

The Elusive Neighborhood Effect: Heterogeneity in the Impact of Concentrated Poverty on Adolescents' Future College Outcomes

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This research analyzes the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage during adolescence and future college outcomes. Neighborhoods continue to be the focus of substantial scientific inquiry, including recent calls to analyze heterogeneity in neighborhood effects. Cumulative advantage/disadvantage and stage-environment fit theories offer competing expectations for effect heterogeneity. I find that concentrated poverty has no impact on an adolescent's likelihood of attending college but does reduce odds of graduating college. The neighborhood effect is strong and heterogenous, operating only for adolescents least likely to reside in concentrated poverty, which accords with stage-environment fit theory. I assess collective socialization, relative advantage, and epidemic/peer effects as mechanisms for the neighborhood effect. Supporting collective socialization theory, neighborhood economic opportunity and resources explain the effect. These results offer an explanation for the lack of educational impacts from the Moving to Opportunity experiment; adolescents most likely to experience neighborhood effects were unlikely to be included in the experiment.