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Employment Outcomes of the Clarksdale HOPE VI Program

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Abstract

The HOPE VI initiative aimed to reshape neighborhoods in terms of their resident socioeconomic characteristics, business activity, levels of community collaboration, and economic growth. The goal of this research was to examine the relationship between education and employment while controlling for the type of housing received at relocation. This paper is part of a larger quasi-experimental research evaluation. Data sources included administrative records, baseline and follow-up surveys. The survey data was collected from the main adult in the family during face-to-face interviews two years apart. The questionnaire collected information about residents' demographics, socioeconomic, health, housing, and satisfaction with the support services. For this paper, the focus was on education, type of housing received at relocation, and employment status at relocation. Even though the follow-up survey was conducted during the 2009 recession, the results show that improvements in education made a significant difference in the employment outcomes, particularly for the residents who were not relocated in another public housing development.

Keywords: Public Housing; HOPE VI; Employment; Education; Poverty; Urban Revitalization; Subsidies.

Introduction

Clarksdale was a public housing neighborhood in downtown Louisville, where high poverty, drug dealing, prostitution, and other criminal behavior were part of the daily life (Stone, 2011b). Originally, developed for low-income working families, as middle-class working families moved to affordable housing in the suburb, Clarksdale became a very-low-income housing project. But, because renters with very-low incomes yield minimal revenue, the budget for housing management shrank, and overtime these units became too expensive to maintain (Buron et al., 2002; Smith, 2002; Turner, 2007; Stone, 2011b, 2011a). Moreover, as the majority of the businesses moved to neighborhoods with higher economic status, this urban area fell into deeper poverty and became an economic burden for the community (Popkin, 2002; Moschetti, 2003; Turner, 2007) (HUD, 2002a, HUD 2002b, GAO, 2003). By the early 2000s, Clarksdale area was in dire need of support to mitigate the social and economic issues and the potential health hazards associated with older buildings. Moreover, to attract investment and higher income populations, it needed to be fully revitalized, to erase it from the memory of the local population as an undesirable place to be or live. The area carried such a social stigma that tearing it down and rebuilding it under a different name was the only viable solution to create a vibrant social and economic urban neighborhood.

The local housing authority agency applied and obtained revitalization funding from the Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE) VI federal program, administered by the Housing Urban Development (HUD). Clarksdale HOPE VI urban redevelopment program was implemented between 2004 and 2010. A local network of private, public, and non-profit agencies worked together to rebuild the physical environment, while supporting the residents in their efforts to lift themselves out of poverty; 20% of the 22 million dollars were used to invest in residents' training, education, apprenticeship, job readiness, life skills, homeownership and financial counseling. The case management program aimed to improve the wellbeing of the

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former residents by increasing their social and economic capital. Clarksdale was redeveloped into a new neighborhood, Liberty Green. The new name is indicative of the “green neighborhood” with energy efficient publicly and privately owned housing. Some apartment units are available at market value prices while others are subsidized, and thus, people with various social and economic capital could afford to live there.

One common denominator of all of the HOPE VI programs in Louisville, Kentucky was the strong emphasis on training and education for the public housing residents, to enable residents to be more competitive on the job market. This is consistent with prior research that showed the positive impact of education on employment in disadvantaged populations (Kalil et al., 1998). In Clarksdale, at baseline, only 37.7% of all adults had a high school education and only 27.5% were employed, of which less than half were in full-time jobs. Training and education for the underemployed was expected to help them advance to positions with better pay.

The purpose of this paper was to report on the changes in the economic variables after relocation, specifically, on the changes in employment status, and to explore whether the type of housing received at relocation was a confounder variable for the relationship between education and employment. The patterns reported in this paper were identified during the Clarksdale HOPE VI Program Evaluation, conducted between 2004 and 2010 (Stone, 2011a). The protocol for the program evaluation research study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Boards for at the University of Louisville (2005-2010) and University of Kentucky (2010-2012).

Theoretical Framework. A series of social theories, including the classic sociological model, the social capital and the social network theories attempted to explain individual wellbeing as related to employment, and individual employment in relationship to the socioeconomic makeup of the neighborhood of residence. While the factors conducive to change in people’s wellbeing are not known, the classic sociological model (Janlert & Hammarstrom, 2009) links individual wellbeing to the economic deprivation, suggesting that higher levels of education are associated with increased chances to obtain and maintain employment, a higher individual income, ability to afford better housing, and thus, with an improved quality of life.

Some researchers (Wilson, 1987; Briggs, 1998, 2006) suggested that residing in mixed-income neighborhood is an opportunity to access a more diverse job network, as neighbors with different levels of education and income might be a source of information about employment opportunities and serve as “employed role models” too (Wilson, 1987). Poor neighborhoods are “low” or “deficient” in social capital (Wilson, 1987; Briggs, 1998, 2006), and have “homogeneous and dense” social networks where the information on jobs and employment opportunities may be redundant (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). To examine the relationship between employment and education we developed a multivariable model to predict the likelihood of full-time employment based on having at least a high school education, while controlling for housing type received at relocation. Relocation to yet another public housing development would represent no change in the neighborhood impact, while relocation to scattered housing or to a home using Section 8 housing vouchers would be more desirable and more likely to lead to change in opportunity.

Method

Population

The former residents of Clarksdale included a mix of families with children, elders, and single individuals. Some of the residents resided in Clarksdale all or most of their lives, others relocated there from other places, including other states, while others were relocated to Clarksdale from Park DuValle, the first area of Louisville that was demolished and redeveloped with HOPE VI funds. The overall population included 1767 residents in 695 households of which 59 households were elders. Given the focus on employment and income, the elder group (65 years or older) was not included in the analyses.

Data Items

The baseline and follow-up questionnaires were very similar. At baseline, we collected a significant amount of information about the adults and children, including, demographic, socioeconomic, housing, physical and mental health, case management participation, school behavior and after school participation, community engagement, perception of safety, and relocation experience. To measure change, the follow-up survey included many of the baseline questions, to which questions about the case management satisfaction and the new neighborhood were asked.

The focus of this paper was on the changes in the socioeconomic indicators. To measure education, respondents were asked “hat is the highest level of education completed”, “do you have any other training other than high school or high school equivalent”, “do you have any certificates”. To measure employment and income, the questions asked included: “have you ever worked for pay”, “are you currently working for pay”, “how many jobs do you have”, “what is your employment status at your main job”, “for how long have you worked at your main job”, “how many hours per week do you work”, “what is your hourly pay”, “what is your annual income”, “do you have other sources of income, if yes, what other sources of income do you have”.

Data Collection

Data was collected using face-to-face surveys from a random sample selected at baseline (2005-2006); the baseline respondents were invited to participate in the follow-up (2008-2009) survey two years later. Survey data was matched and merged with the administrative records available through the tracking system. The data were matched by the resident identification number.

Sampling

The sample was selected at from the list of former Clarksdale residents, using a stratified random technique, with family structure being the stratum criterion: (1) families with children, (2) families without children. It was estimated that to achieve a ±5 percent precision level and a statistical power of at least 80%, we needed a minimum sample of 200 families from the group with children and 155 families from the group without children; to account for non-responses we over-sampled both groups by 30%. Table 1 shows that the response rates were 96.4 (188 of 195) for the group of families with children, and 76.8% (116 of 151) for the group without children; the overall response rate was 87.9 percent (304 of 346).

Table 1: Survey Response Rates

	Population	Selected	Baseline		Follow-up		Baseline + Follow-up of Selected
			Participants	Response Rate	Participants	Response Rate	
Families:	N	N	N	%	N	%	%
With children	388	195	188	96.4	148	78.7	75.9
Without children	248	151	116	76.8	94	81.0	62.3
Total	636	346	304	87.9	242	79.6	69.9

Data Analyses

Traditional univariate and bivariate analyses were used to describe the distribution of the data and examine group differences in employment. A multivariate logistic regression model predicted the likelihood to be employed at follow-up by resident’s education level while controlling for the type of housing received at relocation.

Results

Population

From the administrative data (Stone, 2011a), we know that the 695 Clarksdale households included 1,767 individual residents, 874 adults (19 years of age or older) and 893 children (ages 0 to 18). Overall, there were 1,157 females (65.5%) and 610 males (34.5%) of all ages. Among the 1,767 residents, 276 (15.6%) were 5-years old or younger, 617 (34.9%) were 6 to 18-years old, 806 (45.6%) were adults ages 19 to 64, and 68 (3.8%) were ages 65 or above. The majority of residents were African-American (1,716 or 97.1%), 41 (2.3%) were Caucasian, and 10 (0.6%) were of “other” race.

The administrative records for the marital status, education, and employment (Stone, 2011a) showed that of the 959 individuals age 16 or older, 242 (25.2%) were single, 18 were married (2.1%), and 59 were divorced, separated, or widowed (6.8%); however, marital status was not available for 640 of the residents ages 16 and above (73.2%). In the overall population majority (97%) were African American, 87% were female heads-of-household, and 2.1% were married.

The data on employment, education and income (Stone, 2011a) showed that 118 (12.3%) of the 959 residents of working age were employed, and the majority, 617 (64.3%), had no work experience. The unemployment rate among the former Clarksdale residents was over 87%. Barriers to employment included disability, lack of education or work experience, difficulties with child care and transportation, and lack of jobs.

Sample

All respondents in the survey sample were African-American (Stone, 2011a). The demographic figures at baseline and at follow-up are fairly similar (Table 2); majority of respondents were women, and very few of them were married. When compared to the population, the baseline and the follow-up samples had a slightly higher proportion of female respondents, but the difference was not significant. The 304 baseline households consisted of 806 people, of which 451 (56%) were children and 355 (44%) were adults; there were 523 (65%) females and 283 (35%) males. These proportions were almost the same at follow-up. The average age of the survey participants was 41 years (SD = 16) at baseline and 44.7 (15.7) at follow-up.

Relocation

The top reasons for which residents favored relocation (Stone, 2011a) were: (1) to move to a larger and better home, (2) have access to better schools, (3) get away from gangs and drugs, and (4) to live in a better neighborhood. The top reasons for which some residents did not want to relocate were (1) losing physical proximity to other family members, (2) the need for children to change schools, (3) being farther away from the work place, and (4) the potential lack of access to public transportation. The top neighborhood problems (Stone, 2011a) identified by respondents were: the sale and use of drugs, the groups of people who were “just hanging out” in the area, the number of teenage mothers, unemployment, gang activity, and the trash/junk in the parking lots, streets, lawns, and sidewalks. The least problematic issues (Stone, 2011a) with living in Clarksdale included: availability of transportation, the access to good schools, and police responsiveness. At baseline, 24.3% of respondents said that their apartment was infested with cockroaches, 3.5% said they had rats or mice, and 37.1% reported mold on the walls, ceilings, or in the bathrooms.

According to the final evaluation report (Stone, 2011a), at follow-up, 85% benefited from housing subsidies; 94.4% had government or charity subsidies of which a third were housing choice vouchers. 76.5% of the residents were satisfied with their new home, 64.6% received their top preference, 15% received their second preference, and 16.4% did not receive their preferred housing. At follow-up, 63.2% were still at the address where they were originally relocated. Table 2 shows that, at follow-up, about half of the respondents were located in another public housing development, while the other half was located either in scattered housing, or in market-value housing for which they received vouchers.

Education

At baseline, 37.7% of the survey respondents had at least a high school or high school equivalent education, compared to 55.5% at follow-up (Table 2); the 18 percentage points increase represent a 47.2% improvement rate. At follow-up, a high participation in training

(40.1%) and in vocational and technical programs (29.2%) was observed, and 9 (3.3%) respondents earned a college degree, one of them being a doctoral student (Stone, 2011a).

Table 2: Respondents’ Sociodemographic Characteristics

	Baseline (%)	Follow-up (%)
Households		
All families with children	61.8	61.2
Only adults <65, no children	38.2	38.8
Respondent’s Gender		
Female	90.8	92.6
Male	9.2	7.4
Respondent’s Age		
19-24	12.8	0
25-34	35.9	39.2
35-49	30.9	29.8
50-64	20.4	31.0
Total (19-64)	100.0	100.0
Marital Status		
Single – never married	42.1	45.0
Married	3.9	4.5
Divorced/Widowed/Separated	9.5	9.9
Unknown	44.4	40.5
Respondent’s Education		
High School/GED	37.7	55.5
Certificates	12.9	17.5
Training other than HS/GED	0.0	40.1
Vocational/Technical	0.0	29.2
Associate/Bachelor/Graduate	0.0	3.3
Housing Type		
Scattered Housing	12.8	17.5
Housing Choice Voucher	30.3	32.9
Public Housing Development	56.9	49.6

Employment and Income

The patterns in the data (Table 3) show a movement from unemployment to part- or full-time employment, and from part-time to full-time employment. The overall proportion of respondents with work experience increased from 63.2% to 75.6%; among the group without children the proportion increased significantly (p=.025) from 57.3% to 80%.

Table 3: Employment

	Baseline (%)	Follow-up (%)	p
Ever worked for pay/ Work experience	63.2	75.6	.581
Has kids	67.0	72.7	.136
No kids	57.3	80.0	.025
Currently employed/work for pay	28.9	29.8	.897
Has kids	31.4	34.5	<.001
No kids	22.6	22.1	.004
Looked for a job (prior 12-month)	61.5	50.0	.003

Has kids	68.9	56.4	.005
No kids	49.5	40.2	.359
Has multiple jobs	9.6	2.7	.063
Number of work hours/week			.101
Less than 20 hours	13.3	12.9	
20 – 34.5 hours	43.4	37.1	
35 hours and more	43.4	50.0	
At current job for:			.699
Less than 3 months	23.9	11.4	
3 months to less than 6	12.0	8.6	
6 months to less than 1 year	14.5	15.7	
1 year to less than 3	15.4	28.6	
3 years or more	34.2	35.7	
Average \$/hour (mean, SD)	8.40 (2.1)	10.06 (5.45)	.001
Income from employment			.005
No earned income	66.1	72.3	
\$5,000 or less	3.5	1.1	
\$5,001 – \$10,000	16.1	4.7	
\$10,001 – \$15,000	4.4	5.5	
Over \$15,000	9.9	13.9	
Sources of Income (past 12-month)			
Work/Employment	27.5	26.6	.454
Food stamps	67.8	73.0	.125
Has kids	81.0	79.1	
No kids	59.8	56.8	
Cash assistance/welfare	14.3	4.7	.003
Has kids	21.3	7.2	
No kids	7.8	1.1	
Adult SSI disability	21.1	23.7	.625
Child SSI disability	9.6	10.6	.534
Unemployment benefits	0.0	1.8	.022

Although not statistically significant, the proportion of individuals in full-time employment (35h or more) increased from 43.4% to 50% between the two points in time. Of those employed at follow-up, 50% worked 35+ hours (full-time), 37.1% worked between 20 and 34 hours per week (part-time), and 12.9% worked less than 20 hours per week in odd, temporary, or seasonal jobs. At baseline, 66.1% had no earned income, and only 27.5% were employed. The proportion of respondents with multiple jobs decreased from 9.6% to 2.7%, while the average hourly pay increased significantly ($p=.001$) from \$8.40 to \$10.06, which was still much lower than the median income level in the area, which was \$13.92 in 2006 and \$19.22 in 2010 as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. About 70% of those employed at baseline obtained their job *after* the relocation (Stone, 2011b). At follow-up, 35.7% were at the same job for three or more years, 28.6% for one to three years, and 35.7% job for less than one year; 1.8% were eligible for unemployment benefits.

Figure 1 provides a visual of the number of new jobs secured by former Clarksdale residents over time; this graph supports the claim that most new jobs were secured in the early stages of the case management. Nevertheless, at follow-up, in the midst of the 2009 economic recession, only 50% of the unemployed were searching for a job vs. 61.5% at baseline.

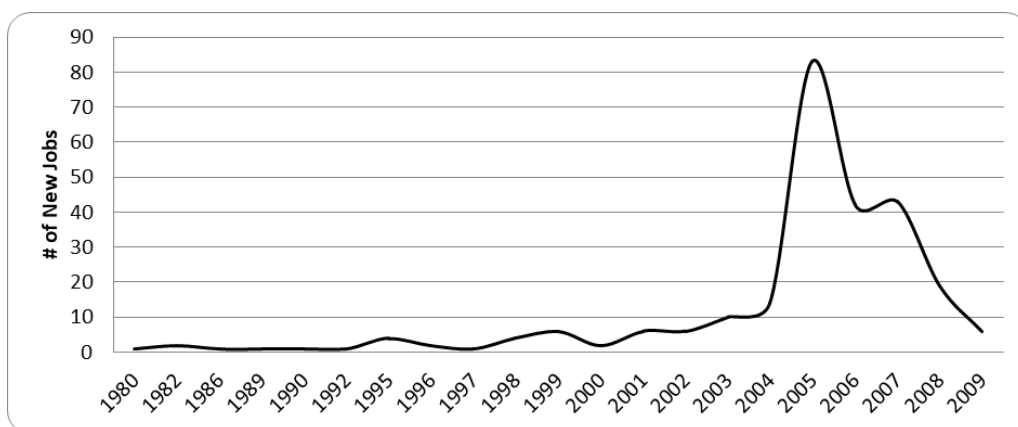


Figure 1: Number of New Jobs by Year (Administrative Data Tracking System)

The follow-up income data shows an increase in the annual income; the proportion of residents with incomes over \$10,000 increased from 13.4% to 19.4%. 76.6% of the households were below poverty, a significant decrease ($p < .05$) from the baseline (Stone, 2011a), but the proportion of respondents without any earned income (72.3%) was significantly higher ($p < .05$) than at baseline (66.1%).

The evaluation report (Stone, 2011a) showed that, overall, 88.3% had incomes below the federal poverty level, while the others were either at or slightly above the poverty level. Of all surveyed households with income below federal poverty levels, 59.5% were households with children. Specifically, 421 children (93.3%) of the 451 children in our sample were in poverty (Stone, 2011a). While the majority of former Clarksdale residents were eligible for social supports, only 14.3% were taking advantage of cash assistance at baseline and an even smaller proportion at follow-up (4.7%). But, the proportion of people receiving food stamps or other type of in-kind supports increased significantly from 67.8% to 73%. There was a slight increase in the proportion of residents with disability income for adults and children, not statistically significant though ($p > .05$).

Barriers to Employment

At baseline, the lack of transportation (27.4%) or of childcare (23.8%), disability (22.6%), lack of jobs (17.7%) and lack of work experience (16.1%) were the most common reasons for not working (Stone, 2011a). At follow-up, a significant decrease was recorded in the proportion that lacked transportation (13.4%), childcare (13.4%), or work experience (9.4%), 6% said there is a lack of jobs, and 4.5% claimed disability; the proportion of individuals with two or more barriers to employment increased significantly from 24.3% to 53.1%. There was a significant increase, from 2% to 17.4%, in the proportion of respondents who had “other” barriers, most commonly specified being poor health and low/inadequate education. Thus, noteworthy changes in barriers to employment included an increase in the proportion with health problems (36.7% to 52.2%), a decrease in the proportion of respondents who cared for disabled family members (15.7% to 3%) and a decrease in the proportion of respondents who said that they were unable to find a job in the area (15.7% to 8.5%).

Multivariable Regression

The logistic regression model showed that respondents with at least a high school or equivalent education were almost twice ($OR=1.94$) as likely to be employed at follow-up when compared to those with less than high school education; respondents with a housing voucher ($OR=1.998$) or relocated to scattered housing ($OR=2.298$) were at least two times more likely to be employed than residents who were relocated to another high density low-income public housing development. Thus, the type of housing received at relocation was critically important to the program’s success to improve employment outcomes; families relocated to other poverty-

stricken public housing developments were significantly less likely to be employed two years after the relocation.

Table 4: *Logistic regression to predict employment status*

	OR	p	95% C.I. OR	
			Lower	Upper
High school or above	1.940	.034	1.053	3.574
Housing Choice Voucher	1.998	.037	1.043	3.828
Scatter Housing	2.298	.030	1.082	4.882
Constant	0.185	.000		

Goodness of fit ($\chi^2(4) = 6.028$, $p = .197$, Nagelkerke = 7.6%)

Discussion

The findings of this research evaluation should be considered as the early outcomes of the Clarksdale HOPE VI program, which assessed how people fared after relocation (Stone, 2011a), whether they made strides toward self-sufficiency. This study reported on the data collected at two points in time, using a random sample, which allowed generalization of the results to the population from which it was extracted.

At relocation, the majority of residents received their first or second choice of housing, and two years later, most people resided at the same place where they were relocated. Initially, Clarksdale residents were reluctant to relocate when they learned about the redevelopment, the long-term residents being the most reluctant of all. But, at follow-up the majority of the residents were satisfied with their new housing arrangement (Stone, 2011a). Overall, cases that were relocated to scattered sites were better off than those who were relocated to another public housing development, even though the new neighborhoods are only slightly better in terms of income than Clarksdale was. However, the areas of relocation were safer, more appropriate to raise children, and it appeared that the respondents were well integrated in their new communities (Stone, 2011a).

A key finding of this study was that although the unemployment rate remained constant, the proportion of residents with full-time employment increased at a time when the county's unemployment rate was almost double. The respondents' incomes had increased, in spite of the recession, when there were no pay raises, and most companies reduced cost by laying people off, or by lowering employees' incomes to avoid lay-offs (Stone, 2011a).

As respondents improved their education and earned more work experience, they obtained better jobs and became more self-sufficient (Stone, 2011a). Increasing the number of years of education, the number of years of experience, acquiring new skills, etc. appears to have helped people lift themselves out of poverty even though future studies are needed to confirm this trend. Nevertheless, a greater proportion of individuals reported two or more barriers to employment at follow-up than at baseline. As noted in the final evaluation report, this was a critical finding that must be interpreted in the macro context of the local employment market. Nevertheless, it transpired that although significant improvements in the training and education of this HOPE VI population were recorded, the residents were still underprepared for the jobs available on the market when they were compared to the rest of the unemployed labor force. This finding was supported by the high proportion of respondents who perceived their education to be inadequate for the job market. This perception may explain the increased participation in education and training programs. On the same note, efforts were made to increase awareness of the importance of health and personal care at work place, but also as strong determinants of health and wellbeing (Stone, 2011a).

The group of families with children, used HOPE VI as their opportunity to move to a better neighborhood, away from the crime and other problems over which they had no control (Stone, 2011a). By moving away from areas with high crime, to better housing and safer neighborhood,

adults and children alike are expected to improve their health and wellbeing (Stone, 2011a). Further, improvements in education and working experience could yield higher employment rates and income levels as noted by prior studies (Kalil et al., 1998; Reynolds, 2000) focused on lifting low-income populations out of poverty.

The manifestation of the ultimate program outcomes could take 10 years or even longer (Stone, 2011a). The program was evaluated with a pre-post design, with 2-3 years between baseline and follow-up surveys. Changes in education that can occur in just 2-3 years are minimal; the greatest change was in the group of residents who did not complete high school, but were able to do so with case management support. Further, changes in the employment as a result of changes in the education are expected to take a different length of time for each individual, in most cases a longer period of time than the lag between baseline and follow-up. For this study, exploring the changes in various indicators, and the direction of change were of main interest, to identify any necessary mid-course action (Stone, 2011a) to be recommended to the program directors. Finally, the length of time in case management was different from one family or individual to another, the type of services they received were tailored to their needs, and thus a longer lag time would provide a better outcome assessment. However, the increase in the proportion of people with high school diploma or equivalent, of individuals who completed some employment training, earned some work experience, and the increase in the proportion of individuals with full-time employment and in the average hourly pay, were above the expectations (Stone, 2011a) for such a short period of time. The multivariable model confirmed the expectations that residents with at least a high school education, who moved away from large and dense public housing developments were more likely to be employed at follow-up.

Limitations

The baseline survey was delayed by lengthy contract negotiations. By the time the data collection process started, over 90% of the households were already relocated; only 65 out of the 695 households were still residing in Clarksdale (Stone, 2011a). Further, the residents enrolled in the case management at the time of the survey were more likely to participate in the study than those who were not enrolled at that time; the proportion of case management participants was 56.5% in the sample as compared to 38% in the administrative data. At the time of the baseline survey most families with children were participating in the case management program, hence their higher survey response rate. This may be a result of the priority given to the most vulnerable families, families with children and of elderly, during relocation.

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