

2001-2

**INTERPRETING COMMUNITY EFFECTS ON YOUTH EDUCATIONAL
ATTAINMENT**

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Draft

November 2000

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Abstract

Longitudinal data from 1,128 respondents in the National Survey of Children are used to examine factors that help explain the higher rates of school dropout and lower rates of high school graduation in socioeconomically distressed communities. We find that about one-third of the observed positive effect of community socioeconomic disadvantage on high school discontinuation can be explained by the educational behaviors of peers, a result broadly consistent with epidemic models of neighborhood effects. A smaller proportion of the impact of neighborhood socioeconomic status on youth educational attainment can be attributed to youth's lower educational aspirations and higher rates of residential mobility in poor neighborhoods. Despite their centrality to theories of neighborhood effects, adolescents' delinquent behavior, attachment to school and parents, and parental control over adolescent behavior do little to mediate the impact of community disadvantage on high school dropout and graduation. We also find no significant effect of neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage on college attendance once family SES and other background variables are controlled.

****This research was supported by grants to the first author from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (RO1 HD35560) and the National Science Foundation (SBR-9729797), a grant to the second author from U.S. Department of Justice (97IJCX0028), and grants to the University at Albany Center for Social and Demographic Analysis from NICHD (P30 HD32041) and NSF(SBR-9512290). We thank Glenn Deane for helpful comments and advice. Address all correspondence to Professor Scott J. South, Department of Sociology, University at Albany, Albany, NY 12222 email: s.south@albany.edu**

