

The Three-City Study of Moving to Opportunity

Principal Investigators:

Xavier de Souza Briggs, *MIT*

John Goering, *CUNY*

Susan Popkin, *The Urban Institute*

August 14, 2006

Section on Urban and Community Sociology
Annual meetings of the American
Sociological Association
Montreal, Canada



Outline

- **Objectives and design**
- **Adolescent outcomes and neighborhood risk: “Girls in the ‘hood”**
by Popkin, Leventhal, and Weismann
- **Adult employment outcomes:**
“How does leaving high poverty neighborhoods affect employment prospects?”
by Briggs, Cove, Duarte, and Turner

3cMTO main objectives

- **Shed light on the puzzles in the MTO Interim Impacts Evaluation (2003).**
- **Directly address questions about metro restructuring and which contexts matter for kids, which families tend to benefit, what repeat mobility implies.**
- **Generate useful information for policy and program design and management, not just for science of human development or “neighborhood effects.”**
Do this in a shifting policy context.

Questions and major domains

- How do *neighborhood context* and the *relocation experience* matter for child and family well-being and prospects?
 - **Health and mental health**—focus on obesity, anxiety, depression, stress.
 - **Education**—focus on school choice, attitudes, efforts, school-to-work (or college).
 - **Employment**—focus on readiness to work, barriers, networks, norms, spatial access.
 - **Risky behavior**—focus on gender differences, delinquency.

Three integrated methods

- **In-depth qualitative interviews (large sample=123, more coverage):** focus on lived experience, attitudes and behaviors; followed by linked
- **Ethnographic fieldwork (subsample=37):** repeat visiting, observation and mix of semi-structured and naturalistic interviewing to directly observe patterns, learn social context for choices and patterns.
- **Context scans:** track and link change in contexts (metro and neighborhood-level) to what families report.



Sample design: Metro Boston, L.A., NYC

Qualitative interviewing (all treatment groups)

- *Among* families: random-stratified (focus on families with adolescent children)
- *Within* families: focal parent; focal adolescent (random); focal young adult if present (random).

Ethnographic visiting: random within above, controls and experimental (MTOX) compliers only, plus:

- Oversample 1: SE Asian refugee families (LA).
- Oversample 2: “Locationally successful” MTOX families, living outside central-city school district when we recruited (2004). Can also check *ex post* by tract poverty or other traits.

Ethnography (more)

- “Family-focused,” not *community study* or *peer-group study* (a la delinquency research)—focus on how daily life “gets accomplished.”
- Major focus on three core constructs:
 - Daily routines
 - Social relations
 - Neighborhood context
- Major logistical challenges: Wide geographic dispersion, 15 fieldworkers, entrée with multiple family members, secure data via UCLA.
- Plus tension between ethnographic method and experimental science (breadth versus depth): “holism but not comprehensiveness.”

***Girls in the 'Hood:
Reframing Safety
and Its Impact on
Health and Behavior***

Susan J. Popkin

The Urban Institute

Tama Leventhal

Johns Hopkins University

Gretchen Weismann

*Massachusetts Institute of
Technology*



Research Question

- How did the MTO demonstration affect adolescent girls' mental health and behavior?
- *Expectation:* Provide access to safer neighborhoods and as a result, adolescents—both girls and boys—would be exposed to fewer negative influences, such as gangs and drugs, and would then be at lower risk for delinquency and other risky behavior, as well as poor health and mental health

Puzzles: Mental Health and Behavior

- **As of the Interim Evaluation, Experimental-group girls reported less psychological distress, anxiety, and substance use, were less likely to be arrested (especially for violent and property crimes), and less likely to be idle than control girls.**

Why are adolescent girls in the experimental group doing better?

Key pathways (possibilities)

- **Collective efficacy: Improvements in neighborhood social organization, positive norms**
- **Greater institutional resources (schools, after-school programs, etc.)**
- **More positive peer groups**
- **Improved parenting and family functioning, thanks to changes in parents' well-being and behavior**

Yet the interim survey found little support for these, except for changes in social conditions that result in safer neighborhoods.

Meaning of Safety

There are safety factors that pose unique challenges for girls' health and behavior, including what Gordon and Riger (1989) term the “female fear”—the fear of sexual victimization, verbal and physical harassment, and sexual exploitation.

How do changes in “female fear” affect girls?

- **Less exposure to the risk behaviors in question;**
- **Reduced victimization and consequent engagement in risk behaviors;**
- **Increased sense of personal efficacy or agency.**

▪

From Robin, a mom in the L.A. experimental group:

“I'm glad we are living out here, cuz there is more intimidation and everything down there [in the projects]. Who knows, those boys down there are bad, say all kind of stuff ... I'm like 'man look at these kids'. It's a faster pace. My kids are slow, so when my kids go down there now and they look at them, like, 'you guys are different.’”

And mom reported her daughter Terri's friends from LA were doing

“Everything. Having sex, I mean, little girl she was practically raised with before we moved out here, she got raped, was pregnant before. She's the same age as Teri, and she was already pregnant before, and I guess her mom took her to get an abortion. She's having sex. Teri's not having sex. And [she has] different guys, even the 13 year old girl, who my 13 year old was raised together [with], they grew up together, she has a boyfriend, 16 years old and she's 13, and her mom lets her.”

From Tonya, an adolescent girl in the experimental group:

“Foul. Just like in any other projects....They'll call them “B’s [Bitches], ho’s, tramps, sluts, stuff like that. They don't care. They don't have no respect for females at all. They beat up females over here and all that, throw them out of windows. Oh, my God. These projects is crazy. They throw their girlfriends out of windows and everything else, pull out guns on them and stuff. They don't really too much care for females over here.”

Girls' Coping Strategies

- **Avoiding risky places**
- **Acting tough when you have to "run the gauntlet"**
- **Securing protection (people to "watch your back")**

From Antionette, a young adult, experimental complier who moved back from a low to a high poverty neighborhood ...

“I got a way. When I walk down the street, I look real evil.... I don't even smile like nothing, nothing. And if you did say something to me, it's like....Why you talking to me?...something like that...I don't respond to people. I have never responded to anyone. I think one time I responded to somebody and that's because the guy touched me....Because,Somebody could be crazy. You could be crazy, I could be crazy.”

By comparison girls in lower poverty neighborhoods...

From Cassandra, age 15, who has lived in low poverty suburban neighborhoods outside of Boston since moving there in 1994:

Q: And how about the guys, how do the guys treat women around here?

A: They know not to touch them.

From Tracy, an experimental complier in Boston:

“There really isn't a lot of men on the street. I don't really know a lot of people. I don't hang around here.”

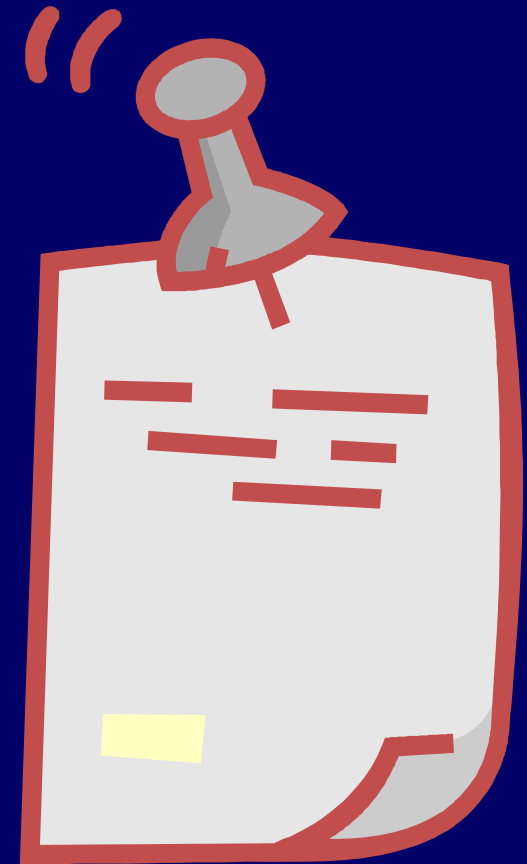
From Brianna, a mother in the L.A. experimental complier group:

“I have thought about that before, if I was living there still, how would it be. I think the type of person I am, I would have control of it, but I wouldn't be able to trust it because of the guys... That try to hit on younger girls. So I wouldn't trust it.” Q: Do you think that happens more over there than it does here? *Yeah. It does. I'm not going to lie to you. It does.* Q: How does it happen over there or how did you see it happen? *A: That's what they're like. They don't like the women my age. They go for the 12-year-old, the 11-year-olds, and give them drugs and that's not good...I have seen a lot of young girls like that....I refuse for my daughter to be like that.”*

Emerging patterns

Experimental-group girls gain several advantages from living in a low-poverty neighborhood:

- **Less likely to be preyed on by men (and older men);**
- **Parents and adolescents less likely to be afraid of sexual harassment and violence in neighborhood;**
- **Less likely to be engaged with peers who are involved with risky behavior;**
- **More likely to expect respectful treatment from people in neighborhood.**



Conclusions and Implications

- **As a result of greater safety—less pressure to engage in sexual behavior and less harassment from men and boys—experimental-group girls are less fearful than their control counterparts.**
- **Our findings suggest the importance of focusing on these issues to understand what factors matter most for improving outcomes for women and girls.**
- **We know that MTO (and HOPE VI) participants cite safety as their biggest gain; our findings offer insight into what safety means for women and girls beyond the reduction in gang violence.**
- **Long-term benefits? Need to continue tracking.**

How might relocation help?

- **Spatial mismatch: relocating toward areas of job growth (in skill-appropriate jobs), e.g. growing suburbs.**
- **Networks: gaining social resources (social capital) useful for finding and keeping jobs.**
- **Norms: motivation from more work-supportive social climate**

But movers might lose social support for work, not have access to openings nearby, etc.

Interim Impacts: Results and puzzles

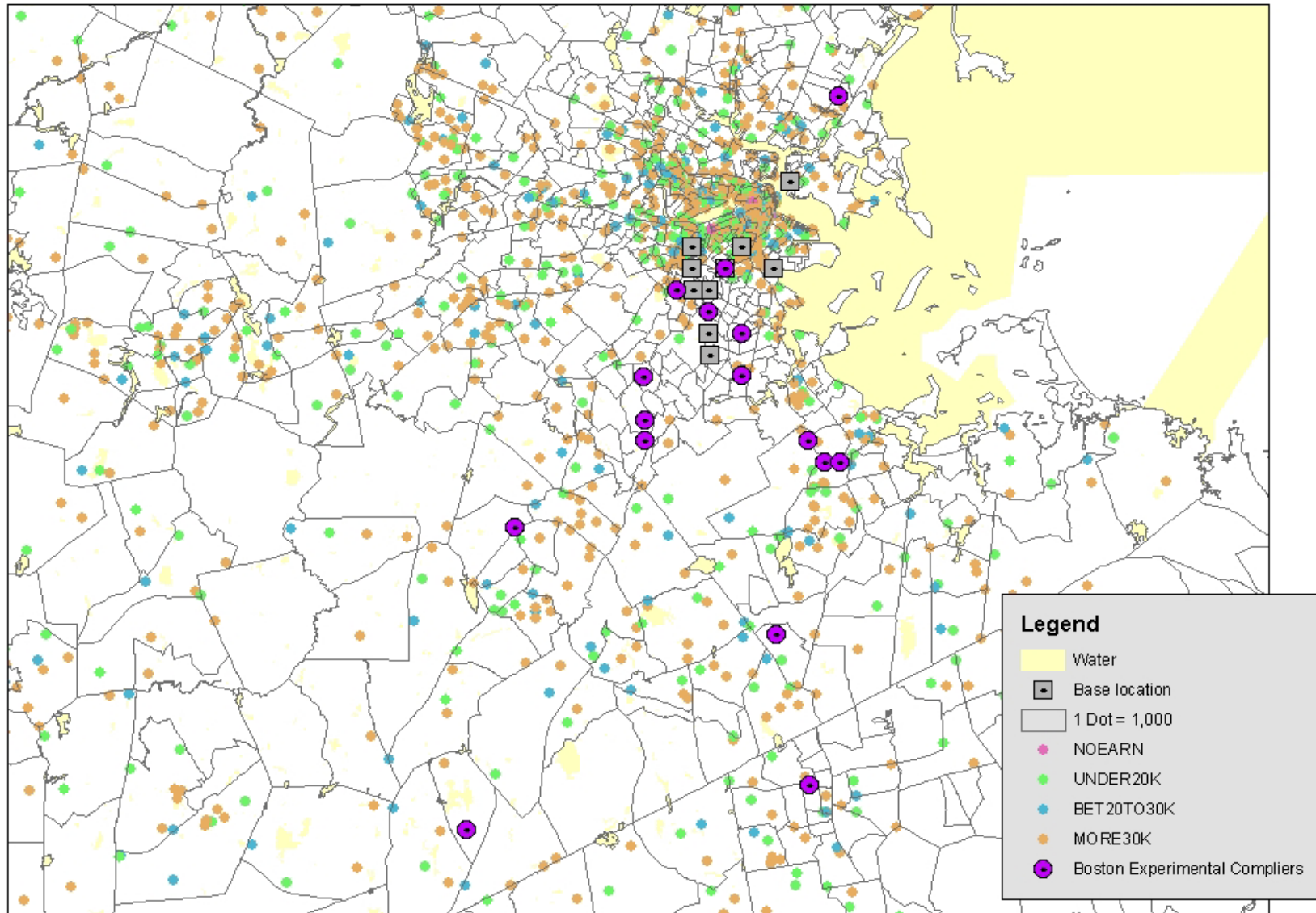
- No significant *generalized* impacts on employment, earnings or receipt of public assistance.
- *Welfare reform and strong job economy* raised employment across treatment groups.
- Some impacts when disaggregated *by site*:
 - Los Angeles: Increased rate of employment.
 - New York: Significant increases in earnings.
 - Women under 40 appear to do better in the job market.
- Length of exposure to more advantaged neighborhoods is associated with employment outcomes—*though possible selection effects cloud this picture.*

Spatial Mismatch

- **Boston & New York: Relocating meant leaving denser concentration of low-wage jobs in transit-rich areas for car-reliant areas in low job density communities.**
- **All three sites: High concentration in healthcare, retail and social services.**
- **Some families moved closer to jobs they already had:**

“I started while I was in Manhattan and then moved here where I was closer to work, which was a plus for me. Yeah, it’s like now 10 minutes [away] ... and I also do a lot of overtime.” (Rhadiya)

Boston MSA: Housing vs. low-wage job concentrations



The real challenge

- **Lining up jobs-housing-support “matches”**
 - Accessible childcare at low or no cost was often unstable (relatives move, refuse, become risky)
 - Low-wage job market and low-rent housing markets both bruising and so much in flux for those on the bottom: rent spikes, layoffs, shift changes



Social Networks

- **Assumptions:** Movers would be willing and able to *form* ties, and their more advantaged neighbors would be willing and able to *provide* information.
- But movers don't "convert" new locations into significant new social resources: Had casual, mostly cordial, interaction with neighbors, lives remained *kin-centered*, with some *distancing* from burdensome relatives.
- They were far more likely to get referrals from current and former co-workers, few of whom were neighbors; some from kin or another trusted source, such as clergy.



Norms

- **In low poverty neighborhoods: Feelings of security and calm; pride in having neighbors who worked—possible “observation effects” but little interaction.**
- **The next generation: gains in motivation and soft skills?:**

“It gives the kids a different atmosphere, because it’s a lot of working people out here. And everybody’s always busy. If they’re not in school [or] working, they’re doing something. So you never really just see anybody just hanging around” (Jackie)

Serious barriers to work, lack of job readiness

- **Missing skills and credentials**
- **Chronic health and mental health problems (self or dependent)**
- **Lack of transportation isolates some**

Tina came back to the conversation saying that she had decided she really didn't want to do the training because it was so far. "She has to be to school at 8, I have to catch a ferry, he takes him [Dad takes son to daycare] thank god, I don't know what I would do, then catching the bus and a ferry and the train and then the bus. It's crazy. Or two trains to Spring street on those days." (Fieldnote 12/04)

Assisted relocation is no panacea, but it “promotes” some women:

I asked Anique how she feels that she's been successful in her life. She responds, "Maintaining employment through all the layoffs and downsizing, where I didn't have to end up goin' back on welfare. Getting my daughter out of the Jordan Downs [public housing projects]. And I'm still working on everything else." (Fieldnote 4/05)

Conclusions and implications

- **It's the jobs-housing-support matches. *Need supports that make each leg of the stool—jobs or training, childcare, affordable rental housing—more stable and secure. “Car vouchers” could help, too.***
- **Relocation alone does little to affect the employment or employability of those who are not work ready. It cannot overcome the barriers, and it isolates some. *Need better targeting, plus intensive supports.***
- **Low-income movers don't convert new locations into significant new social resource. *Institutional connections could be fostered.***