



Disparities in Neighborhood Poverty of Poor Black and White Children

Recent debate over the minimum wage has highlighted the fact that a full-time minimum wage worker—even earning the higher proposed wage—does not earn enough to lift a family out of poverty. Poverty has many devastating consequences, especially for children, including its influence on the neighborhoods where they live and the schools that they attend. Disadvantaged neighborhoods are associated with exposure to environmental hazards, community violence, weak neighborhood institutions and services, and scarcity of positive role models and peer influences. But the income of a child’s household explains only a part of the dramatic differences in neighborhood characteristics of white and black children. Poor white children overwhelmingly live in higher income, more advantaged neighborhoods than do poor black children in the same metropolitan area. Family poverty is certainly part of the problem for minority children, but there is much more to the story.

Using data drawn from the diversitydata web resource, this brief examines 94 large metropolitan areas across two measures:

- 1) metropolitan areas with the highest and lowest neighborhood poverty rates for poor black children
- 2) metropolitan areas where the inequality in neighborhood poverty between poor black and white children is highest and lowest.

Neighborhood Poverty Rate at Least 20% for Poor Black Children in 82 Large Metro Areas

In a dozen large metropolitan areas, led by Mobile, Louisville, New Orleans, and Fresno, the average poor black child in 2000 lived in a neighborhood in which at least a third of the population was in poverty (see Table 1 and Figure 1.) In 82 metros, the average poor black child lived in a neighborhood in which at least a fifth of the population was in poverty. In fact, in every one of the 94 largest metro areas, the poverty rate of the average poor black child’s neighborhood was at least 10%. The metro areas with the highest levels of neighborhood poverty for poor black children generally form a band stretching from central and western New York, down through Ohio and Appalachia into the Deep South.

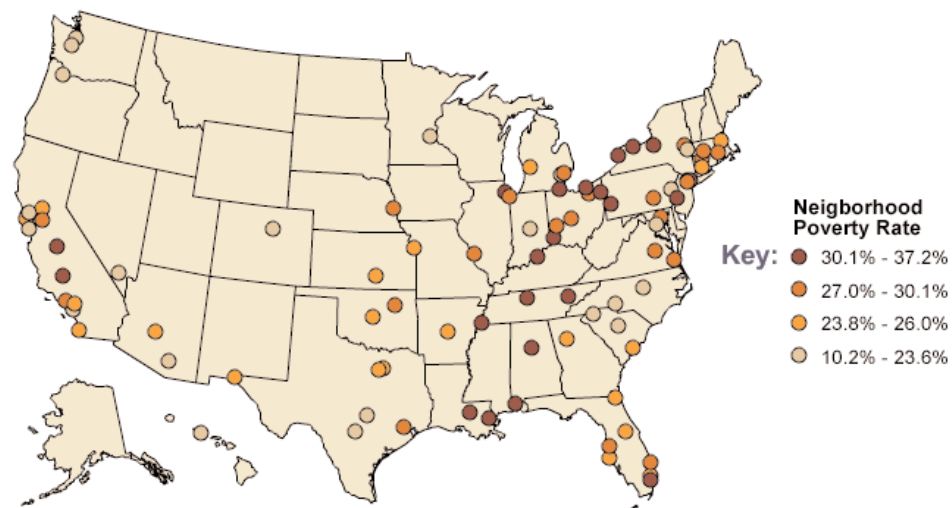
Poor white children encounter very different neighborhoods. In only one metro area—the overwhelmingly Latino McAllen-Edinburg-Mission area, which contained less than 10,000 poor white children—did the average poor white child live in a neighborhood with at least a third of the population in poverty. And in only 5 metro areas was the poverty rate at 20% or above, as opposed to the 82 metro areas in which poor black children encountered this level of poverty in their neighborhoods. In fact, the very best metro area for poor black children was still worse than a quarter of all metro areas for poor white children, in terms of neighborhood poverty rate.

Table 1
Poverty Rate in Neighborhood Where Average Poor Black Child Lives

Metro Area	Percent
Mobile, AL	37.2
Louisville, KY--IN	37.1
New Orleans, LA	37.0
Fresno, CA	35.2
Cleveland--Lorain--Elyria, OH	34.8
Syracuse, NY	34.7
Chicago, IL	34.5
New York, NY	34.5
Cincinnati, OH--KY--IN	34.5
Milwaukee--Waukesha, WI	34.3

1 Data are drawn from the 2000 Census and include only those metro areas that are among the largest 100 in terms of total child population and also have at least 5,000 black children.

FIGURE 1
Poor Children's Exposure to Neighborhood Poverty by Race/Ethnicity
(For: 1999 / Black)



Neighborhood Disparities Particularly Large in Northeast/Midwest, Lower in the West

It is also useful to examine those metros where the disparity between the neighborhoods of poor black and white children is high, even when they live in the same metro area. Comparing the exposure of poor black and white children to poverty neighborhoods within the same metro area, disparities are particularly large in the Northeast and Midwest (See Table 2). Chicago stands out, with a poverty rate of 34.5% in the neighborhood of the average poor black child, compared to just 8.7% in the neighborhood of the average poor white child, a disparity ratio of 4. In other words, the poverty rate in the average black child's neighborhood in metro Chicago is four times the poverty rate of the neighborhood of the average poor white child.

At the other end of the spectrum, metro areas exhibiting more equality in neighborhoods for poor black and white children tend to be concentrated in the West, including Honolulu, San Jose, Riverside, and Tucson (as well as El Paso and New York outside the West.) Some of these metro areas have relatively low exposure of poor black children to poverty neighborhoods, but they also have higher exposure of poor white children to poverty neighborhoods. Clearly a better goal is to achieve both low levels of poverty concentration and low disparity between black and white children. Metros that do the best in combining both dimensions are almost entirely in the West, including Honolulu, San Jose, Colorado Springs, and Vallejo-Fairfield-Napa, CA.

Policy Implications

Differences in poverty between black and white children remain shamefully large and need to be addressed. But centuries of racial discrimination, often institutionalized in governmental policy, have left a legacy of segregation that isolates poor black children in concentrated poverty neighborhoods, to a much greater degree than that experienced by poor white children. Indeed, in many metro areas, even affluent black households are more likely to live in low-income neighborhoods than are low-income whites. Home sales and rental audit tests continue to document discrimination in housing markets between blacks and whites, even when black testers have better financial profiles than whites. Differing preferences of racial groups for integrated neighborhoods play a part as well, yet most white and black households prefer integrated communities. Fear and apprehension about being unwelcome in mostly white neighborhoods also continue as barriers preventing blacks from moving to communities with more opportunities.

Concentrated efforts to improve the neighborhoods of poor black children, including construction of affordable, well-designed housing, improved public safety, recreational space, availability of healthy food, and accessibility to high quality primary and preventive health care, are vital but are only part of the solution. Programs to enhance mobility of minority households are important components as well, including:

- Siting of affordable housing in areas of low poverty concentration
- Expanding neighborhood choice in the HUD Section 8 Voucher program
- Support of minority realty agents working in moderate-upper income areas
- Ongoing enforcement of fair housing laws and regular testing to ensure compliance
- School assignment plans that do not predestine a child living in a concentrated poverty neighborhood to attend a concentrated poverty school

TABLE 2
Metro Areas with Highest and Lowest Disparity in Average Poor Child's Exposure to Neighborhood Poverty

Highest Disparity	Poverty Rate in Neighborhood of Average Poor Child:		Disparity Ratio: Black to White
	White	Black	
Chicago, IL	8.7	34.5	4.0
Newark, NJ	8.7	28.0	3.2
Bergen--Passaic, NJ	7.8	25.0	3.2
Richmond--Petersburg, VA	8.6	27.3	3.2
Milwaukee--Waukesha, WI	10.9	34.3	3.2
Washington, DC--MD--VA--WV	7.4	22.6	3.1
San Francisco, CA	8.4	24.3	2.9
Minneapolis--St. Paul, MN--WI	7.9	22.9	2.9
Hartford, CT	10.0	28.2	2.8
Atlanta, GA	9.3	25.8	2.8
Lowest Disparity	Poverty Rate in Neighborhood of Average Poor Child:		Disparity Ratio: Black to White
	White	Black	
El Paso, TX	23.1	25.0	1.1
Honolulu, HI	10.6	12.1	1.1
New York, NY	27.7	34.5	1.2
San Jose, CA	8.0	10.2	1.3
Riverside--San Bernardino, CA	18.3	24.6	1.3
Tucson, AZ	17.4	23.4	1.3
Colorado Springs, CO	10.0	13.9	1.4
Vallejo--Fairfield--Napa, CA	10.5	14.6	1.4
Oklahoma City, OK	17.2	24.8	1.4
Stockton--Lodi, CA	19.7	28.5	1.4

The diversitydata Web Resource

The data presented in this brief are drawn from diversitydata (www.diversitydata.org) an online interactive website presenting information on racial/ethnic disparities in metro areas across the U.S. A wide range of neighborhood characteristics describing the neighborhoods of average black, white, Latino and Asian residents are available. These neighborhood characteristics are available for the total population, children, poor children, owners and renters, and households of differing income characteristics for the four major racial/ethnic groups. Diversitydata also includes hundreds of other indicators covering education, housing, health, demographics, economic status and more and offers the opportunity to make custom profiles, rankings, and maps.

FIGURE 2
Home page of DiversityData.org.

The screenshot shows the DiversityData.org website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Home, Profiles, Rankings, Maps, Related Resources, About Us, and Mailing List • FAQ • Feedback. Below the navigation bar is a search bar with the text "metropolitan quality of life data". The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Profiles by Metro Area:** A section with two dropdown menus: "1. First select a state." and "2. Then, select a metropolitan area."
- Rankings & Maps by Indicator:** A section with radio buttons for "Ranking" and "Map", and a list of indicators: Population Demographics and Diversity, Health, Housing Opportunities, Economic Opportunities, Education, Residential Integration and Neighborhood Characteristics, Crime, and Physical Environment.
- Data spotlight on...:** A section featuring a map of the United States and a legend for "Share of Children Living in Low-Income Neighborhoods by Race/Ethnicity" for the year 2000. The legend categories are: 72.7% - 87.7%, 61.6% - 72.6%, 53.4% - 61.2%, and 19.5% - 53.2%.
- Join our mailing list:** A section with an input field and a "go" button.
- Spotlight:** A section with links to reports: "Children Left Behind: How Metropolitan Areas Are Failing America's Children -- download a PDF of the first in a series of reports from DiversityData.org, January 2007" and "Chartbook -- download a PDF of the tables and charts related to Children Left Behind: How Metropolitan Areas Are Failing America's Children, January 2007".

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Further Reading

Read more about racial/ethnic disparities in children's birth attributes, family, neighborhood and school characteristics, and well as policy prescriptions in *Children Left Behind: How Metropolitan Areas are Failing America's Children*: (http://diversitydata.sph.harvard.edu/children_left_behind_final_report.pdf) and in the accompanying *Chartbook*: (http://diversitydata.sph.harvard.edu/children_left_behind_chartbook.pdf)

About diversitydata Briefs:

The diversitydata Briefs series highlights specific indicators of racial/ethnic inequality for metro areas from the diversitydata.org online web resource (www.diversitydata.org). Diversitydata is an ongoing project of the Harvard School of Public Health and The Center for the Advancement of Health, supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. The authors of this brief are: Nancy McArdle, Theresa Osypuk, and Dolores Acevedo-Garcia.