

Kids from disadvantaged neighborhoods more likely to be obese as adults

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Children who grow up in disadvantaged neighborhoods are nearly one-third more likely to experience obesity as adults, according to new research from Cornell University.

The research, which offers a more precise and longer-term view than previously available of the lasting influence a neighborhood can have on unhealthy weight gain, shows the risk of obesity is strongest for teens.

"Growing up in a disadvantaged neighborhood sticks with you, and can have a [negative impact](#) on one's health through increasing one's chance of obesity in [adulthood](#)," said lead author Steven Alvarado, professor of sociology.

Among respondents followed in the data across different age ranges, that chance is 13% greater among children up to age 10 who live in disadvantaged [neighborhoods](#), and 29% higher for kids aged 11 to 18. Overall, the odds rose 31%.

Alvarado defined "disadvantaged" neighborhoods based on seven variables, including median income and home values and the percentage of residents who were living in poverty, unemployed or had earned bachelor's degrees. But measuring a neighborhood's association with adult outcomes including obesity is complex. Researchers must consider "unobserved" factors not included in their data that might explain any association between childhood neighborhoods and obesity in adulthood.

Genes, for example, or high parental stress level associated with household instability might be more responsible for children's later [weight gain](#).

The study accounted for these factors by comparing siblings. The siblings largely shared the same genes and parenting habits but may have experienced different neighborhood circumstances growing up, because their families moved or their neighborhoods changed over time between sibling births.

Alvarado's study is the first to adjust for criteria such as grandparents'

experiences in segregated schools and neighborhoods, while exploring the link between growing up in tough neighborhoods and adult obesity.

"We must continue to consider the context in which individuals are making decisions, the neighborhood resources that could serve as catalysts or suppressors for any genetic predispositions toward obesity in adulthood," he said.

The study, "The indelible weight of place: Childhood neighborhood disadvantage, timing of exposure, and [obesity](#) across adulthood," was published in *Health & Place*.

More information: Steven Elías Alvarado, The indelible weight of place: Childhood neighborhood disadvantage, timing of exposure, and obesity across adulthood, *Health & Place* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2019.102159](#)

Provided by Cornell University

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