

LONG-RUN IMPACTS OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND SCHOOL QUALITY ON ADULT HEALTH

RUCKER C. JOHNSON
GOLDMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the extent and ways in which childhood school quality factors causally influence later-life health outcomes. The study analyzes the health trajectories of children born between 1950 and 1975 followed through 2005 using the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) spanning four decades linked with multiple data sources containing detailed neighborhood attributes and school quality resources that prevailed at the time these children were growing up.

I estimate the long-run impacts of court-ordered school desegregation plans on later-life health by exploiting quasi-random variation in the timing and scope of desegregation implementation during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. I find school desegregation significantly narrowed black-white adult health disparities for the cohorts exposed to integrated schools during childhood. The analysis disentangles the effects of neighborhood and school quality. The results suggest the mechanism through which school desegregation led to beneficial health outcomes in adulthood for blacks include the significant improvement in access to school resources reflected in reductions in class size and increases in per-pupil spending. The results highlight the significant impacts of educational attainment on future health status, and point to the importance of school quality in influencing socioeconomic mobility prospects, which in turn have far-reaching impacts on health. Taken together, the study finds that racial differences in adult health can be accounted for by childhood family, neighborhood, and school quality factors.