

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Social Science Research

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch)

# Understanding trends in concentrated poverty: 1980–2014



John Iceland\*, Erik Hernandez

Penn State University, 211 Oswald Tower, Department of Sociology, University Park, PA 16802, USA

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 3 February 2016  
 Received in revised form 20 July 2016  
 Accepted 2 September 2016  
 Available online 7 September 2016

### Keywords:

Concentrated poverty  
 Racial residential segregation  
 Income segregation  
 Neighborhood poverty

## ABSTRACT

Trends in concentrated neighborhood poverty in the United States have been volatile over the past several decades. Using data from the 1980 to 2000 decennial census and the 2010–2014 American Community Survey, we examine the association between concentrated poverty across metropolitan areas in the United States and key proximate factors, including overall changes in poverty, racial residential segregation, and income segregation. One of our unique contributions is assessing the relative contribution of each of these to long-term trends in such poverty using a decomposition analysis. We find that changes in the segregation of the poor explained the largest share of the change in concentrated poverty over most of the time period, with the exception of the 1990s, where the plunge in both black and white poverty rates had the largest role in explaining the considerable decline in concentrated poverty in that decade for both groups. The association between racial segregation and black concentrated poverty is positive but weaker, indicating that without declines in black segregation, concentrated poverty would have been higher. Overall, growing income segregation, along with weak economic performance in recent years, have put more poor people at risk for living in high-poverty communities.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Increasing income inequality and the persistence of poverty in many communities are among the most vexing economic problems in the United States today. *Concentrated* poverty, which refers to the high incidence of poverty in specific neighborhoods or groups of neighborhoods, has been particularly volatile in recent decades. The 1980s, for example, saw a substantial increase in the number of poor people living in high-poverty neighborhoods. This was followed by a remarkable decline in such poverty in the 1990s, and then a rebound in the 2000s. While early research on concentrated poverty often focused mainly on black inner-city poverty, in recent years the population living in high poverty areas has become more suburban and ethnically diverse, as it includes a substantial number of Hispanics and a nontrivial representation of whites (Jargowsky, 1997; 2003; Kneebone et al., 2011).

Concentrated poverty is an issue of broad concern because many problems such as crime, welfare dependency, nonmarital childbearing, and unfavorable health, educational, and work outcomes are most prevalent in high-poverty areas. Many resources are tied to people's neighborhoods. Public education, for example, is frequently funded in part from local property taxes, and its quality varies dramatically across communities in the United States. Because people's social networks are also in part geographically rooted, those living in high poverty neighborhoods have less social capital to link them to good jobs and other kinds of public and private goods. Poor people living in disadvantaged neighborhoods often must cope not only with

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [jdi10@psu.edu](mailto:jdi10@psu.edu) (J. Iceland).

their own poverty but also with the problems that accompany poverty of so many of their neighbors (Jargowsky, 1997; Wilson, 1987, 1996).

A number of social and economic processes have likely influenced patterns and trends in concentrated poverty across metropolitan areas and its prevalence among different groups, such as economic restructuring and accompanying regional changes in poverty, racial and ethnic residential segregation, and income segregation (Iceland et al., 2013; Jargowsky, 1997, 2003; Kneebone et al., 2011; Massey and Denton, 1993; Quillian, 2012). While all of these factors are important, we know little about the relative contribution of each and how their effects might have changed over time. For example, were declines in concentrated poverty in the 1990s mainly a function of declining overall poverty in that decade, or also shaped by changing patterns of racial and income residential segregation?

The goal of this study is to therefore determine the key proximate factors driving changes in concentrated poverty across and within metropolitan areas over time, as well as whether this differed among blacks and whites. To investigate this issue we use decennial census data from 1980 to 2000 and American Community Survey data from 2010 to 2014 to calculate the extent of concentrated poverty in all metropolitan areas in the United States. We employ ordinary least squares (OLS) and fixed-effects models to examine factors that contributed to concentrated poverty and then, beyond past studies on this issue, conduct a decomposition analysis to estimate the relative contribution of overall changes in poverty, segregation of the poverty population, and racial segregation to changes in concentrated poverty over time, and among both whites and blacks, over the 1980 to 2014 period.

## 2. Background

Concentrated poverty has been a feature of many large American cities for some time. One has only to read Jacob Riis' ethnographic description of immigrant slums in New York City in the late 19th century to get a sense that poor, densely-packed tenement housing dominated certain neighborhoods (Riis, 1890 (1997)). However, these pockets of poverty were less common outside of large cities and less prevalent in the days before the proliferation of automobiles and growth in mass transit in the early part of the 20th century. Rather, the poor frequently lived on particular blocks and alleyways that were not that geographically distant from the affluent (Drake and Clayton, 1945; Sugrue, 1993). Racial and economic segregation gradually increased in the 20th century, particularly in Northeastern and Midwestern cities that experienced an influx of poor African Americans from the South during the course of the Great Migration. Suburbanization exploded after World War II, facilitated by federally-funded improvements in the nation's highway infrastructure and the continued growth in the number of white, middle-class families who sought to avoid what were often considered dense and dangerous cities with growing minority populations. The Federal Housing Authority (FHA) also facilitated the growth of segregated white suburbs by insuring the financing of many homes purchased by whites in these areas while providing virtually no mortgage assistance to minorities (Massey and Denton, 1993).

Focusing on the more recent past, the 1970s and 1980s saw considerable increases in concentrated poverty. This was accompanied by widespread concern about the growth in an urban "underclass" that seemingly rejected mainstream norms about work and family. High poverty areas were characterized by low rates of high school completion and labor force attachment, and high rates of single parenthood, welfare receipt, drug and alcohol abuse, and incarceration (Auletta, 1982; Jencks and Peterson, 1991; Wilson, 1987, 1996). A considerable body of research has since shown that the problems in high poverty neighborhoods are much more than just an expression of cultural values rejecting the mainstream, but rather a function of structural barriers impeding upward mobility, such as racial discrimination and a lack of access to resources—such as good public schools—that facilitate such mobility (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, 1998; Edin and Reed, 2005; Harding, 2003).

High-poverty neighborhoods have been defined in a variety of ways, though most commonly as neighborhoods where at least 40 percent of the population is poor (20 percent and 30 percent thresholds have also been used). Paul Jargowsky (1997: 11) has noted that neighborhoods where 40 percent or more of the residents are poor are ones that tend to have a "threatening appearance, marked by dilapidated housing, vacant units with broken or boarded-up windows, abandoned or burned-out cars, and men 'hanging out' on street corners." According to this measure (the 40 percent threshold), the number of people in high-poverty neighborhoods nearly doubled from over 4 million to 8 million people from 1970 to 1990, even as overall metropolitan area poverty rates remained relatively stable. Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics all experienced increases in concentrated poverty (Jargowsky, 1997, 2009). In marked contrast, the number and percentage of people living in high poverty neighborhoods declined dramatically—by 24 percent—between 1990 and 2000. The largest decline occurred among African Americans. During this period an increasing share of high poverty tracts were located in the suburbs (Jargowsky, 2003; Kingsley and Pettit, 2003).

This volatility continued in the 2000s, as the trend in concentrated poverty again pivoted and increased. By 2007–2011, 12.8 percent of poor people in the U.S. lived in high-poverty neighborhoods, up from 10.3 percent in 2000, though considerably below the 15.1 percent rate in 1990. There was a decline in the share of the population in high poverty neighborhoods that was black (from 42 percent to 37 percent) and Latino (from 31 to 30 percent) in the 2000s, while the share that was white increased (from 20 to 26 percent) (Jargowsky, 2013). Concentrated poverty nearly doubled in Midwestern metropolitan areas in the 2000s, where manufacturing declined significantly, and the population in extreme-poverty neighborhoods rose more quickly in the suburbs than in central cities (Kneebone et al., 2011). Concentrated poverty in metropolitan areas is thus now

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5047035>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5047035>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)