Metropolitan Housing and Communities Center

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HOPE VI:
Where Do We Go from Here?

Moving On: Benefits and Challenges of HOPE VI for Children

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While children who relocated to other public housing were no different in 2001 from children who relocated with vouchers, they have diverged since relocation began.

The HOPE VI program targets the most distressed and dilapidated public housing for demolition and redevelopment, requiring the relocation of the original residents to new HOPE VI sites, homes in the private market, and other public housing (see text box on page 9). A major goal for the program is to provide an improved living environment for residents; since relatively few residents move back, this improvement has to be accomplished primarily through relocation. HOPE VI is now up for reauthorization, making this an ideal time to assess how effectively it has achieved its goals.

The HOPE VI Panel Study has tracked the well-being of families at five sites around the country as they have made these transitions, surveying them before relocation in 2001 and again in 2003 and 2005 (see text box on page 9). In this brief, we examine the well-being of the youngest and most vulnerable HOPE VI residents—the children. Most original residents have school-age children who have spent a large portion of their lives in some of the most unsafe developments in the country. These environments increase the likelihood of health issues, developmental delays, and behavior problems already faced by poor children (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997). Safer neighborhoods and higher-quality homes can influence the mental and physical health of children (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000). Although moving can be difficult for children (Hartman 2002; Scanlon and Devine 2001), the HOPE VI program may improve children's health and well-being if it improves the living conditions of residents and moves families in the least disruptive ways.

At the first follow-up in 2003, we found that children who had relocated between 2001 and 2003 experienced various improvements within those two years, particularly in safety (Popkin, Eiseman, and Cove 2004). We also reported improvements in behavior for children of voucher holders and residents in the original development, and declines in behavior for those who moved to other public housing. In particular, the prevalence of negative and delinquent behaviors decreased among boys whose families received vouchers and increased among boys who were still living in their original public housing developments. Since that time, more families have moved, and early movers have had time to adjust to their new homes and neighborhoods and possibly make subsequent moves.

Findings from the 2005 follow-up indicate that voucher holders and others who have moved to the private market are living in better housing in safer, lower-poverty neighborhoods (Popkin and Cove 2007; Comey 2007). Findings also point to significant differences in outcomes between voucher holders and those who stayed in the original development or temporarily relocated to other public housing (Buron, Levy, and Gallagher 2007). These outcomes provide context and further motivation for exploring whether improvements in living conditions for families might translate into

improvements in children's overall well-being and for comparing the well-being of children of voucher holders and children in public housing.

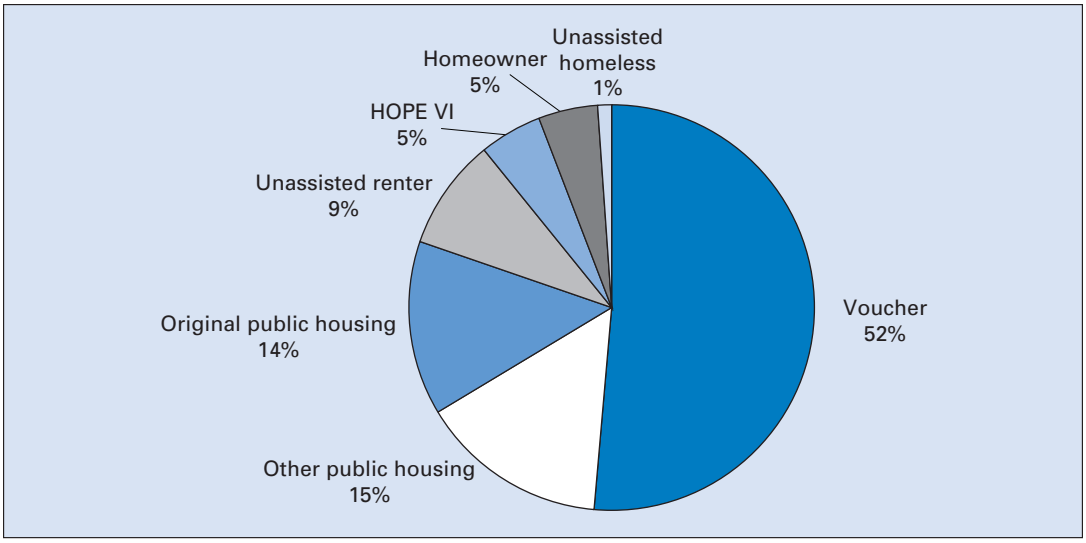
Here, we explore the potential benefits and challenges of relocation in the areas of behavior, health, and school engagement for children in families with different relocation experiences, including voucher holders, movers to other public housing, and those who remained in the original development. We examine their well-being in two ways. First, we identify changes that took place between the time relocation began in 2001 and the final follow-up in 2005. Second, we look for differences in outcomes for children with different relocation experiences in 2005. And since other recent studies show dramatically different outcomes for boys and girls whose families have moved from distressed public housing (Orr et al. 2003; Popkin, Leventhal, and Weismann 2007), we compare boys and girls.

Children in the HOPE VI Panel Study

This analysis focuses on 304 school-age children who were age 6 to 14 in 2001 (and thus age 10 to 18 at the end of our follow-up period in 2005).[1] Although many of these children had already moved at least once by the time we interviewed them in 2003 (66 percent), about a quarter moved for the first time between 2003 and 2005. By 2005, 52 percent had relocated to rental apartments in the private market with vouchers, while 15 percent had relocated to other public housing. Another 14 percent remained in their original development, waiting for their turn to relocate. Of the remaining 20 percent of families with children, 9 percent rented apartments without assistance, 5 percent were homeowners, 5 percent lived in HOPE VI units, and 1 percent became homeless (figure 1).

It is important to acknowledge differences at the start of the study between families that ended up living in private rental apartments in 2005 and families that moved to public housing by 2005. Specifically, respondents in voucher households with children were younger, more likely to be employed, and less likely to feel safe in their neighborhoods than respondents in families with children that moved to public housing. Despite these differences, the children in these two groups did not differ significantly on any child well-being measures in 2001. The improvements in housing and neighborhood outcomes that voucher families experienced are unlikely to have happened without the HOPE VI program—most families were long-term public housing residents and were unlikely to have moved to better situations without assistance.[2] Still, these initial family differences are critical to bear in mind when

FIGURE 1. 2005 Relocation Outcomes for Children Age 6–14 in 2001 (N = *304*)



Source: 2005 HOPE VI Panel Study.

Note: Numbers do not total 100 because of rounding.

interpreting subsequent differences between children with different relocation outcomes.

Another caution is that throughout our study these children are aging and going through many developmental changes, which coincide with changes induced by relocation. By 2005, many children had entered adolescence and begun to assert their independence. These developmental advancements alone may bring about changes in health, behavior, and school engagement, and since separating these influences from the analysis is impossible, we must take care in interpreting any changes we find.

In the following sections, we examine child outcomes in five key domains: behavior problems, health, school engagement, positive behavior, and delinquent behavior.

Behavior among Children in Voucher Households Stable or Improving

Parents of children in families that relocated with vouchers report lower rates of behavior problems in 2005 compared with their children's behavior in 2001, before relocation.[3] In 2001, 53 percent of children in voucher households demonstrated two or more behavior problems, but by 2005, this proportion dropped to 41 percent. Although the pattern held for both boys and girls in voucher households, only the decline for girls was statistically significant (figure 2).

Although this improvement in behavior problems was noteworthy for children from voucher households, improvements in health and school engagement were not found for children in this group.[4]

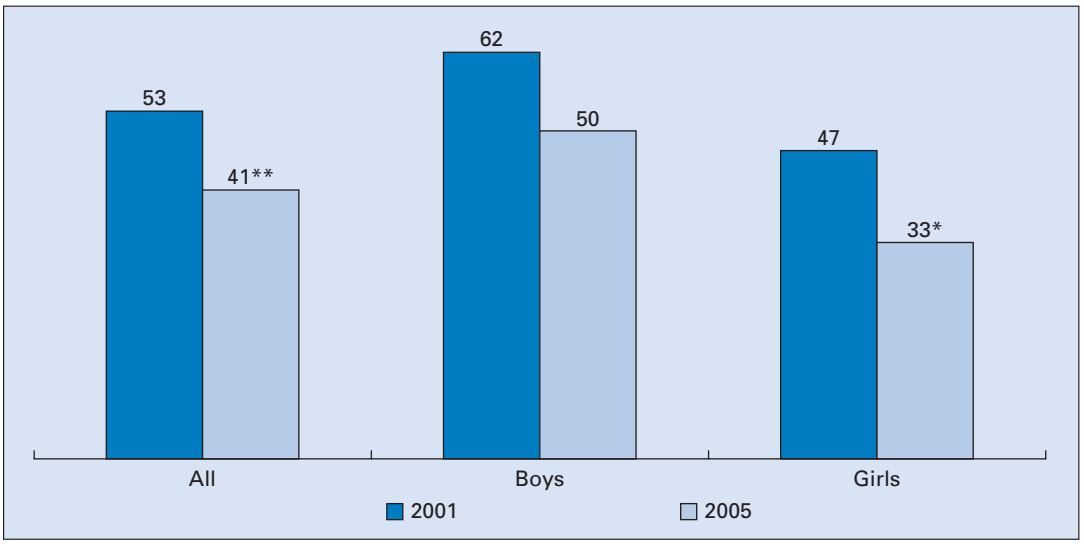
Not only are the children in voucher households doing better than they were doing in 2001 in behavior problems, they are also doing better relative to children who relocated to other public housing in positive and delinquent behaviors (figure 3). In 2005, children in voucher households were more likely than children in other public housing to exhibit five out of six positive behaviors (62 versus 43 percent).[5] They were also marginally less likely to exhibit two or more delinquent behaviors (3 versus 12 percent).[6]

It is clear from our interviews that moving profoundly affected many parts of children's lives. For example, 18-year-old Jamal talked about how his attitude toward life has changed since he moved from Durham's Few Gardens:[7]

> The friends I have now, we hang out. We go to the movies, chill out, go to the bowling alley, go play basketball. But if I would have still been hanging with the other friends now, I probably be in

Residential choices made by voucher holders since 2001 appear to have translated into improved behaviors for their children.

FIGURE 2. Proportion of Children in Voucher Households with Two or More Negative Behaviors Declines between 2001 and 2005 (percent)

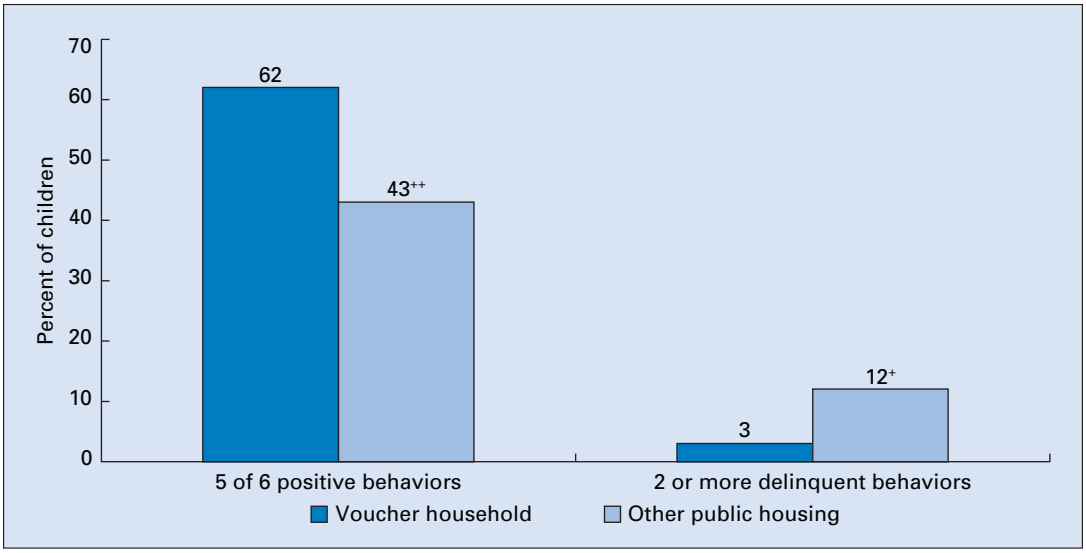


Sources: 2001 and 2005 HOPE VI Panel Studies.

* Difference between 2001 and 2005 is statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

** Difference between 2001 and 2005 is statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

FIGURE 3. Children in Voucher Households Exhibit More Positive and Fewer Delinquent Behaviors



Source: 2005 HOPE VI Panel Study.

+ Difference between voucher households and other public housing is marginally significant at the 11 percent level.

++ Difference between voucher households and other public housing is statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

> a whole mess of trouble. . . . used to think of life as like a joke. I used to say that. I didn't really care. . . . Now, I just look at life like it's something you got to be glad of. You got to be positive.

Other comments made by youth during our in-depth interviews, however, suggest that children in voucher households may not yet have fully adjusted to their new neighborhoods. Children were asked about their new neighborhoods and friends relative to their old neighborhoods and friends. While many of them said that that they had made new friends, many also said that they did not have close friends in their new neighborhoods. While this adjustment period may be isolating for children, it may also be protective. Time spent alone or with family may protect youth from the negative influences of peers in their new neighborhood and original development. For example, Cara, an 18 year old in Chicago whose family relocated with a voucher, explained how she does her homework and hangs out at home because she does not know as many people in her new neighborhood.

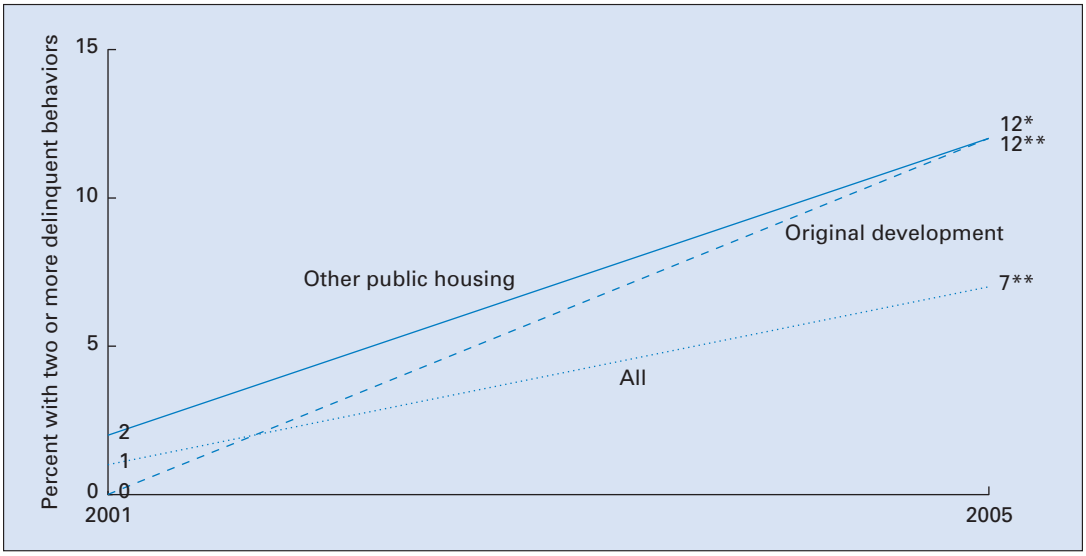
> After school I'd just come home and do my work, and kind of hang out for an hour or two. But that's about it. . . . When I was living at Wells, it was different from here, because I'm new around here. . . . So, like, if I get out of school down there, I'd just go to my sister's house, or just hang out with your friends, go to the park or something like that. . . . But since I've been here, there's not too many people that know around here.

Behavior among Children in Public Housing Stable or Worse

While relocation dramatically changed the living environments of children from voucher households, the demolition and revitalization activities in the original developments have also changed the lives of children that remain there, and other children are adjusting to living in different public housing developments. Many interview respondents in the original developments report that units are vacant and their neighbors have left. So, while children in voucher households have experienced improvements in behavior, children who are still living in the original development and children who have moved to other public housing have experienced significant declines in their behavior, particularly in the area of delinquent behaviors.

The incidence of delinquent behaviors has increased for youth still in their original development (by 12 percentage points) and youth in other public housing (by 10 percentage points), while it has changed in no significant way for youth in the voucher households (figure 4).

FIGURE 4. Delinquent Behavior Increases, Especially among Children in Public Housing



Sources: 2001 and 2005 HOPE VI Panel Studies.

* Difference between 2001 and 2005 is statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

** Difference between 2001 and 2005 is statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

Parental reports of delinquent behavior increased for both boys and girls between 2001 and 2005. But the incidence of delinquent behaviors has skyrocketed for girls in the original development since 2001 (by 24 percentage points). This spike is primarily driven by increasing rates of school suspensions (28 percentage points) and going to juvenile court (24 percentage points).

Many of our in-person interviews with girls who were still living in their original development—all from Chicago's Wells or Atlantic City's Shore Park—reveal real concerns about physical fights with other girls in school and in the neighborhood. In Chicago, 16-year-old Amara has been involved in fights with her friends at school.

> I got a set of friends in my school, and it's like 30 some of us, we hang with each other every day . . . if one person fight, they going to fight, you going to fight, what are we all jumping on you for, we going to go to jail. And I been to jail before, I been locked up, picture took, everything, because of goofy stuff.

Further, only girls in the original development experienced a real increase in the rate of behavior problems between 2001 and 2005 (26 percentage points); the rate decreased for boys in the original development and remained stable or declined for children in other groups. The increase over time among girls in the original development tracked with increasing rates of not getting along with teachers (26 percentage points) and hanging around kids who get in trouble (20 percentage points).

The rise in delinquent behavior among girls in the original development is so large that by 2005, the incidence of two or more delinquent behaviors is far more common among girls in their original development than it is among boys (24 versus 0 percent).[8] This finding is particularly striking because it is the only circumstance in which girls are clearly worse off than boys. In families that have received vouchers or moved to other public housing, boys and girls fare similarly or boys are slightly worse off than girls. This dramatic increase in reported problems for girls who still live in the original development suggests something particularly destructive about that environment—an increase in gang activity, violent crime, or social disorder—may be driving them to become involved in delinquent behavior.[9]

Rising Delinquency and Declining Behavior Problems

When we look at changes over time for children who moved to different types of housing, we see both hopeful and troubling patterns. One of the most perplexing patterns that we observed cannot be clearly

Children remaining in the original development, particularly girls, are worse off than they were before their neighbors relocated.

explained in the context of the HOPE VI experience. The pattern involves a drop in behavior problems and a contemporaneous rise in delinquent behavior between 2001 and 2005 (table 1). While it is clear that children in our sample are experiencing a great deal of turbulence, this pattern is more likely to be explained by developmental changes and limits on the scope of parental reports. In other words, when the children in our study were age 6 to 14 in 2001, their parents were probably good judges of their socioemotional well-being. But as the children mature, their parents may monitor them less and may therefore know less about their child's emotional well-being and behavior at school and with peers.

The measures of delinquent behavior require less intuition from parents. In fact, each item in the delinquent behavior scale reflects a significant transgression that would be difficult for a child to hide from his or her parents and similarly difficult for the parent to forget. Therefore, less parental monitoring as the child matures could limit the parent's knowledge of behavior problems in a way that would not affect their knowledge of delinquent behaviors, which were probably more traumatic and memorable for the family.

Where Overall Sample Remains Stable, Some Individual Children Change

While no major changes in health, school engagement, and positive behavior took place between 2001 and 2005 for the sample as a whole, it would be misleading to suggest that no children in our sample experienced changes for the better or the worse. For this reason, we conducted detailed analysis of changes to identify individual children who saw significant improvements and declines over the study period. These analyses help explain changes that were not observable when studying the entire sample of children or its subgroups (boys and girls, or children from voucher and public housing households).

Although we saw no significant changes between 2001 and 2005 for the overall sample in the share of children in very good or excellent health, we found that almost one-quarter of children actually experienced changes in health during that time for better or worse. Overall, improvements and declines canceled each other out. The balance between positive and negative changes, however, was tipped for several housing assistance groups. More children from the original developments saw their health worsen over time (19 percent) than did children from other public housing (12 percent) or children whose parents moved with vouchers (9 percent).

The significant decrease in the share of boys in the original development with multiple behavior problems between 2001 and 2005, accompanied by the dramatic increase in girls' behavior problems over the same period, resulted in no gender differences by 2005. Our analysis of individual changes points to further evidence of a troubling trend, showing that the share of girls in the original development whose behavior problems worsened between 2001 and 2005 is about five times higher than the corresponding share of boys (25 versus 5 percent).

The analysis of changes at the individual level provides further evidence of the differences between children from the voucher and the original development households in delinquent behaviors. Significantly more parents of girls from the original developments noted over time an

TABLE 1. Negative Behavior Falls While Delinquent Behavior Rises

	Share reporting, 2001	Share reporting, 2005	Change, 2001–05 (percentage points)
2 or more problem behaviors	51%	42%	–9*
2 or more delinquent behaviors	1%	7%	+5**

Sources: 2001 and 2005 HOPE VI Panel Studies.

Note: Change in delinquent behaviors does not match difference between 2001 and 2005 shares because of rounding.

* Difference between 2001 and 2005 is statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

** Difference between 2001 and 2005 is statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

increase in the number of delinquency problems than parents of girls from the voucher households (35 versus 17 percent).

Policy Implications

This study provides further evidence that children in voucher households are benefiting from their new environments. Behavior problems have dropped substantially for this group, and delinquent behavior has remained stable. Yet, behavior problems have not declined among children in public housing, and delinquency is on the rise, especially for girls. While the survey data reveal no major shifts in health, school engagement, or positive behaviors for the overall sample, it is apparent from our interviews that relocatees feel better than children who have stayed. Evidence from our analyses of neighborhood and housing outcomes shows that families who have moved to the private market with vouchers or by other means are living in better housing in dramatically safer neighborhoods; it seems likely that the differences we see for children reflect these striking differences in neighborhood environments.

It is in the context of these findings that we present the following policy implications.

Be sensitive to the needs of children in HOPE VI relocation plans. Children remaining in the original development, particularly girls, are worse off than they were before their neighbors relocated. Many girls are having problems in school and becoming involved in the juvenile court system. Partially vacated HOPE VI sites are not safe places for children, possibly because of increased gang activity, social disorder, and isolation. It is critical that redevelopment plans consider the needs of families with children by scheduling family moves during the summer and giving priority to families with children so they are not left in partially vacated HOPE VI sites.

Extend supportive services to children and parents in voucher households. Residential choices made by voucher holders since 2001 appear to have translated into improved behaviors for their children. Better housing and neighborhood quality may partially explain the favorable changes observed, but moving also appears to have provided young people with an opportunity to redefine themselves. Nonetheless, these children are still poor and face several disadvantages. They could use help sustaining their improved behavior, staying healthy, and engaging in school. Supportive services traditionally targeted to adults to enhance employment must be extended to meet the needs of children. Parents should be made aware that moving their children during the school year can be damaging, and they should be told about available services when registering their children for school. Moreover, effective after-school and summer programs that encourage disadvantaged children and teens to work hard in school, get involved in their communities, and take care of their bodies can help young people who have relocated with a voucher to stay on track. Such programs have been identified within Child Trends' What Works guide.[10]

Encourage families with children to relocate with vouchers. While the children who have relocated to other public housing were no different at the outset from children who relocated with vouchers, they have diverged since relocation began in 2001. Although this may be partly the result of a few preexisting family differences, it is also likely to be related to their relocation experiences. Girls in distressed public housing are vulnerable to undesirable sexual advances and appear to adapt by becoming involved in delinquent and problem behavior. It is also critical to identify children who are becoming involved in delinquent and problem behavior as early as possible in the relocation process so their parents can be encouraged to move with a voucher rather than moving to another troubled housing development.

Notes

1. Children who were age 18 and older in 2005 were not included in our survey data analyses but were sometimes interviewed in our in-depth interviews.
2. See Buron et al. (2007) for a discussion of these issues.
3. Respondents were asked to indicate how often the child exhibited any one of seven specific negative behaviors, taken from the Behavior Problems Index: 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 tracked the proportion of children whose parents reported that they demonstrated two or more of these behaviors often or sometimes over the previous three months.

4. The health status measure, from the National Health Interview Survey Child Health Supplement, requires respondents to rate the child's health as excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor. We track the proportion of children in excellent or very good health.

   The school engagement measure, developed in 1996 by Jim Connell and Lisa J. Bridges at the Institute for Research and Reform in Education in California, attempts to assess the child's interest in and willingness to do schoolwork. Respondents were asked four questions: 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 from 1 ("none of the time") to 4 ("all of the time"), or in reverse for the negative items. Then scores were summed up, creating a 16-point scale. We track the proportion of children with a high level of school engagement (a scale score of 15 or more). Since the school engagement scale was not included in the survey instrument until 2003, this measure is not available in the 2001 data.

5. The positive behavior scale requires respondents to rate how closely each of the following six positive behaviors describes their child: usually in a good mood, admired and well liked by other children, shows concern for other people's feelings, shows pride when doing something well or learning something new, easily calms down after being angry or upset, and is helpful and cooperative. The list of behaviors was derived from the 10-item Positive Behavior Scale from the Child Development Supplement in the Panel Study of Income Dynamics. Each behavior was rated on a scale ranging from 1 ("not at all like this child") to 5 ("completely like this child"). We track the proportion of children with at least 5 out of 6 behaviors rated relatively high ("a lot" or "completely like this child").

6. For the delinquent behavior measure, respondents were asked if over the previous year their child had been involved in any of the following five 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, and doing something illegal for money. We track the proportion of children involved in two or more of these behaviors.

7. All resident names are pseudonyms.

8. Although none of the boys in the original development exhibited two or more delinquent behaviors in 2005, 30 percent exhibited at least one delinquent behavior.

9. There is evidence that distressed public housing is particularly destructive for girls because of the "sexual culture" that puts girls at risk for sexual exploitation and assault. See Popkin et al. (2007) for a discussion of these issues.

10. See http://www.childtrends.org/_catdisp_page.cfm?LID=CD56B3D7-2F05-4F8E-BCC99B05A4CAEA04.

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HOPE VI Program

Created by Congress in 1992, the HOPE VI program was designed to address not only the bricks-and-mortar problems in severely distressed public housing developments, but also the social and economic needs of the residents and the health of surrounding neighborhoods. This extremely ambitious strategy targets developments identified as the worst public housing in the nation, with problems deemed too ingrained to yield to standard housing rehabilitation efforts. The HOPE VI program is now up for reauthorization; if reauthorized, it will run for another 10 years.

The program's major objectives are

- to improve the living environment for residents of severely distressed public housing by demolishing, rehabilitating, reconfiguring, or replacing obsolete projects in part or whole;
- to revitalize the sites of public housing projects and help improve the surrounding neighborhood;
- to provide housing in ways that avoid or decrease the concentration of very low income families; and
- to build sustainable communities.

Under the $6.3 billion HOPE VI program, HUD has awarded 609 grants in 193 cities. As of June 2006, HOPE VI revitalization grants have supported the demolition of 78,100 severely distressed units, with another 10,400 units slated for redevelopment. Housing authorities that receive HOPE VI grants must also develop supportive services to help both original and new residents attain self-sufficiency. HOPE VI funds will support the construction of 103,600 replacement units, but just 57,100 will be deeply subsidized public housing units. The rest will receive shallower subsidies or serve market-rate tenants or homebuyers.

HOPE VI Panel Study

The HOPE VI Panel Study tracks the living conditions and well-being of residents from five public housing developments where revitalization activities began in mid- to late 2001. At baseline in summer 2001, we surveyed a sample of 887 heads of households and conducted in-depth, qualitative interviews with 39 adult-child dyads. We conducted the second wave of surveys in 2003 (24 months after baseline) and the third and final wave in 2005 (48 months after baseline). In 2003, we surveyed 736 heads of household and interviewed 29 adults and 27 children; in 2005, we surveyed 715 heads of households and administered 69 interviews. We also interviewed local HOPE VI staff on relocation and redevelopment progress, analyzed administrative data, and identified data on similar populations for comparative purposes. The response rate for each round of surveys was 85 percent. We were able to locate, if not interview, nearly all sample members; the largest source of attrition was mortality.

The Panel Study sites are Shore Park/Shore Terrace (Atlantic City, NJ); Ida B. Wells Homes/Wells Extension/Madden Park Homes (Chicago, IL); Few Gardens (Durham, NC); Easter Hill (Richmond, CA); and East Capitol Dwellings (Washington, DC). These sites were selected as typical of those that had received HOPE VI grants in 1999 and 2000 but that had not yet begun revitalization activities.

The principal investigator for the HOPE VI Panel Study is Susan J. Popkin, Ph.D., director of the Urban Institute's A Roof Over Their Heads research initiative. Funding for this research was provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Fannie Mae Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Chicago Community Trust.

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