

CHA Families and the Plan for Transformation

CHA Transformation *Children and Youth*

Megan Gallagher

The distressed public housing developments of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) were home to tens of thousands of children, many of whom suffered terrible consequences from the deplorable conditions—plagued by asthma after living in cockroach-infested buildings or injured by lead paint, unprotected radiators, darkened stairwells, and other hazards. Still more were victims of the overwhelming social disorganization, neglected or abused by drug-addicted parents, traumatized by witnessing violence, killed or injured in gang wars, or arrested and incarcerated for their own involvement in the disorder (Popkin et al. 2000).

Because children are particularly vulnerable, child outcomes have been a special focus for the HOPE VI Panel Study since the baseline study in 2001. On one hand, children are the most likely to benefit in important ways from improved housing quality—and reduced exposure to such risks as lead paint or mold—and from safer, less distressed neighborhoods. On the other hand, moving can disrupt their education and friendships and even put older youth at risk for conflict with local gangs. The HOPE VI Panel Study survey

included questions about children's behavior, which is an indicator of children's mental health. In 2005, we found that across the five sites, children whose families received vouchers were faring better after relocation than those still living in traditional public housing developments (Gallagher and Bajaj 2007). However, those still living in their original development in 2005 were experiencing the most problems, with parents—especially those of girls—reporting high levels of behavior problems and delinquency. These findings suggested that girls, in particular, were suffering from the ill effects of being left behind in a development that was becoming increasingly dangerous and chaotic as vacancies increased (Popkin 2010).

By the 2009 follow-up, Madden/Wells had been closed for more than a year and all the residents had been relocated. This brief examines how relocation has affected the well-being of the youngest former Madden/Wells residents. As in our earlier work, we rely on parental reports from the survey, because we did not survey children. However, we did conduct in-person interviews with nine young people from

the survey sample. In general, we find that these youth are doing relatively well; however, there are some reasons for concern, especially for boys.

Youth Live in Safer, Lower-Poverty Communities

In 2001, we interviewed the parents of 95 children age 6 to 14 years old in Madden/Wells. In 2009, we collected data on 56 of them. Some of these children are still school-age and others are young adults; their ages range from 14 to 22 years old.¹ Most live in households where their parents have received vouchers (63 percent). Another 10 percent live in traditional public housing, 13 percent in mixed-income housing, and 13 percent in households that are no longer receiving assistance.

- Over a quarter of the youth (27 percent) lived in households that remained in Madden/Wells almost until it closed, moving for the first time between 2005 and 2009. In 2009, we find that Madden/Wells families have generally moved to better quality housing in neighborhoods that are considerably safer and lower in poverty than their original public housing community (Popkin and Price 2010). Over two-thirds of parents (69 percent) report that their current neighborhoods are better than the Madden/Wells neighborhood for themselves and their children.
- Neighborhood-level data suggest that youth have moved to lower-poverty neighborhoods with lower violent crime rates (Buron and Popkin 2010). The median neighborhood poverty rate for youth was 65 percent in 2001, versus 33 percent in 2009. The median violent crime rate was 43 per 1,000 people in 2001, versus 27 per 1,000 people in 2009.² Families with children are no more likely to relocate to lower-poverty or lower-crime neighborhoods than families without children.

In in-depth interviews, some youth report that their neighborhoods are “qui-

eter” with less gun violence and drug trafficking. Anthony, a 15-year-old boy whose family is renting a home with a voucher on the far South Side said that he feels safe “because it’s more quiet and you barely hear shooting or anything.”

Other young people are more skeptical about their safety. Several young people whom we spoke with discussed the shooting, fighting, and gang activity in their neighborhoods. Terell, a 19-year-old whose family rents a home in a South Side neighborhood with a voucher, thinks that his current neighborhood is safer than Madden/Wells but that many of his neighbors are involved in illegal behavior: “So now I just see majority of every, every black male either gang banging, drinking, or smoking weed. That, that’s what I see. Not everyone, but majority and especially living around in this [South Side neighborhood] . . . ”

Our in-depth interviews also suggest that some youth struggle with the stress of relocation. Like Amara, a 20-year-old now living in another small public housing development, they say they have had to make trade-offs: the comfort and familiarity of the Madden/Wells development for the improved safety of their new neighborhoods. Amara reminisced: “I loved the Wells. If it was still there, I’d love to be in there right now. Honestly. I mean, it was, it was fun. It . . . was an interesting time growing up because it was, I, it was where I was from and I know everybody.”

Although most of the young people we spoke with reported that they made friends easily in their new neighborhood, a few said they had difficulty adapting to new neighborhoods and social networks. For example, Lionel, a 17-year-old whose family was living in the same South Side neighborhood, said that in his new neighborhood, he had no real friends, “just associates.”

Older Youth Seem to Be Getting Wiser

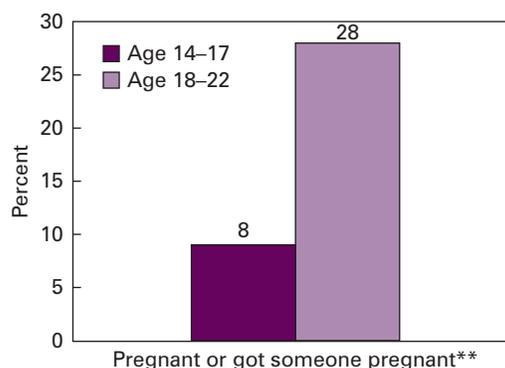
As in the previous rounds of the HOPE VI Panel Study, in 2009 we examined several domains of child well-being.³ In contrast to

“Young people have had to make trade-offs: the familiarity of Madden/Wells for improved safety.”

the last round in 2005, when we found that youth—especially girls—whose families had relocated with vouchers were faring better than those still living in Madden/Wells (Gallagher and Bajaj 2007), in 2009, we find no consistent patterns of change over time or differences in outcomes for youth with different types of housing assistance. However, while the numbers are small, some patterns suggest that older youth may be aging out of many of the problem behaviors they exhibited when they were younger (figure 1).

- Young adults (18 and older) made up over a third of our sample in 2009, allowing us to explore the youths' transitions to adulthood. According to parental reports, these young adults are significantly less likely than younger sample members to exhibit two or more negative behaviors in the past three months⁴ (20 percent versus 44 percent) or two or more delinquent behaviors in the past year,⁵ such as going to juvenile court, getting into trouble with police, or being in a gang (0 percent versus 12 percent). For example, young adults are less likely to be arrested than school-age youth (0 percent versus 12 percent).
- Youth appear to be better off in some ways, but our data also indicate a reason for concern: 9 percent of school-age youth and 28 percent of young adults

FIGURE 2. Youth and Pregnancy



Source: 2009 Chicago Panel Study Sample

** indicates difference between subgroups is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

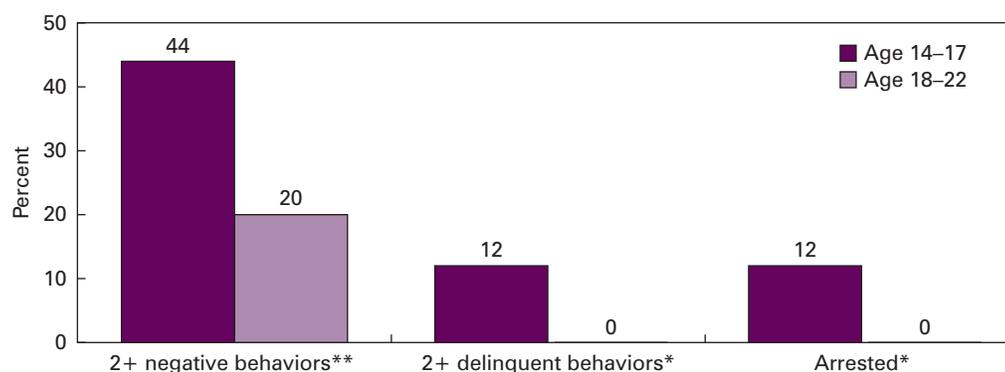
have gotten pregnant or gotten someone else pregnant (figure 2). Becoming a parent at such a young age can make it more difficult to have stable relationships (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy 2008) and can have serious consequences for the physical and mental health and cognitive and emotional well-being of their children (Logan et al. 2007).

Girls Are on a More Positive Path

Our findings also highlight another change since 2005: in 2005, parents of girls in Madden/Wells reported surprisingly high rates of negative and delinquent behavior, while the figures for boys remained relatively stable compared to the 2001 base-

“Young adults are aging out of behavior problems, but many are becoming parents too early.”

FIGURE 1. Youth with Behavior Problems



Source: 2009 Chicago Panel Study Sample

* indicates difference between subgroups is significant at the $p < .10$ level.

** indicates difference between subgroups is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

line. In 2009, these trends have reverted to what we found in 2001 and 2003 (Popkin, Eiseman, and Cove 2004; Popkin et al. 2002); young women appear to be faring substantially better than young men, particularly in terms of behavior and education (table A).

- In 2009, boys were significantly more likely than girls to have two or more delinquent behaviors (10 percent versus 0 percent). Boys were also more likely than girls to be suspended, excluded, or expelled (34 percent versus 4 percent); go to juvenile court (11 percent versus 0 percent); and be arrested (15 percent versus 0 percent). All of the sampled youth who were arrested are boys (figure 3).

In our in-depth interviews, it was clear that many of the young men had placed their hopes in sports as a way out of poverty. But our findings suggest that while participation in basketball, baseball,

and football may have benefits—keeping them occupied outside school, building their self-esteem, and providing them with male role models—it may not keep them off the streets. In fact, the survey data suggest that their school attendance, school engagement, and delinquent behaviors are compromising their potential. These findings are consistent with previous research on the well-being of young males in high-poverty neighborhoods (Popkin, Leventhal, and Weissman 2010; Leventhal, Dupere, and Brooks-Gunn 2009).

In contrast to the young men in our sample, the young women appear to be applying themselves in school and at home.

- Girls are significantly more likely to be highly engaged in school⁶ than boys (52 percent versus 19 percent) (figure 4). To put it more starkly, three-quarters of the youth whose parents say they are highly engaged in school are girls.

“Young women are applying themselves in school and taking responsibility at home while young men are preoccupied with sports.”

TABLE A. Youth Outcomes by Gender and Age Group, 2009 (percent)

	All (n = 57)	Girls (n = 25)	Boys (n = 24)	Age 14–17 (n = 41)	Age 18–22 (n = 16)
Excellent or very good health	65	66	60	72	53
School involvement					
High level of engagement	35	52	19**	31	44
Low level of engagement	31	20	38	36	19
Absenteeism					
5+ days per year	18	4	28*	20	14
10+ days per year	8	0	10*	12	0
Age is appropriate for grade	67	73	65	62	76
Repeated a grade	29	23	29	33	23
Behavior					
Exhibits 5+ positive behaviors	53	53	56	46	65
Exhibits 2+ negative behaviors	35	27	36	44	20**
Exhibits 2+ delinquent behaviors	7	0	10*	12	0*
Suspended, expelled, or excluded	23	4	34***	26	15
Been arrested	8	0	15**	12	0*
Went to juvenile court	4	0	11*	7	0
Pregnant or got someone pregnant	16	17	9	8	28**
Employed	20	26	17	15	30

Source: 2009 Chicago Panel Study Sample.

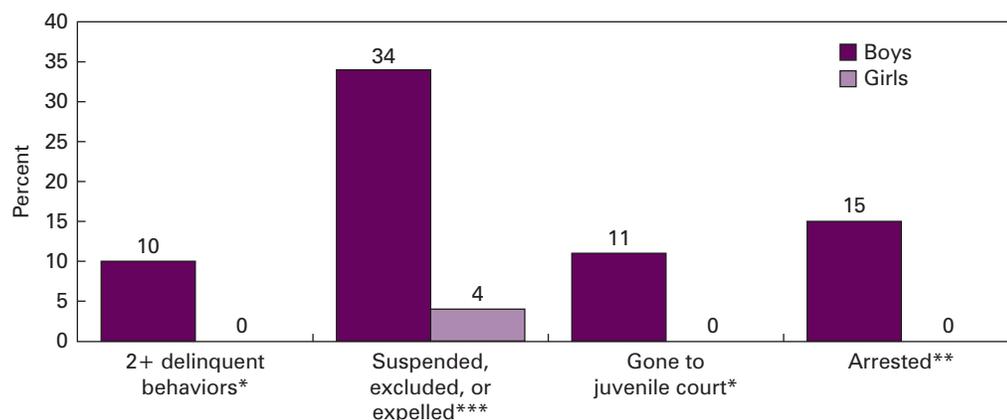
Notes: Sample sizes shown are the lowest weighted sample sizes among the variables presented in the table.

* indicates difference between gender or age subgroups is significant at the $p < .10$ level.

** indicates difference between gender or age subgroups is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

*** indicates difference between gender or age subgroups is significant at the $p < .01$ level.

FIGURE 3. Delinquent Behaviors in Boys and Girls



Source: 2009 Chicago Panel Study Sample

* indicates difference between boys and girls is significant at the $p < .10$ level.

** indicates difference between boys and girls is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

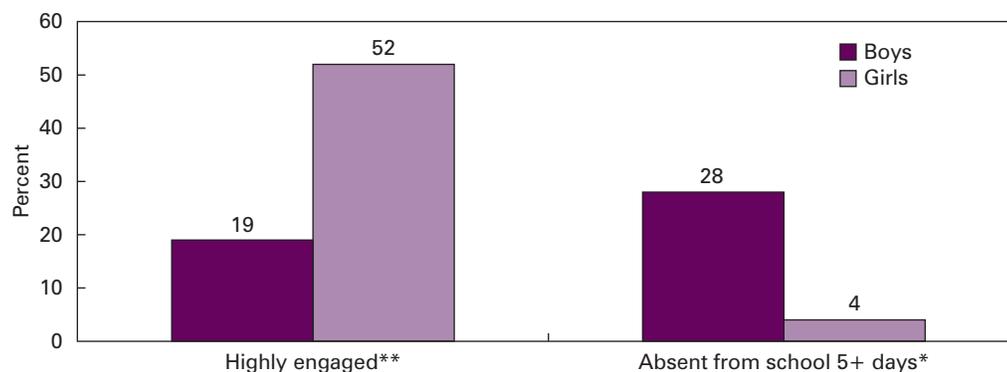
*** indicates difference between boys and girls is significant at the $p < .01$ level.

■ Boys miss school more than girls. Over a quarter of boys miss five or more days versus 4 percent of girls. Ten percent of all boys miss 10 or more days of school; all of the students missing 10 or more days are boys.

Not only are young women present and engaged in school, but they are also taking on additional responsibilities at home, and some are even going to college. Tonya, an 18-year-old girl whose family is now living in mixed-income housing not far from the former development, describes how leaving Madden/Wells changed her attitude and lifestyle for the better:

I took life more serious. That's what I can say. Because at first it was like when you was in the Wells, whatever happens. And now I am thinking for tomorrow. And now I'm thinking about, oh, I wonder what I'm going to do next week or I wonder can I do this. So it's like I got more opportunities. I thought outside the box. 'Cause when you was in Wells most people didn't know much. You didn't have the things that you have now. So, me getting older, more mature, I have bills, I have responsibilities, I can't sit here and horseplay. Oh,

FIGURE 4. School Engagement and Absences of Girls and Boys



Source: 2009 Chicago Panel Study Sample

* indicates difference between boys and girls is significant at the $p < .10$ level.

** indicates difference between boys and girls is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

[I'm fixing to buy] these shoes. I have to budget now. So it's like you grow, you grow up, you meet new people, see new things. It's just real it's different now. It's a good thing.

Implications

CHA's transformation of its distressed developments has the potential to profoundly affect the life chances for children. Instead of growing up in physically deteriorating, extremely violent communities, they are now living in decent housing in neighborhoods that are lower poverty and lower crime than where their families were living a decade ago. On the other hand, moving is hard on children, particularly for young people already struggling behaviorally or academically, and children have suffered serious consequences as a result of the transformation—having to endure worsening conditions as developments were gradually emptied. Our findings in 2009 paint a mixed picture—some youth seem to be on a positive trajectory, but others are struggling, already parenting or engaged in delinquent or destructive behavior. As other research has found, young men seem to be particularly vulnerable, and too many are alienated and disengaged (see Popkin, Leventhal, and Weissman 2010; Briggs, Popkin, and Goering 2010; Leventhal et. al 2009).

Although CHA's Transformation was likely to have major impacts on youth, the agency's relocation and supportive services have focused primarily on working with heads of household to help them make housing choices and connect to the labor force (Popkin 2010). To date, only a few comprehensive programs, such as the Chicago Family Case Management Program and Project Match, have systematically targeted youth (Theodos et al. 2010). Going forward, CHA must increase its focus on youth, both to help promote positive outcomes for its residents and ensure the sustainability of its mixed-income and newly rehabilitated public housing. If more youth are engaged and on positive trajec-

ries, it will be easier for the housing authority to ensure its developments are safe and manageable.

- The CHA should ensure that its supportive services and relocation programs include a focus on youth. In particular, services should provide assistance to help children and youth transition to new neighborhoods and schools. In addition to providing support, partnering with community programs that provide youth with after-school and summer activities could reduce social isolation and dependence on past social networks. Job training and tutoring could improve their prospects for success once they graduate.
- Young people can also help design the resources for revitalized communities. Innovative programs like Youth-Plan, Learn, Act, Now! (Y-PLAN) in California engage youth in the neighborhood revitalization process by providing opportunities to collect information, air their opinions, and discuss problems and solutions with local leaders (McKoy, Bierbaum, and Vincent 2009).

Notes

1. Of the 39 children from 2001 who were not interviewed in 2009, 15 had parents who did not respond to the 2009 survey, 2 had lost their parents (died), and 21 no longer lived with their parents. Why the remaining child was not included in the survey sample is not clear. Of the children who don't live with their parents, 18 of them are 18 years or older; 2 are age 17, and 1 is 16. Young people who are not in the 2009 sample may have different outcomes than young people who are.
2. We ran correlations between neighborhood characteristics and child well-being outcomes: no clear relationships exist. We also ran correlations between time in the current neighborhood and child well-being outcomes: no clear relationships exist.
3. We examine health status, school involvement, behavior, and employment. Health and employment findings are presented in table A but are not discussed in this brief. Likewise, our positive behaviors measure, which was derived from the 10-item Positive Behavior Scale from the Child Development Supplement in the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, is shown in table A but is not discussed.

4. All reported differences in means and proportions are significant at the $p < .10$ level. Items for the negative behaviors scale were taken from the Behavior Problems Index. The heads of households were asked to indicate how often the children exhibited any one of the seven specific negative behaviors: trouble getting along with teachers; being disobedient at school; being disobedient at home; spending time with kids who get in trouble; bullying or being cruel or mean; feeling restless or overly active; and being unhappy, sad, or depressed. The answers ranged from “often,” and “sometimes true” to “not true.” We measure the proportion of children whose parents reported that they demonstrated two or more of these behaviors often or sometimes over the previous three months.
5. Respondents were asked if over the previous year their children had been involved in any of the following nine activities: being suspended or expelled from school, going to a juvenile court, having a problem with alcohol or drugs, getting into trouble with the police, doing something illegal for money, getting pregnant or getting someone else pregnant, being in a gang, being arrested, and being in jail or incarcerated. We measure the proportion of children involved in two or more of these behaviors.
6. Developed in 1996 by Jim Connell and Lisa J. Bridges at the Institute for Research and Reform in Education in California, this measure attempts to assess the level of child’s interest and willingness to do their schoolwork. Each head of household was asked four questions about whether the child: cares about doing well in school, only works on homework when forced to, does just enough homework to get by, or always does his or her homework. The answers were scored on a scale, from 1 to 4, where a value of 1 means “none of the time” and a value of 4 means “all of the time” (answers to the negative items were scored in reverse). The response scores were summed up, creating a 16-point scale. We measure the proportion of children with a high level of school engagement, which is equivalent to a scale score of 15 or more.

References

- Briggs, Xavier de Souza, Susan J. Popkin, and John Goering. 2010. *Moving to Opportunity: The Story of an American Experiment to Fight Ghetto Poverty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buron, Larry, and Susan J. Popkin. 2010. “Transformed Housing: Major Improvements in CHA Residents’ Quality of Life.” *CHA Families and the Plan for Transformation* Brief 2. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Gallagher, Megan, and Beata Bajaj. 2007. “Moving On: Benefits and Challenges of HOPE VI for Children.” *HOPE VI: Where Do We Go from Here?* Brief 4. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Leventhal, Tama, Véronique Dupere, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. 2009. “Neighborhood Influences on Adolescent Development.” In *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, 3rd ed., edited by R. M. Lerner and L. Steinberg (411–43). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Logan, Cassandra, Emily Holcomb, Jennifer Manlove, and Suzanne Ryan. 2007. “The Consequences of Unintended Childbearing: A White Paper.” Washington, DC: Child Trends, Inc.
- McKoy, Deborah, Ariel Bierbaum, and Jeffrey Vincent. 2009. “The Mechanics of City-School Initiatives: Transforming Neighborhoods of Distress and Despair into Neighborhoods of Choice and Promise.” Berkeley: Center for Cities and Schools, Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California, Berkeley.
- National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy. 2008. “Unplanned Pregnancy and Family Turmoil.” *Science Says* Brief 34. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy.
- Popkin, Susan J. 2002. “The HOPE VI Program—“What About the Residents?”” Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- . 2010. “A Glass Half Empty? New Evidence from the HOPE VI Panel Study.” *Housing Policy Debate* 20(1): 42–62.
- Popkin, Susan J., Michael Eiseman, and Elizabeth Cove. 2004. “How Are HOPE VI Families Faring? Children.” *A Roof over Their Heads* Brief 6. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Popkin, Susan J., Victoria E. Gwiasda, Dennis P. Rosenbaum, Lynn M. Olson, and Larry F. Buron. 2000. *The Hidden War: Crime and the Tragedy of Public Housing in Chicago*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Popkin, Susan J., Bruce Katz, Mary K. Cunningham, Karen D. Brown, Jeremy Gustafson, and Margery Austin Turner. 2002. *HOPE VI Panel Study: Baseline Report*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Popkin, Susan J., Tama Leventhal, and Gretchen Weissman. 2010. “Girls in the ‘Hood: How Safety Affects the Life Chances of Low-Income Girls.” *Urban Affairs Review* 45(6): 715–44.
- Popkin, Susan J., and David J. Price. 2010. “Escaping the Hidden War: Safety Is the Biggest Gain for Chicago Housing Authority Families.” *CHA Families and the Plan for Transformation* Brief 3. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Theodos, Brett, Susan J. Popkin, Elizabeth Guernsey, and Liza Getsinger. 2010. “Inclusive Public Housing: Services for the Hard to House.” Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

About the Author



Megan Gallagher is a research associate in the Urban Institute’s Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center.

The Chicago Panel Study

The Chicago Panel Study is a follow-up to the five-site HOPE VI Panel Study, which tracked resident outcomes from 2001 to 2005. The Chicago Panel Study continues to track the residents from the Chicago Housing Authority's Ida B. Wells Homes/Wells Extension and Madden Park Homes who were part of the original HOPE VI Panel sample. In October 2009, the CHA marked the 10th anniversary of the Plan for Transformation; the purpose of the Chicago Panel Study is to track the circumstances of the families in the Chicago HOPE VI Panel Study sample to assess how they are faring as the Plan for Transformation progresses.

Revitalization activities began in Madden/Wells in mid- to late 2001, and the last residents were relocated in August 2008. At the baseline in summer 2001, we surveyed a random sample of 198 heads of household and conducted in-depth, qualitative interviews with seven adults and seven children. We conducted follow-up surveys and interviews for the HOPE VI Panel Study in 2003 (n = 174, response rate 88 percent) and 2005 (n = 165, response rate 83 percent). In 2009, when we attempted to track the original Madden/Wells sample for the Chicago Panel Study, we surveyed 136 heads of household (response rate 69 percent) and conducted in-depth interviews with 9 adults and 9 children. The largest source of attrition between 2001 and 2009 was mortality; we were able to locate, if not survey, nearly all original sample members in the 2009 follow-up.

The principal investigator for the Chicago Panel Study is Susan J. Popkin, Ph.D., director of the Urban Institute's Program on Neighborhoods and Youth Development. Funding for this research was provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Finally, we wish to thank the CHA, the many colleagues who have assisted with and commented on this research, and most of all, the Chicago Panel Study respondents, who have so generously shared their stories with us for so many years.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

Permission is granted for reproduction of this document, with attribution to the Urban Institute.