

REFLECTIONS ON AIR POLLUTION AND EQUITY FROM A STUDY OF PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

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It appears that air pollution, like many environmental risks, is not evenly distributed across the population. Many mapping studies have shown that minority racial groups and people of lower socio-economic status tend to be subjected to greater air pollution where they live. This is extremely important by itself but a recent study of people's experiences of air pollution has added a further dimension. This particular study looked at four neighbourhoods in north London, in which calculated pollution levels and socio-economic status differed. The study considered perceived levels of pollution as well as perceived health and non-health impacts. It was found that residents of the different areas differed in their perception of air pollution levels but their perception of the impacts attributed to air pollution differed far less. It seems, therefore, that concentration at home may not be the most important factor in terms of perceived impacts, as people experience air pollution in many places in their daily lives. Nevertheless, the physical attributes of certain areas may affect how air quality is experienced. In addition, other aspects such as the individual's medical vulnerability may be important in the experience of impacts. This has implications for the conceptualisation of environmental equity or implementation of environmental justice, as it concerns air pollution.