

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

- Is there a link between public housing transformation and crime?
- Do effects vary by neighborhood?
- What are the implications for relocation efforts?

# Public Housing Transformation and Crime

## Making the Case for Responsible Relocation

Susan J. Popkin, Michael J. Rich, Leah Hendey, Chris Hayes, and Joe Parilla

Chicago and Atlanta are very different cities, but in the 1990s both faced serious problems with their public housing—distressed, high-crime developments that were damaging residents' lives and contributing to neighborhood decline. By the end of the decade, both cities' housing authorities had used federal HOPE VI<sup>1</sup> grants to launch ambitious plans for citywide transformation efforts, with the goal of demolishing their worst developments and replacing them with new, mixed-income communities. Transforming public housing meant relocating thousands of households while the new housing was constructed, a process that often took years and required developing new services to support residents through the process. As part of the relocation effort, many former public housing residents in both cities received Housing Choice (Section 8) Vouchers and moved to private-market housing; most opted to keep their vouchers and stay in their new neighborhoods rather than return to new mixed-income communities.

Not surprisingly, the nation's two largest public housing transformation efforts—the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) Plan for Transformation and the Atlanta Housing Authority's (AHA) Olympic Legacy and Quality of Life Initiatives—have generated a variety of concerns, and many affordable housing advocates focused on how former residents fared during the relocation process.<sup>2</sup> But local politicians and press accounts have also raised questions about whether households receiving vouchers have brought crime and disorder to their new communities.<sup>3</sup>

This issue reaches beyond Chicago and Atlanta. In 2008, a highly controversial *Atlantic*

*Monthly* article claimed that HOPE VI—specifically, relying on vouchers to relocate residents in private rental housing—was to blame for rising crime in Memphis. The article drew a grim picture of rapidly increasing crime in previously safe Memphis communities, and then used an analysis that associated crime incidents with the movement of voucher recipients to make the case that HOPE VI was responsible for these problems (Rosin 2008). The article ignited a national debate about the impact of housing vouchers on crime, with many researchers and advocates arguing that the *Atlantic* analysis was too simplistic, blaming voucher holders unfairly for broader trends (Briggs and Dreier

This research rigorously investigated whether relocating public housing residents into private-market housing affected crime rates in Chicago and Atlanta.

## Key Terms

**Housing Choice Voucher (voucher):** a federal rental subsidy that enables eligible families to rent homes and apartments in the private market

**Relocated household:** a household formerly living in public housing that has relocated to the private market with the assistance of a Housing Choice Voucher

**Neighborhood:** defined here as census tracts, geographic areas with an average population of around 3,000 residents

**Public housing transformation:** efforts in Chicago and Atlanta to demolish distressed public housing and relocate families using housing vouchers (among other strategies) to prevent the concentration of low-income households

**Plan for Transformation:** the Chicago Housing Authority's plan to replace or revitalize 25,000 units of distressed public housing

**Quality of Life Initiative:** the Atlanta Housing Authority's initiative to replace 12 public housing developments with mixed-income communities

**Violent crime:** aggravated assault, forcible rape, murder, and robbery

**Property crime:** arson, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft

**Gun crime:** crimes involving handguns or other firearms—homicide, sexual assault, robbery, battery, ritualism, and assault

2008). Yet, until recently, no systematic efforts have tried to understand whether there is empirical evidence for these fears or if they simply represent negative stereotypes of public housing residents.

This research rigorously investigated whether relocating public housing residents into private-market housing affected crime

rates in Chicago and Atlanta. The relationship between crime rates and relocated public housing households moving into the private market is complex. Crime declined dramatically in both cities throughout the 2000s—even in neighborhoods that received many relocated households. Further, the transformation efforts led to substantial decreases in crime in neighborhoods<sup>4</sup> where the CHA and AHA demolished public housing communities. This decline contributed to a small but significant net decrease in violent crime across all Chicago neighborhoods and a small decrease in violent crime and property crime in Atlanta neighborhoods. However, the picture is not entirely positive. The transformation contributed to slightly higher property crime overall in Chicago, and some neighborhoods in both cities have experienced problems associated with concentrations of relocated households. Once the number of relocated households reached a certain threshold, crime rates, on average, decreased less than they would have if there had been no former public housing in-movers. These findings have important policy implications and suggest that future relocation efforts need to learn from Chicago and Atlanta's experiences, particularly the responsible relocation strategies both housing authorities developed as they learned more about resident needs.<sup>5</sup>

## How Could Public Housing Transformation Affect Crime?

Over the past two decades, housing assistance in the United States has undergone a profound transformation (Turner, Popkin, and Rawlings 2009). The \$6 billion HOPE VI program facilitated the demolition of hundreds of distressed inner-city public housing developments and allowed housing authorities to replace them with a combination of new, mixed-income communities and vouchers. Underlying this transformation was the hope that public housing residents would

benefit both socially and economically from living in more diverse, higher-opportunity neighborhoods (Joseph, Chaskin, and Webber 2007). Although not all these hopes have been realized in every public housing revitalization project, a large body of research shows that former residents are generally living in better housing in safer neighborhoods where they experience less stress and anxiety.<sup>6</sup>

Public housing transformation also intends to improve neighborhoods. Removing distressed public housing properties that are causing blight may allow for new development, increase property values, and attract more affluent residents (Turner et al. 2009). However, while controversial, the question of how large-scale relocation of public housing families might affect destination communities has received relatively little attention from researchers, despite real concerns about the potential for creating new concentrations of poverty (Galster et al. 2003). Only one major study rigorously explored how voucher holders living in a community might affect crime rates, and it found no evidence to support a link between the presence of voucher holders and increased crime (Ellen, Lens, and O'Regan 2011). However, that study looked only at traditional<sup>7</sup> voucher holders (who are not generally former public housing residents), used annual data on voucher holders, and did not explicitly examine the question of the potential effect of large-scale public housing relocation.<sup>8</sup>

There are several reasons to expect that large-scale public housing demolition and relocation might affect crime in other communities more than the presence of traditional voucher holders.<sup>9</sup> First, relocating public housing residents for redevelopment could disrupt their social networks (Hagedorn and Rauch 2007), increasing their risk for either perpetrating or becoming victims of crime in their new neighborhoods (Haynie and South 2005; Sharkey and

Sampson 2010). Second, new residents moving into a neighborhood could disrupt the community’s “collective efficacy”—the degree of mutual trust and social cohesion that acts as a protective factor for residents—thereby making the residents of these neighborhoods less safe (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). And third, some public housing residents or their associates could simply bring crime with them, essentially displacing problems like drug trafficking and gang activity from one neighborhood to another.<sup>10</sup>

### Transforming Public Housing in Chicago and Atlanta

Atlanta and Chicago have the two most prominent public housing transformation efforts in the nation, initiatives that have been both widely lauded and extremely controversial. In both cities, the most visible change has been replacing notorious developments like Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago and Techwood Homes in Atlanta with new, mixed-income housing that reflected the current thinking on how to provide affordable housing without creating concentrations of poverty.<sup>11</sup>

Chicago has been one of the country’s housing policy bellwethers, and efforts there have received considerable national attention. The CHA’s Plan for Transformation began in 1999, when the agency announced its goals to replace or rehabilitate 25,000 units of public housing. As in many cities, relocation proved the most challenging aspect of the transformation initiative. First, with over 16,000 households to relocate, the sheer magnitude of the problem was daunting. Second, many of the CHA’s residents faced numerous barriers that made relocation particularly challenging. Because of the terrible conditions in CHA family developments, tenants who had better options had left long ago, leaving behind a population dominated by extremely vulnerable families (Popkin et al. 2000).

Third, like most housing authorities, the CHA had little experience providing supportive services and certainly had not previously attempted a large-scale relocation.<sup>12</sup> The challenges only intensified over time as families who were easier to relocate moved, leaving the CHA with a population increasingly dominated by the most vulnerable households (Popkin 2010). The agency ultimately overcame these challenges. Using the funding and regulatory flexibility provided by HUD’s Moving to Work (MTW) program, the CHA built a robust resident services department (Popkin et al. 2010); by 2011, the CHA had completed work on over 85 percent of its planned units.

CHA residents had three relocation options: move to new mixed-income housing, live in rehabilitated public housing, or use a voucher to rent a private-market unit. By 2008, approximately 6,400 former public housing households had relocated to the private market with vouchers. However, the limitations of the voucher program—that rents must fit HUD’s guidelines for affordability and landlords must be willing to comply with program rules and regulations—meant that most voucher rentals tended to be concentrated in lower-income, minority areas (Cunningham and Drosch 2005). Although the CHA offered residents relocation assistance and mobility counseling to encourage them to move to “opportunity areas” that offer better schools and services, and those who chose vouchers could move to any unit that met housing quality and rent payment standards, many have chosen to stay in familiar areas on the city’s South and West sides (Popkin et al. 2009). Further, one benefit of tenant-based vouchers is that recipients have the freedom to move, and many residents have moved several times since leaving public housing.

While the CHA did not launch its Plan for Transformation until 1999, the AHA was an

early leader in the national movement to replace distressed public housing developments with market-quality communities. In 1996, the Atlanta Blueprint called for using a HOPE VI grant to revitalize the Techwood-Clark Howell Homes, the nation’s oldest public housing development, marking an important point in the evolution of the HOPE VI program nationally. When the first phase of Centennial Place—in reference to the Centennial Olympic Games that Atlanta hosted that year—opened in summer 1996, it was the nation’s first mixed-income development that included publicly assisted housing. Also in 1996, the AHA unveiled its Olympic Legacy Program, the agency’s effort to bring to scale the mixed-income revitalization model for traditional public housing. The AHA was able to build on the momentum from the Centennial Place revitalization and leverage additional local investments to support replacing three additional public housing developments with mixed-income communities.<sup>13</sup> After nearly a decade of experience in turning distressed public housing into mixed-income, mixed-use developments, the AHA launched its final and even more ambitious effort to fully transform public housing in Atlanta. Similar to CHA, the legal and regulatory framework for that effort was made possible through Atlanta’s participation in the MTW program, which began in July 2003. Among the key initiatives were a number of policy changes in AHA’s leasing standards and practices, and the adoption of strategies intended to enable families to use their vouchers in a broader range of neighborhoods. In addition, like the CHA, the AHA introduced, in 1998, a five-year family-focused coaching and counseling program to provide comprehensive assistance to tenants through the relocation process as well as post-relocation.

AHA’s Quality of Life Initiative (QLI), launched in 2007, aimed to demolish nearly all of the city’s remaining family public

housing developments and replace those units with new mixed-income communities. Like the CHA, the AHA found that the families still needing to be relocated during these later phases of the agency's transformation initiative were more vulnerable and required more substantial support. The AHA's comprehensive supportive services, launched as part of its expanded relocation strategy, offered these services to relocated families for up to five years. Relocated households who received this comprehensive support reported substantial improvements in their quality of life (Rich et al. 2010). By 2010, the AHA no longer owned or operated any large family public housing developments. To underscore the magnitude of the transformation, in 1996, more than 70 percent of the AHA's assisted households lived in conventional public housing; by 2011, nearly 70 percent of AHA residents had vouchers, with another 15 percent living in new, mixed-income housing and the rest living in other mixed-income properties with project-based rental assistance developed throughout the city. In the course of this transformation, about 10,000 households were relocated, and the vast majority used vouchers to move to the private market.

## Is There a Link between Relocation and Crime?

During focus groups, residents living in Chicago communities that received former public housing residents echoed many of the same concerns about crime raised by media accounts. The changes in Chicago have been highly visible, and residents clearly associate changes in their communities with the disappearance of the CHA's high-rises. Even in communities with few relocated households, residents claimed that CHA families brought new problems with them, especially criminal behavior.

Although these beliefs are widely—and firmly—held, no rigorous research has tested

their validity. This analysis used econometric techniques to probe the relationship between large-scale public housing relocation and changes in crime trends in neighborhoods in both Chicago (2000–08) and Atlanta (2002–09). We estimated the impact of relocated households using a fixed-effects panel model of crime counts based on quarterly crime and voucher data, controlling for other possible contributory factors such as population trends, concentration of other voucher households, tract-specific features, and nearby crime trends. We modeled the impact of project demolition in public housing development neighborhoods separately with an OLS regression model, using quarterly crime data before and through the study period. Like all statistical models, our methods estimated average patterns and cannot perfectly explain changes in every neighborhood (for details on our data and research methods see page 12). Our analysis examined the total effect of public housing transformation on crime, including census tracts where public housing was demolished as well as destination neighborhoods where relocated households moved; whether the presence of relocated voucher households significantly influenced crime rates in their new neighborhoods; and, if so, whether this effect varied by the concentration of relocated households.

## Public Housing Transformation Reduced Crime Citywide

As in many American cities, crime declined in both Chicago and Atlanta during the study period. However, in both cities, tearing down public housing and relocating residents with vouchers meant a modest, statistically significant reduction in violent crime overall.<sup>14</sup> Over the study period, CHA's Plan for Transformation is associated with a 1.0 percent net decrease in violent crimes reported and a 0.3 percent increase in property crimes reported, independent of other factors affecting

crime rates. The demolition of CHA's housing had a bigger effect on gun crime, which was more heavily concentrated in public housing: reports of gun crime decreased on net by 4.4 percent citywide. In Atlanta, the effects of public housing transformation yielded a 0.7 percent net decrease in violent crimes and a 0.5 percent decrease in property crimes.<sup>15</sup>

## Divergent Trends for Neighborhoods

While the overall impact on crime in both cities was generally positive, as with any major social policy intervention, CHA and AHA's efforts generated positive effects in some places and negative effects in others. Both cities experienced large and lasting crime declines in neighborhoods where public housing was torn down and in many neighborhoods where former public housing residents moved. But, in a relatively small number of areas in Chicago and Atlanta that received more than a few relocated households, crime decreased less than it would have if no former public housing residents had moved in.

## Substantial crime decreases in neighborhoods with public housing demolition

In the Chicago neighborhoods where public housing was demolished, violent crime decreased more than 60 percent, property crime declined 49 percent, and gun crime declined 70 percent between 2000 and 2008. In Atlanta, violent crime declined 13 percent and property crime declined 9 percent between 2002 and 2009 in neighborhoods with public housing demolition (figure 1).

## Crime would have been slightly lower in destination neighborhoods without relocated households

Crime generally decreased in the residential neighborhoods without public housing demolition in Atlanta and Chicago during the study periods. The solid lines in figure 2 represent the actual number of crimes reported. The



dashed lines show how much crime we predict would have occurred in these neighborhoods if there were no relocated households and public housing transformation had not occurred. The differences between the two lines are our estimates of the impact of the relocated households on crime in these neighborhoods. Our estimates of the effects of public housing relocation voucher holders on crime in the destination neighborhoods varied depending on the density of relocated households (see below); these estimates suggest that overall crime reports in the destination neighborhoods would have been 2.8 and 5.5 percent lower, respectively, for violent crime in Atlanta and Chicago. Without relocated households in these neighborhoods, property crime would have been lower by 1.1 percent in Atlanta and 2.8 percent in Chicago. Gun crime in Chicago also would have been 4.3 percent lower in destination neighborhoods.

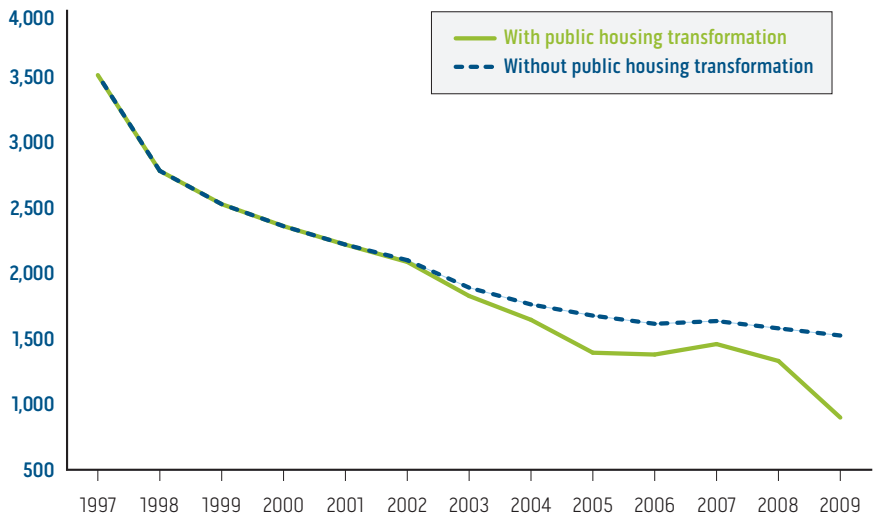
**Crime impact varies by the density of relocated households in a neighborhood**

Our findings clearly indicate a much smaller impact of public housing transformation on destination neighborhood crime rates than popular accounts imply. Nevertheless, they suggest that there are negative impacts for some neighborhoods when relocated households take up residence in them. Using neighborhoods with at least one relocated household, we defined four categories of relocatee density: **very low** density areas have more than zero to 2 relocated households per 1,000; **low** density areas have more than 2 to 6; **moderate** density areas have more than 6 to 14; and areas with **high** density have more than 14 relocated households per 1,000.

In Chicago, for instance, a neighborhood with a low density of relocatees at the beginning of the quarter has a (statistically) significantly higher rate of violent and property crimes per capita (5 percent) during that quarter than a neighborhood without relocatees,

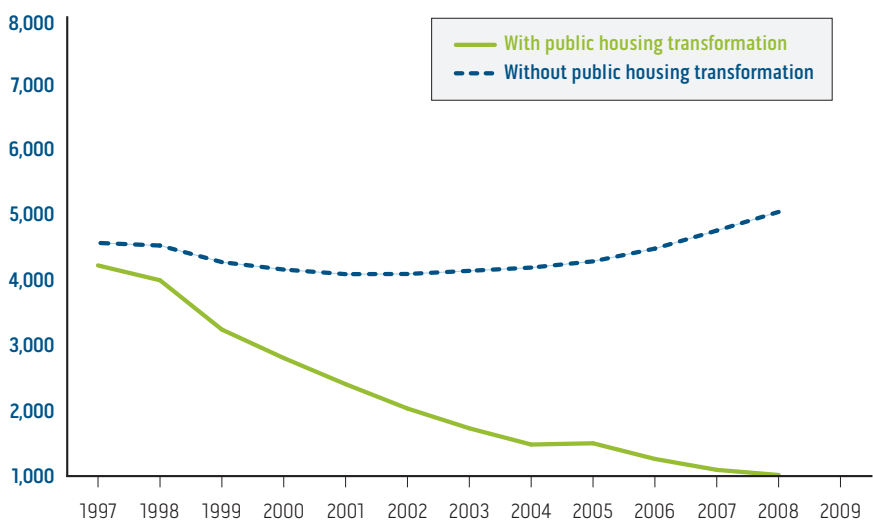
**Figure 1. Annual Number of Violent Crimes in Public Housing Tracts**

**Atlanta**



Source: Emory University analysis of data from the Atlanta Police Department and the Atlanta Housing Authority.

**Chicago**



Source: Urban Institute analysis of data from the Chicago Police Department and the Chicago Housing Authority.

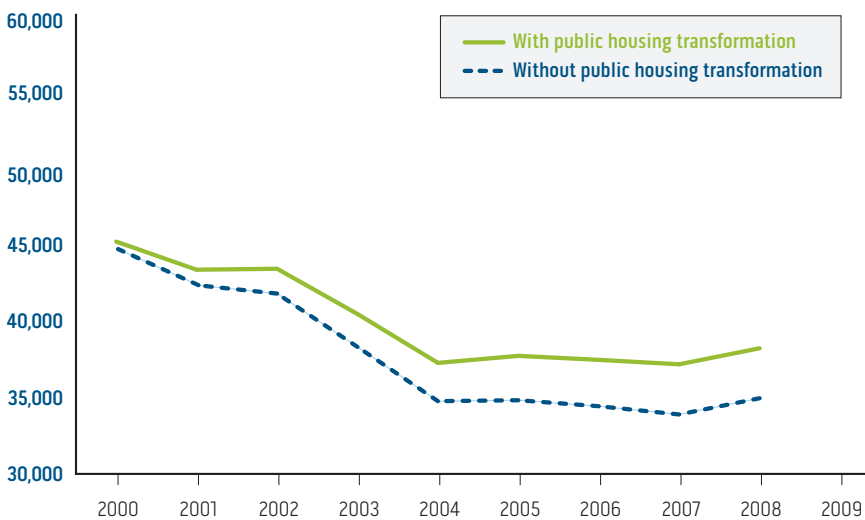
Figure 2. Annual Number of Violent Crimes in Destination Tracts

Atlanta



Source: Emory University analysis of data from the Atlanta Police Department and the Atlanta Housing Authority.

Chicago



Source: Urban Institute analysis of data from the Chicago Police Department and the Chicago Housing Authority.

all other things being equal.<sup>16</sup> Gun-related crime in Chicago and both property and violent crime in Atlanta are not affected until a moderate density of relocated households is reached. A neighborhood with a moderate density of relocated households compared with a similar neighborhood with no relocated households would have a violent crime rate that is 11 percent higher on average in Atlanta and 13 percent higher on average in Chicago. Compared with a similar neighborhood with no relocated households, a neighborhood with a high density of relocated households has a violent crime rate that is 21 percent higher in Atlanta and Chicago.

The analysis also looked at the effect of traditional voucher holders—those that were not relocated from public housing—on crime. Traditional voucher holders have much smaller effects on crime rates than relocated households, and it takes a much higher density of traditional voucher holders before we see any effect at all. For violent crime in Chicago, compared to a similar neighborhood with no traditional voucher holders, there is no impact on crime until the density of traditional voucher holders in the neighborhood exceeds 64 households per 1,000 households, which is nearly five times greater than the high-density threshold for public housing relocation vouchers. Violent crime per capita in Chicago neighborhoods with that many traditional voucher holders is about 8 percent higher, on average, than a neighborhood with no voucher holders.<sup>17</sup> In Atlanta, there were no statistically significant threshold effects at any level for traditional voucher holders in regards to property or violent crime.

These findings raise the question of how many and how often census tracts have densities of relocated households that are associated with higher crime rates. Because households move, census tracts may shift between our four density categories over the course of the study period. Also, since these thresholds are

based on cumulative voucher holders in a neighborhood, as more public housing relocation vouchers are added to the private market over the study period, there are likely to be more census tracts with moderate and higher densities of relocation households. In the study period, most Chicago tracts had no (33 percent) or very low (19 percent) densities of relocated households—the categories for which there are no effects on crime. Another third of tracts had relocated households at the density levels associated with impacts on crime (low, moderate, and high) for a majority of the study period. In the remaining 15 percent of tracts, the density of relocated households was also at these levels but not for a majority of the study period.

Similarly, most of Atlanta's census tracts fell into the lowest relocated household categories. From 2002 through 2009, about half the Atlanta census tracts included in the analysis had either no public housing transformation relocation households (21 percent) or had a very low or low density of relocation households (25 percent), where the effects of public housing transformation on crime were not statistically significant. Only about 13 percent of the census tracts in Atlanta had moderate or high densities of relocated households during the majority of the study period, while 41 percent had moderate or high densities of relocated households for less than half the study period, with the vast majority of these tracts reaching that threshold level during the last four quarters of the study period.

Finally, the tracts in both cities that experienced the greatest impact on crime associated with relocated households are neighborhoods that were already vulnerable, with high rates of poverty and crime before the arrival of public housing relocation households. In other words, our story is not the popular version of previously stable communities spiraling into decline because of public housing residents moving in, but rather a story of poor families moving into

areas that were already struggling. In Chicago tracts where there was at least a low density of relocated households for at least half the study period, the median income was \$31,400 and the poverty rate was 31 percent (citywide figures were \$38,600 and 20 percent). The violent crime rate in 2000 in these tracts was 29.6 per 1,000 people, compared with 16.6 per 1,000 for Chicago overall. The tracts that received relocated households, but only at the lowest category, are much less vulnerable. The median income in these tracts was \$50,858, the poverty rate was 15 percent, and the violent crime rate was 8.8 per 1,000 people. In 2008, the proportion of the city that experienced the impacts on crime associated with relocated households included 12 percent of tracts with a low density of relocated households, 16 percent with a moderate density, and 14 percent with a high density. Of the remaining tracts, 41 percent did not contain relocated households, and only 17 percent of tracts had a very low density of relocated households where the effects were not statistically significant.

In Atlanta, the census tracts classified as having a moderate or high density of relocated households for more than half the study period had median incomes of only \$26,000 and poverty rates of 32 percent (citywide figures were \$37,200 and 24 percent). The violent crime rate in these tracts in 2002 was 29.7 per 1,000 people; the rate for Atlanta overall was 22.7 per 1,000. By comparison, the median income (on average) in the tracts that had public housing relocation vouchers but never reached densities to classify them into the two highest threshold categories at any point during the study was \$56,090 and the poverty rate was 22.6 percent. The violent crime rate in these tracts was 22.6 per 1,000 people, equivalent to the overall rate for Atlanta. By the end of 2009, 14 percent of tracts in the city had a moderate density and 37 percent had a high density of relocated households. Of the remaining tracts, where no

impact on crime was found, 22 percent had no relocated households, 15 percent had a very low density, and 12 percent had a low density of relocated households.

## Policy Implications

Untangling the relationship between public housing transformation and crime trends is extremely challenging. Neighborhoods with preexisting higher crime rates are more likely to be affordable and accessible to voucher holders because they have higher vacancies, lower rents, and more landlords actively recruiting them (see Popkin and Cunningham 2000). The econometric techniques developed for this research provide the best estimation possible of the effect of large-scale public housing relocation on crime trends in the neighborhoods where relocated households move. This analysis shows a similar pattern in both Chicago and Atlanta: not the simplistic relationship implied by media accounts, but rather a complex picture of declining crime rates in both cities, a small net decrease in violent crime citywide associated with the transformation efforts, but effects in some neighborhoods—those that received more than a few relocated households—that suggest that crime would have been lower in those neighborhoods had there been no public housing transformation. Overall, our findings show that a substantial majority of neighborhoods in both cities were able to absorb public housing relocation voucher households without any adverse effect on neighborhood conditions.

This research raises many questions, most notably *why* the presence of even relatively small clusters of relocated households in the destination neighborhoods is associated with statistically significant differences in crime rates during that quarter, on average, compared to tracts without any relocation voucher holders, while the presence of traditional voucher holders seems to have little to

no impact. Historically, public housing developments suffered extreme rates of violent crime and drug trafficking; many households had members tied to gangs or the drug trade (Popkin et al. 2000; Popkin 2010). It is possible that some former households could have brought problem behaviors—or associates—with them, or that they could have become targets in their new communities because of gang turf issues.<sup>18</sup> Ethnographic research might help shed light on how relocated households affect neighborhood dynamics.

Regardless of the mechanism, a crucial policy implication from this research is the need for responsible relocation strategies—like those now employed in both Chicago and Atlanta—that offer former residents a real choice of housing and neighborhoods, and provide long-term support to them once they leave public housing.<sup>19</sup> Other housing authorities planning large-scale redevelopment should learn from the experiences of these two cities about how to support former residents in moving to a wider range of communities and not creating new concentrations of poverty in other vulnerable communities. These strategies include the following:

- comprehensive supportive services for relocated households before and after relocation;
- mobility counseling to ensure that residents are making informed choices about their housing and neighborhood options; and
- financial incentives to voucher holders and potential landlords in desirable areas, such as raising allowable fair-market rent levels there.<sup>20</sup>

Other types of strategies that HUD or local housing authorities should consider:

- direct leasing and brokerage for connecting voucher holders to market-rate rental housing and subsidized developments in a wider range of neighborhoods;

- performance incentives for housing authorities, rewarding those who help voucher holders move outside disadvantaged neighborhoods and avoid creating new concentrations of poverty;
- prohibitions on the use of vouchers in certain neighborhoods that already have high concentrations of assisted housing and/or requirements that they can only be used in more “opportunity rich” neighborhoods;
- requirements for all landlords to participate in the voucher program upon request;
- intensified fair housing enforcement aimed at expanding choices for minority voucher holders and families with children; and
- coordination with local law enforcement to ensure that patrol officers and narcotics and gang units are aware of the neighborhoods receiving relocated households to take action in preventing any violence that might result.

But promoting opportunity and choice will not be sufficient to address the needs of many relocated households—the families that endured the worst of the gang violence, drug trafficking, and management neglect that characterized the nation’s worst public housing. The substantial differences in crime impacts between relocated households and traditional voucher holders underscore the unique challenges of long-term public housing residents and suggest that these findings regarding relocated households should not be applied to the general voucher holder population. Many of these residents—who, after all, are moving involuntarily—require much more intensive support throughout the search, relocation, and post-move process than most housing authorities have provided to date. Other research on CHA families has found that many of these residents have never lived anywhere other than public housing and lack the skills and experience necessary to negotiate the private market (Popkin 2010). The Chicago Family Case

Management Demonstration showed that it was feasible to provide intensive, wraparound services—more intensive than the comprehensive services that CHA offers to all residents—to vulnerable families even after relocation (Popkin et al. 2010). The costs of these services were not insignificant, but not more expensive than standard place-based services. Further, the benefits in terms of stable households could be significant both for former public housing residents and the communities to which they move. ■

## Acknowledgments

This research was the result of a tremendously collaborative partnership. We thank George Galster for leading the design of the methodology and providing his deep subject matter expertise. We acknowledge Wesley Skogan for lending his insights to the methodology and report. For their critical review of our methodology, we thank John Hipp, Lance Hannon, Jens Ludwig, and Akiva Liberman. Our partners at Metropolitan Chicago Information Center provided access to rich geocoded data. The University of Illinois-Chicago’s Survey Research Laboratory helped organize and transcribe our focus groups. At the Urban Institute, we are grateful for the enlightening qualitative research conducted by Diane Levy. We acknowledge the thoughtful guidance given by Nancy La Vigne and Marge Turner. At Emory University, we thank Moshe Haspel, Lance Waller, Jeffrey Switchenko, Michael Leo Owens, and Elizabeth Griffiths (now at Rutgers) for their important contributions. We are appreciative of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Chicago Housing Authority for their generous support of this work. And finally, we acknowledge the Chicago Housing Authority and Atlanta Housing Authority for their collaboration, transparency, and commitment to evidence-driven policymaking.



## Notes

1. HOPE VI stands for Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere. Begun in 1992, it funded the demolition and rehabilitation of public housing around the country. For more information on the program, see Popkin, Cunningham, and Burt (2005).
2. See, for example, Bennett, Smith, and Wright (2006); Keating (2001); and National Housing Law Project et al. (2002).
3. See, for example, Mitch Dumke, “A Neighborhood’s Steady Decline,” *New York Times*, April 28, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/29/us/29cncguns.html>; and Jennifer Medina, “Subsidies and Suspicion,” *New York Times*, August 11, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/11/us/11housing.html?\\_r=2&src=me&ref=us](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/11/us/11housing.html?_r=2&src=me&ref=us).
4. We define neighborhoods as census tracts in this analysis. Throughout this brief, the terms “neighborhood,” “census tract,” and “tract” are used interchangeably. These are not in reference to Chicago’s 77 community areas, which are much larger, typically containing around nine census tracts.
5. Responsible relocation is a strategy that provides relocation counseling and other direct services to ensure that residents receive appropriate relocation benefits and have the opportunity to move to better neighborhoods than those they are leaving. See Annie E. Casey Foundation (2008).
6. See, for example, Popkin, Levy, and Buron (2009); Briggs, Popkin, and Goering (2010); and Turner et al. (2009).
7. Throughout the report, we refer to “traditional voucher holders” as those households that receive a Housing Choice Voucher subsidy but were not relocated from public housing.
8. Research is thin on the differences between Housing Choice Voucher households and public housing households, but evidence indicates that public housing households are more likely to be elderly and less likely to include children.
9. The connection between public housing and crime is complex, yet the two are clearly related. For example, research shows a moderate to strong positive relationship between the location of subsidized housing in cities and crime hotspots (Galster et al. 2002; McNulty and Holloway 2000; Roncek, Bell, and Francik 1981; Suresh and Vito 2007), and that public housing may impose negative crime externalities on surrounding neighborhoods (Sandler 2011). Opportunities for involvement in gang violence and drug sales, among other kinds of offending, are more readily available to youth who reside in public housing developments than to those who live outside (Popkin et al. 2000; Venkatesh 2000). Public housing residents also experience elevated levels of criminal victimization relative to their non-public housing counterparts (DeFrances and Smith 1998; DeKeseredy et al. 2003; Griffiths and Tita 2009; Holzman, Hyatt, and Dempster 2001; Kling, Liebman, and Katz 2005).
10. Evidence across multiple U.S. cities is mixed (Kleinhans and Varady forthcoming; Suresh and Vito 2009; Van Zandt and Mhatre 2009), although the most rigorous research suggests this phenomenon is not occurring as a result of HOPE VI demolition (Cahill, Lowry, and Downey 2011; Santiago, Galster, and Pettit 2003).
11. For an overview of the CHA’s history and the Plan for Transformation, see Popkin (2010).
12. The agency’s long history of mismanagement and broken promises compounded its problems with relocation (Popkin and Cunningham 2005; Venkatesh et al. 2004; Bennett et al. 2006).
13. Overall, 10 family public housing projects were included in the AHA’s Olympic Legacy Program, with seven receiving assistance through the HOPE VI program.
14. It is important to note that this analysis of “public housing transformation” only includes former public housing residents relocated with Section 8 vouchers and does not include analysis of residents living in rehabbed public housing or mixed-income developments without vouchers.
15. Due to data limitations, we were unable to perform the analysis for gun crime in Atlanta.
16. To the extent that neighborhoods with higher preexisting rates of crime ended up attracting more relocated households because vacancies were higher, rents were lower, or landlords were more heavily recruited there, our estimates will overstate the true effect of these households on subsequent crime rates.
17. Traditional voucher holders were associated with a very small impact on property crime per capita in Chicago (an average of less than 0.1 percent higher), but we could not identify thresholds for the effect.
18. We do not have empirical evidence to stake this claim, which would require linking addresses of crime victims and crime perpetrators to addresses of voucher holders.
19. This recommendation is consistent with a wide range of research showing how neighborhoods are adversely affected by concentrations of disadvantaged households (Galster et al. 2003; Galster, Cutsinger, and Malega 2008). There has been considerable discussion about how preventing such reconcentration can best be accomplished; see, for example, Turner and Williams (1998); Popkin and Cunningham (1999); Katz and Turner (2001, 2008); Pendall (2000); Galster et al. (2003); Grigsby and Bourassa (2004); Popkin et al. (2005); and Briggs et al. (2010).
20. Both the AHA and CHA were able to use the flexibilities afforded by HUD’s Moving to Work program to institute these reforms.

## References

- Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2008. *Responsible Redevelopment: Relocation Road Map 1.0*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- Bennett, Larry, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia Wright. 2006. *Where Are Poor People to Live: Public Housing at the Crossroads in Chicago*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Briggs, Xavier de Souza, and Peter Dreier. 2008. "Memphis Murder Mystery? No, Just Mistaken Identity." *Shelterforce* 22 (July).
- Briggs, Xavier de Souza, Susan Popkin, and John Goering. 2010. *Moving to Opportunity: The Story of an American Experiment to Fight Ghetto Poverty*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cahill, Meagan, Samantha Lowry, and P. Mitchell Downey. 2011. *Movin' Out: Crime Displacement and HUD's HOPE VI Initiative*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Cunningham, Mary, and Audrey Drosch. 2005. *Neighborhood Quality and Racial Segregation*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- DeFrances, Carol J., and Steven K. Smith. 1998. *Perceptions of Neighborhood Crime, 1995. Special Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- DeKeseredy, Walter S., Martin D. Schwartz, Shahid Alvi, and E. Andreas Tomaszewski. 2003. "Crime Victimization, Drug Use, and Alcohol Consumption in Canadian Public Housing." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 31(4): 383–96.
- Ellen, Ingrid Gould, Michael C. Lens, and Katherine O'Regan. 2011. *American Murder Mystery Revisited: Do Housing Voucher Households Cause Crime?* New York: Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy.
- Galster, George, Jackie Cutsinger, and Ron Malega. 2008. "The Costs of Concentrated Poverty: Neighborhood Property Markets and the Dynamics of Decline." In *Revisiting Rental Housing: Policies, Programs, and Priorities*, edited by Nicholas Retsinas and Eric Belsky (93–133). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Galster, George, Kathryn Pettit, Anna Santiago, and Peter Tatian. 2002. "The Impact of Supportive Housing on Neighborhood Crime Rates." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 24(3): 289–315.
- Galster, George, Peter Tatian, Anna Santiago, Kathryn Pettit, and Robin Smith. 2003. *Why NOT in My Backyard? Neighborhood Impacts of Deconcentrating Assisted Housing*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, Center for Urban Policy Research, Transaction Press.
- Griffiths, Elizabeth, and George Tita. 2009. "Homicide In and Around Public Housing: Is Public Housing a Hotbed, a Magnet, or a Generator of Violence for the Surrounding Community?" *Social Problems* 56(3): 474–93.
- Grigsby, William, and Steven Bourassa. 2004. "Section 8: The Time for Fundamental Program Change." *Housing Policy Debate* 15(4): 805–34.
- Hagedorn, John, and Brigid Rauch. 2007. "Housing, Gangs, and Homicide: What We Can Learn from Chicago." *Urban Affairs Review* 42(4): 435–56.
- Haynie, Dana, and Scott J. South. 2005. "Residential Mobility and Adolescent Violence." *Social Forces* 84:361–74.
- Holzman, Harold R., Robert A. Hyatt, and Joseph M. Dempster. 2001. "Patterns of Aggravated Assault in Public Housing: Mapping the Nexus of Offense, Place, Gender, and Race." *Violence Against Women* 7:662–84.
- Joseph, Mark L., Robert J. Chaskin, and Henry S. Webber. 2007. "The Theoretical Basis for Addressing Poverty through Mixed-Income Development." *Urban Affairs Review* 42(3): 369–409.
- Katz, Bruce, and Margery Turner. 2001. "Who Should Run the Housing Voucher Program? A Reform Proposal." *Housing Policy Debate* 12(2): 239–62.
- . 2008. "Rethinking U.S. Rental Housing Policy: A New Blueprint for Federal, State, and Local Action." In *Revisiting Rental Housing: Policies, Programs, and Priorities*, edited by Nicolas Retsinas and Eric Belsky (319–58). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Keating, Larry. 2001. *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Kleinhans, Reinout, and David Varady. Forthcoming. "A Review of Recent Evidence on Negative Spillover Effects of Housing Restructuring Programs in the USA and the Netherlands." *International Journal of Housing Policy*.
- Kling, Jeffery R., Jeffrey B. Liebman, and Lawrence F. Katz. 2005. "Bullets Don't Got No Name: Consequences of Fear in the Ghetto." In *Discovering Successful Pathways in Children's Development: Mixed Methods in the Study of Childhood and Family Life*, edited by Thomas S. Weisner (243–81). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McNulty, Thomas L., and Steven R. Holloway. 2000. "Race, Crime, and Public Housing in Atlanta: Testing a Conditional Effect Hypothesis." *Social Forces* 79(2): 707–29.
- National Housing Law Project, Poverty & Race Research Action Council, Sherwood Research Associates, and Everywhere and Now Public Housing Residents Organizing Nationally Together (ENPHRONT). 2002. *False HOPE: A Critical Assessment of the HOPE VI Public Housing Redevelopment Program*. Oakland, CA: National Housing Law Project
- Pendall, Rolf. 2000. "Why Voucher Holder and Certificate Users Live in Distressed Neighborhoods." *Housing Policy Debate* 11(4): 881–910.
- Popkin, Susan J. 2010. "A Glass Half-Empty: Public Housing Families in Transition." *Housing Policy Debate* 20(1): 42–62.
- Popkin, Susan J., and Mary Cunningham. 1999. *CHAC Section 8 Program: Barriers to Successful Leasing Up*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- . 2000. *Searching for Rental Housing with Section 8 in the Chicago Region*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- . 2005. "Demolition and Struggle: Public Housing Transformation in Chicago and the Challenges for Residents." In *Housing, Race, and Regionalism: Rethinking the Geography of Race in America*, by Xavier de Souza Briggs (176–96). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

- Popkin, Susan J., Mary Cunningham, and Martha Burt. 2005. "Public Housing Transformation and the Hard-to-House." *Housing Policy Debate* 16(1): 1–24.
- Popkin, Susan J., Diane K. Levy, and Larry Buron. 2009. "Has HOPE VI Transformed Residents' Lives? New Evidence from the HOPE VI Panel Study." *Housing Studies* 24(4): 477–502.
- Popkin, Susan J., Brett Theodos, Liza Getsinger, and Joe Parilla. 2010. "An Overview of the Chicago Family Case Management Demonstration." Supporting Vulnerable Public Housing Families Brief 1. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Popkin, Susan J., Victoria E. Gwiasda, Lynn M. Olson, Dennis P. Rosenbaum, and Larry Buron. 2000. *The Hidden War: Crime and the Tragedy of Public Housing in Chicago*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Rich, Michael J., Michael Leo Owens, Elizabeth Griffiths, Moshe Haspel, Kelly Hill, Adrienne Smith, and Katherine M. Stigers. 2010. *Evaluation of the McDaniel Glenn HOPE VI Revitalization: Final Report*. Atlanta, GA: Emory University.
- Roncek, Dennis W., Ralph Bell, and Jeffrey M. A. Francik. 1981. "Housing Projects and Crime." *Social Problems* 29(2): 151–66.
- Rosin, Hanna. 2008. "American Murder Mystery." *The Atlantic Monthly* 302(1): 40–54.
- Sampson, Robert J., Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls. 1997. "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy." *Science* 277(5328): 918–24.
- Sandler, Danielle. 2011. "Is Public Housing a Public Bad? Externalities of Chicago's Public Housing Demolitions." Job Market paper. Davis: Department of Economics, University of California, Davis.
- Santiago, Anna, George Galster, and Kathryn Pettit. 2003. "Neighborhood Crime and Scattered-Site Public Housing." *Urban Studies* 40(11): 2147–63.
- Sharkey, Patrick, and Robert J. Sampson. 2010. "Destination Effects: Residential Mobility and Trajectories of Adolescent Violence in a Stratified Metropolis." *Criminology* 48(3): 639–81.
- Suresh, Geetha, and Gennaro F. Vito. 2007. "The Tragedy of Public Housing: Spatial Analysis of Hotspots of Aggravated Assaults in Louisville, KY (1989–1998)." *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 32(1/2): 99–115.
- . 2009. "Homicide Patterns and Public Housing: The Case of Louisville, KY (1989–2007)." *Homicide Studies* 13(4): 411–33.
- Turner, Margery, and Kale Williams. 1998. *Housing Mobility: Realizing the Promise*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Turner, Margery Austin, Susan J. Popkin, and Lynette Rawlings. 2009. *Public Housing and the Legacy of Segregation*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- Van Zandt, Shannon, and Pratik Mhatre. 2009. "The Effects of Housing Choice Voucher Households on Neighborhood Crime: Longitudinal Evidence from Dallas." Working Paper 09-01. College Station: Sustainable Housing Research Unit, College of Architecture, Texas A&M University.
- Venkatesh, Sudhir Alladi. 2000. *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Venkatesh, Sudhir, Isil Celimli, Douglass Miller, and Alexandra Murphy. 2004. *Chicago Public Housing Transformation: A Research Report*. New York: Center for Urban Research and Policy, Columbia University.



**Data:** Information on voucher holders is collected from each housing authority using data from HUD Form 50058, which is completed as part of the annual recertification process. These records were linked over time, and voucher holder locations were aggregated to the census tract for each quarter in the study period. Reports of Part I crimes were collected from each city's police department and aggregated by quarter and census tract. In Chicago, data from Census 2000 and Census 2010 were used to create population and household counts at the tract level, while the Atlanta estimates used Census 2000 and population estimates calculated by the Atlanta Regional Commission. The final analysis samples contained observations for 843 tracts over 37 quarters for Chicago (2000–08) and 121 tracts and 32 quarters for Atlanta (2002–09). This brief also draws on qualitative data from focus groups conducted in Chicago in 2010.

**Methods:** We estimate negative binomial, fixed-effects panel models of crime counts as a function of relocated household rates per 1,000 households. Our base model treats this key variable as continuous; our threshold model breaks the rate into various categories to test for nonlinear responses. We control for the concentration of voucher holders who are not relocated households, as well as the citywide crime trend and seasonality of criminal activity. Tract fixed-effects, the spatial lag of the given crime dependent variable, and population with its coefficient fixed to one complete the specification. Our estimates from the threshold model are used to determine how much crime would have occurred in the absence of the public housing transformation in destination neighborhoods.

The model just described does not tell us what effect relocation had on crime in neighborhoods where public housing was demolished. To predict how many crimes would have been reported in these neighborhoods without demolition, we estimated an OLS model for these tracts for each crime type, using data before and through the study period, and setting crime counts to missing after the relocation of households began in preparation for the first building demolition in each tract. We used the coefficients in this model, which included controls for time, season, and tract fixed effects to produce a count of “expected” crimes in these neighborhoods. Subtracting the expected number from the actual number of crimes gives us the change in crime due to the public housing demolition in these tracts. To calculate the overall net effect for the city, we compare the changes in actual versus expected crime for both public housing and destination neighborhoods. Our methodology is described in more detail in our forthcoming article in *CityScape*.

## About the Authors

**Susan J. Popkin** is both director of the Urban Institute's Program on Neighborhoods and Youth Development and a senior fellow in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center.

**Michael J. Rich** is an associate professor of political science and director of the Office of University-Community Partnerships at Emory University.

**Leah Hendey, Chris Hayes, and Joe Parilla** are research associates in the Urban Institute's Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center.

Copyright © April 2012

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Permission is granted for reproduction of this document, with attribution to the Urban Institute.

URBAN INSTITUTE

2100 M Street, NW

Washington, DC 20037-1231

(202) 833-7200

[paffairs@urban.org](mailto:paffairs@urban.org) [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)