

The ethnic concentration of a neighbourhood has varying effects on employment prospects for men and women across different ethnicities

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There are longstanding debates about whether neighbourhood segregation of ethnic minorities promotes minorities' economic success or whether it constrain opportunities. Here, [Carolina V. Zuccotti](#) and [Lucinda Platt](#) show that growing up in a neighbourhood with a higher proportion of those from the same ethnic group as you can have both positive and negative consequences: these play out differently for men and women and for groups with different levels of resources



In 2005 the then chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips sparked a heated discussion about the spatial distribution of ethnic minorities in the UK, when he argued that the British society was 'sleepwalking' its way towards segregation. Underlying the debate around whether or not spatial segregation of ethnic minorities is increasing or decreasing are assumptions that it matters for minorities' integration, including their socio-economic integration.



But there are different views on whether greater concentration of minorities is positive or negative for work and occupational success. Some argue that neighbourhood segregation brings benefits in terms of group resources and economic support; others argue that relative isolation can limit access to job opportunities.

Focusing on England and Wales, [we used](#) a large scale nationally representative data set, the [ONS Longitudinal Study](#), to assess the effect of neighbourhood composition on the labour market outcomes of the UK's main ethnic minority groups. This dataset, which follows individuals across five successive Censuses, makes it possible to study the impact of the neighbourhood children grew up on their subsequent labour market outcomes as adults.

Our approach offers important advantages over previous work. First, people's social environment and social networks during their upbringing are crucial for socialising them into norms and expectations and giving them access to specific social networks. Second, looking at the influence of childhood neighbourhood on adult outcomes helps to address questions of reverse causality, which studies of neighbourhood effects often struggle with. Furthermore, the data enable us to control for neighbourhood deprivation, which we know is likely to have long-term effects on children's subsequent labour market outcomes. This is particularly relevant given that ethnic minorities tend to be concentrated in deprived areas.

Our findings reveal that greater neighbourhood concentration of people from the same ethnic group results in substantially *lower* subsequent labour market participation for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. Conversely, greater concentration of co-ethnics leads to *better* occupational outcomes for Indian men. Findings for other groups are indeterminate.

These results suggest that rather than own ethnic group concentration being simply positive or simply negative, there may be different consequences of the concentration of one's own ethnic group for men and for women. Gender role attitudes among Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations tend to be traditional; women in these groups often have low rates of labour force participation. The findings for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women might therefore be linked to the greater exposure of these women to such traditional norms through greater social interaction with others from the same ethnic group in the neighbourhood. The results for Indian men, instead, suggest the positive role that high levels of group resources can play. Group socio-economic resources in the parents' generation are generally higher for Indians than other minority groups. For Indians, therefore, the neighbourhood might become an arena of social interaction that helps to stimulate and support educational and occupational success.



Asking whether ethnic concentration is positive or negative – which is a frequent question both in research and, especially, political discourse – is, then, the wrong question. Local social interaction with one's ethnic group can mean different things for different ethnic groups and genders, because of contact with – and internalisation of – different group norms, expectations and opportunities. While it can be argued that spatial segregation reduces social cohesion, in specific cases it may also enhance it by increasing socio-economic integration. Our study concentrated on labour market outcomes; however, the study of other outcomes, such as health, or life satisfaction, might suggest other benefits, or challenges, that greater own group concentration can bring.

The current study is the first to demonstrate a role for co-ethnic concentration in childhood in helping to explain Pakistani and Bangladeshi women's low labour market participation and Indian men's occupational success, distinctive employment outcomes that have been highlighted, but not fully explained, in a number of existing studies. Future research could elaborate the pathways we suggest lead from co-ethnic concentration to labour market outcomes.

Please note this blog draws from the article: Zuccotti, C. and Platt, L. 2016, Does Neighbourhood Ethnic Concentration in Early Life Affect Subsequent Labour Market Outcomes? A Study across Ethnic Groups in England and Wales, published by Population Space and Place, DOI: [10.1002/psp.2041](https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2041).

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(Image credit: Author's own – Carolina V Zuccotti – Whitechapel, London)

