The Geography of Opportunity: Developmental Trajectories of Children in Baltimore

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ABSTRACT

Neighborhood disadvantage across America affects children in several domains. Geographic differences that result from racial and economic segregation have the potential to change life paths. Using the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study we estimated behavior, cognitive and health trajectories of children transitioning into adolescence born in Baltimore, and we compared their trajectories to those of children born in other urban cities. To account for neighborhood effects, we matched different measures of inequality at the county level. Results showed that early on children in Baltimore had less behavioral problems, better cognitive health outcomes, in comparison to children born in other cities. Through time, there was a convergence of means, which resulted from a worsening situation for children in Baltimore and improvements for children elsewhere. Once we incorporated measures of neighborhood inequality, we observed an improvement in the developmental trajectories of children in Baltimore, and larger positive changes among black girls.