Girls in the ‘Hood: Understanding How Place Matters for Kids

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The Importance of Place

- Policy goal: ensure that all children have opportunity to reach their full potential
- But where children live affects life chances
- Challenge is how to improve access to opportunity
The Costs of Concentrated Poverty

• Risks for adolescents
  – Poor physical and mental health, alienation
  – Delinquency, risky behavior
  – Criminal justice involvement
  – Early sexual initiation
  – Pregnancy, STIs
Moving to Opportunity

- Unique effort to improve the lives of poor families,
  - Housing subsidies to help public housing families move to lower-poverty communities
  - Demonstration in five cities
  - Volunteers randomly assigned to *experimental group*, *comparison group*, or *in-place control*
MTO
Ambitious Goals

- Improve employment and family income
- Increase children’s educational achievement
- Increase access to “social capital”
- Demonstrate that federal housing programs could have positive benefits
Implementation Challenges

- Community resistance
  - Baltimore
  - Loss of political support
- Rental markets
- Variations across the sites
- Counseling model did not fit families’ needs
Mixed Findings from MTO

- Major impacts on quality of life
- Improvements in mental and physical health for women and girls
  - Obesity
  - General mental health, anxiety
- No gains in employment, education
- Mixed effects on risky behavior
MTO
Important Benefits for Girls

• MTO mover girls showed:
  – Better mental health, less risky behavior
  – Pattern strikingly different than for boys

• Qualitative follow up suggests safety is key explanation
  – Mover girls escaped “the female fear”
  – Framework that can help explain the factors that place youth at risk
Escaping a Worse Fate

Girls who moved to lower poverty talk about the friends they left behind.

Antionette, a girl from New York said:

….Because a lot of kids in my [old] neighborhood, like the girls, wound up not finishing junior high or just starting high school like one of my best friends. I mean, we were in every single class since we started school together. We even went to the same high school. And then like ninth grade she had a kid and that was it.
Costs for girls in high poverty

- Pressure for early sexual initiation
- Depression, fear
- Pregnancy, STDs
- Sexual violence,
- Peer victimization
- Restrictions on movement
Sexual Assault and Violence

Mother from Los Angeles about her daughter’s victimization said:

- You know, so we have experience her being sexually assaulted at her school and it was, to this day, I don't think I ever got over, I haven't got over it because I felt like they should have had a harsher punishment than what they got because they got probation, and they had to register as a sex offender. I'm like because if you don’t watch them, they going to do it again. Something they been around or seen or heard that make them think this is okay, you can sexually assault somebody, and it's nothing going to be done to you.
Sexualized Perceptions of Youth

Keisha, 12 year old girl living in public housing in Chicago, August 2008:

- Because [I] look at me like as a little girl, so like when I was in [my former public housing development] they looked at me like ...a grown lady. 'Cause I got—I got body parts that men like.....So, then when I moved over here [to this new development] I noticed that people looked at me like—they were (friendly) and they, they know me as a little girl. I tell them that I'm 12 years old. And they don't believe it, but I tell them that I'm 12, they say that I look like I'm 13, something.
Costs for Boys Too

- Embedded in risky networks
- Lack of positive relationships
- Alienation
- Depression, Sexually transmitted disease
- Extreme isolation to avoid risks
Policy Implications

• Plight of children in concentrated poverty is a national crisis
• Public health intervention models—peer education, mentoring, early intervention
• Comprehensive community initiatives
Research Agenda

• Building on MTO Final Evaluation to understand more about how neighborhood environments influence outcomes for youth

• HOST Demonstration—Dual generation, place-based intervention in public and assisted housing
  – Interventions for youth targeted at reducing risky behavior, dating violence, etc.
HOST Goal

Determine how housing can be used as a platform to provide comprehensive services to vulnerable residents in public housing and mixed income developments.
HOST MODEL

HOST Demonstration: Developing comprehensive, coordinated service models

Intervention: UI + Site Partners
Case management and wrap-around services for adults with strategies to engage children and youth

Engagement and program implementation: Site Partners

Follow-up and ongoing adjustment of services: UI + Site Partners

Adulst: Increased self-sufficiency/Improved health & well-being

Children and Youth: Positive educational, health, and behavioral outcomes

Sustainable community revitalization

Improved well-being of families and kids
Participating Sites

- **Altgeld Gardens**, Chicago Housing Authority, Chicago IL
- **Oakwood Shores**, The Community Builders, Chicago IL
- **New Columbia and Humboldt Gardens**, Home Forward (Housing Authority of Portland), Portland OR
- **Brownsville Development**, NYC Housing Authority, Brooklyn NY (Pending)
- **Benning Terrace**, DC Housing Authority, Washington DC
Common Elements Across Sites

Participants

**Adults:**
- Public and Assisted Housing Residents

**Facing issues of:**
- Unemployment
- Substance Abuse
- Credit/Financial troubles
- Mental/Physical health
- Low literacy

**Youth:**
- Children of parents receiving services
- High-needs youth

Process

**Phase 1:** Needs Assessment and Program Development

**Phase 2:** Engagement and Program Implementation

**Phase 3:** Follow-up and ongoing adjustment of services / case management model

Intermediate Outcomes

**Adults:** (sample)
- Gain job skills
- Financial literacy
- Access to needed services
- Motivation and Self efficacy
- Reduction in lease problems

**Youth:** (sample)
- Involvement in school / Attendance
- Literacy
- Social and leadership skills
- Family integration

End Outcomes

**Adults:**
- ↑ Employment
- ↑ Job earnings
- Stabilized physical health
- ↓ Drug use/abuse
- ↑ Financial stability/savings
- ↓ Anxiety

**Youth:**
- ↑ School performance
- ↓ Behavior problems and delinquency
- ↓ Anxiety
- ↑ Motivation
- ↑ Physical health