



## Staten Island among worst counties to grow up poor, study finds

nws mobility

Growing up on Staten Island as opposed to an average American county may be detrimental to achieving a higher standard of living for children from poor families, the study suggests. (Associated Press) (Associated Press)

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'... in general we find that places that have worse commute times have a negative impact on the mobility of kids.'

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — Its proximity to the Statue of Liberty notwithstanding, Staten Island is not where you want to grow up if you're a poor kid angling for the American Dream.

**A new study of economic mobility** by a pair of Harvard economists found that Richmond County is one of the worst counties in the country for poor kids trying to pull themselves out of poverty.

In fact, growing up on Staten Island as opposed to an average American county may be detrimental to achieving a higher standard of living for children from poor families, the study suggests.

### LONG-TERM, WIDER IMPACT

Every year a poor boy spends living on Staten Island rather than in an average county, he loses about \$170 from his annual household income at age 26, according to the study.

Over an entire childhood — which goes up to age 20 for the purposes of the study — that adds up to \$3,450 less that he'll make at age 26 because he grew up here rather than in an average American county.

The negative financial impact of growing up on Staten Island as opposed to an average county applies not only to poor children, but also to average-income and even rich kids, the study found.

Only kids born into families in the top 1 percent of the income bracket receive an economic benefit from growing up on the Island.

The detrimental effect on future income for Island-bred kids is more pronounced for boys than for girls across all income brackets.

Only 3 percent of counties in the nation are worse than Staten Island when it comes to helping poor males climb the income ladder, the study found. Just 6 percent are worse for average-income males.

Staten Islanders need not look far to find counties in which growing up creates an even greater economic setback, however.

## **NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

In fact, raising a kid just about anywhere in New York City — but especially in the Bronx or Manhattan — leads to worse future economic outcomes than does rearing a child in most other counties in the U.S., according to the study.

The difference between this analysis and past ones that found children who grew up in the Big Apple were more upwardly mobile than most is that this study attempted to isolate the causal effect of growing up in New York City, rather than just looking at the economic outcomes of children who grow up here.

To do that, the authors asked the question, "How would a child born and raised in New York City fare if, holding all else about his family's background constant, he had grown up in a different part of the country?"

## **HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED**

They answered that question by studying the economic outcomes of millions of children who grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, and had moved across counties with their families during childhood.

The researchers found that while children who grew up in New York City did have above-average rates of upward mobility, it had to do with the types of families who chose to live in New York City, not the locale itself.

In particular, immigrant families, who have high rates of upward mobility regardless of where they live, often move to New York City in large numbers.

Their success rising out of poverty in part masks the negative effect that growing up in the city has on kids.

According to the study's findings, if those immigrant families and other New York City families were to raise their kids most anywhere else in the country, their children would fare even better.

## **BENEFITS OF MOVING**

The researchers found that the positive effect of growing up in a better neighborhood is linear, meaning that every additional year a child spends living in one helps.

"The earlier you move to a better neighborhood, the more you benefit from it," explained Augustin Bergeron, a pre-doctoral fellow at Harvard who worked extensively on the study. "Each extra year a child spends in a better environment improves their outcomes."

That's true whether they move at birth or at age 15.

"What we find is that there is no critical age, so it's not necessarily the earlier the better, and it's never too late to move," said Bergeron, who noted that the benefit extends only until about age 23, at which point children no longer gain from moving to a better community.

So what is behind the negative impact Staten Island has on kids? It's difficult to say without additional focused analysis, the researchers explain.

## THE REASONS VARY

"It's hard to have a story for each of the 3,000 counties or more in the United States," said Bergeron, pointing to a series of factors like less violent crime, less segregation by income and race, lower levels of income inequality, better schools, higher levels of religious and civic engagement and a larger percentage of two-parent households that the authors found correlated with upward mobility in counties across the country.

"Obviously, what we provide are national correlations, so you'll necessarily have a few outliers," he said. "And this is where we think some more research should be done in explaining exactly what is it that makes a neighborhood have a good or a bad impact on young children."

"The region is pretty poorly connected for low-income households," said CSI professor Jonathan Peters, adding that residents who can't afford a car are often limited to finding work in their neighborhoods or enduring a lengthy commute via public transit.

Staten Island Advance

College of Staten Island finance professor Jonathan Peters, who called the study's findings for Richmond County "disheartening," speculated that the borough's transportation infrastructure and dearth of quality local jobs might be to blame.

"The region is pretty poorly connected for low-income households," he said, noting that residents who can't afford a car are often limited to finding work in their neighborhoods, where decent paying jobs can be hard to come by, or enduring a lengthy commute via public transit.

## TRAVELING TO FIND WORK

With about twice as many workers as there are jobs on Staten Island, even residents with cars often must travel off-Island to find work, Peters said. That reality, and the lack of a robust public transportation system connecting the borough to New Jersey or other parts of New York City, contributes to extraordinarily long commute times for residents.

At more than 42 minutes each way, Richmond County residents have the fourth-highest median commute time in the country, according to 2013 Census data.

Besides being a major inconvenience, long commutes are also a symptom of segregation, which, along with income inequality, are the factors researchers found most strongly impact income mobility.

"We indeed find that areas that improve upward mobility are characterized on average by shorter commute times," Bergeron said.

In fact, of all the elements the researchers analyzed to measure segregation, they found that commute times had the greatest causal effect.

"It doesn't mean that in this case for this county of New York this is the explanation," Bergeron said of Staten Island commute times stunting kids' economic potential, "but in general we find that places that have worse commute times have a negative impact on the mobility of kids."

Peters said he hopes that city government takes note of the study's findings and makes an effort to more evenly allocate resources among boroughs, particularly for transportation infrastructure. Given past precedent, however, he's not particularly hopeful.

"When we look at our infrastructure and our investment there's not been a huge change [over the last 50 years]," he said. "It wouldn't surprise me if we continue to struggle because our infrastructure is not that robust."

"Every morning we wake up and we really don't have as competitive an economy as we really should."

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**Click here** and search for any county in the U.S., including Richmond, N.Y., to see how children who grow up there make out.

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