**Poverty and Education Learning Module**

In this Project, you will be examining data from the Vital Signs report produced annually by the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators (BNIA) alliance here at the University of Baltimore to understand the links between poverty and education. You will then answer the six questions in the Assignment section.

**Introduction**

The links between poverty, neighborhoods, and educational achievement has been examined in numerous studies. Perhaps the most compelling study is the book *The Long Shadow[[1]](#footnote-1)*, which examines these issues right here in Baltimore. In the work, the authors state that, “The overlapping spheres of influence imagery implies that family socioeconomic level, neighborhood, and school are vehicles, at least potentially, for the transmission of social advantage and disadvantage across generations” (2014:74). In this module we will be examining Vital Signs data to assess the “overlapping spheres” between poverty, neighborhoods, and educational achievement in Baltimore City.

**Step 1**

To begin, we will look at the following [Vital Signs](http://bniajfi.org/) indicators. The data for these can be found in the Excel workbook titled Poverty and Education.

* Percent of Family Households Living Below the Poverty Line (2012)
* Unemployment Rate (2012)
* Percentage of 5th Grade Students Passing MSA Reading (2012)
* High School Completion Rate (2012)
* Percent Population (25 years and over) with a Bachelor’s Degree or Above (2012)

In the Poverty and Education workbook, look at the description of these indicators on the Introduction page. For each indicator consider the following questions:

* What does this indicator measure?
* What is the source of the data and how does this affect the measurement?
* What are the strengths and limitations of this indicator?

**Step 2**

Now take a look at the Data page of the workbook. Figure out the Community Statistical Area (CSA) that has the following:

* Highest Poverty Level

In cell K3, type the following formula exactly as follows: =MAX(C3:C57) then press enter.

Now, look at the column “Percent of Family Households Living Below the Poverty Line”, and find the CSA that has the number given in cell K3. Write this CSA down or in enter it into cell J3.

* Median Poverty Level

In cell K4, type the following formula exactly as follows: =MEDIAN(C3:C57) the press enter.

Now, look at the column “Percent of Family Households Living Below the Poverty Line”, and find the CSA that has the number given in cell K4. Write this CSA down or in enter it into cell J4.

* Lowest Poverty Level

In cell K5, type the following formula exactly as follows: =MIN(C3:C57) then press enter.

Now, look at the column “Percent of Family Households Living Below the Poverty Line”, and find the CSA that has the number given in cell K5.

Write this CSA down or in enter it into cell J5.

**Step 3**

The next step is to look at the Chart worksheet. The graph shows the five indicators. In the selector box at the top left of the worksheet, select the CSA that has the highest poverty, median poverty, and the lowest poverty. Then select in the fourth list Baltimore City.

**Assignment**

1. What is the relationship between poverty and 5th grade reading abilities? What are some of the reasons that might explain this relationship?
2. What is the relationship between 5th grade reading abilities and college educated people in these CSAs? What are some of the reasons that might explain this relationship?
3. What is the relationship between unemployment and high school education? What are some of the reasons that might explain this relationship?
4. What is the relationship between poverty and college education? Also consider 5th grade reading levels with poverty and college education, and provide some social factors that might explain these relationships.
5. Now, play around with the chart a little and select some other CSAs that have high or low poverty. Do the relationships you discussed above still hold true?
6. After looking at this data and answering these questions, discuss the general relationship between poverty and education. What are the challenges that a child or teenager from a CSA with high poverty rates might face in succeeding in their education?

1. Alexander, Karl, Doris Entwhistle, and Linda Olson

   2014 *The Long Shadow: Family Background, Disadvantaged Urban Youth, and the Transition to Adulthood*.

   New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)