

# Where Black adolescents live affects their mental health

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It's easy to imagine that growing up in a neighborhood with safe and clean parks, little to no discrimination, and where people are not struggling financially makes for a lower-stress childhood. In contrast,

neighborhoods with few community spaces, violence, and poverty create a higher-stress environment for a child to live in.

Unfortunately, systemic and structural issues such as wealth inequality, residential segregation, barriers to [home ownership](#), and environmental injustice in [neighborhoods](#) where Black American adolescents disproportionately reside make it more likely that Black American adolescents will grow up in this second scenario.

A new study by Assistant Professor of Social Work Melissa Villodas provides evidence that the stress of neighborhood poverty and community violence negatively affects Black American adolescents' mental health. This could be a contributing factor to Black American adolescents experiencing higher rates of suicidality than any other racial or ethnic group and the growing incidence of mental health challenges among racial minority youth.

"We need initiatives that build healthy neighborhoods and local resources to support [adolescent](#) stress reduction and mental health so that we can improve the lives of Black youth living in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods," said Villodas, who reviewed the existing research about the neighborhood environment's contribution to stress among Black American adolescents.

The [review](#) found that four distinct aspects of the neighborhood environment have been examined in relation to Black American adolescent stress:

- perceived neighborhood environment, such as perceived levels of trust and safety;
- built neighborhood environment, such as parks and community centers;

- exposure to community violence, such as gang activity and drug use; and
- neighborhood disadvantage, such as poverty, racism, and discrimination.

The study also highlights opportunities for [mental health](#) interventions to address neighborhood-based stressors through community revitalization in spaces where Black American adolescents experience minimal [stress](#), including parks, community centers, and libraries.

The work is published in the journal *Youth & Society*.

**More information:** Melissa L. Villodas et al, Examining the Influence of the Neighborhood Environment on Stress Among Black American Adolescents: A Scoping Review, *Youth & Society* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/0044118X231179243](#)

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