

**RACE DIFFERENCES IN THE INCIDENCE & DURATION OF EXPOSURE TO  
CONCENTRATED POVERTY OVER THE LIFE COURSE:  
UPWARD MOBILITY OR TRAPPED IN THE HOOD?**

RUCKER C. JOHNSON  
GOLDMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

**ABSTRACT**

This study is among the first to use nationally-representative data from the US to analyze the persistence in neighborhood quality over the life course. The analysis utilizes the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, spanning 1968-2005, and follows a cohort born between 1951 and 1970 from childhood into adulthood. I examine the extent of upward and downward residential mobility/instability from childhood through mid-adulthood using PSID geocoded neighborhood information and residential location patterns over 35 years. Characterizing the length of exposure to poor neighborhood conditions for different demographic groups also serves to shed light on the age-profile of neighborhood effects on later-life attainments, including adult health and economic status.

The results highlight substantial race differences in the incidence and duration of exposure to concentrated poverty over the life course. The study reveals high rates of immobility from poor neighborhoods over the life course, especially among African-Americans. The results demonstrate that the average black child spent  $\frac{1}{4}$  of childhood years in high poverty neighborhoods, one-third of early-to-mid adulthood years in high poverty neighborhoods, and fifteen percent of adulthood years lived in low poverty neighborhoods. This is in stark contrast to those rates for the average white child, who spent just three percent of childhood and adulthood years in high poverty neighborhoods, spent eighty percent of childhood years in low poverty neighborhoods, and more than half of early-to-mid adulthood years in low poverty neighborhoods. The analysis shows that black-white differences in adulthood exposure to neighborhood poverty are largely accounted for by differences in the likelihood of being born into a poor neighborhood, and to a lesser extent by differences in rates of upward and downward socioeconomic mobility over the life course.

**LIFETIME EXPOSURE TO NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY, BY NEIGHBORHOOD STATUS AT BIRTH AND RACE**

	Low poverty ( $<10\%$ )		Moderate poverty ( $10\%$ to $<30\%$ )		High poverty ( $\geq 30\%$ )	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
Proportion of Childhood lived in neighborhood type	79.6	31.8	17.5	43.1	2.9	25.1
Proportion of Adulthood lived in neighborhood type by neighborhood type at birth						
All types	54.2	14.9	42.1	52.2	3.7	32.9
Low poverty	57.3	17.2	39.8	60.6	2.9	22.2
Moderate poverty	38.4	16.2	54.6	44.5	7.0	39.3
High poverty	17.3	8.4	64.0	51.4	18.7	40.2

Source: Panel Study of Income Dynamics, 1968-2005, cohort born between 1951-1970. Sample-weighted to produce nationally-representative estimates. Adulthood years span ages 30-50; childhood years 1-18.