

Education levels in Asian American neighborhoods affect residents' health

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Higher neighborhood education is associated with better self-rated health among Asian Americans who live in Asian ethnic neighborhoods, but this correlation between individual health and neighborhood education levels does not exist for Asian Americans living in non-Asian neighborhoods, according to a recent study in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*.

"When Asian Americans live in neighborhoods that are not Asian ethnic neighborhoods, the [education level](#) of the neighborhood doesn't affect their health," says Emily Walton, an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Dartmouth College, whose study considered 1,962 Asian Americans living in 256 neighborhoods in large [metropolitan areas](#) across the United States. The data set for her research was taken from the National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS, 2003-04).

"Why would we think that education matters in a neighborhood?" she asks. "Research suggests that when a population is highly educated they may advocate for certain neighborhood resources or institutions; that the [rising tide](#) of education in the neighborhood lifts everyone, even those individuals who may not have high [educational attainment](#) themselves. In the context of an Asian ethnic neighborhood, these institutions and resources accompanying higher levels of education may be culturally and socially oriented toward the group, and thus more effective in supporting health."

Walton also found that while Asian Americans experience less

discrimination when living in Asian neighborhoods, levels of [social cohesion](#) are not different from those of non-Asian neighborhoods.

"This goes against [conventional wisdom](#), which often explains [better health](#) among residents of ethnic enclaves as a result of the social support and connection they feel with members of their same [racial group](#)," says Walton, who joined the sociology faculty in July 2012.

Walton's findings are at odds with the historic perception of ethnic neighborhoods as temporary immigrant enclaves that immigrant residents leave for more integrated neighborhoods once they are financially able to do so.

"This image of ethnic neighborhoods is being dispelled by the residential patterns of contemporary Asian Americans," Walton says, "as many, even those with a high socioeconomic status, choose to settle and then remain in predominantly Asian American neighborhoods."

Sociologists refer to this as "resurgent ethnicity," "where living in an ethnic neighborhood is more of a choice, rather than an economic or social constraint," Walton explains. "Rather than thinking about ethnic neighborhoods as sites of disadvantage, we can think about the assets in ethnic neighborhoods and how living among others of similar ethnicity might actually be beneficial."

As the racial and ethnic makeup of the U.S. continues to diversify, Walton's findings add new complexity to the literature on segregation and ethnic neighborhoods. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, approximately 14.7 million people (5 percent of all Americans) identified their race as "Asian alone," and this number is growing as Asians continue to immigrate to the U.S. in large numbers.

"Scholarship has tended to focus on levels and rates of integration and assimilation among current immigrants and the next generation, and that

has been their measure of successful incorporation," Walton says. "But we might do better to re-think that model, and instead say that living in an ethnic neighborhood in the second generation and beyond could actually be beneficial."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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