



Ethnic differences in timing and duration of exposure to neighborhood disadvantage during childhood

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines ethnic differences in childhood neighborhood disadvantage among children living in the Netherlands. In contrast to more conventional approaches for assessing children's exposure to neighborhood poverty (e.g., point-in-time and cumulative measures of exposure), we apply sequence analysis to simultaneously capture the timing and duration of exposure to poor neighborhoods during childhood. Rich administrative microdata offered a unique opportunity to follow the entire 1999 birth cohort of the Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Antillean second generation and a native Dutch comparison group from birth up until age 15 (N = 24,212). Results indicate that especially Turkish and Moroccan children had higher odds than native Dutch children to live in a poor neighborhood at any specific stage during childhood, but particularly throughout the entirety of childhood. Although ethnic differences in neighborhood income trajectories became smaller after adjusting for parental and household characteristics, a substantial proportion of the differences remained unexplained. In addition, the impact of household income on children's neighborhood income trajectories was found to be weaker for ethnic minority children than for native Dutch children. We discuss our findings in relation to theories on spatial assimilation, place stratification, and residential preferences.

1. Introduction

The importance of residential neighborhoods in shaping children's lives has been studied extensively (Pebley & Sastry, 2004). Growing up in a deprived neighborhood is thought to impede children's well-being and development due to, amongst others, a lack of successful role models, exposure to high levels of crime within their local communities, scarce institutional resources, and environmental health hazards (Galster, 2012). Motivated by the relevance of the neighborhood context for children in particular, various studies have focused on children's neighborhood socioeconomic status as an outcome in itself. Previous research in the US has shown substantial racial and ethnic inequality in this regard, with black children having much higher odds of residing in poor neighborhoods than children from white families (Briggs & Keys, 2009; Sharkey, 2008; Timberlake, 2007, 2009). In European research, however, little attention has been paid to factors shaping children's neighborhood environments (for exceptions, see Morris, 2017; Van Ham, Hedman, Manley, Coulter, & Östh, 2014).

Prior studies have often measured children's neighborhood socioeconomic status at a single point in time. These measures are

increasingly criticized because children's neighborhood characteristics may change over time, either because families move to a different neighborhood or because neighborhoods themselves change over time (Kleinepier & van Ham, 2017; Sharkey & Faber, 2014). In response, recent work has developed more dynamic measures of children's neighborhood experiences, mainly by studying the duration of exposure to poor neighborhoods (Wodtke, Harding, & Elwert, 2011). For example, Timberlake (2007) showed that racial differences in the cumulative exposure to poor neighborhoods during childhood are greater than racial differences at any single point in time. However, while measures of duration of exposure avoid some of the shortcomings of point-in-time measures of neighborhood quality, an exclusive focus on duration of exposure obscures another potentially important aspect of children's neighborhood histories: the timing of exposure. Despite many studies showing that family poverty during early childhood versus family poverty during adolescence has heterogeneous effects on later outcomes (e.g., Wagmiller, Lennon, Kuang, Alberti, & Aber, 2006), research on neighborhood deprivation has largely neglected such variation in children's exposure to disadvantage (for exceptions, see Wodtke, 2013; Wodtke, Elwert, & Harding, 2016).

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This paper examines ethnic differences in childhood exposure to poor and nonpoor neighborhoods among children in the Netherlands, focusing on the second generation of the four largest non-Western immigrant groups in the country (Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, Antilleans) and the native Dutch population. Our study has three core aims. The first aim is to better capture ethnic differences in children's exposure to neighborhood disadvantage by using sequence analysis to simultaneously take into account the duration and timing of exposure (Abbott, 1990; Abbott & Tsay, 2000). The second aim of this study is to examine the extent to which ethnic differences in children's patterns of exposure to neighborhood disadvantage can be explained by observed parental and household characteristics. Drawing on different theoretical perspectives, differences in children's neighborhood socioeconomic status may be related to observed factors (e.g., family income, household size) and unobserved factors in our dataset (e.g., preferences, discrimination) (Timberlake, 2009). Research furthermore suggests that, at least in the US context, the impact of socioeconomic status on exposure to neighborhood poverty differs by race/ethnicity (South & Crowder, 1997; Swisher, Kuhl, & Chavez, 2013). As such, the third aim of this study is to assess whether ethnicity moderates the relationship between household income and children's exposure to neighborhood deprivation.

2. Background

In this section, we outline the relevant literature on ethnic differences in children's neighborhood socioeconomic status. It is worth noting that families with young children have been found to change residence relatively frequently (Tønnessen, Telle, & Syse, 2016). Recent empirical research further indicates that there is substantial variation over time in children's neighborhood characteristics, particularly among those who moved (Kleinepiet & van Ham, 2017). These findings highlight the need to take a longitudinal approach to the study of children's neighborhood socioeconomic status. Importantly, furthermore, children usually do not have a choice in where they live until they reach the age of maturity, and so their neighborhood histories depend on the choices and constraints faced by their parents. In the remainder of this section, we therefore focus on parental and household characteristics – rather than characteristics of the children themselves – in order to formulate hypotheses on ethnic differences in children's neighborhood status. For context, we first provide background on why and when the ethnic minorities' parents in this study arrived in the Netherlands as well as their position in Dutch society.

2.1. Migrants in the Netherlands

Currently, about one in five of the 17 million inhabitants of the Netherlands has an immigrant background, i.e. has at least one parent born abroad, including those born abroad themselves (first generation) and those born in the Netherlands (second generation). These people can be about equally divided into those of Western and non-Western origin. Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, and Antilleans make up a sizable share of the population of non-Western origin, comprising respectively 2.3, 2.3, 2.1, and 0.9 percent of the total population of the Netherlands. All other origin groups are considerably smaller (especially the second generations) and cover a heterogeneous population in terms of migration history and time of residence in the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2017).

Turkish and Moroccan immigrants were initially recruited in the 1960s and early 1970s in order to fill unskilled occupations in the Netherlands. They were typically low or uneducated men who originated from the rural parts in their origin countries (Vermeulen & Penninx, 2000). Although these so-called 'guest workers' were expected to stay temporarily in the Netherlands, many decided to permanently settle in the Netherlands and were gradually joined by their wife and children in the 1970s and early 1980s. Many of these children, in turn,

married partners from Turkey and Morocco in the 1980s and 1990s.

Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles are former Dutch colonies. Surinamese and Antillean immigrants were thus usually familiar with the Dutch language and culture upon arrival in the Netherlands. Many Surinamese immigrants moved to the Netherlands just before Surinam obtained its independence in 1975, as they were able then to retain Dutch citizenship. Migration from the Antilles has traditionally been dominated by short-term student migration, but limited employment opportunities in the Antilles in the 1980s and 1990s have led to more diverse and more permanent migration flows towards the Netherlands (Oostindie, 2011).

All four ethnic minority groups are more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged than native Dutch, but in general Turks and Moroccans experience a larger gap in educational attainment and labor market outcomes with respect to the native Dutch than do Surinamese and Antilleans. For instance, around 33 percent of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants has attained no more than primary education, as compared to some 15 percent among Surinamese and Antillean immigrants and 6 percent among native Dutch (Huijnk & Andriessen, 2016). Consequently, particularly Turkish and Moroccan immigrants are facing difficulties in finding employment, and if they do, they are often in low-skilled and unstable jobs (ibid). The homeownership rate is also much lower among the ethnic minority groups than among the native Dutch (71%): Moroccans are the least often owner-occupiers (14%), followed by Antilleans (32%), Turks (34%), and Surinamese (43%) (Zorlu, Mulder, & van Gaalen, 2014).

Finally, there are important demographic differences between the ethnic groups under study. Due to relatively high fertility rates¹ and multigenerational living arrangements, Turkish ($M = 3.7$ persons) and Moroccan ($M = 3.8$ persons) households are almost twice as large as those of the native Dutch, while the average size of Surinamese ($M = 2.6$ persons) and Antillean ($M = 2.4$ persons) households is close to the Dutch average of 2.2 persons (Heering, de Valk, Spaan, Huisman, & van der Erf, 2002). Single mother families are much more common among Surinamese and Antilleans than among Turks, Moroccans, and native Dutch, with respectively 17, 15, 4, 7, and 2 percent of women born in 1982/83 living with their child(ren) but without a partner in young adulthood (Kleinepiet & de Valk, 2016). In line with this, previous research indicates that Surinamese and Antillean migrants have higher union dissolution rates than the native Dutch, while there is no difference between the native Dutch and Turks and Moroccans in this regard (Rooyackers, Das, & de Valk, 2015).

2.2. Spatial assimilation

Spatial assimilation theory contends that immigrants often start out at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder upon arrival in a new society. Consequently, many immigrants initially settle in poor neighborhoods with a relatively high proportion of ethnic minorities, sometimes referred to as 'ethnic enclaves' (Massey & Denton, 1985). From the spatial assimilation perspective, ethnic enclaves are undesirable residential areas. The key expectation is that by improving their socioeconomic position and becoming more proficient in the language of the host society, immigrants will move away from ethnic enclaves to higher socioeconomic status neighborhoods (Alba & Logan, 1993). Thus, the spatial assimilation model predicts that immigrants' neighborhood attainment goes hand-in-hand with their social and economic mobility. It has been argued, however, that the process of assimilation and integration may take many years or even multiple generations to complete, especially when the cultural and linguistic distance between the country of origin and destination is large (Crowder & South, 2005).

¹ In 2005, the total fertility rate (TFR) was 2.17 among Turkish immigrants, 3.22 among Moroccan immigrants, and 1.87 among the native Dutch (Garssen & Nicolaas, 2008).

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