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**STUDY ESTIMATES PUBLIC HOUSING TRANSFORMATION'S EFFECT  
ON CRIME IN ATLANTA AND CHICAGO,  
ADVANCING UNDERSTANDING OF SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES**

Washington, D.C., April 5, 2012 -- Crime declined throughout Chicago and Atlanta as the two cities undertook the nation's largest public housing transformations, but some destination neighborhoods for families leaving public housing with vouchers saw smaller than expected decreases, an Urban Institute–Emory University [study](#) has found.

Many neighborhoods to which public housing families relocated experienced no adverse effect on neighborhood crime, demonstrating a much smaller impact of public housing transformation on crime than popular accounts imply. But in neighborhoods where relocated households were more concentrated, the study's rigorous econometric modeling techniques indicated that crime did not fall at the expected rate.

In both Chicago and Atlanta, crime rates declined dramatically throughout most of the past decade, particularly in areas where public housing was demolished. Researchers estimated that tearing down Chicago's public housing and relocating residents with vouchers was associated with a 1 percent decrease in violent crimes citywide between 2000 and 2008 (and a 4.4 percent drop in gun crimes), independent of other factors. In Atlanta between 2002 and 2009, the public housing overhaul was associated with a decrease of 0.7 percent in violent crimes.

Smaller than expected decreases in crime rates were found in neighborhoods where relocated households were more concentrated, and no effect was found in neighborhoods where concentrations were low. A neighborhood with 6 to 14 relocated households per 1,000 households, on average, had a violent crime rate 11 percent higher in Atlanta and 13 percent higher in Chicago than it would have had with no relocated households. Violent crime rates in neighborhoods with more than 14 relocated households per 1,000 families were 21 percent higher, on average, than they would have been with no relocated households, other things being equal.

The causes behind the relationship between neighborhood crime rates and relocated households are unknown. The neighborhoods that received the most relocated families were already vulnerable before the arrival of relocated families, with especially high rates of poverty, unemployment, and crime. These neighborhoods may have been more resistant to factors contributing to the downward trend in crime—such as crime reduction strategies and economic factors—than other areas of the city. In addition, some former public housing residents may be particularly vulnerable to victimization; others may bring crime with them, whether as perpetrators or through their visitors; and relocation can disrupt some families' social networks, increasing their risk of victimization.

“A crucial policy implication from this research is the need for responsible relocation strategies, like those now used in 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. 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 neighborhoods,” said Susan Popkin, the project’s lead investigator and director of the Urban Institute’s Program on Neighborhoods and Youth Development.

Among the strategies the researchers recommend for housing authorities to avoid exacerbating poverty and crime in vulnerable communities are

- comprehensive supportive services for relocated households before and after relocation,
- hands-on help with housing search so relocated families can make informed choices about where to move, and
- financial incentives to voucher holders and landlords in safe, stable areas, to prevent excessive clustering of relocated families.

Between 1999 and 2008, approximately 6,400 households relocated to the private market with vouchers as part of the Chicago Housing Authority’s Plan for Transformation. In Atlanta, about 10,000 households relocated, mostly to the private market, between 1996 and 2011.

“Atlanta has a long-established history of firsts,” Renee Lewis Glover, CEO of the Atlanta Housing Authority, said. “In 1994, we re-conceptualized our approach to affordable housing resource because policies that concentrated families in poverty, coupled with extremely low expectations, were destroying Atlanta’s families, neighborhoods, and the city itself. Independent research has proven that ‘environment matters’ and that mixed-use, mixed-income community revitalization, coupled with high expectations and standards and investing in affected families, can lead to extraordinarily improved outcomes for families, children, neighborhoods, and Atlanta. We supported this study and are encouraged by its findings.”

“Just a decade ago, Chicago was the poster child for failed public housing policy because of its inability to serve low-income families and the city,” said Charles Woodyard, CEO of the Chicago Housing Authority. “Today, 12 years after Chicago took the bold step of tearing down the high-rise islands of poverty that isolated tens of thousands of CHA residents from the rest of the city, Chicago is a model of housing and community revitalization. This report supports the Plan for Transformation’s key principle -- that life in the communities that lie in the shadow of the former high-rise towers could be better -- and joins other research in documenting how both the City of Chicago and CHA have successfully addressed the conditions they sought to change. We are pleased to have supported this study, as it is evidence like this and other research that help us improve our policies and practices.”

Data from the Chicago and Atlanta housing authorities, the U.S. Census Bureau, and each city’s police department were linked to test for the effects of relocated households on crime counts. The analysis incorporated observations for 843 tracts over 37 quarters for Chicago (2000-2008) and 121 tracts and 32 quarters for Atlanta (2002-2009).

“Public Housing Transformation and Crime: Making the Case for Responsible Relocation,” by Susan Popkin, Michael Rich, Leah Hende, Chris Hayes, and Joe Parilla, is available at <http://www.urban.org/publications/412523.html>. Michael Rich, associate professor of political science and director of the Office of University–Community Partnerships at Emory University, led the research team in Atlanta. The Urban Institute’s Susan Popkin oversaw the Chicago research. This study was funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Chicago Housing Authority.

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