strategy.	Level: Low. Factors: Fear among immigrants; combative approaches not necessary. Note: Some activism through churches.	Level: High. Factors: Several petitions in survey year; petitions more accessible than ballot box; active neighborhood assocs.
Civic leadership	Level: High. Factors: Small group of long-term leaders; heavy on prominent families; need to recruit young and new people.	Level: Low. Factors: Transience; troubles getting minority leaders. City leaders lauded for preparing for growth and new immigrants.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: Leaders commended for strong ties to Ft. Riley. Military is embraced.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: Small group of leaders; lack of young leaders. Note: Leaders commended for coordination of servcs; local leaders emerging through neigh assocs.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: Conservative town; leaders avoid contentious issues; competition between government leaders at all levels. Note: Efforts underway re leadership.

	Abilene	Garden City	Junction City	Kansas City	Wichita
Organizational involvement	Level: Low. Factors: Residents participate but are not “members.”; young people too busy; no neighborhood assocs; more arts and hobby groups; training for youth available.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: Transience; weekend exodus; young age of residents; nobody invests for the long-term; many groups predominantly white—not easy for minorities.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: No neigh. assoc. (more youth, school & veteran grps); youth not joiners. Note: Military families are highly involved; orgs trying to adapt schedules to busy lives.	Level: High. Factors: High number of neighborhood assoc; barriers to joining: language, time, culture (joining is dangerous in some countries), fear of reprisals and deportation.	Level: Comparable to KS. Factors: Sports teams, neighborhood groups; gardening clubs, youth organizations.
Giving	Level: High. Factors: Generous culture; focus on youth.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: Young residents; transience; weekend exodus. Note: Perception of high giving (divergence from survey).	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: Low-income, but generous people; many small donations; leadership key in obtaining donations; anonymous giving.	Level: Low. Factors: Low income population.	Level: High. Factors: Generous support for families & community; youth not so giving; corporate motivations are complex.
Volunteering	Level: Comparable to KS. Factors: Some activities (e.g., coaching) not called volunteering; younger people do not volunteer. Same small group does all work.	Level: Low. Factors: transience, youth, and long work hours (shift work). Same small group of people volunteer.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: People don’t come through; more talk than action (some said it was much lower than survey); others discussed impressive volunteer efforts.	Level: Low. Factors: People are too busy; high level of poverty; initiatives are dying for lack of volunteers. Some divergence—perception of more volunteering.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: Time and scheduling. Note: community service is becoming part of education and community programs.
Faith-based engagement	Level: High. Factors: Churches play prominent role; membership is important; numerous denominations.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: Many attend but do not join; weekend travel limits participation.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: No young members. Note: High Church diversity; tolerance all types of engagement.	Level: Lower than KS. Factors: Church is less prominent than it was. Note: Church still plays role in community devt. and leadership training.	Level: Higher than nation; lower than KS. Factors: Churches play key role. Young not involved. Politicization of churches is turnoff.
Informal socializing and diversity of friendships	Level: Both comparable to KS. Factors: Extensive family ties; more difficult for young people without children (no venues) and newcomers (cliquish).	Level: Both low. Transient; set up for business, not play. More socializing among Hispanics. Those who stay long-term have stronger ties.	Informal soc: low Div. of friends: high Factors: Too few restaurants; venues (new sites under development.). High diversity of race, class, and religion in population.	Level: Both low. Factors: Diverse population; segregated neighborhoods; closing of malls; lack of transportation; people socialize within their networks.	Informal soc: = KS. Div of friends: > KS. Factors: Not much to do; cost of events; safety of some venues; exodus to other cities; diversity of population.

	Abilene	Garden City	Junction City	Kansas City	Wichita
Assets	Public spaces; transportation; stability; family friendliness	Open to innovation. Visionary leadership. Prepared for change.	Diversity; tolerance; growth; military.	Revitalization; strong neighborhoods; coordinated services, leadership.	Decentralized government; neighborhood associations; sports teams; welcoming city; “visioneering” effort underway.
Challenges	Tolerance of diversity not clear; engagement of newcomers and residents difficult.	Transience; immigration tensions; no mid-level jobs.	Growth goes up and down; infrastructure and housing not ready for rapid growth of military return; cost of homes.	Segregated neighborhoods; history of neglect of certain populations; discrimination; wariness of newcomers; transportation.	Lack of things to do; retaining young people; perceived racism and classism; fear of diversity; White flight; poor transportation; apathy.

For example, take social trust. They survey and field work both found social trust to be high in Abilene and Junction City. The “story” around this finding in Abilene was quite different than it was in Junction City. In Abilene, people explained that social trust is high because the town is small, safe, and stable, with many families living there for multiple generations. Residents take pride in their history and heritage, and the leaders are committed to meeting the needs of the residents. In Junction City, which is much more transient and racially diverse than Abilene, the high social trust, particularly among minorities, was related to the presence of the military, which generally embraces diversity and collaboration.

Another example can be seen comparing the context around the low involvement in conventional politics found in Garden City and Kansas City. In Garden City, reasons for low involvement included the transient population, the structure of the economy (low-skilled, shift work, long hours), lack of information in Spanish, immigrants’ ineligibility to vote, and apathy. In Kansas City, lack of involvement in conventional politics was related to a history of neglect of certain populations and areas of town. In some neighborhoods, it was difficult to get information about upcoming elections or to meet candidates, and residents did not think their votes would make a difference.

Although most of the contextual characteristics were unique to each city, there were certain community factors that had a consistent influence on social capital across the different cities. For example, in Abilene, Garden City, and Wichita, residents mentioned that **youth** were less likely to volunteer or donate money and less likely to be involved in community organizations. In addition, in several communities, **leadership** was mentioned as critical for preparing for growth and increased immigration (Abilene, Garden City, Junction City), strengthening neighborhoods (Kansas City, Wichita), and improving coordination of government services (Kansas City, Wichita). Also fairly consistent regarding leadership was the identification of a need for recruitment and training of new and younger leaders. **Transience**, which emerged as a significant barrier to almost every component of social capital, was a major challenge in Garden City, where the structure of the economy relies on low-skilled workers, and in Junction City, where a large portion of residents are in the military. Further, the cities with significant numbers of **immigrants** noted that these residents are less likely to join organizations, engage in conventional or protest politics, or participate in civic leadership for a variety of reasons, including language barriers, illegal status, and poor treatment by other ethnic groups. These barriers were considerably less for those who have been in the U.S. for a while compared to new arrivals. The issue of immigration is relevant to all five communities, as each is expecting periods of growth and increased immigration. Related to immigration is the issue of **tolerance**. Most communities revealed some degree of tensions related to minority populations. Whether these issues are deeply rooted in history or emerging with growth, intolerance was noted as a significant barrier to building social capital. Finally, two **infrastructure** characteristics were mentioned in multiple cities: transportation and translation. Public transportation affected both mobility and ability to interact with others. Translation and bilingual information were essential to engage immigrant populations.

Convergence/Divergence Between the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

In addition to learning about the community context, the qualitative study also provided a means to validate (or refute) the data coming from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey. The question of whether RDD telephone surveys generate valid conclusions about social capital was raised in many of the communities that participated in the 2000 SCBS. Critics of the survey cite the fact that even the best telephone surveys now have response rates below 50% and fail to reach individuals who only use cell phones. TNSI employs a rigorous algorithm to compensate for under-represented segments of the sampled population, but doubts have persisted as to whether the survey data are truly reflective of actual levels of trust, connectedness, engagement, volunteering, etc. The JHU team explicitly addressed this question by presenting community leaders with summary data from the survey and asking about the believability of the findings.

For the most part, the case studies validated the survey findings, with interviewees providing extensive explanations that support the findings. There were only a few identified cases of divergence between the survey results and the perceptions of the community residents. For example, in Abilene, interviewees perceived the level of volunteering to be much higher than the survey indicated. One potential explanation offered by residents was that many people do activities for the community (e.g., coaching for their child's team) but do not consider it volunteering; instead, they consider these activities as part of family life. The other examples of divergence are summarized in the full report. Overall, the points of divergence do not indicate the survey was not accurately measuring the dimensions of social capital. Instead, they provide insight into what is really happening with regard to the specific social capital component and provide helpful explanations and caveats for interpretation.

Recommendations for Intervention

The findings from this study have implications for how the foundation frames its analysis of a community and how it tailors its programming to address community issues. The overriding conclusion from the case studies is that any efforts to address social capital need to examine communities individually. Social capital is a multifaceted construct and each community will have strengths and weakness. Even more importantly, each community has its own unique set of contextual influences. For both reasons, it would be imprudent for a foundation (or any outside actor) to develop one approach to improving social capital and apply it across the board. Instead, the first step is to identify and understand those contextual factors.

In this study, we found that leadership, politics, demographics, history, economy, infrastructure, community size, and geographical location were among the many factors influencing social capital. Identifying these contextual factors will guide the tailoring of interventions. For example, we found the poor public transportation system in Kansas City affects multiple aspects of social capital, including participation in community organizations, civic leadership, and conventional politics as well as informal socializing, diversity of friendships, and volunteering. This lack of participation, in turn, diminishes social trust and inter-racial trust. Improving the transportation system, therefore, will have extensive benefits for social capital.

Both bonding and bridging social capital are important and should be considered separately. In many cities, bonds within neighborhoods or specific groups of residents were strong, but bridges between neighborhoods and between groups were weak. It is also possible that strong bonds among community residents could hinder bridging to other residents. This is particularly important given the growth and increase in immigration occurring in Kansas. Communities that have been historically strong in social capital may be challenged by the influx of newcomers and immigrants and need assistance with forging bridges between the different groups.

Social trust emerged as a particularly important component of social capital. In each of the cities social trust and interracial trust affected many of the other dimensions of social capital. For example, in Kansas City, low social trust, especially among minorities, can be connected to the lack of faith in the political system and leadership activities as well as the low level of diverse friendships and informal socializing. In Abilene, high social trust, which is rooted in the stability of social ties and the close knit fabric of the community, fosters high levels of engagement. However, those who are not part of this long-standing community do not report as much trust or involvement. It is important to note that Abilene expects a continual increase in newcomers and immigrants, and this may have an effect on social trust.

Leadership plays an important role in developing social capital. Each city underscored the role of leaders at the city and neighborhood levels in building and maintaining community ties and involvement. Leaders sensitive to the issues affecting social capital can address intermediary factors and develop a social context that fosters improved social capital.

Continued Assessment

If KHF does decide to develop strategies to build social capital in Kansas communities, we would recommend that the methods employed in this study be incorporated into the evaluation. Especially if KHF focuses resources on a relatively small set of communities, it would be useful to have quantitative and qualitative data at baseline and at a suitable follow-up point (e.g., five years after the initiative begins). The survey can quantitatively assess change; the qualitative assessment will help explain the survey findings and identify areas in need of attention.

Even if KHF decides not to develop initiatives focused specifically on building social capital, the social capital framework allows for a broad, yet strategic examination of community attitudes and functioning – one that can be helpful in determining which resources and guidance will be most effective and which forms of leadership training the community will find amenable.

The methods employed in this study can be useful with regard to community assessment. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches yields a rich community profile that is valuable in 1) assessing the needs of the community up front, and 2) guiding the approach one would take to work at the community level to build healthier communities.

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