



Do We Know Where We Stand? Neighborhood Relative Income, Subjective Social Status, and Health. Roy, A.L, Godfrey, E.B., Rarick, J.R.D. *Am J Community Psychol* 57, 448-458, 2016).

“Neighborhood relative income is related to one’s subjective social status, and in turn, physical and mental health.”



Figure 1 East River State Park. Williamsburg, Brooklyn NY. Used under [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License](#).

How Keeping Up With the Joneses (or at least living next door) Can Be Good for Your Health

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Can the income-level of the people we share our neighborhoods with affect our health? Does the income-level of our neighbors shape how we perceive our own social status?

In a recent study published in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Roy and colleagues find the answer to these questions to be “yes”. Neighborhood relative income, or the intersection between one’s household income and the income of one’s neighbors, is related to how we perceive our status within our neighborhoods. In turn, this subjective social status is related to physical and mental health.

These findings are surprising and encouraging. Roy et. al find that people with lower incomes living in wealthier zip codes have better health than people with similar incomes living in less well-off areas. This is, in part, due to residents “seeing” themselves as better off. Surprisingly, they also find that people with higher incomes living in lower income neighborhoods also see themselves as better off and this also has the potential to be protective for health. Roy and colleagues’ work shows that economically diverse neighborhoods have the potential to benefit people across the socioeconomic continuum.

Highlights

Neighborhood income impacts health.

Living in a higher income neighborhood is protective for health.

People with lower incomes who live in wealthier neighborhoods are healthier and perceive their social status to be higher.

High income people also benefit from living in economically mixed neighborhoods.

Methods

Roy and colleagues used a nationally representative sample of 1807 adults living in 1807 distinct neighborhoods recruited through the [Knowledge Networks Knowledge Panel](#). Study participants reported their household income and rated their economic standing as compared to others in their neighborhoods using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status. Participants' residential zip codes were linked with estimates of median zip code income obtained from the American Community Survey's 2008–2012 5-year estimates.

Results

- Neighborhood relative income is protective for self-reported physical and mental health.
- Among lower income individuals, living with higher income neighbors can be protective for health and boost perceived social status.
- Among higher income individuals, living with lower income neighbors can also boost perceived social status.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Neighborhood context influences the relationships between income and health.

DATA SNAPSHOT

Mixed income neighborhoods increase well-being for all residents. Both rich and poor may benefit from access to resources and boosts in perceived status. These factors can be protective for both physical and mental health.



Figure 2. Playground in the Kensington Neighborhood, Philadelphia, PA., 2006, Wikimedia Commons. Used under [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License](#).

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation- Subjective social status is an important factor influencing mental and physical health.

Practice- Health Care Providers can ask patients about their neighborhoods to better understand the social context of their health and connect their patients to local resources.

Social Action- A sense of health and well-being is contextually dependent. Socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods are beneficial to all residents

Policy Makers- There is strong evidence supporting mixed income housing for health promotion.