Unlike most whites, blacks and Hispanics tend to have neighbors from other racial groups who are disproportionately likely to be poor. This contributes importantly to the high poverty rates of the neighborhoods lived in by black and Hispanic families and to high poverty rates of schools attended by black and Hispanic children.

Lincoln Quillian, professor of sociology and faculty fellow at the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University, analyzed data from the 2000 census and found that the disproportionate poverty of blacks' and Hispanics' other-race neighbors plays an important role in creating racial disparities in neighborhood poverty. The other-race neighbors of black and Hispanic families are disproportionately likely to be poor regardless for black and Hispanic families of all income levels.

Concentrated poverty in minority communities results from three segregations: racial segregation, poverty-status segregation within race and segregation from high- and middle-income members of other racial groups, according to the study. Past work has emphasized racial segregation and poverty-status segregation within race, but has missed the important role played by the disproportionately low-income levels of other-race neighbors of blacks and Hispanics.

Quillian hopes his study continues to shed light on the phenomenon of concentrated poverty in neighborhoods and racial inequalities in neighborhood environments.

"Nationally there is evidence that as racial segregation has been slowly going down that income segregation has been going up," Quillian said. "Blacks and Hispanics often are co-residing with poorer members of their racial groups."

White middle-class families overwhelmingly live in middle-class neighborhoods and send their children to middle-class schools. But many black and Hispanic middle-class families live in working-class or poor neighborhoods and send their children to high-poverty schools.

Less appreciated is the influence of other-race neighbors of blacks and Hispanics on the high poverty rates of neighborhoods blacks and Hispanics reside in.

"So much emphasis in sociology has been on the role of racial segregation and how that contributes to poverty concentration by separating high-income race and ethnic groups from low-income groups," Quillian said. "But that only is part of the story."

Decreasing racial segregation through aggressive enforcement of anti-discrimination policies in housing would significantly reduce poverty concentration, Quillian concluded. But attention must be paid to income segregation taking its place in a complicated way, he said.

"Policies that aim to provide broader housing choices may not deconcentrate poverty if blacks and Hispanics can only find places in the most disadvantaged desegregated neighborhood," Quillian concluded.


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