

# Disadvantaged neighborhoods set children's reading skills on negative course

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A landmark study from the University of British Columbia finds that the neighbourhoods in which children reside at kindergarten predict their reading comprehension skills seven years later.

The study, published this week in the journal *Health & Place*, finds children who live in neighbourhoods with higher rates of poverty show reduced scores on standardized tests seven years later - regardless of the child's place of residence in Grade 7. The study is the first of its kind to compare the relative effects of neighbourhood poverty at early childhood and early adolescence.

"Our findings suggest that it's not necessarily where children live later in life that matters for understanding literacy in early adolescence - it's where they lived years earlier," says lead researcher Jennifer Lloyd of UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP). "Children's reading comprehension may be set on a negative course early in life if children and their families are living in resource-deprived places."

Lloyd explored children's Grade 7 reading comprehension outcomes in relation to their residential neighbourhoods' level of poverty (concentrated disadvantage) at [kindergarten](#) and Grade 7. Higher rates of poverty have been shown to be associated with higher rates of infant mortality, low birth weight, high school drop-out rates and adolescent delinquency.

Along with colleagues Leah Li and Clyde Hertzman, Lloyd collected

Grade 7 Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) data for 2,648 urban British Columbia children, followed from kindergarten to Grade 7, as well as socioeconomic data describing the children's residential neighbourhoods at both time points.

The researchers found a "delayed effect" of the residential environments in which children are raised. Children who lived in neighbourhoods with a higher socioeconomic status at kindergarten age scored better on the Grade 7 FSA than children who came from poorer neighbourhoods - regardless of where they lived in Grade 7.

The researchers say it's possible that the socioeconomic conditions of children's early residential neighbourhoods exert a strong effect later because acquiring reading skills involves the collective efforts of parents, educators, family friends and community members, as well as access to good schools, libraries, after-school programs and bookstores.

"Sadly, our findings demonstrate the lasting effect of neighbourhood poverty on children's reading comprehension - highlighting that children's literacy is not simply an important issue for parents, but also for community leaders and policy makers alike," Lloyd says.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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