

MOST FORMER RESIDENTS OF CHICAGO'S MADDEN/WELLS PROJECT LIVE IN BETTER HOUSING, SAFER NEIGHBORHOODS; STILL FACE HEALTH AND JOB PROBLEMS

WASHINGTON, D.C., August 11, 2010—Nearly a decade after the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) started to relocate families from the distressed Madden/Wells community, most former residents live in better housing and safer neighborhoods and report lower levels of anxiety.

But poor health—marked by high rates of chronic physical and mental health problems—is keeping many out of the workforce.

The findings, in seven new Urban Institute research briefs, posted at <http://www.urban.org/housing/Transforming-Public-Housing-in-Chicago.cfm>, suggest that it has been easier to improve public housing residents' quality of life than to undo the damage that years of living in a dangerous, stressful environment has done to their health.

The Urban Institute tracked 198 Madden/Wells households between 2001 and 2009 to see how they have fared in the wake of Chicago's \$3.2 billion, 25,000-unit public housing revitalization. With 3,000 units, Madden/Wells was one of the CHA's largest complexes.

"CHA families' lives have improved in important ways—they now live in substantially higher-quality housing and dramatically safer neighborhoods—a far more positive result than many would have predicted a decade ago. At the same time, they are contending with significant problems, such as shockingly poor health and persistently low levels of employment, that will require more intensive interventions," says Susan Popkin, the study's lead researcher.

Key Findings: Neighborhoods and Housing

- 84 percent of respondents say their new homes are in excellent or good condition, regardless of whether they moved to mixed-income communities or revitalized public housing.
- The families now live in considerably lower-crime neighborhoods and feel much safer than they did at Madden/Wells; still, 23 percent say that drugs and gangs remain a major problem.
- 26 percent of the families live in low-poverty communities (poverty rate below 15 percent), but 54 percent still live in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 25 percent or higher.
- Most reside in poor, predominantly African-American communities with limited economic and educational opportunities.

Key Findings: Health

- The mortality rate for the former Madden/Wells residents from 2001 to 2009 was 14 percent, compared with 5 percent in the general population during the same period.
- 54 percent of respondents have an illness requiring ongoing care and 52 percent have two or more major health conditions.
- Although residents report less anxiety than when they lived in Madden/Wells, 17 percent report poor overall mental health and 8 percent have had major depressive episodes.

Key Findings: Employment and Income

- 50 percent of working-age respondents are employed, and 60 percent of those work full-time.
- 26 percent of working-age respondents have been employed throughout the study, 47 percent have cycled in and out of jobs since the study began in 2001, and 27 percent report never having a job during the course of the study.
- 89 percent of respondents with poor mental health are not working.
- 67 percent with two or more mobility limitations are not employed.
- 73 percent of the working-age respondents continue to live below the poverty level, including 54 percent of those working.
- 59 percent of respondents worry they might run out of food and 22 percent cut or skip meals.

The new research briefs are

- [“The CHA’s Plan for Transformation: How Have Residents Fared?”](#)
- [“After Wells: Where Are the Residents Now?”](#)
- [“Transformed Housing: Major Improvements in CHA Residents’ Quality of Life”](#)
- [“Escaping the Hidden War: Safety Is the Biggest Gain for CHA Families”](#)
- [“CHA Transformation: Children and Youth”](#)
- [“The Health Crisis for CHA Families”](#)
- [“The Limits of Relocation: Employment and Family Well-Being among Former Madden/Wells Residents”](#)

Susan Popkin, the director of the Urban Institute’s Program on Neighborhoods and Youth Development, headed up the Chicago Panel Study. The research team included the Institute’s Diane Levy, Megan Gallagher, and David Price and Abt Associates’ Larry Buron. The research was funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

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