Deconcentration and Social Capital: Contradictions of a Poverty Alleviation Policy

Susan Greenbaum
Wendy Hathaway
Cheryl Rodriguez
Ashley Spalding
Beverly Ward

ABSTRACT. Deconcentration is a policy aimed at reducing poverty by relocating residents of distressed public housing complexes into private mixed income neighborhoods. This change is presumed to offer new social opportunities and better public facilities that can facilitate improved economic status. HOPE VI is a federal U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program, which has effected this policy in a large
number of U.S. cities. This paper reports the findings from research in two relocation sites (high and low poverty) in Tampa, Florida, based on interviews with HOPE VI relocatees and their homeowning neighbors. Results indicate that relocation does not enhance social capital for former public housing residents. Social networks are diminished in comparison with prior conditions in public housing. There is very little interaction with homeowners in relocation sites, and considerable resistance by homeowners. Relocatee satisfaction with housing is greater in the low poverty site, but social networks are not different across sites.

KEYWORDS. Deconcentration, HOPE VI, poverty, urban neighborhoods

INTRODUCTION

Structural explanations of poverty constantly contend with theories based on individual characteristics. From Medieval conviction about God’s role in selecting the poor, to Darwinian beliefs in the fitness of the wealthy, to 1960s notions about the “culture of poverty,” many writers on this subject exonerate state indifference and the greed of the wealthy. Instead, individual defects and moral lassitude are the presumed causes of poverty. A more contemporary version of this contention focuses on alleged deficiencies in social organization within areas of highly concentrated poverty.

How does the concept of “social capital” inform our understanding of who is poor and why? What kinds of social resources do low-income families have? Can we design interventions that build valuable new social resources for people who are poor? In this paper we examine these questions through the lens of a federal housing program (HOPE VI) that utilizes “assisted mobility” to improve social opportunities for low-income families. We present data from a study in two neighborhoods in Tampa, Florida—low poverty and high poverty—where large numbers of former public housing residents were resettled in 2000. Our goal was to assess the social impacts of these moves, on both the relocated families and their new neighborhoods.

Many researchers and commentators have argued that the social isolation of inner city populations causes impoverishment and reproduces this condition across generations (e.g., Ellen & Turner, 1997; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Khaddurri, 2001; Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001). Stuck in their bleak neighborhoods, socially in touch only with each other, it is argued that members of the urban “underclass” are disconnected from channels that could lead to better jobs and educational opportunities (Wilson, 1987,
According to Wilson and many others who reflect this view, the inner city poor lack social contacts with more prosperous individuals who can provide models for youthful aspirations and connections to brighter opportunities. Poverty is thus perpetuated by a spatially constrained absence of useful social capital (Briggs, 1997; Putnam, 2007; Tigges, Browne, & Green, 1998; Wacquant, 1998). The following statement exemplifies this logic:

Trapped in economically devastated neighborhoods where few employed adults or stable families remain, individuals and families often lack contact with persons with knowledge, experience, and, most important, the valuable social connections to aid them in their efforts to improve their life circumstances (Rankin & Quane, 2000, p. 141).

The HOPE VI program, which demolishes public housing and disperses the residents, was designed in part to correct that perceived problem (Zhang & Weismann, 2006).

An opposing opinion argues that social networks among the poor mitigate material deprivation and are often critical to the survival of families living on insufficient household incomes.

Poor people rely on the support of extended family relationships and of more formal organizations, like churches, to survive. Scholars have long recognized the importance of these community support structures (Warren, Thompson, & Saegert, 2001, p. 1).

Lopez and Stack (2001) reviewed a large number of ethnographies about low-income families in the U.S. that illuminate this perspective on the social capital of poor people. They concluded that the social ties of the poor are not qualitatively deficient, and actually may be more numerous and valuable than those connecting middle class neighbors (see also Lee, Campbell, & Miller, 1991). Ethnography involves direct acquaintance with people and their relationships, a vantage that offers a more complex view of life in public housing (e.g., Boyd, 2005; Clampet-Lundquist, 2003; Vale, 1997; Venkatesh, 1997). These and other ethnographers have found that the social environment in public housing is multilayered, not nearly as dysfunctional as standard media portrayals. As in other neighborhoods, most residents are law-abiding, and one finds many social arrangements that aid in survival and self-improvement. Ineffective management of these complexes and inconsistent HUD policies and funding are more obvious causes of many problems.

Poverty in this more humanized view is a political and economic condition that mainly afflicts people born into families with limited
resources. This condition results from racism, unequal education, limited job opportunities, health disparities, and other societal barriers; it is far less the product of individual shortcomings, ineffective socialization, or lack of appropriate social connections. Without incorporation into supportive networks of kin and neighbors, their situations would be much worse. Programs like HOPE VI that intentionally fragment social networks may result in new hardships and cause gaps in essential arrangements for mutual aid.

Additionally, there is little reason to expect that incumbent residents of relocation neighborhoods, especially homeowners, will play the mentoring role that is implied for them in assisted mobility programs. To the contrary, prior experiences with resettlement by Urban Renewal showed that higher status residents tended to flee or resist the influx of lower status families into their neighborhoods, or both, and there is growing evidence that this remains a problem (Bennett & Reed, 1999; Goetz, 2003; Keating, 2000).

In 2003 we received a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to examine these contradictory theories about the impact of relocation on the social integration of poor families. We also conducted interviews with a comparable number of homeowners in the two sites where our research was conducted. These interviews were designed to establish comparisons of social networks, and to explore homeowner reactions to the influx of former public housing residents in their neighborhoods. Results of this research will be reported below. First, however, we consider more closely the theoretical basis of the policy known as “deconcentration” (Khadurri, 2001) and prior research on the impacts of this policy.

DECONCENTRATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION

In the past 15 years, about $6 billion have been allocated to demolishing public housing complexes and dispersing the residents into other neighborhoods (Comey, 2007). The principal HUD program aimed at effecting poverty “deconcentration” is known as HOPE VI, which stands for Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere. Initiated in 1992, about 100,000 units of public housing have been, or will be, demolished. Residents are relocated to other areas, and most will be unable to return to the redeveloped complexes, which are designed to contain fewer units overall and reserve only a portion for very low-income families, who must meet strict screening criteria. In an era when we have a large and
growing deficiency of low income housing (Vandenbroucke, 2007), the primary federal low income housing policy has been to demolish existing units and spend very large sums building lower density complexes that contain a mix of income levels. The inevitable result is a significant net loss in affordable (albeit undesirable) housing units for the lowest income families.

The presumed trade-off is a reduction in residential segregation and concentrated poverty. Moving hopefully will promote improved social and economic opportunities for former public housing residents. Discussions of the benefits of this program rarely mention its effects on the overall housing supply, or potential increases in homelessness (exceptions include Popkin, Buron, Levy, & Cunningham, 2000; Popkin & Cove, 2007; Smith, 1999).

Households dislocated by these demolitions can receive vouchers for private rentals, ideally in neighborhoods that include higher income families. The vouchers, and redeveloped “mixed income” complexes on the cleared sites, are aimed at dispersing poverty and eliminating spatial concentrations of very low-income households. Such policies are designed to effect instant integration by economic class and, by implication, ethnicity. In this respect, this policy finds adherents across a wide political spectrum, including liberal advocates of eliminating racism in housing. The real question, however, is how well this policy works. Are the large financial investments and concomitant loss of very low cost housing justified? Has deconcentration really created stable mixed income neighborhoods in place of previously highly segregated urban living zones? Have these policies contributed to reductions in the overall rate of poverty?

Dispersing poverty across a wider landscape may cause it to be less visible, but does not make it disappear. Jargowsky (2003) analyzed census data between 1990 and 2000 to determine if spatial deconcentration had been occurring. He found what he described as “stunning progress” in poverty statistics at the tract level—a 24% drop in the number of high poverty urban census tracts. However, the overall poverty rate declined less than 1% (from 13.1% to 12.4%). This very modest improvement is attributable more to the health of the economy in 2000 than to strategies of assisted mobility implemented during the 1990s.¹ A more recent study published by the Brookings Institution (Berube & Kneebone, 2006) reports a sharp rise in rates of poverty overall since 1999, with suburban rates showing the greatest amount of increase. Although neither they nor Jargowsky connect these observed outcomes to relocation programs in the 1990s, deliberate deconcentration of poverty is logically implicated in this pattern.²
Moving to Opportunity?

The foregoing data suggest that real improvements in the lives of low-income people have not materialized by simply changing location. Indeed, lack of improvement in income is a very consistent finding in research on the five-city HUD demonstration project known as “Moving to Opportunity” (MTO) (Clampet-Lundquist, 2004b; Goering, Feins, & Richardson, 2002; Katz, Kling, & Leibman, 2001; Turney, Clampet-Lundquist, Edin, Kling, & Duncan, 2006). Although reported satisfaction with housing and neighborhood quality tend to be better, relocated families have not improved their economic conditions (Katz et al., 2001; Rosenbaum & Harris, 1995). Positive findings from the MTO research include access to better services, especially schools, and reported perceptions of more safety and serenity (Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001). Offsetting these advantages, however, is less public transit in low poverty neighborhoods, which limits access to both jobs and other facilities (Rankin & Quane, 2000; Smith 2006; Turney et al., 2006).

Relocation is supposed to improve the social environment and educational opportunities for youth, who are considered to be the primary victims of “neighborhood effects” (Ellen & Turner, 1997; Jencks & Mayer, 1990). Social adjustment, however, involves more than a positive change of place. There were reported increases in juvenile offenses by relocated male youths (Fauth, 2004) and greater loneliness for adolescent girls (Del Conte & Kling, 2001). Related research indicates that relocated youths spend considerable energy in maintaining contact with friends from before moving (Briggs, 1998).

Improved educational opportunities in better neighborhoods are the most compelling rationale for mobility strategies. School achievement among child participants in MTO, however, has not improved significantly (DeAngelis, 2001; Fauth, 2004; Ludwig, Duncan, & Hirschfield, 2001; Sanbonmatsu, Kling, Duncan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2004). Fauth (2004) instead reports negative impacts of mobility on school success by MTO children in single parent homes. Although the new schools themselves are better, the fact of changing poses a variety of risks (Scanlon & Devine, 2001). More generally, Coleman (1988) identified stability as a primary factor in promoting success in school. Many subsequent studies have confirmed the importance of this variable (Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Wood, Halfon, Scarlata, Newacheck, & Nessim, 1993). Assisted mobility inherently or deliberately involves school changes, but this shift brings trade-offs that are highly risky and apparently not yielding success.
The overall results of MTO have been disappointing from the standpoint of its designers. Ratings of satisfaction with housing and surroundings are generally positive, but there have not been substantive economic improvements. The effects on poverty status have been negligible, and most of the observed improvements are based on self-reports and perceptions rather than objective measures. It is noteworthy that the MTO experiment was halted prematurely, because residents of receiving neighborhoods in Baltimore mobilized sufficient political resistance to kill it (Moberg, 1995).

HOPE VI

There were three conditions in the MTO studies—experimental, comparison, and control. The first two groups received vouchers, but the experimental group also got help finding a low poverty neighborhood and added supports and counseling. When HOPE VI was initiated, there were supposed to have been supportive resources to ensure that relocations were into better neighborhoods and residents were aided in the transition. However, this component of the program was successively diminished (National Housing Law Project, 2002), especially after the 1994 takeover by Republicans in Congress. In actual practice HOPE VI has resembled the voucher-only comparison condition of MTO, which showed virtually no improvements over control groups in most studies. A further difference was that HOPE VI relocations are not voluntary, and total removal means far more people simultaneously are pursuing the same vouchered apartments in the same markets. More than a decade later, there have been relatively few studies of the impacts of HOPE VI. Most have focused on the redevelopment sites (which have had very low rates of return by former residents), rather than on the tenants who have been dispersed into the private market. An exception has been a large multisite longitudinal tracking study conducted by the Urban Institute. The panel design calls for interviews repeated at two-year intervals to gauge the progress of former residents of public housing targeted by HOPE VI in five cities. Data for 2001, 2003, and now 2005 have been released. The latest reports (Hope VI: Where do we go from here? http://www.urban.org/projects/hopevi/index.cfm) offer the clearest picture yet of how well assisted mobility has performed in alleviating poverty and improving quality of life. There were six topical reports covering a diversity of adjustment issues; youth, employment, health, safety, housing/living costs, and risks of homelessness.
Similar to the MTO assessments, the picture is mixed for voucher users, who comprised 42% of the sample. The remainder of the sample was split among those who went into other public housing (23%), 14% still in original public housing complexes, 15% no longer subsidized, and only 5% relocated into new HOPE VI developments.

Nearly half of the voucher users had moved to low poverty (rates < 20%) neighborhoods, and they tended to rate their new housing very highly (Comey, 2007). Reduction in fear of crime was a major area of improvement among voucher holders (see also Popkin & Cove, 2007). However, their living costs, especially for utilities, were also higher (Buron, Levy, & Gallagher, 2007).

Employment outcomes were mainly negative, and tended to be relatively worse among the voucher holders (Levy & Wooley, 2007). There was no improvement in percent employed, compared to baseline; 57% of those who were employed still earned below poverty level wages. Most disturbing, these indicators have gotten slightly more negative over time.

Health problems were found to be a major impediment to employment. The report on health status (Manjarrez, Popkin, & Guernsey, 2007) was the most negative of all. HOPE VI relocatees overall had very poor health, both at baseline and ongoing through each interval. Voucher holders were no better than public housing residents, and both groups showed much worse health indicators than are found among African American women in general; rates of depression, diabetes, asthma, arthritis, hypertension, and stroke were about twice as high. Inexplicably, health findings were worst among voucher holders, worse than relocatees to other public housing, and worse than had been reported among the MTO control group (those who remained in public housing). The authors concluded that the HOPE VI group of public housing residents began with much worse health than the general population (disabilities that limit income), but they could not explain why relocation into private housing seemingly made this condition worse.

Youth behavior was the only area that recorded substantial improvements for voucher holders (Gallagher & Bajaj, 2007). Based on self-reported measures, the authors found reductions at the five-year mark in delinquent behavior for children of voucher holders, although the difference for boys was not significant. There were correspondingly higher reports of positive youth behaviors among voucher holders than for those still living in public housing. No improvements were found for either health of the youth, or in measures of "school engagement." The authors again found reductions in numbers of social contacts for youth, although they
do not regard this finding to be problematic, concluding instead that this social isolation “may protect youth from the negative influences of peers in their new neighborhood and original development.” (Gallagher & Bajaj, 2007, p. 4).

Social Capital and Relocation

Socializing among adults is not addressed in the Urban Institute reports, but other studies of HOPE VI relocatees have found similar reductions in social activity for both adults and youth (see recent review articles by Joseph, 2006; and Turney et al., 2006). For both the MTO and HOPE VI programs, research indicates that moving involved loss of social ties that were both affective and instrumental (Clampet-Lundquist, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Kleit, 2001; Pettit & McLanahan, 2001). Many former residents express nostalgia and sadness for the loss of these relationships, and struggle with new problems, such as child care and transportation, previously solved by neighbors.

In contrast, proponents of deconcentration argue that most relationships among spatially segregated low income families actually constitute “negative” value (Fellin, 1998; Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001; Tigges et al., 1998; Rankin & Quane, 2000; Wacquant, 1998; Wilson, 1987). Although some writers concede the importance of sharing and mutual aid in the survival of impoverished households, the ties that connect poor people to each other are also regarded as liabilities hindering their prospects for upward mobility. Xavier de Souza Briggs (1997; 1998; 2002), who is a prodigious contributor to this debate, distinguishes between “supportive” ties and those that serve as “bridges.” Bridges, which offer links to more affluent or successful people, are the ones that count. Supportive ties among poor people may ease the difficulties of insufficient resources, but will not lead to real changes in condition, and may entail obligations for reciprocity that prevent individuals from getting ahead. This perspective reflects the seminal position of Mark Granovetter (1973), who argued that weak ties of acquaintance are more useful than strong ties, especially among low-income individuals, for whom insularity and lack of access to opportunities are structurally inevitable.

Improving the quality of social connections and access to persons of influence is seen as a prime mechanism for achieving change through mobility (Del Conte & Kling, 2001; Rankin & Quane, 2000). Advocates believe that new acquaintances will lead both to knowledge of new opportunities and assimilation into a local culture that reinforces hard work and
an orderly life (Hughes, 1995; Joseph, 2006; Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001). Schwartz & Tajbakhsh (1997), who probe the theoretical and practical issues in mixed income housing strategies, affirm these social purposes of relocation, but note the lack of evidence that it actually works.

Khadduri (2001) suggests that some neighborhoods may be too “fragile” to serve as sites of such interventions, that there are potential costs and harm in this policy. A recent article by Putnam (2007) draws on interviews with 30,000 people across the United States and concludes that ethnically and economically diverse neighborhoods, or either, are poorer in social capital than those that are homogeneous. These findings suggest that the deliberate relocation of low income families into higher income or racially integrated neighborhoods, or both, may actually diminish social interaction and exchange for all parties involved, and that such efforts may have unforeseen costs for destination neighborhoods.

**DECONCENTRATION IN TAMPA**

**Methods**

For the past five years we have done research on the adjustment of former public housing residents who have been relocated into two different neighborhoods in Tampa, Florida. We conducted in depth interviews with 41 HOPE VI relocated household heads and 39 incumbent homeowners in inner ring suburban neighborhoods. Both groups were selected randomly; HOPE VI from lists of relocated families provided by the Tampa Housing Authority and homeowners from the property appraiser’s database. Interviews were conducted from spring 2003 to fall 2004.

The two sites we selected were the census tracts that had been the destinations for the largest number of Tampa’s HOPE VI voucher holders. One neighborhood, which we have called “Riverbend,” dates to the early part of the 20th century. The site plan primarily consists of small single-family houses and duplexes. In 1990, the poverty rate was 35%, and 41% were African American. The 2000 census, which was taken about half way through the relocations, showed that the poverty rate had increased to 43%, and African Americans were 58%. As a White working class neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s, this area had a reputation for resistance to African Americans (although clearly not successful), and has had an active neighborhood association for over 20 years that is predominantly composed of homeowners. When we began our pilot research in this area...
in 2000, the association was mainly white and the officers were all white. In the intervening period, the organization has become much more integrated, with an African American president. It is still mainly homeowners, however, and none of the HOPE VI families we interviewed had ever attended a meeting.

The other site, which we call “Greenwood,” is located about three miles from the first and is newer, having been developed in the 1960s. It consists of single-family houses of widely varying quality and value and about a dozen large apartment complexes, many of which have accepted Section 8 vouchers. This area also has a neighborhood association, begun in 1994 and comprised predominantly of homeowners. As with Riverbend, none of the HOPE VI residents that we interviewed had attended any meetings. In 1990, the poverty rate in this neighborhood was 20%, and 50% of residents were African American; in 2000, the poverty rate was unchanged, but African Americans had increased to 67%. Both of our sites were experiencing fairly rapid racial transition well before the arrival of the HOPE VI relocatees. Riverbend qualifies as a “high poverty” tract, and Greenwood could be described as a “low poverty” tract (see Jargowsky, 2003).

Our study was designed in part to assess differences in the experiences of relocation into high and low poverty neighborhoods. An added emphasis of our design, which is different from the Urban Institute’s study and most others that have tracked HOPE VI relocatees, was inclusion of the perceptions and reactions of homeowners, and an examination of social networks within and between homeowners and relocatees in the same neighborhoods.

The primary basis of our data was a set of qualitative interviews. These were semistructured conversations about 90 minutes in length designed to elicit information on neighborhood experiences and perceptions: thoughts about the HOPE VI relocations; social ties with neighbors, kin, and persons of influence; use of neighborhood facilities; feelings about the future and memories of the past; and the activities and wellbeing of children. Interviews with the relocatees included a section of questions about how their current neighborhoods compared with public housing complexes where they had lived previously.

In addition to the interviews, we compiled census data and other neighborhood indicators, which we mapped using GIS techniques to detect spatial patterns within the sites. We reviewed relevant documents, secondary sources and news stories, and most importantly participated regularly in neighborhood meetings and events over a period of three years.
Results

The sample characteristics revealed a few significant, although unsurprising, differences between HOPE VI relocatees and homeowners (henceforth referred to as H6 and HO). All of the H6 interviewees were African American females; HOs were ethnically divided, with 19 White, 17 Black, and 3 Latino. Ten of the HOs were males, 24 were females, and five were husband-wife pairs. The mean age for the overall sample was 49.25 years (sd = 15.52). Mean household size was 2.76 (sd = 1.68). There were significant differences between HO and H6 interviewees for mean age, 55.62 and 42.87 years, respectively; \( t = 3.95, p < 0.001 \). Between sites, but within condition, the H6 interviewees in Riverbend were younger (mean = 37.96 v. 48.61, \( t = 2.26, p < 0.05 \)), and had larger households, 3.95 v 2.11; \( t = 3.55, p < 0.001 \). There were no additional significant differences in the sample between conditions or across the two sites. In the Greenwood site sample, the mean differences between HO and H6 in age (56.15 v 48.61) and household size (2.20 v 2.11) were negligible.

H6 Social Networks

Data on social networks before and after relocation show a substantial drop in number of neighborhood social contacts by the HOPE VI families. Even after residing in the new areas for more than three years, the relocated families in both sites had experienced large reductions in the size of their neighborhood networks. In the current locations, more than half (54%) of the relocatees knew fewer than 5 of their neighbors; only 20% knew more than 10. In previous public housing sites, these results were reversed; 63% knew more than 10 of their neighbors, and only 13% knew fewer than 5. These results applied to both sites and were highly significant, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, Greenwood, \( Z = 2.81, p < 0.005 \); Riverbend, \( Z = 3.274, p < 0.001 \).

Many commented on losses of mutual assistance and friendship that they depended on when they lived in public housing. The following narrative is illustrative.

A lot of people . . . over there they didn’t have a lot of money. So when you have a good friend or a good neighbor they can look out for you, they can help you out. And having get-togethers and some things like that sometimes help that next door neighbor to be able to have a meal, or to be able to have decent food to feed their kid that
day. So that’s why we used to always, like every other weekend, we used to always try to have something. Help a neighbor out if they can’t get all their stuff that they need for their kids’ birthday or Christmas or something like that. Just try to help them out the best way we could.

These practices have been much reduced, especially the social gatherings and shared meals. Reports of mutual aid in the relocation areas mainly involved family members, who often lived in other parts of town. With the reduction in neighborhood ties, kinship has emerged as the principal basis for supportive arrangements. These relations were important before, and are now even more so, but they generally lack the convenience of proximity that can be crucial in both emergencies and the casual daily needs that poor people experience.

Many of the social ties that these families have in their relocation areas are with other HOPE VI families; 35% of those we interviewed reported no acquaintances with anyone who had not been part of the program, and very few (8%) knew more than five non-HOPE VI residents. The apartment complexes in Greenwood, with their dense site plans and gated perimeters, make contact with nonrenters unlikely. Riverbend has no large apartment complexes, only duplexes and single-family houses. There are significant differences between the sites in numbers who have non-HOPE VI acquaintances, with Riverbend much higher (86% v 45%; \( \chi^2 [1, n = 40] = 7.56, p < 0.01 \)). This difference may be the result of site plans, or it could reflect the fact that Greenwood is a low-poverty neighborhood where most of the other residents tend to have higher incomes, or a combination of these and other factors, such as differences in age and number of children. In a later section, we will consider overall differences between the neighborhoods.

Asked about contacts with persons of influence or in high status occupations, most respondents said that they actually have fewer such ties now than when they lived in public housing. For example, it was not unusual for elected officials seeking votes or good public relations to visit periodically and become acquainted with residents of public housing complexes. Although the same politicians also occasionally appear at meetings of neighborhood associations in the new neighborhoods, relocated residents do not attend these meetings which are overwhelming populated by homeowners.

We used an adapted version of the “position generator,” an approach developed by Nan Lin (Lin, Fu, & Hsung, 2001) to gauge the existence of
"bridging ties" to persons of influence. This instrument is based on a list of high status and upper or middle class occupations; respondents were asked to identify whether they have acquaintances who are employed in any of these positions. Our list consisted of 14 occupations that represent common professional and business positions. On average, the H6 respondents answered yes to acquaintances with only 24% of the occupations shown on lists they scored. Although there was no difference in this measure between the two sites, $X^2 (1, n = 40) = 0.21, p > 0.05$; there were large differences between H6 and HO respondents. HO respondents answered yes to occupations listed on this instrument 62% of the time, $X^2 (3, n = 79) = 174.9, p < 0.001$.

**Homeowner Networks**

The homeowners we interviewed confirm an absence of social integration between them and the relocated public housing residents. Only 36% of HO respondents stated that they were acquainted with any H6 residents. Many HO interviewees expressed aversion to becoming acquainted with former public housing residents. A few examples:

They [landlords] look at Section 8 as a way to make money off of them [H6 relocatees], and it's not a good thing for the residents, the homeowners that live there. It's not a stable environment, as far as neighbors go, and stuff like that. They are coming and going, you really don't want to get to know them. You don't know if you can trust them and so on and so forth.

Well, the public housing, for people who moved out of public housing, they'll move mostly in the duplexes and, um, my interaction has been kind of minimal. Civil, but minimal. And I don't really know them.

Yeah, well... I don't know them, you see... you know, you get the rentals. You see, most of them are Section 8s. And, um, well, they move in and most of them have 3 or 4 or 5 kids, and no control of them at all.

I never, I don't get to know those people. I will know their children, but I don't get to really know the parents. And I'm going to look out for my neighborhood first.
More generally, the social practices reported by homeowners do not involve much neighborhood socializing; 31% of the HO interviewees reported knowing fewer than five of their neighbors, although 36% knew more than 10 neighbors. These responses were only marginally higher than the current H6 social patterns in these same neighborhoods ($X^2(2, n = 79) = 4.44, p < 0.20$), and there were no differences between HOs from the two sites, $X^2(1, n = 39) = 1.53, ns$. Homeowners often referred to past conditions, before the neighborhood “changed,” when they remembered a lot more social activity and less fear of crime.

And in a lot of ways, it was kind of like living in a country town. You could walk down the street at night. It was just a very different quality of life, and uh, I didn’t start locking my door until, you know, maybe ten years ago.

I am comfortable because I stay to myself. I mean, it would be nice if you had nice neighbors. Growing up I can remember the neighborhood, the streets, doing things together.

We used to walk up and down the sidewalks and talk and visit. Not as much anymore. But we still talk to some people that we used to know.

When I built this house . . . I came out here and . . . I left tools out. I didn’t even carry my tools. Nobody ever bothered a thing. But I’m going to tell you if you leave something out there now, it’s going to get stolen.

You know, when you find, I find stolen cars abandoned in front of my house. I had a brick thrown through my front window. I had my car vandalized, my windshield smashed. . . . These are things that’ve happened in the last ten years, and you kind of retreat a little bit when that happens.

Interviews with homeowners frequently reflect anger towards the new residents and the public policies that placed them in their midst. Many homeowners expressed generalized negative impressions and resentment about the relocated families, particularly single mothers. For example, one Riverbend homeowner said:
So you get a young girl, and you give her a Section 8 apartment or a Section 8 house and they do not work the way you and I do. We get up and go to work every day. So that is the downside of it . . . . These people have mooched off the system and lived this way for so long. They don’t have the skills. No social skills. I’ve been living on my own since I was 17 and I have never been on Section 8. I just never liked that.

Homeowners blame the incoming residents for many of the conditions that have beset their neighborhoods in recent years. Such attitudes are expressed often within meetings of the homeowner associations in both neighborhoods. There are differences among the HO respondents on these issues, and several (both black and white) spoke positively about diversity and social justice, but there was a strong consensus that the relocations had not helped these neighborhoods, and that the program was harming homeowners.

In Greenwood, the neighborhood with the most class diversity, a true mixed income low poverty area, members of the local association have taken various measures to curb the influx of low-income families and police the complexes where they reside. For example, in one instance they persuaded local authorities to enact a “nuisance abatement” ordinance against one of the large Section 8 complexes that reportedly resulted in the eviction of a large number of tenants. Although census tract statistics indicate a high level of heterogeneity in this area, internal spatial arrangements establish compacted homogeneity behind fences and gates. Proximity has not resulted in social incorporation, nor has this policy overcome institutionalized practices of class segregation and racial panic. Some homeowner expressed the following views on this subject:

You know if you have one family, or a small number of people, absorbed in a greater population, I think that could happen. But it’s an entirely, if an entire group from the projects just comes over and becomes a permanent population in another, then it’s, you know, all it’s going to do is just, uh, create a slum.

I think maybe, in a way, it’s kind of like a ‘white flight’ kind of thing. I think there was some of that, you know, and the place got a worse and worse reputation. And uh, I had a friend who was stabbed on this street. Another friend, who was killed, an old man. A lot of predators moved in.
Yeah, it was something we used to talk about a lot, that we had a huge change in the demographics, and, um, I really hesitate to use the term “White flight” because, uh, I think that kind of, I just don’t like to validate that, you know. But I think it did happen on my street. The six or seven families, this is just a two block stretch in a period of two or three years, they moved out and they were replaced by very, very poor people who just ran it into the ground.

References to “White flight” hearken back to the period following Urban Renewal, when federal policies designed to eliminate blight and create new opportunities for slum dwellers instead had the effect of devastating urban working class neighborhoods. The homeowners in these two neighborhoods are aware of this history and have legitimate concerns about the future value of their own property.

SITE COMPARISONS

The two neighborhoods in our study varied considerably in the type and quality of housing, neighborhood amenities, and the average incomes of residents. It should also be noted that the H6 respondents in the two areas varied in both age and family size; those in Riverbend were significantly younger with larger families. The poverty rates place these areas into categories of low and high poverty—Greenwood (20%) and Riverbend (43%). The three census tracts where the demolished complexes were located, the places from which they were removed, had higher poverty rates (47%, 49%, and 71%, respectively). Thus it could be argued that even Riverbend offers improvement. We asked the H6 respondents a series of questions comparing their current neighborhoods with the public housing complexes where they lived previously. Although there are many similarities in responses, these answers also reveal some substantial differences in the experiences of those who were resettled into low and high poverty areas.

Housing Quality and Cost

The largest differences between sites are found for these two variables. In the Greenwood neighborhood where residents live in relatively newer apartment complexes, nearly all (84%) rate their current housing as better than public housing, although many (35%) reported higher costs. In the older Riverbend neighborhood, with single family houses
and duplexes, 52% said that their current housing was actually worse (compared with none in Greenwood who felt that way), and 85% reported that their costs are now higher. Measures of both quality and cost were significantly different between the two sites, $X^2 (1, n = 40) = 10.6, p < 0.01$; $X^2 (1, n = 40) = 9.7, p < 0.01$, respectively. Several relocated residents indicated that housing costs consumed most of their income. Comments like the following were common among employed residents who constantly must negotiate unpredictable utility costs and other new economic demands in their lives:

It's [voucher] a help to some people, but it's a hassle in the same thing. . . . I am struggling to pay just the $312, when my checks only be like $400 every two weeks. Its like, I got a light bill, phone bill, I still don't have no car insurance. And my tag need to be renewed.

**Safety**

In terms of safety, most respondents in both neighborhoods felt that they were no better off than they had been prior to the move: 81% in the Riverbend neighborhood reported that conditions were the same or worse there than in public housing; in the Greenwood neighborhood, 68% reported safety conditions were either the same or worse. Greenwood respondents were only marginally more positive, $X^2 (2, n = 40) = 3.47, p < 0.20$. Several issues were involved in these responses. In public housing familiarity and mutual surveillance had helped avoid problems with crime and other threats, or they said that they at least felt less helpless. Additionally, the new neighborhoods, especially Riverbend, were already established sites of drug and gang activity when the new residents arrived.

The drug dealers, yeah, I mean, it's like, they park in your yards. They, you can't even let your kids go out and play without the drug dealers coming up and down the street.

**Youth Opportunities**

A major rationale for HOPE VI was to rescue young people from the dangers and diminished opportunities of public housing. Assessing the youth environment in the relocation neighborhoods, 72% of our interviewees in both neighborhoods rated the current situation as the same or
worse than public housing. On this measure, the two sites were significantly
different from each other, although the majority in both agreed that no
improvement had occurred (60% in Greenwood; 85% in Riverbend),
\[ X^2 (2, n = 40) = 8.37, p < 0.025. \] These responses closely parallel the
previous results on perceptions of safety, and they are indeed related.
Parents are worried about the safety of their children, both from the crim-
inal activities of other youth and from the raids that police conduct on
kids in the streets that often scoop up the innocent along with the guilty.

Basically you really have no real choice cause it’s either, keep them
in the house or let them play in the street and either get harassed by
the cops or even worse, get shot. They arresting people ’cause that’s
what they doing usually. I mean for little crazy stuff. I done seen
guys getting arrested for you know bicycling with no lights, you
know, stupid stuff like that. They just ride back and forth, back and
forth. I see ’em a lot.

Many children were reluctant to move out of the projects where they had
grown up, and several parents claimed there were actually more constructive
activities for their children back there than in the new areas.

You know, she was so sad about them tearing them projects down. . . .
They were hurt. And they had to move from there, and they was
teenagers, they had made a lot of friends, you know. And so they
have a lot of friends like over there. My kids had a lot of friends.
Like over here, almost nothing.

They felt more comfortable there and they was also a little more
safer there. People try to make the project like it was so bad. No it
wasn’t. It wasn’t bad.

They can say what they want about the projects but, at least the . . .
children played volleyball, basketball. They made sure they played
something. If you come to that park you make sure they are playing
something instead of being on the streets and being like the rest of
the children. At least they did have something going on for them.

**Transportation and Services**

Transportation is another issue that has led to worse, rather than better,
consequences. In both neighborhoods only 30% of relocated residents
owned dependable cars. Most respondents relied on public transit or rides from family and friends. Of the total interviewed, 90% rated transit access in the present location as worse or no better than where they used to live in public housing; 50% said it was worse. The two sites do not differ on this rating, $X^2 (1, n = 40) = 1.35$, ns. Lack of transportation makes the maintenance of employment more difficult, especially since there are relatively few jobs within walking distance of these neighborhoods (see also Turney et al., 2006). The prior inner city sites actually had ample bus stops, compared to more sparsely distributed stops, with long waits and the need to transfer, in and around the two relocation areas.

Access to other kinds of services, such as health and child care, was also better in the previous sites due to patterns of locating Medicaid clinics and subsidized day care in high poverty tracts. In another study of after school programs in Tampa (Greenbaum, Hathaway, & Ward, 2005) we found that high poverty tracts, including those where public housing is located, had a far higher ratio of slots to kids in single parent families than our two HOPE VI study tracts (63% v 23%).

**CONCLUSIONS**

Our study tracked former public housing residents who were able to move into apparently better neighborhoods and remain there for several years. In many respects, these are the most fortunate relocatees. Nationally (and in Tampa) 29% of tenants dislocated by HOPE VI simply have been moved to other public housing complexes that are often no better than those that were demolished (Buron, Popkin, Levy, Harris, & Khadduri, 2002, p. 64). Buron et al. found that an additional 20% had lost their housing assistance. Consistent with the preponderance of research on both MTO and HOPE VI, our interviews suggest that most of the relocated families have not achieved the expected social and economic benefits. Reported improvements in housing conditions are not surprising. The physical condition of the public housing complexes that were demolished was notoriously bad. Apart from these limited material improvements (which were principally confined to Greenwood), a large number of our respondents felt that they actually had lost ground in terms of safety, convenience, and advantages for their children. They also had lost the sense of community that many described in their former residences. Their social networks were smaller, and they had forged very few “bridging ties” in their new locations.
Greenwood respondents were overwhelmingly more satisfied with their housing, although many were paying more now than they did when they were in public housing. In Riverbend, housing quality was far less satisfactory and utility costs were much higher. They were actually paying more to live in worse housing, and they had many other complaints about their neighborhood. Riverbend has more dangers and fewer amenities, although the majority in both neighborhoods perceived no real improvement in safety for themselves or their children. Similarly, transportation access in both sites was worse for most than in the public housing complexes. In terms of social integration, relocated residents in both areas had few ties with non-HOPE VI residents. In Greenwood, where there are more high status neighbors, respondents had fewer such ties than in Riverbend, where average household incomes are lower overall. Possible causes of this difference are complex, although the spatial configuration of the Greenwood apartment complexes offers few opportunities for ties to form across social classes. Space is not the only impediment. Homeowners in both neighborhoods are generally disinclined to make friends with relocated families.

The disaffection of the incumbent homeowners, many of whom felt that their property had been devalued and their families made less safe by this program, is rarely mentioned in the literature on deconcentration. These attitudes and the actions that often follow (both fight and flight) are, however, having deleterious effects on all concerned.

Tensions are greatest between older white homeowners and adolescent children of relocated African American families. Lack of adequate recreational facilities in both sites was partly responsible for the congregation of large groups of teens in the streets of these areas, which sometimes led to conflict with motorists and pedestrians. In Greenwood, the homeowners organized resistance to these conditions, by forcing apartment owners to erect fences, hire security guards, and strictly enforce rules of conduct. These measures led to evictions of whole families and increased barriers to interaction between homeowners and apartment dwellers. Such actions did nothing to solve the problem of inadequate facilities for youth in the neighborhood. Similar complaints are voiced by homeowners in Riverbend, where beefed up police presence and a "Weed and Seed" grant have been secured to respond to these threats. One result of this campaign, however, has been to put more youth into the juvenile justice system, often for minuscule offenses that would not lead to arrest in other neighborhoods.
Our results challenge the claimed social benefits of HOPE VI relocation, and many prior studies have yielded similar findings. At this juncture there is little reason to believe that we can solve the problems of poor families by moving them around. It is remarkable that so few authors of these studies have either questioned basic assumptions behind the deconcentration policy, or suggested that we stop squandering public resources and upending communal supports. Zhang & Weismann’s (2006) analysis of the origins of HOPE VI emphasizes the dilemma that shaped its development. Public housing was clearly a failure, and there was insufficient political will to reform it or invest in physical improvements and added social services. Deconcentration offered a new approach, and seemingly a last chance to leverage public funds to improve the lives of the urban poor. However, this approach ignores history and was founded on a vicious contradiction.

Failure to confront lessons of Urban Renewal—destruction of communal ties, destabilizing effects of relocation, and heavily ingrained racism in the real estate business—has obstructed serious consideration of potential problems with more recent mass relocation strategies. These dynamics have not changed. White middle class homeowners still believe that property values decline in “racially transitional” neighborhoods, and their realtors, insurers, and bankers reinforce that belief. The concept of “mixed” housing, whether by class or color, directly challenges long-standing and tenacious orthodoxy among these elite actors who drive real estate development and lending. Writers on the topic of deconcentration rarely address that contradiction (see also Goetz, 2003). Moreover, as with earlier residents of neighborhoods destroyed by Urban Renewal, uprooting people in public housing severs relationships and inflicts trauma. The presumed benefits for children are offset by the negative effects of changing schools, losing friends, and having to negotiate hostile new social territories.

Most problematic is that deconcentration is founded on the assumption that poor people are bad neighbors, that their negative influence on each other exacerbates a culture of poverty and crime, breeds pathology and social disorganization. Relocation is designed to break up this unhealthy formation. To their new neighbors in relocation sites, however, this rationale effectively signals that the HOPE VI program is designed to disperse problem families, at the immediate expense of those unfortunate enough to live near to where they land. There is little wonder that positive social incorporation has not ensued.
Déconcentration is based on a disease-model of poverty in which the poor themselves are the agents of infection, alleged transmitters of inappropriate childrearing and unacceptable civic norms (Crane, 1991). The goal of previous policy and practice was to quarantine these perceived threats through various containment techniques, “red-lining the ghetto” (Massey & Denton, 1993). Although the implication of déconcentration is reversed, it is paradigmatically consistent; the goal is to excise and dismember a tumor, to flush the site of disease. If concentration causes the problem, déconcentration should neutralize it. Perhaps the larger territory outside the ghetto can absorb and assimilate the relocated families. Alternatively, in this same model, however, is the unstated likelihood of spreading “infection” and producing unwanted outcomes, like self-fulfilling prophecies of neighborhood decline.

Policies that demonize the poor sow these seeds. As researchers, we need to think about poverty in a different way, to address the checkered and politicized history of scholarship on this subject (e.g., O’Connor, 2001) and take a fresh look at the empirical data. For example, the recent Urban Institute study (Manjarrez et al., 2007) reports that the health status of relocated public housing residents is far worse than other urban counterparts, including those still living in public housing. For unexplained reasons, it appears that detachment from the institutional structure of public housing, however inadequate its services, is associated with worsening health conditions for voucher holders. Illness and disability strongly interfere with earning a living. Perhaps public resources would be more effective if directed at curing real disease, instead of the metaphorical ailments of poverty concentration. Perhaps, if scholarship and research reflected more humane and reasoned assumptions about both the causes of poverty and the character and capacities of those who are poor, we would generate results more conducive to finding effective policies for alleviating these problems.

NOTES

1. Those figures have now reversed, with a 2005 estimate of 13.3% of families below the poverty line in the U.S. (Berube & Kneebone, 2006). It is important to note that Jargowsky adds cautionary language to his “stunning progress” assessment by observing the apparent problems this movement has caused for older inner ring suburbs. Berube and Kneebone’s recent study confirms that worry.
In Tampa, a city with a pronounced reduction in high poverty tracts between 1990 and 2000, our analyses indicate that more than half of the effect was due to HOPE VI relocations. These data will be reported in an article currently under preparation.

3. MTO was a quasi-experiment designed to assess the effects of assisted mobility. HUD launched this $70 million project in 1994 in five cities (Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York). Three groups were established drawing from current residents of public housing—experimental households were relocated with vouchers into low-poverty neighborhoods, a comparison group had vouchers they used without assistance or restriction, and a control group remained in public housing. The program was not refunded in 1995, due primarily to backlash from residents of relocation neighborhoods in Baltimore.

4. Improvement in housing conditions, when compared with public housing where original construction was typically poor and maintenance progressively neglected under the funding formulas of HUD, is not difficult to achieve.

5. Atlantic City (NJ), Chicago, Durham (NC), Richmond (CA), and Washington, DC.

6. The authors do not address potential reactivity problems in these questions, but youth misbehavior is cause for eviction from vouchered apartments. It could be surmised that respondents may be less truthful about such issues.

7. Funded by an award from NSF (BCS-0241178), the project ended on December 31, 2006. Opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

8. The extent of randomness in the HOPE VI recruitment was affected by the age of the contact list (which was two years old when we began), and by the relatively small size of potential interviewees in each neighborhood in relation to desired sample; for about half of the interviewees, we had to rely on other means of identifying eligible families and contacting them one by one in order to achieve our target of 20 in each area.

9. Occupations were: nurse, doctor, nurse’s aide, public official, police officer, business owner, store manager, teacher, principal, lawyer, judge, paralegal, bank employee, and realtor. We included nurse’s aide, a fairly low status occupation, in our list. We expected that H6 interviewees might be likely to know someone in that occupation, and thus included it to detect potential response sets in the answers. H6 interviewees were just as likely to know a nurse’s aide as the HO respondents, but far less likely to be acquainted with a physician ($X^2[1, n = 79] = 21.1, p < .001$).

10. This compares with 66% of H6 respondents who claimed one or more acquaintances with non-H6 residents. However, the questions on this issue were not quite parallel, which may account for the discrepancy. H6 respondents were asked how many non-H6 neighbors they knew. Individuals they identified would include unsubsidized renters in their housing complexes, as well as homeowners. HO were asked if they knew any residents who had been relocated there from public housing. In this regard, the HO responses are more pertinent to the issue of interaction across these two conditions.

11. This is a federal program begun in the early 1990s that combines law enforcement and community development to eliminate lawless elements (weeding) and nurture new social practices and projects (seeding). It is aimed at distressed, high crime areas like Riverbend.
REFERENCES


