

## CHA Families and the Plan for Transformation

## Escaping the Hidden War *Safety Is the Biggest Gain for CHA Families*

Susan J. Popkin and David J. Price

*“The CHA’s developments were among the most dangerous places in the nation.”*

A main goal of the HOPE VI program was to improve public housing by replacing failed developments with healthy and safe communities that offer a better quality of life for residents. In 1999, when the Chicago Housing Authority’s (CHA) Plan for Transformation began, the agency’s large family developments were notorious for being among the most dangerous places in the nation. Decades of failed federal policies, managerial incompetence, financial malfeasance, and basic neglect had left these developments in an advanced state of decay, with overwhelming crime and violence and near-absolute gang dominance. During the 1990s, the CHA had fought an all-out war against the drug trafficking and violence in its developments, spending \$500 million on such efforts as law enforcement “sweeps” intended to remove drug dealers and gangs from its buildings, in-house police and security forces, and tenant patrols, none of which had any lasting effect on the crime and disorder (Popkin et al. 2000).

In 2001, before the HOPE VI redevelopment initiative began in Madden/Wells, respondents reported extreme problems

with crime and disorder. Over 80 percent reported “big problems” with drug sales and drug use in their development and more than 70 percent reported “big problems” with shootings and violence. Residents’ perceptions were supported by official crime statistics; in 2001, reported violent crime in Madden/Wells was more than two times that for the rest of the city. The CHA’s plans for Madden/Wells called for demolishing the development and replacing it with a new mixed-income development called Oakwood Shores.

By 2005, about 60 percent of Madden/Wells respondents had been relocated, most to the private market with vouchers. Respondents who had moved out reported dramatically improved circumstances—the proportion of voucher holders reporting big problems with drugs and violent crime fell by about 50 percentage points. However, the respondents still living in their original units in 2005 were living in conditions just as bad as in 2001. Indeed, circumstances were possibly worse; more than half of the development was empty and, according to respondents, gangs and drug dealers from recently closed

## A Good Place to Raise Children

Matthew and his granddaughter Amara were among the last families to move out of Madden/Wells. When we interviewed them in 2005, they were living with Amara's older sister and infant brother in a nearly vacant building. Matthew described his efforts to keep the drug dealers out of his building and to keep his grandchildren safe:

I keep them out of the building here. I don't have them around the building—at least, I talk to them and tell them, don't be doing drugs in this building. I got kids going to school, people going in and out. I got a senior citizen in this building, so I usually take care at this point. . . . You have to stand up to them . . . then you stand up to the ones that's controlling them, not the ones that's out there working for them. You know, you let them know how you feel about it, because if you don't, they'll run over you.

In 2005, Amara was 16 and, although doing well in school, was facing many challenges. Her mother was a drug addict and Amara described being a member of a crew, being involved in fights, and being arrested. Worst of all, Amara had witnessed her father being shot during a fight in Madden/Wells:

. . . When he got shot, I was close to him, that's why I think . . . that's what made him not want to come around me for a long time, because he thought like he almost had me killed, I guess, because I was just leaving him. . . . I was walking home from him. . . . The person came up out of nowhere, got to shooting him. Him being who he is, he running toward the person. . . . I ran behind the tree. I didn't know it was him. My momma grabbed me. Wouldn't nobody tell me what it was, but I'm crying because I'm scared, though. . . .

Matthew's first choice for relocation was Oakwood Shores, but he lost his job and the CHA relocated the family to another traditional public housing development. When we interviewed them in 2009, Matthew now had custody of three more of his grandchildren and Amara had a baby of her own. But the family was doing relatively well and both Matthew and Amara felt the new development was much better and a good place for raising children.

Matthew said,

Occasionally, people fight each other. Sometimes you hear a shot or two. But the last time I heard any shots around here was four, five months ago. You know, so . . . they don't do that quite often out here. And then, usually, when you hear people shooting, they're usually shot up in the air, not at the individual.

Amara agreed that the new development was much safer:

Even in the little violence that has happened over here, it hasn't been much, and I can honestly say if they have been shooting over here, I've been in my house and I ain't heard it.

developments, such as Robert Taylor Homes and Stateway Gardens, were moving into Madden/Wells in search of new territory. Finally, the remaining residents were disproportionately those who faced multiple challenges, such as substance abuse, mental illness, and criminal records (Popkin et al. 2008).

Because of the crime and rapidly deteriorating physical conditions—

one building had to be closed on an emergency basis when the heat stopped working—the CHA accelerated the schedule for closing the development and relocated the last residents in August 2008. In 2009, all of the Madden/Wells Panel Study respondents were living in new housing, either in Oakwood Shores, in the private market, or in a rehabbed CHA development. This brief explores

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*“Improved safety and quality of life has been the greatest benefit for CHA residents.”*

whether the safety gains for early relocatees have been sustained and whether those who moved later have benefited equally—because these residents tended to be among the most vulnerable, there was good reason to think that they would not fare as well. We find that almost all former residents are now living in safer conditions and that improved safety and quality of life has been the greatest benefit of the Plan for Transformation for CHA residents.

### Residents Feel Safe in Their New Communities

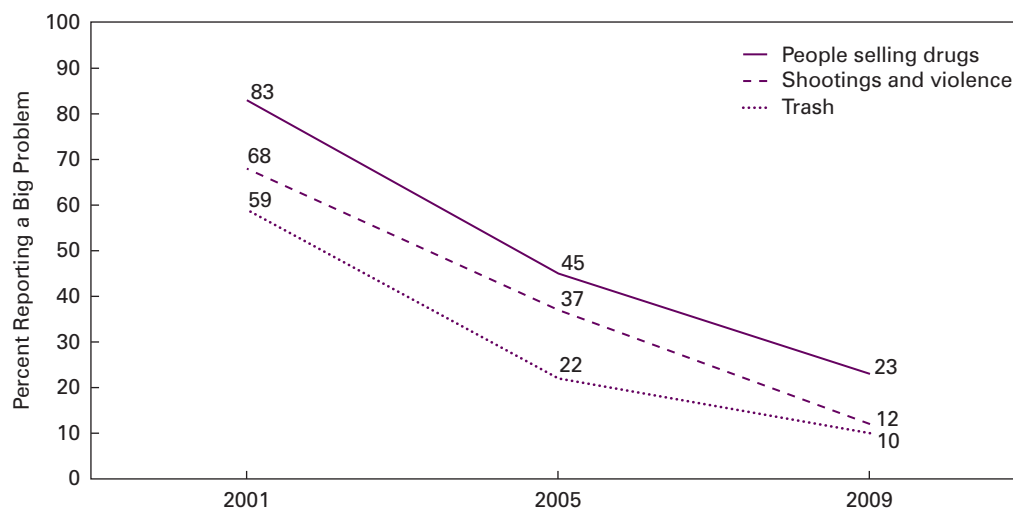
The results of the 2009 Panel Study follow-up show that nearly all respondents are now living in communities that they view as substantially safer than Madden/Wells.

■ Figure 1 illustrates how much the situation for Madden/Wells respondents has improved since 2001. Respondents' perceptions of violence and disorder in their neighborhoods have decreased significantly across the board. In 2001, more than 70 percent of the respondents rated each of four indicators of social disorder (drug use, drug trafficking, loitering, and gangs) a big problem; in 2009, fewer than 25 percent viewed

these issues as a major problem in their community.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the proportion of respondents who rated three indicators of violence (shootings and violence, attacks, and sexual assault) as a big problem decreased by more than half. Finally, complaints of big problems with physical disorder (trash and graffiti) in 2009 were 40 percentage points lower than they were in 2001.

- Further, in a major shift from 2005, there are no longer any significant differences in perceived safety among respondents in different types of housing. Those who relocated to traditional public housing are just as well off as those renting with vouchers or living in mixed-income developments. This finding reflects the significant investment the CHA has made in its traditional public housing developments as part of the Plan for Transformation.
- Another indicator of improved neighborhood conditions is that respondents now rate their current communities much higher than they rated Madden/Wells on collective efficacy (table 1). Collective efficacy is a summary measure for neighborhood health (defined as social cohesion and trust) and is correlated with crime rates and other neighborhood indicators, such as low

FIGURE 1. Perceptions of Neighborhood Social Disorder and Violence



Source: 2009 Chicago Panel Study Sample.

Note: All changes are significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

## I Feel Safer Now

Michelle has three children—a daughter, Tonya, who is about to leave for college, and two adult children. When we interviewed Michelle in 2001, she talked about the dangers in her community, speaking of other children who had been shot and her fears that her own children could be caught in the cross-fire.

I had a girlfriend lost her daughter in a drive-by shooting and she wasn't 12 or 13 years old.

Q: When was this?

A: About three or four years ago. Like my neighbor friend around here, her son got shot. It hurts these kids to know somebody that is killed by gang-related. That's why late at night, I have her (my daughter) with me. . . .

Tonya also said she felt unsafe in her community:

Q: Are there times that you don't feel safe in the neighborhood?

A: Yeah . . . When they start shootin' and then when all of them start yelling, turn around, I'm going to get my family and stuff.

When we interviewed them again in 2009, Michelle and Tonya were living in Oakwood Shores. Michelle said she no longer had to worry:

I don't have the fear, you know, everybody shoots on the streets everywhere, but over there on King Drive [in Madden/Wells], it was like just sitting on the porch fearing, going to the park fearing, just couldn't walk to the store but they done had a shootout early that morning, so now you can't go nowhere because you scared to go outside. They might start shooting around the time you go out putting garbage cans in the streets and all that. Over with. It's love, love right here. I love this crib. Been here three years. It's all good.

Tonya was a little more equivocal than her mother, citing problems in a nearby park. But she said that she generally feels much safer than in Madden/Wells and that her mother gives her much more freedom.

■ I feel safer now . . . because of the simple fact you have to think about it. In Wells, you didn't have the [utility] bills, you didn't have the locked doors, you had none of that. And no security walking around—it's just you out there. . . . But over here, you've got so much. You've got the police, then you have your neighbors. Your neighbors look like, "Oh, I think she need help," and then they're calling the police. So it's a lot.

birth weight, infant mortality, and asthma (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). In 2001, Madden/Wells HOPE VI Panel Study respondents rated their neighborhood lower on collective efficacy than Chicago-area residents in a citywide survey.<sup>2</sup> But by 2009, the situation was reversed, with Panel Study respondents rating their communities higher than the Chicago-area average on both social cohesion and social control.

## Residents Live in Lower Crime, but Still Troubled Areas

To put respondents' perceptions in context, we examined the change in official crime

rates from Madden/Wells in 2001 to the varied Chicago neighborhoods where respondents live in 2009. This analysis supports respondents' reports—they are now living in communities where the crime rate is half that reported in Madden/Wells in 2001.

■ In 2001, the Madden/Wells community reported 43 violent crimes per 1,000 residents.<sup>3</sup> By 2009, the median respondent lived in a neighborhood with a much lower rate of 23 violent crimes per 1,000 residents (figure 2). However, while this represents a significant improvement, this figure is still well above the Chicago-area rate of 14 violent crimes per 1,000 residents.

- Another indicator that Madden/Wells respondents are now living in less dangerous communities is that respondents were significantly less likely to report being the victim of a crime in 2009 than in 2001. In 2001, 5 percent of the respondents reported that a member of their household had been caught in a shootout in the previous six months; in 2009, this figure was down to 1 percent. Likewise, in 2001, 4 percent of the respondents reported a bullet coming into their home, but none reported such an incident in 2009. Finally, 5 percent reported having their homes broken into over six months, down from 12 percent at the baseline.
- Findings from the in-depth interviews with adults and children also reflect the fact that Madden/Wells respondents now live in much safer neighborhoods. However, these interviews also highlight the fact that although these communities are better than Madden/Wells, they are still often troubled. Even if the drug dealing or gang activity is not as pervasive or threatening as it was in Madden/Wells, it is still a very real presence. In a few instances, youth

seemed to view the neighborhood as more troubled than their parents did, perhaps because they were more likely to encounter problems with other teens or because their parents, who had more vivid memories of the extreme conditions in Madden/Wells, were more likely to make favorable comparisons.

### Implications

These findings highlight a very real and important impact of the CHA’s Plan for Transformation—CHA residents no longer live in virtual war zones. That the overwhelming majority of Madden/Wells respondents no longer have to live in fear is a dramatic and important improvement in their quality of life. Given the mixed picture found in 2005 (Popkin 2010), the fact that this effect holds even for those living in rehabilitated CHA developments is an unexpected and truly impressive change, one that might have longer-term implications for residents’ overall well-being. Indeed, as we have documented elsewhere (Price and Popkin 2010), our results also show a significant reduction in anxiety attacks, which is likely a reflection of improved circumstances. The CHA’s next

*“CHA residents no longer live in virtual war zones.”*

TABLE 1. Social Cohesion and Social Control

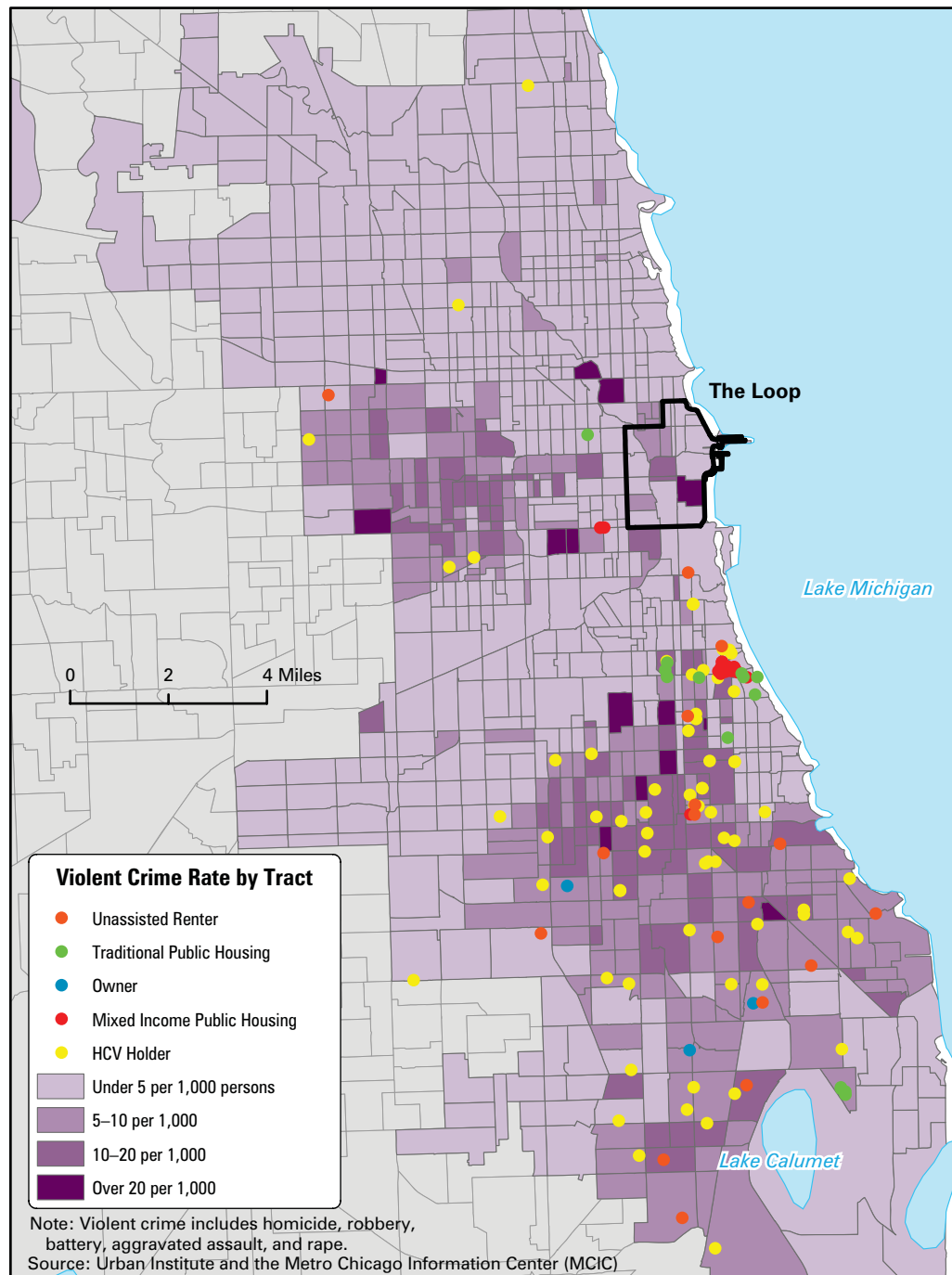
	2001	2005	2009	Chicago
Social Cohesion (percent who agree)				
Neighbors willing to help	65	69	81**	74
Neighbors share values	40	53**	62**	48
Close-knit neighborhood	49	60**	58	55
Neighbors can be trusted	30	40*	42**	60
Neighbors get along with each other	52	70**	73**	72
Social Control (percent who think neighbors likely to do something if they saw)				
Kids skipping school	55	57	65*	57
Kids defacing a building	59	69*	84**	74
Kids disrespecting an adult	61	65	69	53
A fight in front of their home	56	68**	76**	62

Sources: 2009 Chicago Panel Study Sample and Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, 1994–1995 Community Survey.

\* indicates change from baseline is significant at the  $p < .10$  level.

\*\* indicates change from baseline is significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

FIGURE 2. HOPE VI Relocates and Violent Crime, 2008



challenge will be to sustain and improve upon these gains:

- The CHA must recognize that these gains, however impressive, are fragile. To sustain these improvements, the CHA must remain vigilant about monitoring the private companies that now manage its mixed-income and traditional public housing developments.

Further, the CHA must continue to work with the Chicago Police Department to ensure that its properties remain safe and decent places for its residents to live. Finally, the housing authority should continue funding its comprehensive resident service programs to ensure that troubled residents receive the support they need to reduce the chance they could create serious problems that

threaten overall conditions in their developments and put them at risk of losing their housing.

- Further, while conditions for voucher holders have improved substantially as a result of relocation, the reality is that they continue to live in moderately poor, moderately high crime, racially segregated neighborhoods that offer few real opportunities for themselves and their children. The CHA needs to continue to explore strategies to encourage families to move to low-poverty opportunity areas, and to reduce the barriers that prevent assisted households from accessing such communities.

## Notes

1. All reported differences in means and proportions are significant at the  $p < .10$  level.
2. Chicago-area averages are based on data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, 1994–1995 Community Survey.
3. Rates of violent crimes are based on data collected and tabulated by the Metro Chicago Information Center.

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## **The Chicago Panel Study**

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

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

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