

Neighbourhood Effects Upon Children and Adolescent Outcomes

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1. Summary

It is important from both theoretical and social policy points of view to identify neighbourhood factors that are conducive to successful child development. Children are raised in neighbourhoods as well as families, yet current theories of child development stress family factors rather than neighbourhood context and often ignore the overlap between the home and the community. The development of children into healthy, autonomous and law-abiding adults involves a wide range of social processes and social institutions but especially involves community context, often discussed under the headings of “space”, “social ecology” and the neighbourhood-level effects of “social capital”, “social cohesion” and “social advantage.” High local expectations for informal social control and mutual support of children ought to allow child surveillance and other parenting tasks to be shared with neighbours and more effective child rearing should result when parents are linked to each other through their participation in community activities, including support of local schools. At the opposite end of the scale, the absence of community cohesion and networks of social support isolates families, leading to lower degrees of trust between neighbours and markedly reducing the possibilities of practical assistance with family matters such as caring for children or sick relatives. Less cohesive neighbourhoods should be associated with less effective political mobilization and thus fewer local facilities and services of the kind that make parenting easier (i.e., community centres, day-cares, parks, policing, social services).

Our research will show the extent to which neighbourhoods matter for child development in Canada and will also illuminate the social processes by which neighbourhood characteristics have their impacts upon a range of child outcomes. We will create improved measures of *neighbourhood economic and social disadvantage* as well as neighbourhood *collective efficacy*, *social support* and *social capital* in order to demonstrate how neighbourhood and community context impact upon children’s developmental trajectories in the domains of Physical Health, Mental Health, Cognitive Functioning, Social Participation and School Attachment.

We will measure neighbourhood characteristics using Census products and aggregated data from respondent and interviewer ratings of neighbourhood quality as collected in Canada’s National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) and National Population Health Survey. We will also obtain richer materials about neighbourhoods from the Communities Component of the NLSCY and from the Canadian Community Health Survey. Once neighbourhood characteristics have been properly measured, we shall assess their various impacts upon different aspects of children’s development. Certain subgroups of children will be of particular interest here: among them children whose schools are in a different neighbourhood from their homes, as well as children who move between more and less advantaged neighbourhoods. We will carry out data analysis using powerful and appropriate graphical and statistical methods to estimated models that best account for children’s developmental trajectories over the first five waves (“cycles”) of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. Our results will demonstrate the ways in which supportive neighbourhood contexts, institutions and policy interventions can most effectively help parents.

1.1 Objectives

We have two main objectives as follows:

A. to show the extent to which neighbourhoods matter for the development in of children and adolescents in Canada

B. to illuminate the social processes by which neighbourhood characteristics have their impacts upon a range of outcomes for children and adolescents.

In pursuit of these objectives, we will develop measures of *neighbourhood economic and social disadvantage* as well as *neighbourhood collective efficacy*, *social support* and *social capital* in order to answer three general questions about how neighbourhood context relates to child outcomes.

- i. What are the relationships between *neighbourhood economic and social disadvantage* as well as *neighbourhood collective efficacy*, *social support* or *social capital*, and child/adolescent outcomes in the developmental domains of Physical Health, Mental Health, Cognitive Functioning, Social Participation and School Attachment?
- ii. Are the impacts of neighbourhoods upon child/adolescent outcomes the same for different age groups, or *are there certain ages where neighbourhood differences have more profound consequences* for child/adolescent outcomes?
- iii. To what extent do *the impacts of neighbourhoods upon child/adolescent outcomes vary* between these developmental domains? For example, is the impact of neighbourhood social support upon Social Participation greater than its impact upon Physical Health?

Certain subgroups of children and youth will be of particular interest in answering these research questions. Among them will be those whose schools are in a different neighbourhood from their homes, as well as children who move between more and less advantaged neighbourhoods. Measures of neighbourhoods will be based on Census products, on the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) and the Community Component of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), as well as on aggregated variables from the CCHS, the NLSCY, the National Population Health Survey (NPHS), the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) and later cycles from the General Social Survey (GSS). We will carry out data analysis using powerful graphical and analytic methods to estimate models that best account for children's developmental trajectories over the first five waves ("cycles") of the NLSCY and NPHS. Our results will disentangle the impact of neighbourhood level social processes from those of family level events.