

Where and for How Long Does Parental Influence Last? Parents, Neighborhoods, and Adolescent-to-Adulthood Health Behavior and Wellbeing

Kathleen Mullan Harris
Carolina Population Center
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Brian L. Levy
Carolina Population Center
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This research examines the ways in which parenting processes vary by aspects of the neighborhoods in which families are embedded and whether neighborhood context moderates the relationship between parenting and adolescent risk behavior. Using data from Add Health we measure parenting behaviors that include parental control and parental involvement, and the quantity and quality of parent-child relations. Neighborhood contexts are characterized by degrees of social support, social cohesion, collective efficacy, intergenerational closure, and parental community involvement, as well as by their structural conditions. We examine four domains of health-risk behavior: substance use, delinquency, violence, and sexual activity. Parenting behaviors differ according to the social and economic context of neighborhoods and we find important conditioning effects of neighborhood context. For example, parental control is more effective in protecting youth from engaging in health-risk behavior in neighborhoods characterized by low social cohesion and low parental involvement in the community.