Prioritizing choice: Perceptions of neighborhood social cohesion for residents in subsidized housing

Daniel Brisson, Ph.D.
Stephanie Lechuga Peña
Mark Plassmeyer

University of Denver

Please direct all correspondence to daniel.brisson@du.edu

Background

- The housing choices of families living in poverty are severely limited yet, based on neighborhood characteristics, can have important consequences for well-being.

- Many families living in poverty rely on housing subsidies, and this public housing can limit choices even further.

Neighborhood Social Cohesion

- Neighborhood social cohesion can protect families from many of the deleterious consequences associated with living in a low-income neighborhood.

- Unfortunately, we do not have a lot of information about how public housing impacts neighborhood social cohesion.

Research Questions

- This study tests how families in three types of housing: 1) non-public housing; 2) HCVs; and 3) other public housing not an HCV, perceive social cohesion in their neighborhood. Further, the study tests how moving from one housing type to another affects changes in neighborhood social cohesion.

1. For families living in low-income neighborhoods, are there differences in the perceptions of neighborhood social cohesion for three different types of housing: 1) non-public housing; 2) HCVs; 3) other public housing not an HCV?

2. What predicts changes in neighborhood social cohesion for families that have moved from one type of housing to another?

Methods

- The study uses data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative (MC).

- MC was a community change initiative implemented in low-income neighborhoods in ten U.S. cities between 2002 and 2011 and included the administration of a survey to a stratified random sample of households (N=7,495) in low-income neighborhoods (N=430).

- The MC data is unique in that it provides the opportunity to test perceptions of neighborhood social cohesion in different housing types.

Methods (cont.)

- The probability sample used in the study consists of 2,470 households living in low-income neighborhoods in ten cities in the United States.

- Neighborhood social cohesion (Mean=3.20, SD = .70) is measured on a five point Likert type scale with higher scores indicating more favorable perceptions of neighborhood social cohesion.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

	Full Sample	Non-Public Housing Sample Wave 1	HCV Sample Wave 1	Public Housing Not an HCV Sample Wave 1
n	2,470	1,990	264	216
% female	70%	68%	81%	78%
% Asian	6%	6%	6%	6%
% Black	36%	33%	53%	46%
% Hispanic	22%	22%	23%	23%
% multiple or other race	10%	9%	8%	16%
% Native American	3%	3%	3%	**
% White	25%	29%	10%	11%
Mean Age of respondent (SD)	42 (14.90)	42 (14.90)	37 (13.00)	40 (16.03)
Education (HS or more)	71%	72%	67%	62%
U.S. Citizens	88%	87%	93%	89%
Mean Wave 1 Social Cohesion (SD)	**3.22 (.72)**	**3.27 (.72)**	**3.03 (.75)**	**3.00 (.68)**
Mean Change in Social Cohesion Wave 1 to Wave 2 (SD)	.01 (.90)	.002 (.82)	.02 (1.00)	.07 (.94)
Moved to non-public housing Wave 2	7%	X	**32%**	**44%**
Moved to HCV Wave 2	5%	4%	X	14%
Moved to Public Housing not an HCV Wave 2	4%	4%	13%	X
Mean Years in neighborhood Wave 2 (SD)	12 (11.30)	13 (11.70)	8 (8.85)	8 (7.44)
Moved to a new neighborhood Wave 2	**21%**	**18%**	**33%**	**29%**
Children in the household (yes)	65%	62%	80%	74%

Results

Variables	Non-Public Housing Model	HCV Model	Public Housing Not an HCV Model
Wave 2 years in the neighborhood	.00 (.002)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Moved to a new neighborhood Wave 2 (yes)	**.41** (.06)**	**.31** (.15)**	**.44** (.17)**
Wave 1 Education (high school or more)	.01 (.04)	-.10 (.13)	.26* (.14)
Wave 1 identify as an immigrant	.06 (.07)	.25 (.27)	-.09 (.22)
Respondent sex (female)	-.09 (.06)	-.26 (.22)	.09 (.21)
Hispanic (Whites as reference for all race and ethnicities)	-.09 (.06)	-.26 (.22)	.09 (.21)
Asian	-.13 (.09)	-.49 (.35)	.21 (.33)
Black	-.13** (.05)	-.19 (.20)	-.12 (.20)
Native American	-.36** (.11)	-.78** (.34)	-.45 (.56)
Multiple or other race	-.05 (.07)	-.53* (.28)	.15 (.25)
Respondent age	.00 (.002)	-.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)
Household with kids at Wave 1	-.04 (.05)	-.18 (.21)	-.33 (.21)
Wave 2 non-public housing		.08 (.14)	.06 (.15)
Wave 2 HCV	**-.19* (.10)**		.05 (.20)
Wave 2 public housing not an HCV	**-.22** (.10)**	-.26 (.20)	
Constant	-.04 (.05)	.67* (.41)	.15 (.42)
N	1989	264	216

**P<.05; *<.10

Discussion

- Results demonstrate that there are differences in perceptions of neighborhood social cohesion for public housing residents compared to non-public housing residents in low-income neighborhoods.

- The most consistent predictor of improved perceived neighborhood social cohesion was moving to a new neighborhood.

Conclusions

- Choice in where one lives seems to play an important and positive role in perceptions of neighborhood social cohesion.

- Although choice is a goal of the HCV program, in practice choice is compromised due to the limited stock of affordable housing units that can be rented on the private market with a HCV.

- Findings from the study confirm the importance of mobility for households in low-income neighborhoods.

- This research suggests that public housing is associated with declining perceptions of neighborhood social cohesion—a real concern when considering the positive role of neighborhood social cohesion for health and safety.