

Black families growing up on either side of the tracks have same economic outcomes, says study

June 27 2023, by Tracy DeStazio



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

For many, neighborhoods that offer children access to better resources, less crime and less violence often result in better opportunities for

healthier and more prosperous lives. Indeed, researchers studying the effects of moving to "opportunity neighborhoods" argue that very point and many policymakers have taken notice. However, so far, researchers have only accounted for the neighborhoods where children grow up, ignoring the long-term effects that parents' childhood neighborhoods have on children's adult economic well-being.

Expanding on the relatively short-term and single-generation body of research, University of Notre Dame assistant professor of sociology Steven Alvarado used 35 years' worth of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth from 1979 to 2014 to study what happened when multiple generations of Black, white and Latino families lived on one side of the tracks versus the other.

Somewhat surprisingly, Alvarado and his co-author, Alexandra Cooperstock, a doctoral candidate in sociology at Cornell University, found that Black families—regardless of where they lived—still ended up in similar economic circumstances as they moved into adulthood and entered the workforce.

In their study, "The Echo of Neighborhood Disadvantage: Multigenerational Contextual Hardship and Adult Income for Whites, Blacks, and Latinos," which was recently published in the journal *City and Community*, the researchers concluded that race was the chief factor in contributing to one's economic success in the U.S. over multiple generations.

"Any benefits accrued by growing up in more advantaged neighborhoods may be undercut by enhanced discrimination in the [labor market](#) and society at large," the researchers wrote. "Race, not class origins, is the dominant factor governing the economic mobility of Black individuals."

Alvarado explained that neighborhood mobility does not work as well

for Blacks in the United States as it does for whites and Latinos in terms of economic development.

"When comparing Black families who were exposed to multiple generations of neighborhood disadvantage versus Black families who were not, they both end up having the same economic outcomes in adulthood," he said. "Race still trumps class origins in America when it comes to the labor market."

Alvarado said his study employed a novel technique not used in previous studies of the effects of neighborhood processes on economic outcomes: the examination of intergenerational associations rather than just using a single generation. The researchers linked exposure to neighborhood disadvantage in both mothers' and children's childhoods with the adult income of the children—which, researchers wrote, "will provide a more complete picture of neighborhood influence and expand our understanding of how inequality forms and is maintained over time."

The longitudinal survey data allowed the researchers to link neighborhood conditions with economic outcomes across multiple generations for white, Latino and Black families.

One of the more compelling findings of their study, researchers said, was that Latino families experienced the most positive growth in adult earnings. These findings suggest that Latinos—especially non-Black Latinos—are likely to benefit more in the long run, economically speaking, than whites or Blacks when removed from their disadvantaged neighborhoods.

"There's definitely a lot more room for neighborhood-level opportunity to manifest into economic success for Latinos than for Blacks," Alvarado added.

And Black residents' incomes, the researchers said, "continue to be immune" to whether their [family](#) lives in a good neighborhood or a bad neighborhood, across generations.

"Moving Blacks to better neighborhoods could procure positive outcomes—such as improved [cognitive development](#) and behavior and decreased [illicit drug use](#) during childhood and adolescence," Alvarado concluded. "But once it gets to the labor market, it's a whole different story."

The researchers argued that structural change is needed in the way that Black individuals are treated in the U.S. labor market to increase their economic success. Efforts to simply move Black residents to better [neighborhoods](#) "are unlikely to have a significant impact on racial income gaps," they said.

More information: Steven Elías Alvarado et al, The Echo of Neighborhood Disadvantage: Multigenerational Contextual Hardship and Adult Income for Whites, Blacks, and Latinos, *City & Community* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/15356841231179436](https://doi.org/10.1177/15356841231179436)

Provided by University of Notre Dame

Citation: Black families growing up on either side of the tracks have same economic outcomes, says study (2023, June 27) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-06-black-families-side-tracks-economic.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.