

Moving from high-poverty to low-poverty neighborhoods appears beneficial for some adolescent girls

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Although some girls benefited from a program that moved families from high-poverty areas to low-poverty areas, boys and adolescents from families with preexisting health-related vulnerabilities did not appear to experience mental health benefits, according to a report published Online First by *Archives of General Psychiatry*, a JAMA Network publication.

"Extensive observational evidence indicates that youth in high-[poverty neighborhoods](#) exhibit [poor mental health](#), although not all children may be affected similarly," according to background information in the article. "Racial/ethnic minority families are disproportionately more likely to live in impoverished neighborhoods, and many research studies suggest that adolescents who reside in high-poverty communities experience elevated [psychiatric morbidity](#)."

Theresa L. Osypuk, Sc.D., Sc.M., of Bouvé College of Health Sciences, Northeastern University, Boston, and colleagues conducted a [randomized controlled trial](#) using volunteer low-income families in public housing in five U.S. cities (Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles and New York) between 1994 and 1997. The authors analyzed 4- to 7-year outcomes in 2,829 youth ages 12 to 19 years. Families were randomized to remain in public housing (control group) or to receive government-funded rental subsidies to move into private apartments (experimental group).

The authors found that girls without health vulnerabilities at the start of the study were the only subgroup to benefit on any outcomes. Neither girls with health vulnerabilities nor boys without experienced intervention benefits. Researchers measured outcomes using a screening scale for mental illness and surveys for behavioral problems and [major depressive disorder](#).

Health vulnerabilities included if any household member had a disability, or a household in which a child had any of four health or development problems including behavior, learning, difficulty in getting to school or playing active games, or problems that required special medicine or equipment.

"In conclusion, this housing policy experiment benefited the mental health of some adolescents, particularly girls in families without health vulnerabilities, but had either nonsignificant or harmful effects on the mental health of adolescents from families with preexisting health-related vulnerabilities, particularly boys," the authors conclude.

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