



# National Institute of Justice

## Research in Brief

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### Issues and Findings

**Discussed in this Brief:** The key milestones reached by the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, an unprecedented longitudinal study supported by the National Institute of Justice and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

**Key issues:** The Project's 8-year research study will attempt to determine how individual personalities, family relationships, school environment, and type of community interact to contribute to delinquency and criminal behavior over time. In the Project's first 2 years, researchers gathered data using the following measures: a community survey, social observation, a survey of neighborhood experts, and interviews with 7,000 children and adolescents and their primary caregivers as part of the first wave of a longitudinal cohort study. Although the researchers are observing areas throughout Chicago, they have identified 80 neighborhoods as the focus for the longitudinal cohort study.

**Preliminary findings:** The community survey drew responses from more than 8,700 adult residents of neighborhoods throughout Chicago. Respondents expressed their opinions on topics such as perceived violence, neighborhood decline, stability and cohesion, signs of disorder, and social

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## Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods: A Research Update

by Felton J. Earls, Harvard School of Public Health, and Christy A. Visher, National Institute of Justice

How do individual personalities, family relationships, school environment, and type of community interact to contribute to delinquency and criminal behavior? The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods is an unprecedented longitudinal study that aims to answer this question by examining the development of delinquency, criminal behavior, and substance abuse from birth to young adulthood, with a particular focus on the effects of community and neighborhood contexts on individual behavior. The National Institute of Justice, in partnership with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, is supporting this project to generate informed recommendations for crime prevention and intervention strategies.

The Project is combining two studies into a single integrated design: a series of data collection efforts at the community level and a longitudinal cohort study. In 1996, the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods reached several important milestones. This Research in Brief highlights the Project's recent accomplishments and reviews the status of the Project.<sup>1</sup>

### A study of Chicago's neighborhoods

The Project's unique vision is to examine individuals *and* their communities—as well as individuals *in* their communities—as both change over time. In 1990, the Project convened a planning workshop that resulted in a community design for data collection efforts. Three measures were developed:

- A community survey of randomly drawn adult household residents in all neighborhoods in the city limits of Chicago.
- An observational study of a subsample of 80 neighborhoods from which the longitudinal cohort study sample is being obtained.
- A survey of neighborhood experts—leaders in each community—from the 80 neighborhoods in the observational study.

With the help of two subcontractors, Abt Associates and the National Opinion Research Center, the Project completed these measures in 1995 and 1996.

## Issues and Findings

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control. This survey will be repeated during the fourth and eighth years of the study.

A second component of the research, systematic social observation, involves observing and videotaping more than 27,000 face blocks in the 80 neighborhoods selected for intensive study. Videotaping was conducted during the first year; subsequent taping will occur during the fourth and eighth years.

The neighborhood expert survey posed questions to community leaders in business, religion, law enforcement, community organization, education, and politics who have specialized knowledge of their neighborhoods.

For the longitudinal cohort study, seven age cohorts—from prenatal to age 18—will be tracked for 7 additional years so researchers can examine development from birth through age 26. Additionally, 500 6-month-old infants are receiving a comprehensive assessment of their cognitive abilities, motor skills development, and temperament.

Preliminary results from the community survey show considerable variation in neighborhood perceptions among residents living in the same community. Researchers will be looking at indicators of neighborhood cohesion to see how these different perceptions affect neighborhood stability. The researchers recently added a new interview to measure lifetime and recent exposure to violence.

**Target audience:** Social scientists; juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and violence specialists and researchers; and Federal, State, and local policymakers.

**Community survey.** For the community survey, in-person interviews were conducted with more than 8,700 Chicago residents. Information was gathered on perceived violence, neighborhood decline, stability and cohesion, signs of disorder, economic and political structure, neighborhood resources, and social control. Residents were interviewed in all sections of Chicago, but proportionally more interviews were conducted in the 80 neighborhoods selected for the longitudinal study. (See “Defining Chicago Neighborhoods.”) The response rate for the community survey was 78 percent in the 80 selected neighborhoods, with an overall response rate of 73 percent.

**Observational study.** Systematic social observation is the second component of the community design. This innovative methodology measures each community’s social organization and how it changes over time. Observations were made during the first year; subsequent observations will be conducted in the fourth and eighth years of the study.

A team of six observers videotaped each “face block” (one side of a block) in the

80 Chicago neighborhoods selected for intensive analysis; more than 27,000 face blocks are being studied. Video cameras affixed to a van recorded life and behavior in each neighborhood from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., 7 days a week, during the summer of 1995. The team also kept observer logs about residents’ activities and how they related to one another, as well as the appearance of the community, i.e., whether there was garbage on the streets or sidewalks, if there were abandoned cars, or if parking rules were being violated. The initial systematic social observation identified more than 200 variables, including features of the face block, presence of people, predominant land use (i.e., commercial or residential), and people’s reaction to the van.

**Expert survey.** The neighborhood expert survey asked systematic questions of residents who, based on their leadership roles in the community, have specialized knowledge of their neighborhoods’ social characteristics. The design called for interviews with experts in six areas: education, religion, business, politics, law enforcement, and community organization. Experts were randomly selected

## Defining Chicago Neighborhoods

In order to measure community characteristics for the cohort study, the researchers had to define neighborhoods within Chicago’s 77 commonly recognized community areas. Using the city’s 1990 census data, the researchers divided the 77 areas into 343 neighborhood clusters—areas that are similar in characteristics such as income, family structure, and race and ethnicity—with average populations of 8,000. The researchers then analyzed each cluster in terms of socioeconomic status, dependence on public assistance, unemployment rates, and race

and ethnicity. This analysis helped researchers identify 80 neighborhoods that showed sufficient demographic variability across clusters, which will enable later measures to detect neighborhood effects.

The Project’s community survey of more than 8,700 adult residents encompassed all 343 neighborhood clusters. To ensure that the residents were spread equally across the clusters, researchers surveyed a minimum number of adults from each neighborhood cluster.

from a list of identified community leaders; this list was augmented by other knowledgeable persons in the community who were nominated by the initial respondents to the neighborhood expert survey. Interviews were completed with 2,822 experts, for a completion rate of 86 percent.

**Additional data.** These three data sets pertaining to the community are being prepared for analysis. In addition to completing these three surveys, the Project acquired police incident files for 1990–1995. Public health and other official records also were obtained. Census data for 1990, such as poverty concentration and ethnic residence patterns, have been matched to Chicago’s neighborhood areas, including the 80 neighborhoods in the study. (See “Preliminary Results From the Community Survey.”)

### The cohort study

#### Enrolling Project participants.

The Project’s participants in the longitudinal cohort study are drawn from the 80 identified neighborhoods previously discussed. Equal numbers of males and females in seven age cohorts (birth, 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 18 years) are being selected from African-American, Hispanic, white, and mixed ethnic communities and from all social classes within these communities. The Project is on course to enroll and interview 7,000 subjects and their primary caregivers by February 1997. Interviews in the first year include questions about impulse control and sensation-seeking traits, cognitive and language development, leisure activities, delinquency and substance use, friends’ activities, and self-perception, attitudes, and values. Interviews with caregivers focus on family structure, parent characteristics, parent-child

relationships, parent discipline style, family mental health, and family history of criminal behavior and drug use. Project participants and caregivers are interviewed separately; interviews are given in English, Spanish, or Polish.

**Intensive assessment.** As part of Wave 1, the Project also is completing intensive assessments of 500 infants aged 6 months and their primary caregivers. A separate unit of specially trained research assistants is gathering information on each infant’s growth and health, cognitive capabilities, and

motor skills. The unit is also videotaping the interaction between infants and caregivers. This assessment responds to the Attorney General’s strong interest in the development of infants and children during the period from birth to age 3 and how these processes may be linked to later delinquency and criminal behavior.

As projected, the researchers encountered several challenges during the startup phase, including overcoming community resistance to research in minority urban neighborhoods, daily

### Preliminary Results From the Community Survey

According to preliminary results of the Project’s community survey, a community’s ability to act collectively to achieve common goals may be related to its rates of victimization, delinquency, and crime.

Preliminary results from 6,700 of the more than 8,700 residents surveyed revealed the following about their perceptions of signs of neighborhood disorder:

Problem	Percent who said it was a major problem
drug dealing .....	36
loitering youths .....	28
trash, litter, and broken glass on the sidewalks and streets .....	27
public drinking .....	25
graffiti .....	21
vacant houses .....	16

Preliminary results from questions about victimization indicated that 14 percent of residents had been victimized by violence; of those, 6 percent said they had been victimized in the last 6 months.

Another component of the survey addressed residents’ perceptions of police relations, particularly police responsiveness, whether police are doing a good job, how officers deal with victims, and law enforcement’s ability to maintain order on the streets. According to the preliminary results, the majority of residents agreed or strongly agreed that police in the neighborhood were responsive to local issues and that they were doing a good job of dealing with residents’ concerns. However, some neighborhood clusters rated police relations more positively than others.

monitoring of a complex array of field operations, and coordinating data management activities. The only significant revision in the research design was a decision to reduce the number of age cohorts from nine to seven (the age 21 and age 24 cohorts were eliminated). The researchers hope to be able to increase the followup period in the study's later years to offset the loss of the young adults. However, because each age group is tracked for 8 years, the age 18 cohort will be assessed annually up to age 26.

### Designs for 1997

Planning for the Project's third year began in the summer of 1996, including pilot testing new sections of the interview. In addition to gathering second-year information on topics covered during the first interview, the Project also will gather details on participants' exposure to violence in community, school, and family environments. The exposure-to-violence interview, created specifically for this Project, will assess both witnessing and experiencing violent events.<sup>2</sup> In Wave 2, Project participants will also be questioned about a wide range of life events and social stressors, perceived self-competence, health, and ethnic identity.

**Community characteristics.** Analyses of data collected thus far have begun, particularly of the vast amounts of information gathered concerning characteristics of Chicago's communities, community-based crime and victimization statistics, and census data. (See "Initial Findings.") Preliminary analyses reveal considerable variation among residents living *within* a neighborhood in their perceptions of neighborhood life, such as whether residents approve of teenage drinking or drug use. Such indicators of neighborhood

cohesion may affect neighborhood stability and may be related to neighborhood disorder, decline, and criminal activity—factors the Project will examine during the next year.

To explore the effects of neighborhoods on individual attitudes and behaviors, including substance abuse and criminality, the Project plans to link interview data from the cohort study to data gathered as part of the community study. In particular, the Project is studying the cultural and economic links to poor mental health and antisocial behavior by examining the role of neighborhood decline, mobility, and composition, reduced supervision of youths, poor access to jobs, and weakened ties to formal and informal social networks. These initial analyses are under way; a preliminary report is expected in spring 1997. In the past year, the Project team also has

made substantial advances in developing software for data analysis using hierarchical linear modeling procedures.

The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods enjoys broad local support throughout the city. Chicago will indeed benefit from the extensive data being collected in its communities. Moreover, the research community and the Project's sponsors—including its newest sponsor, the National Institute of Mental Health—are looking forward to the Project's results. Preliminary reports demonstrate that the Project will provide unprecedented information about the origins of delinquency, substance abuse, and criminal behavior and how to design effective strategies for preventive intervention, treatment, rehabilitation, and sanctions.

### Initial Findings

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hen the researchers combined census records with responses to the community survey and expert interviews, they identified three factors that seem to be related to a community's level of informal social control—defined by the researchers as the capacity of a community to regulate itself according to desired principles and values, or to realize collective goals. The first factor is concentrated disadvantage. In many of Chicago's neighborhoods, as in those of other large cities, there is a correlation between race and poverty, unemployment, and female-headed families. The second factor is ethnicity, which is important in measuring new patterns of immigration. The third factor is residential stability, or the

frequency with which residents move in and out of a neighborhood.

According to results of these preliminary analyses, concentrated disadvantage and residential stability appear to be the most important factors related to levels of informal social control. For example, areas with a high concentration of disadvantage and high residential instability had lower levels of informal social control. The findings also indicate that informal social control has a significant negative effect on levels of crime. Areas that were found to have high levels of informal social control had relatively lower rates of crime, delinquency, and victimization.

**Notes**

1. A technical report, which discusses the sampling plan, measurement strategies, and pilot analyses, is available in limited quantities from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service. Call 800-851-3420 to request a copy.
2. The pilot testing of this new survey and some preliminary analyses are discussed in *Assessing the Exposure of Urban Youth to Violence*, NIJ Research Preview, November 1996, FS 000161.

The sidebar material was presented in a Research in Progress seminar by Robert Sampson, entitled “Communities and Crime: A Study in Chicago,” in April 1996. This videotape is available from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, NCJ 156924, \$19 U.S., \$24 Canada and other countries.

Findings and conclusions of the research reported here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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