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Original Paper

How Does Geographical Context Affect the Development of Youth Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

This paper reviews existing literature on the nuanced impact of geographical location on youth self-efficacy, Collective-Efficacy, and explores differences between urban and rural settings. It highlights how access to resources, cultural and environmental factors, and opportunities for resilience building vary geographically and affect young adolescents' belief in their abilities to achieve goals. By examining the access to resources, the interplay between collective efficacy and self-efficacy, and the unique challenges and opportunities presented by different geographical contexts, this research offers a comprehensive overview of how location shapes adolescents' belief in their abilities to achieve goals. Specifically, it highlights how urban areas, with their abundance of educational and extracurricular opportunities, foster a diverse sense of self-efficacy among youths, enabling them to engage in a variety of experiences that contribute to their self-belief. Conversely, rural settings, characterized by limited access to specialized resources, demand greater adaptability and resilience from adolescents, leading to a distinct form of self-efficacy rooted in community involvement and problem-solving.

Keywords

self-efficacy, collective-efficacy, geographical influences, cultural impact, psychological well-being, adolescents development

The Influence of Urban and Rural Environments on Youth Self-Efficacy and Collective-Efficacy

Imagine two teenagers, one growing up in the streets of a busy urban center and the other in the quiet expanses of a rural countryside. Despite the fact that they are contemporaries, the environment they navigate could be very different. This paper explores how the contrasting geographical factors cause distinct pathways in the development of youth self-efficacy and collective-efficacy, influencing not only their current self-belief but shaping their future trajectories.

Self-efficacy, a term coined by Albert Bandura (1977), is defined as an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments. Youth self-efficacy is a critical component of development. It plays a pivotal role in influencing motivation, effort, and persistence in the face of challenges. The core theme of this paper pertains to examining the differential impacts of urban and rural settings on youth self-efficacy. It hypothesizes that these contrasting environments shape self-efficacy and collective-efficacy levels through access to resources, cultural and environmental factors, and opportunities for resilience building. Urban areas, with their abundant educational and extracurricular opportunities (van Maarseveen, 2021), might enhance self-efficacy and collective efficacy differently compared to rural areas, where community ties and support networks might play a more significant role.

A study conducted by Lenzi et al. (2013) used a comprehensive analysis to explore the effects of perceived neighborhood social resources on prosocial behavior during early adolescence. The research was carried out in Italy with a sample of 1,145 adolescents from the 6th to 8th grades. The study's findings highlighted that: adolescents in urban settings, benefiting from increased social resources such as neighborhood cohesion and friendship networks, exhibited higher levels of social self-efficacy compared to their rural counterparts. This disparity illustrates how enhanced social interaction and diverse activity opportunities in urban environments contribute to higher self-efficacy levels (Lenzi et al., 2013).

Moreover, the research conducted by Roos et al. (2013) utilized a cross-sectional survey design to examine the influences of self-efficacy and collective efficacy on psychological well-being among individuals in transition within urban and rural settings of the North-West Province, South Africa. The study involved 1,050 Setswana-speaking participants, differentiated into urban (n=451) and rural (n=599) groups. Using instruments like the Community Collective Efficacy Scale (CCES) and the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), alongside well-being measures such as the Affectometer 2 (AFM) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), the research demonstrated that urban residents exhibited higher levels of self-efficacy and collective efficacy, which correlated positively with enhanced psychological well-being. These findings underscore the significant role of efficacy beliefs in the psychological adjustment of communities facing urbanization (Roos et al., 2013). With statistical analyses, those studies reveal robust correlations between geographical location and adolescents efficacy.

Collective Efficacy vs. Self-Efficacy

While self-efficacy pertains to an individual's confidence in their ability to achieve (Bandura, 1977), collective efficacy refers to a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments (Bandura, 1997). Unlike self-efficacy, which is intrapersonal, collective efficacy is a relational construct that emerges from

interactions within a community. It plays a crucial role in community psychology by influencing group goals, motivational investment, and the resilience of communities facing transition or adversity. The research by Roos et al. (2013) demonstrates how both self-efficacy and collective efficacy can be influenced by geographical settings and significantly impact psychological well-being in communities undergoing urbanization (Roos et al., 2013). Understanding the interplay between these constructs within different geographical contexts is crucial for comprehending how adolescents perceive their ability to succeed in urban versus rural environments.

Collective efficacy is particularly salient in discussions about community resilience and adaptation. Sampson et al. (1997) introduced the concept of collective efficacy within urban neighborhoods, demonstrating its importance in reducing crime and fostering a safe community environment. This sense of shared responsibility and community cohesion can also be translated into educational and developmental outcomes for adolescents. In urban settings, where diversity and population density might pose both challenges and opportunities, the role of collective efficacy in navigating these complexities becomes even more pertinent.

Conversely, self-efficacy captures an individual's internal belief system and is crucial for personal goal setting and achievement. Bandura (1997) emphasized the role of self-efficacy in individual motivation, resilience, and success. In rural settings, where community ties are strong but resources may be more limited, self-efficacy becomes a vital component of youth development (Bandura, 1997). Adolescents' belief in their individual capacity to overcome barriers and achieve their goals is instrumental in fostering personal growth and educational attainment, despite the potential lack of external resources and opportunities.

The distinction and interaction between collective efficacy and self-efficacy illustrate the complex nature of adolescent development across different geographical settings. A recent study involving Chinese EFL learners demonstrated that self-efficacy and mindfulness directly influence psychological well-being, with self-regulation serving as a significant mediator. This underscores the balance between personal agency and community support, highlighting the varying importance of these factors depending on the socio-cultural and geographical context (Fan & Cui, 2024).

Incorporating a geographical lens into the study of self-efficacy and collective efficacy offers a richer understanding of the environmental factors that influence youth development. By acknowledging the distinct challenges and opportunities presented by urban and rural settings, we can better understand how locations navigate teenagers into different developmental pathways.

Geographical Influence on Access to Resources and Its Implications for Youth Self-Efficacy

The accessibility and variety of resources in a geographical location play a critical role in shaping the experiences and developmental outcomes of its inhabitants. The study by Humphreys et al. (2003) utilized a national mail questionnaire survey to analyze the complexity of general practice activities

across various degrees of rurality in non-metropolitan Australia. The survey targeted all GPs (General Practitioner) who performed at least 375 non-referred services during January to March 2002 in rural and remote areas, totaling 4406 GPs. The researchers achieved a 35% response rate, receiving 1498 usable responses. The Rural, Remote, and Metropolitan Area (RRMA) classification system, ranging from RRMA 3 (large rural centres) to RRMA 7 (other remote centres), was employed to categorize the GPs' locations. Through cross-tabulation and logistic regression analyses of the survey data, the study demonstrated that GPs in more remote settings faced a greater complexity of practice activities, reflecting the necessity for broader skill sets due to limited access to specialized healthcare resources. This complexity varied significantly with rurality, highlighting the unique challenges faced by rural GPs and the critical role of geographical location in defining the scope of medical practice (Humphreys et al., 2003).

Drawing parallels to the developmental context of adolescents, the scarcity of educational and extracurricular resources in rural areas similarly demands a higher level of adaptability and resilience among youths. This environment may influence the development of self-efficacy differently than in urban settings, where access to diverse resources, including educational programs, cultural institutions, and community organizations, is typically more abundant. Recent studies further illuminate the significant role of geographical location in determining access to resources and, consequently, influencing self-efficacy among youths. Schmitt-Wilson and Welsh (2016) examine how self-efficacy varies between urban and rural environments. Their study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to capture the factors influencing self-efficacy. By focusing on a sample from both urban and rural areas, the researchers assessed the direct impact of resource accessibility on self-efficacy levels. Their findings illustrate significant disparities: urban sample often reported higher self-efficacy, attributed to greater access to supportive services and resources that are more readily available in urban centers, such as education and healthcare. Conversely, rural sample faced challenges due to limited accessibility to essential resources, which in turn affected their self-efficacy beliefs (Schmitt-Wilson and Welsh, 2016).

Moreover, the proximity to a wide array of resources can foster a sense of self-efficacy in urban youths by providing numerous opportunities for skill development, social interaction, and achievement. For example, in a longitudinal analysis conducted by Guo et al. (2019), the impact of extracurricular activity participation on the self-efficacy of urban adolescents was examined. The study tracked a diverse group of urban adolescents over several years to assess changes in their self-efficacy levels in relation to their engagement in extracurricular activities. Data was collected through annual surveys that measured the frequency and diversity of extracurricular participation alongside validated scales for self-efficacy. Their findings revealed that adolescents who engaged in a broad range of activities consistently reported higher self-efficacy over time. This effect was attributed to the varied skills and experiences gained through diverse activities, which not only enhance competence, but also provide

valuable social interactions and recognition, all of which are critical components that boost an individual's belief in their capabilities (Guo et al., 2019). These findings suggest that the richness of resources in urban areas can directly contribute to the development of a robust sense of self-efficacy among adolescents.

Conversely, rural adolescents may develop self-efficacy through different pathways. The necessity to navigate resource limitations can foster unique forms of self-efficacy rooted in problem-solving, community involvement, and adaptability (Elder & Conger, 2000). In this context, collective efficacy may also play a more prominent role, as community members often come together to compensate for the lack of external resources (Emery & Flora, 2006). This collective approach to overcoming challenges can instill a sense of efficacy among rural youths, as they witness and contribute to communal resilience and achievement.

In addressing the geographical disparity in resource access, digital connectivity emerges as a critical equalizer. Enhanced online platforms and digital resources mitigate some traditional limitations faced by rural communities, offering improved access to educational content, healthcare information, and virtual communities. Leveraging technology to enhance resource accessibility in rural areas can support the development of both self-efficacy and collective efficacy among youths, empowering them to overcome geographical constraints (Sharma, 2023).

Cultural and Environmental Factors Affecting Youth Self-Efficacy in Different Geographical Contexts

The development of self-efficacy in adolescents is significantly influenced by the cultural and environmental factors unique to their geographical settings. These factors not only shape their daily experiences but also affect their beliefs in their abilities to achieve personal and academic goals. The study by Gershoff et al. (2007) extensively analyzed the interplay between family income levels, material hardship, and child development outcomes using a robust dataset from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999, which included over 21,255 participants. Their research methodologically assessed dual components of economic conditions and their direct impacts on parenting styles and children's cognitive and social-emotional skills. By incorporating variables such as material hardship into their models, Gershoff and colleagues (2007) highlighted how under-resourced families face unique challenges that affect child development, thereby influencing youth self-efficacy. This comprehensive approach provides valuable insights into the multifaceted influence of economic factors on youth development, emphasizing the importance of considering both economic and material conditions in research on geographical impacts on self-efficacy. Hence, understanding such relationship and their influences is crucial for addressing the disparities in developmental outcomes between youths in diverse environments.

Cultural values play a pivotal role in shaping adolescents' perceptions of self-efficacy (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In settings where community and collective success are emphasized, such as in many rural areas, youths may develop a strong sense of collective efficacy, believing in their community's capability to achieve goals (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). This collective orientation can influence individual self-efficacy by fostering a sense of belonging and support. Conversely, urban environments often promote individual achievement and competition, which can enhance personal self-efficacy but may also lead to increased stress and isolation if not balanced with adequate support systems (Luthar & Becker, 2002). To illustrate, Oyserman et al. (2002) conducted a meta-analysis that highlights how individualistic and collectivist cultures differently influence self-perception and motivation, which both are key components of self-efficacy. Their analysis synthesized data from multiple studies to assess how these cultural frameworks affect psychological processes across populations. The researchers found that individualistic cultures tend to foster a sense of independence that enhances personal self-efficacy, as individuals are encouraged to view themselves as autonomous agents. By contrast, collectivist cultures emphasize interdependence and community, which can enhance collective-efficacy, where the focus is on achieving group goals. This distinction profoundly impacts motivation because in individualistic societies, motivation is often driven by personal achievements and goals, while in collectivist societies, motivation is closely tied to group objectives and the well-being of others (Oyserman et al., 2002). Their findings suggest that cultural orientations towards individualism or collectivism can significantly impact the development of self-efficacy beliefs among adolescents.

The physical environment also plays critical roles in shaping youth self-efficacy. Adolescents in urban areas, with their better economic and material conditions, have greater access to educational facilities, cultural institutions, and extracurricular activities. This consequently provides a wealth of opportunities for youths in urban locations to explore their personal interests and develop their autonomous skills. By being able to develop those skills, they can significantly boost self-efficacy by enabling successes and affirming the youths' beliefs in their capabilities (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Conversely, rural environments, characterized by their generally lower income per capita and thusly lower economic performance compared to urban settings, results in a different environment with individuals having less economic mobility and material resources. This also led to a limited access to specialized resources and opportunities. The challenges posed by these environmental constraints can lead to a different kind of self-efficacy, rooted in problem-solving and community engagement. Therefore, rural youths tend to develop collective-efficacy in a different manner.

Given the disparities in cultural and environmental factors between urban and rural settings, targeted interventions are necessary to bridge the gap in self-efficacy development among youths. Programs that leverage community strengths in rural areas and provide urban youths with stress management and social support can help mitigate the challenges unique to each setting.

Further research is needed to explore the complex impact of cultural and environmental factors on youth self-efficacy, particularly in the face of globalization and technological advancements. Understanding these dynamics can inform the development of culturally sensitive and geographically specific interventions aimed at supporting all youths in realizing their full potential.

Adaptation and Resilience Across Geographical Contexts: A Pathway to Youth Self-Efficacy

Understanding how adaptation and resilience contribute to youth self-efficacy requires a deep dive into the interplay between individuals and their environments. This is particularly pertinent when considering the diverse challenges and opportunities presented by urban and rural settings. The development of self-efficacy in adolescents is not merely a reflection of internal psychological processes but is also significantly influenced by the external social, cultural, and environmental factors that characterize their geographical context (Bandura et al., 2001).

Evans (2004) provides a rigorous examination of the multifaceted impacts of childhood poverty on development. In his research, Evans utilized a cross-sectional analysis to assess the conditions of poverty-stricken environments and their direct effects on the developmental trajectories of children and adolescents. The study highlighted that numerous stressors, including overcrowding, noise, and instability, can significantly impede cognitive development and emotional well-being. Moreover, Evan pointed out that some environmental stressors are compounded by limited access to educational resources and recreational spaces. This further restricts children's opportunities for growth and learning. By illustrating how these adverse conditions interact with developmental processes, Evans effectively argues that complex environmental factors can shape health, behavior, and academic outcomes in youth. This comprehensive approach reveals the urgency of addressing environmental determinants and the promotion of equitable developmental opportunities (Evans, 2004). Urban and rural environments present distinct sets of challenges that can affect youths' exposure to stressors. In urban areas, the density and diversity of the population can lead to unique stressors, such as noise pollution and social crowding, which impact adolescent well-being and their ability to adapt (Lepore et al., 1991). Conversely, rural settings may offer fewer stressors of this nature but often present challenges related to isolation and limited access to recreational resources (Israel & Beaulieu, 2004).

Ungar's (2008) work on resilience across cultures reveals that the capacity to adapt and overcome adversity is heavily influenced by the availability of community resources and supportive relationships. In his comparative study, Ungar utilized a mixed-methods approach that included both qualitative interviews and quantitative assessments across multiple countries to explore how different cultures foster resilience in the face of adversity. This comprehensive analysis revealed that: while the intrinsic qualities of resilience, such as tenacity and optimism, are universal, their expressions are profoundly influenced by local contexts. Specifically, Ungar (2008) found that the availability of community resources, such as educational programs, healthcare, social support systems, and the strength of social

relationships, critically enhance individuals' capacity to adapt and thrive despite challenges. By analyzing these patterns across different cultural contexts, Ungar's work underscores the necessity of a socio-ecological approach to understanding resilience. It recognizes the role of environmental and community support in cultivating resilience among individuals, especially youths (Ungar, 2008). This is particularly evident in rural communities, where although resources may be scarce, strong social ties and a sense of community can provide critical support for youth development. Similarly, urban youths benefit from diverse community programs and services that foster resilience, although in a more impersonal and sometimes competitive environment.

Furthermore, Masten and Obradović (2006) delve into the relationship between competence and resilience, pointing that the development of specific skills and abilities is essential for effectively responding to challenges. In their research, they employed a longitudinal study design, tracking the progress of children from various socio-economic backgrounds. This approach allowed them to observe the evolution of competencies that are often seen as foundational for resilience, such as problem-solving skills, emotional regulation, and social competence. Their findings suggest that these competencies play crucial roles against environmental stresses and adversities. Children who developed these skills were markedly better at navigating challenges and maintaining or regaining stability in their lives. Masten and Obradović (2006) highlighted that resilience is not a static trait but a dynamic set of capabilities that develop through interactions with a supportive environment. For youths, geographical context plays a significant role in determining the types of competencies that are developed and valued. Urban environments, with their emphasis on academic achievement and technological literacy, may foster a different set of skills than rural environments, where practical knowledge and community involvement are often more important.

In rural areas, where a sense of community is being valued more, it may be easier for adolescents to access personal support. On the contrary, in cities with highly developed economy and facilities, environmental support for adolescents may be more significant. Werner (1993) also provided a perspective on resilience, demonstrating that resilience is possible with the right mix of personal and environmental supports. The longitudinal study tracked the lives of individuals from birth into adulthood on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, providing detailed analysis of how various factors over the lifespan influenced outcomes for individuals who encountered significant adversities early in life. Werner's methodology involved a comprehensive collection of data through various phases of the participants' lives, combining both qualitative interviews and quantitative assessments to measure the impact of personal and environmental factors on their developmental trajectories. Her findings demonstrated that resilience is significantly influenced by external supports such as nurturing relationships, socio-economic advantages, and community resources. This study underscored the complex interplay between inherent disposition and external environmental factors in the development of resilience, highlighting the critical role of supportive environments in facilitating recovery and

growth after significant adversities (Werner, 1993). Therefore, given rural and urban youth's access to different supports, her study of youths also highlights how these factors contribute to different youth efficacy between the two locations.

The synthesis of these studies shows how geographical context influences the development of adaptation and resilience among youths. Urban and rural settings each offer unique challenges and opportunities that shape adolescents' experiences and efficacy level. Recognizing the importance of environmental and community factors in fostering resilience and self-efficacy is crucial for designing interventions that are sensitive to the needs of youths in different geographical contexts. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, with an emphasis on identifying effective strategies for supporting youths' adaptive capacities and enhancing their self-efficacy across diverse environments.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the significant role that geographical context plays in shaping youth self-efficacy, emphasizing the contrast between urban and rural settings. The analysis revealed that urban environments, with their richer access to diverse educational and social resources, tend to enhance self-efficacy through increased opportunities for engagement and achievement. Conversely, rural environments demand higher adaptability and resilience, fostering a unique form of self-efficacy that is deeply intertwined with community involvement and resourcefulness. The findings underscore the critical impact of environmental factors—both physical and social—on the developmental trajectories of young individuals. These insights not only broaden our understanding of self-efficacy as a multifaceted psychological construct but also highlight the need for targeted interventions that consider the specific needs and strengths of diverse geographical settings.

While offering valuable insights into the impact of geographical context on youth self-efficacy, this paper is not without its limitations. The reliance on secondary data from existing studies limits the ability to control for all confounding variables, affecting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the focus predominantly on urban versus rural settings may overlook the nuances of semi-urban or transitional areas. Future research should aim to delve deeper into the nuances of how specific elements of urbanity and rurality contribute to self-efficacy, with a particular focus on the mediating roles of technology and policy innovations in balancing these influences. By continuing to investigate these dynamics, we can better support the development of policies and programs that enhance self-efficacy across various communities, ultimately leading to more equitable social and educational outcomes.

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