

## Gender Differences in Neighborhood Effects and Delinquency

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There is a disparate and growing literature on the effects of communities—or more specifically, neighborhoods—on behavioral outcomes of residents (Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; see Kroneman, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2004, for a review of neighborhood context, delinquency, and gender). This literature stems from a long history of sociological work, embodied primarily in the social disorganization tradition (Bursick & Grasmick, 1993; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002), developmental psychology (e.g., Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993, 2000; Jencks & Mayer, 1990) and, more recently, economics (e.g., Durlauf, 2004). Literature reviews have been done in each of these areas (see Durlauf, 2004; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Salzinger et al., 2002; and Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002).

Unlike theories focused on individual characteristics, theories emphasizing neighborhood context include an emphasis on the place where individuals live and events transpire. Variables examined include household structure, residential mobility, population density, cultural disadvantage, poverty, concentrated disadvantage, social cohesion or disorganization, and social capital. Dependent variables are highly variable, making comparisons between studies more difficult. They include risky behaviors, school dropout or truancy, physical and emotional health, exposure to and use of violence, victimization, and crime and delinquency.

In general, studies find that urban neighborhoods with concentrated poverty have higher rates of juvenile violence (Lauritsen & White, 2001; McNulty & Bellair, 2003a,b; Messner et al., 2001), violent victimization, exposure to violence (Farrell & Bruce, 1997; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Molnar et al., 2005), and juvenile and adult arrests for property and personal crime (e.g., Krivo & Peterson, 1996; Schuck & Widom, 1995; Steffensmeier & Haynie, 2000) than rural poor neighborhoods or

neighborhoods without this concentration. They are also associated with earlier teen pregnancy, earlier school leaving, and a host of other negative effects. How specifically neighborhoods impact girls versus boys, and whether the effects vary for girls, is not well researched (Jacob, 2006; Steffensmeier & Haynie, 2006b).

### Theoretical Underpinnings

The importance of community context for antisocial and delinquent behavior among youth, and the association with impoverished urban communities, has been acknowledged for more than 50 years (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Abner, 1997; Kroneman, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2004; Sampson & Groves, 1989). Social disorganization theory has long been the underpinning for the study of neighborhood effects. Conceptualized as the inability of a community to realize common goals and solve chronic problems, social disorganization theory was developed by Shaw and McKay (1942), and revised and extended by many others, including Bursik and Grasmick (1993), Sampson and Raudenbush (1999), and Sampson and Wilson (1995). According to the theory, poverty, residential mobility, ethnic heterogeneity, and weak social networks decrease a community's capacity to control the behavior of people in public and hence increase the likelihood of crime (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003a). Social disorganization theorists argue that crime rates are higher in deprived communities because the residents of such communities are less likely to exercise effective control over one another (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Morenoff, Sampson, & Gannon-Rowley, 2001).

Of course effects of strong networks and social control may be positive or negative, depending on the type of network or control exercised (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). Some communities have a strong sense of neighborhood and intense informal control via gangs, drug markets, and other antisocial entities, who then recruit youth into criminal activity and suppress reporting by residents through fear or retaliation (e.g., MacDonald, 1999; Pattillo, 1998; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) note that effects of informal social control depend in part on "the ratio of persons

who hold conventional versus street values, and...the degree to which those who live by the street code are able to dominate others” (p. 381). Markowitz and colleagues (2001) propose a cycle theory of reciprocity, where decreases in positive neighborhood cohesion lead to increases in disorder and crime, heightening fear among residents and further decreasing cohesion. Prosocial residents withdraw and those who are able to may leave the community.

Since the 1940s, researchers have employed theories of community-level social disorganization as an explanatory model for youth problem behaviors, including delinquency, crime, and carrying weapons (e.g., Shaw & McKay, 1942; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson & Morenoff, 1997). Sampson (1997) notes that structural factors in neighborhoods such as poverty, violence, and residential instability are powerful explanatory factors for variations in delinquency among youth. Communities struggling with social disorganization are less likely to monitor juveniles and sanction them when they engage in deviance (external control) and less likely to teach juveniles to condemn crime and exercise self-control. Residents of economically disadvantaged communities are less able to exert these controls for several reasons: they are struggling with a range of economic and family problems that limit their ability to control. They have weaker ties to their neighbors—since people are frequently moving into and out of the community—and are less able to form or support community organizations that often assist and guide youth, although new means of doing this via community–police partnerships may temper negative effects (Carr, 2003).

Neighborhoods with concentrated disadvantage have fewer resources for protecting youth from involvement in illegal and dangerous activities, preventing the proliferation of gangs, or halting illegal drug markets (Pattillo, 1998; Reiboldt, 2001). Lacking opportunities for quality education, safety, and work, adolescents may turn to illegal acts or alternative lifestyles to attain safety, possessions, and status (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Champion & Durant, 2001) and may respond to

atmospheres of threat by using violence, affiliating with delinquent peers, and arming themselves (Anderson, 1999; Durant et al., 1994; Stewart, Simons, & Conger, 2002).

In their classic review, developmental psychologists Jencks and Mayer (1990) developed a theoretical framework for linking neighborhood effects with individual behavior, including (a) Neighborhood Institutional Resource models, (b) Collective Socialization Models, (c) Contagion or Epidemic Models, (d) Models of Competition, and (e) Relative Deprivation Models. A decade later, Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) reformulated that framework into three distinct but related mechanisms by which neighborhood effects may be transmitted to youth: (1) The Institutional Resources Model, (2) The Relationship Model, and (3) the Norms Collective Efficacy Model (p. 322). They note, however, that at that time research findings were too scant to draw firm conclusions in most of these areas.

Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) also identified key levels at which mechanisms of influence may occur, including parent/family, peer group, school, and community. In a more recent review, Salzinger and colleagues (2002) posit a similar developmental-ecological framework taking into account the domains of family and household context, parent-child relationship, peer relationships, and neighborhood and community context (p. 434). None of these conceptual or theoretical approaches specifically posit differential impacts of communities on boys and girls, although there are easily deduced possibilities. For example, since girls tend to be at home more, they may be less affected by community street life than boys, who tend to be external to the home with more frequency. This chapter attempts to summarize evidence on the differences in impact of neighborhoods on adolescent girls as distinct from boys, with particular attention to the effects of violence and delinquency.

## Methodological Issues

Before reviewing studies, it is worth noting that there are a number of methodological limitations to many studies in this area. Good methodological summaries include Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000; and Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley, 2002. Sampson and colleagues, based on a review of 40 studies (2002), found very little consistency across studies in the way neighborhood was operationalized or theoretically situated (p. 457). The concept and measurement, for example, of social capital or of social ties varies from study to study. Thus, it is difficult to determine consistency of results across studies.

Selection bias also remains one of the biggest difficulties facing work in this area (i.e., the difficulty of distinguishing whether results emanate from neighborhood factors or from differential selection of adolescents or their families into certain neighborhoods). Defining neighborhoods remains problematic as well. Much of the research is based on census geography as a definition, which is problematic for studying social processes, since the relationship of census tract boundaries to various social processes may not be either theoretically or empirically relevant to outcome variables. As Durlauf (2004) indicates, the definition of neighborhood is determined by the information available in the data set and not by any substantive criteria. The need to determine an appropriate social notion of a neighborhood has yet to be adequately addressed (pp. 63–64). There is also the simultaneity bias (what is causing what?), since many aspects of communities (e.g., poverty, few institutional resources, and mobility) may operate at the same time. Omitted variable bias—whether effects are a result of unmeasured characteristics associated with individuals, families, or neighborhoods actually account for a proportion of such effects—is an issue as well (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

While there are some longitudinal studies (e.g., the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods; PHDCN), many studies do not take into account the dynamics of neighborhood

change, and cross-sectional studies cannot capture the dynamic processes that may change the social control mix. The influx of immigrant groups or the gentrification of a neighborhood, for example, may change the crime-inducing pattern dramatically, but are not captured by static methods and designs. Further, some recent critics (e.g., Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003) suggest that the extensive contemporary literature on neighborhood effects focuses almost exclusively on structural variables, without including information on cultural or subcultural responses, thus hindering a full explanation. Recent work by Elliott and colleagues (2006) demonstrates how focusing on “good kids from bad neighborhoods” requires looking at positive outcomes from presumed less-than-optimal conditions. Many authors also suggest the importance of establishing the relationship among family level, peer, and community variables, as they intersect and interact (e.g., Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Salzinger et al., 2002; Schuck & Widom, 2005). Neighborhood effects are at a minimum bidirectional, affecting families and peers as much as the family structure and peer groups affect neighborhoods.

Adding to this, there are more specific problems when attempting to determine if there are neighborhood contextual effects on girls’ compared to boys’ delinquent behavior. Few theorists have postulated the linkages and there are few empirical studies dealing with the issue. Figueira-McDonough (1992) is one of the few theorists who suggest that certain community characteristics may affect the sex ratio, which in turn affects gender ideologies, and thus delinquent behavior of girls. Kroneman, Loeber, and Hipwell (2004) do review the existent knowledge of how neighborhood context affects conduct problems and delinquency, with somewhat more emphasis on conduct problems. Our review updates and expands this earlier one, and focuses on delinquent and violent behavior specifically. Given the lack of literature specific to girls, we will begin each section with an overview of evidence on general relationships noted in the literature on youth. We will then present cross-sectional and longitudinal studies with findings specific to girls.

## Effects of Neighborhood Context: General Findings

In this section, we discuss the relationship between neighborhood and community context and youth delinquency and violence, including the domains of race/ethnicity, exposure to criminogenic neighborhoods, witnessing or experiencing violence, and cumulative effects. Neighborhoods are a prime context for socialization of youth, with differing impacts, depending on children's developmental stage (Ingoldsby & Shaw, 2002). While still mediated through parents and families, as children grow into adolescence, effects of neighborhoods become more direct (Elliott et al., 1996; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Wikstrom & Loeber, 2000). Urban neighborhoods with concentrated poverty have higher rates of juvenile violence (Lauritsen & White, 2001; McNulty & Bellair, 2003a,b; Messner et al. 2001) violent victimization, exposure to violence (Farrell & Bruce, 1997; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Molnar et al., 2005), and juvenile and adult arrests (e.g., Krivo & Peterson, 1996; Schuck & Widom, 1995; Steffensmeier & Haynie, 2000). Conversely, affluent neighborhoods seem to protect youth from involvement in violence and delinquency and encourage more positive development (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Molnar et al., 2007; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Sampson et al., 2002).

**Race/Ethnicity.** Effects of concentrated disadvantage and social disorder fall particularly heavily on families and youth of color. Mobility into and out of poverty in the United States has decreased over time, with higher exit rates for households headed by White males and very low exit rates for households headed by Black women (Rafferty, 2003). Urban communities with concentrations of Black residents have become increasingly structurally disadvantaged, differentially exposing youth in these communities to elements highly associated with perpetration of violence and criminogenic activities (Massey & Denton, 1993; Sampson & Wilson, 1995). In their multilevel longitudinal analyses of 2,974 youth ages 18–25, based on 3 waves of PHDCN data from 180 Chicago Neighborhoods, Sampson and colleagues (2005) found that the odds of perpetrating

violence were 85% higher for Black than for White youth, with Latinos 10% lower. However, the total Latino-White gap and over 60% of the Black-White gap was explained by the marital status of parents, immigration generation, and neighborhood social context. Similarly, in their prospective study (n=11,207) combining Census data on community context with panel data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health; a nationally representative, probability-based survey of U.S. adolescents in grades 7–12), De Coster and colleagues (2006) found that the Black versus non-Black differences in youth violence were largely a function of residence in disadvantaged communities and noted that knowledge of the structural characteristics of neighborhoods is central to understanding why individuals become involved in violence and offending (see also Jargowsky, 1997; South & Crowder, 1997).

**Exposure to Criminogenic Neighborhoods.** A consistent finding across studies is that exposure to social disorder, illegal activities, and violence has strong impacts on adolescents during the transition to adulthood, when they may have greater independence, more unsupervised time with peers, and are especially prone to experimenting with alternate lifestyles or identities (e.g., De Coster, Heimer, & Wittrock, 2006; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003a; Sampson et al., 2002.) Given the lack of temporal ordering in cross-sectional studies, in the section that follows, we will emphasize evidence from longitudinal research on the effects of neighborhoods on youth.

Herrenkohl and colleagues (2000), using four waves of panel data from the city-based Seattle Social Development Project's prospective study (n=808), analyzed factors at youth ages 10, 14, and 16 predictive of violence at age 18. Half of the sample were female; 46% were White, 24% were Black, 21% were Asian; and half (52%) came from low-income families. This ethnically and economically diverse study found that neighborhood factors were key predictors in the development of later aggression. Risk taking, drug selling, gang membership, and the presence of neighborhood adults involved in crime at age 14; and community disorganization, availability of drugs, and the



presence of neighborhood adults involved in crime at age 16, *tripled* the odds for perpetration of violence by youth at age 18 (Herrenkohl et al., 2000). One gender difference was reported; as with other studies, male gender was more strongly associated with perpetration of violence than was female gender.

Using the first two waves of Add Health data (n=11,207) for 7th to 12th graders, combining individual-level with neighborhood measures, De Coster and colleagues (2006) note that criminogenic street contexts were more important in explaining mechanisms by which residence in disadvantaged communities leads youth to violence than social capital variables such as parents' participation in organizations, collective neighborhood supervision, and family cohesiveness, suggesting this as a critical dimension for study and intervention (see also Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

**Witnessing or Experiencing Violence.** *Within* communities, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies consistently identify witnessing or experiencing violence as one of the most potent factors differentiating youth involved in delinquency and violence from youth who are not involved (Buka et al., 2001; Champion & Durant, 2001; Durant et al., 1994; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Molnar et al., 2005; Patchin et al., 2006; Scarpa, 2003). Durant and colleagues (1994), analyzing cross-sectional data on a sample of 225 Black male and female 11- to 19-year-old adolescents in nine high-crime housing projects in Georgia, found that levels of violence and victimization in the community were the strongest predictors of use of violence for both boys and girls and were also highly associated with weapon carrying. National longitudinal data support these findings. Shaffer and Ruback (2002), in their analysis of Add Health data over two time points for an ethnically diverse sample of 5,000 youths ages 11–17, reported a strong positive association between exposure to and perpetration of violence among adolescents from time one to time two. Similarly, in their study of the effects of criminogenic street scenes using data on community context combined with individual-level panel

data from the national Add Health sample of 7th through 12th graders, De Coster and colleagues (2006) reported that youth who had witnessed serious violence by Wave 1 were more likely to be involved in a range of violent acts 1 year later, even after previous violence and other variables were controlled.

**Cumulative Effects.** Finally, empirical evidence demonstrates that youth with multiple experiences, or youth who are at risk both inside and outside their homes, seem particularly vulnerable to the development of delinquent and violent behaviors (e.g., Fagan, 2003; Garbarino, 2000; Herrenkohl et al., 2000; Kroneman, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2004; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1998; Osofsky, 1995; Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 2002). Using official data from a prospective cohort design study of 908 maltreated children and 667 matched controls in the Midwest (followed into young adulthood), combined with Census and arrest data, Schuck & Widom (2005) explored how neighborhood conditions influenced the relationship between maltreatment as a child and later involvement in criminal behavior, based on a multiyear prospective cohort design. In this carefully controlled study, the effect of early child maltreatment was strongest on individuals from the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. This association of neighborhood conditions with offending held even when individual and family factors were taken into account.

In the Seattle Social Development Project's city-based study of elementary, middle, and high school-aged youth, assessing potential risk factors for the development of violence across five domains of youths' lives (individual, family, peer, school, and community), the odds for violence by youth exposed to more than five risk factors, versus those for youth exposed to fewer than two risk factors, were 10 times greater at age 14 and nearly 11 times greater at age 16. Youth exposed to multiple risks at each development point were much more likely to perpetrate violence in the future (Herrenkohl et al., 2002). These findings on youth in general highlight the importance of placing violence by teenagers in community context.

## Neighborhoods in Relationship to Girls' Delinquency and Violence

Most studies on how interactions between individual- and neighborhood-level characteristics influence delinquency among youth focus on males or do not disaggregate findings by gender, leaving the impact of community factors specifically on girls largely unstudied (Kroneman, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2004; Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 2002; Wikstrom & Loeber, 2000). Empirical research does indicate differences in girls' and boys' involvement in delinquency and crime. Girls are less likely to be involved in antisocial and deviant activities than boys; onset tends to be later for girls and they desist from delinquency more quickly; girls demonstrate less overt physical aggression, and overall their violence is less frequent and less severe in terms of types of acts, injuries to victims, weapon carrying, or weapon use; they are less likely to become involved with gangs; and they are less likely to victimize strangers (Farrell & Bruce, 1997; Kroneman, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2004; Liu & Kaplan, 1999; McGee, 2003; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996; Steffensmeier and Haynie, 2006a).

Despite much lower rates of delinquency and offending by girls, however, male and female crime trends seem to run in parallel over time and most predictive factors are similar for males and females (e.g., see reviews by Daly, 1994; Kroneman, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2004; Rosenbaum & Lasey, 1990; and Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). This suggests that structural forces affect both boys and girls similarly, but at different levels of intensity (Steffensmeier & Haynie, 2006b). Two studies based on national-level data attempted to address this issue by assessing the intersection of structural disadvantage, urbanicity, and crime perpetration by gender.

In the first study to specifically focus on the link between female offending rates and structural characteristics of U.S. cities, Steffensmeier and Haynie (2006a) assessed the effects of structural disadvantage on Uniform Crime Report (UCR) Index offending arrest rates, comparing effects of structural variables on female rates with effects of those variables on male rates. Data were drawn

from the 1990 Bureau of Census and the UCR for the 178 U.S. cities with 100,000 or more residents. The dependent variable was sex-specific rates for the FBI's Index offenses (homicide, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, and larceny); structural measures of disadvantage included female and male poverty and joblessness, female-headed households, income inequality, distribution of family income, and percent Black. As in other studies, males had much higher perpetration rates than females, especially for the more serious offenses. Index offending rates were higher in all cities with high levels of structural disadvantage for both genders; effects of structural concentrated disadvantage were greater for violent than nonviolent offenses. City-based measures of disadvantage were robust predictors of female as well as male arrest rates, although the disadvantage index was more strongly associated with male than with female rates. The primary gender difference found was for homicide, where structural disadvantage measures were predictive for males but much less so for female rates.

In a later analyses of data on Canadian youth arrested for crimes (delinquency and offending known to the police), Jacob (2006) combined data from the 1996 Canadian Census and the Canadian Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) to examine the relationship between community characteristics and delinquent activities for female and male youth. As with Steffensmeier and Haynie's U.S. findings, Jacob found a predominant main effect for community characteristics with few differences by gender. Social conditions of communities that related to boys' arrest rates were related to girls' arrest rates as well. Socioeconomic status and residential instability were the primary predictors of arrest rates for both girls and boys, although residential instability was not associated with adolescent arrests for violence. Ethnic heterogeneity was correlated only with male arrests (although its impact was weak) and had no impact on female arrests. Conversely, population density was related only to female arrests for property offenses—again a weak association. Communities with a higher proportion of two-parent families had lower rates of juvenile arrests for both genders.

**Exposure to Criminogenic Neighborhoods.** Empirical literature investigating gender typically suggests that girls are exposed to less street violence and deviant peers and activities than are boys (Bottcher, 2001; Farrell & Bruce, 1997; Kim, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Rosario et al., 2003). City-based studies sometimes differ, however. In a cross-sectional stratified sample of 500 inner-city Black high-school-aged youth in a high-crime census tract in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, although males were more likely to report victimization overall, girls were more likely to report having been mugged or attacked with a gun and having witnessed someone else being chased by gangs, beaten, or mugged (McGee, 2003). In this study, for both boys and girls, direct victimization in the community best predicted problem behaviors such as delinquency.

Although they may be exposed less directly to community disorder and violence, empirical evidence from cross-sectional and longitudinal studies indicates that girls who live in disadvantaged or violent communities are more likely to perpetrate violence or other delinquent behavior compared to their female counterparts who live in more advantaged circumstances (e.g., Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Ingoldsby & Shaw, 2002; Molnar et al., 2005). For example, Durant and colleagues' cross-sectional study (1994) found that 11- to 19-year-old Black girls living in housing projects in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods with high levels of violence were much more likely to attack someone out of anger, carry a hidden weapon, and be involved in a gang fight than girls not exposed to this severity of neighborhood disorder. In Song, Singer, and Anglin's (1998) cross-sectional study of 3,735 14- to 19-year-old high school students in six public high schools in Cleveland, Ohio, exposure to shooting or a knife attack had the strongest association with violent behavior for boys. However, for girls, exposure to a knife attack or shooting, becoming the victim of violence at school, and witnessing parental violence at home were equally associated with violent behavior. Findings from some longitudinal studies support a more negative impact of exposure for

girls as well. Farrell and Bruce (1977) examined witnessing community violence across three time points with a sample of 436 mostly Black youth from urban public schools in a large Southeastern city. Witnessing violence in the community was positively associated with frequency of violent behavior for both genders. However, a positive association between witnessing violence and frequency of violence perpetration over time was found only for girls.

In a more focused investigation, Obeidallah and colleagues (2004) analyzed longitudinal data from the PHDCN to assess links between girls' pubertal timing, violent behavior, and neighborhood characteristics. The sample of 501 Hispanic, Black, and White adolescents and their parents were interviewed over a 3-year period and U.S. Census data were mapped onto each neighborhood cluster. Obeidallah and colleagues found that girls who experienced early-onset puberty and lived in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods were at significantly greater risk for perpetration of violence than girls in less disadvantaged neighborhoods. Although pubertal timing was not associated with violence in *itself*, early-maturing girls were more likely to be violent if they lived in neighborhoods of higher concentrated disadvantage. This relationship between early maturation and perpetration of violence only became significant if girls lived in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods. The authors hypothesized that disadvantaged and violent neighborhoods offer girls an increased risk of encountering negative role models, especially among older youth, which in turn may heighten the likelihood that girls will become involved with delinquency and violence. Early-maturing girls also are more likely to date at younger ages and to experience pressure from older males, who involve them in antisocial activities (e.g., Caspi et al., 1993; Stattin & Magnusson, 1990).

**Witnessing or Experiencing Violence.** As noted, one of the most robust findings in the literature is the association between victimization and subsequent youth violence (Champion & Durant, 2001; De Coster et al., 2006; Durant et al., 1994; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Salzinger, 1999; Shaffer & Ruback, 2002). In analyses of Wave 1 of the Add Health data, based on in-home

interviews with 17,036 youth (8,836 girls; 8,290 boys), Blum, Ireland, and Blum (2003) examined environmental factors (school connectedness, friend's suicide, urbanicity and family income), family factors (family size, presence of guns in the home), and individual factors (grade point average, learning problems, skipping school, carrying a weapon to school, use of alcohol or illicit drugs, and history of victimization). Among these factors, victimization had the strongest association with juvenile violence regardless of gender. The authors note that, similar to boys, experiences with victimization "overrode every other factor for adolescent girls' involvement with violence" ( $p < .0001$ ; p. 237).

A recent study from the PHDCN combined information on neighborhood context and victimization histories in prospective analyses of girls' violence, based on three waves of data on 635 girls (ages 9–15 at baseline) from a representative sample of over 80 Chicago neighborhoods (Molnar et al., 2005). As in other studies, concentrated poverty was independently associated with a higher probability of girls perpetrating violence. However, adolescent girls were more likely to act violently if they had previously experienced physical or sexual victimization *and* lived in impoverished and/or severely violent communities. Girls who had been violently victimized also were more likely to report associations with deviant peers and use of illegal substances. Physical or sexual victimization remained an important predictor of subsequent violence by girls, even when factors such as socioeconomic status, illegal substance use, previous violence perpetration, deviant peer behavior, and other family and individual characteristics were controlled. Overall, girls were 2.4 times more likely to perpetrate violent behavior if they had a *victimization history* of prior physical or sexual molestation/assault or other violent victimization. Victimized girls in *violent poor neighborhoods* were twice as likely to behave violently than their nonvictimized peers. Girls in *disadvantaged neighborhoods* were 1.5 times more likely to behave violently than girls in more advantaged neighborhoods.

## Moderating Factors

Since living in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods has deleterious effects for some adolescents, it would appear that moving to more affluent circumstances would improve outcomes. Several moving-to-opportunity studies directly tested that possibility.

**Moving to Opportunity: General Findings.** In response to empirical findings on the negative impacts of community-concentrated disadvantage on youth, the effects of moving from disadvantaged to more advantaged neighborhoods have recently been studied. In a 2-year follow-up study designed to evaluate the outcomes of a court-order neighborhood desegregation effort in Yonkers, New York, Fauth and colleagues (2005) analyzed whether moving from high- to low-poverty neighborhoods would reduce victimization and involvement in violence and delinquency among mostly minority youth. In this project, low-income Black and Latino residents residing in segregated neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage in South Yonkers were relocated via lottery to predominantly middle class White neighborhoods elsewhere in Yonkers. Almost all (95%) of the families randomly selected to relocate moved to the new housing. Youth in the study who moved ( $n=147$ ) were 8 to 18 years of age and were compared to demographically similar youth who remained in their original neighborhoods ( $n=114$ ). The average age of youth in the study was 13; 54% were female.

At the end of 2 years, youth who moved experienced significantly less physical assault, neighborhood disorder, and access to illegal substances than nonmoving youth. Younger children, who were ages 8–9 at the time of the move, had fewer reported behavioral, family, and delinquency problems than their peers who did not move. However, for adolescents 16–18 years old, both boys and girls who moved experienced *more* behavior problems (getting into trouble, problems with behavior at home, problems with behavior at school) and more delinquency (stealing, hitting someone with the idea of hurting them, damaging or destroying property) than their counterparts



who did not move. Youth who were 13 to 15 years old reported slightly more problems than youth who did not move, although differences were not statistically significant. In this project, minority families from poor neighborhoods were moved to newly built, publicly funded, 14- to 48-unit row houses in predominantly White neighborhoods consisting mostly of single-family dwellings. Moves were preceded by nearly a decade of high-level media attention and negative publicity. Families who moved were easily identifiable both by race/ethnicity and dwelling type and faced neighborhood resistance to their presence. Fauth and colleagues (2005) speculate that older youth may have been more affected by stigma, racism, and negative visibility than younger children, as well as by separation from familiar neighborhoods and friends, thus explaining these effects.

**Moving to Opportunity: Relationship to Girls' Delinquency and Violence.** A multisite demonstration project also was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In this project, housing vouchers were assigned via random lottery to low-income, predominantly minority, public housing residents in five cities: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City (Kling, Ludwig, & Katz, 2005). The "Moving to Opportunity" (MTO) program randomly assigned community households to one of three conditions: (1) an experimental, or treatment, group in which families were offered the opportunity to relocate using a housing voucher to lease a unit in a neighborhood where 10% or less of the residents were poor; (2) a control group who received Section 8 housing vouchers—families could relocate wherever the vouchers could be redeemed, but received no other support or assistance; and (3) an in-place control group who received no services through MTO and thus did not move. Families were eligible if they had children in the household and lived in public housing or in a census tract with greater than a 40% poverty rate. Families moved to racially diverse neighborhoods with relatively little publicity.

As reported in Kling and colleagues (2005), after random assignment, both girls and boys in the experimental group experienced fewer violent-crime arrests compared to their counterparts in the

control group (see also Orr et al., 2003). Youth in the experimental group were arrested less for other crimes as well. However, several years after the move, effects for nonviolent crimes changed for males. Although arrests for violence remained low for both genders, property crime arrests became more common for boys who had moved to more advantaged neighborhoods than for their male counterparts who had not moved from disadvantaged neighborhoods. In contrast to boys, the positive effects for girls' arrests for property crime remained over time. Moving to a better neighborhood not only reduced arrests for all forms of crime for girls, it also improved girls' expectations for completing college and their participation in sports, and was associated with a reduction in school absences and an increase in associations with peers who engaged in school activities (Kling et al., 2005).

Interpreting MTO study findings can be complicated. Overall program "take-up rates" (families offered vouchers who actually used them to move) was approximately 50%. Some reported effects were found only for the "Intent-to-Treat" groups (families eligible for the opportunity, whether or not they moved), rather than for the "Treatment-on-Treated" group (youth and families offered vouchers who actually moved) (Katz, Kling, & Liebman, 2001; Kling et al., 2005; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002; see Goering & Feins, 2003 for a review). The finding that boys' rates of property crime and self-reported problem behaviors began to increase several years after moving has been interpreted as an opportunistic response by males to the "economic advantages" of property crime in more advantaged surroundings (Kling et al., 2005). However, it may reflect a gradual sinking process based on MTO findings that boys who moved did more poorly in their new schools than their sisters or other female participants, began to skip school, and became involved with delinquent peers and illegal substances. Differential responses by community members and local police to potential misdeeds by Black male youth versus Black female youth may contribute to these findings by gender as well. In sum, the MTO study finds positive outcomes for girls for both

violence and property crime, and for boys for violent crime. MTO analyses do not account for specific structural contexts or social processes surrounding respondents, leaving the specifics of community influences, supports for youth, and other explanatory mechanisms unknown (Sampson et al., 2002, p. 467).

While living in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods has documented negative effects, it is also true that many “good kids come from bad neighborhoods” (Elliot et al., 2006). This means that other factors are important in generating behavior. In the next section, we briefly review evidence on moderating factors related to neighborhood effects. Borrowing from Salzinger and colleagues’ framework (2002), we discuss findings across the contextual domains of (a) family and household, (b) parent-child relationships, and (c) peer relationships. For each domain, we first note findings for youth in general and then present the few findings specific to girls.

**Family and Household.** Most studies of effects of family on youth delinquency have focused on single-parent versus two-parent/marriage family structures, finding correlations between concentrations of single-parent households and delinquency or criminal involvement by youth (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991; Sampson et al., 2005). In an important break from tradition, Forehand and Jones (2003) explored a family structure unanalyzed in the literature but often utilized by Black families in impoverished neighborhoods: coparenting, in which parental responsibilities are shared between a single parent (usually a mother) and a relative. Data from a sample of 141 inner-city single-mother-headed Black mothers and one referent child in inner-city families in New Orleans were analyzed cross-sectionally and longitudinally. Most participants lived in federally funded or low-income housing in neighborhoods characterized by poverty and crime. Coparents included grandmothers (35%), grandfathers (24%), biological fathers (12%), and other family members. Neighborhoods were analyzed based on physical fighting, shootings or knifings, and people being killed. In addition to coparent conflict, maternal monitoring, supervision, warmth,

and support were assessed at baseline and 15 months later. In this study, when controlling for maternal parental style, low levels of conflict between coparents moderated the association between neighborhood violence and youths' aggressive behaviors (as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist; Achenbach, 1991). For girls—although not for boys—the interaction between neighborhood violence and coparent conflict was significant at both time points, even when positive maternal parenting was controlled. Even in contexts of high neighborhood violence, when coparent conflict was low, the level of aggressive behavior by girls was significantly lower than when coparent conflict was high.

Studies of youth typically find that family conflict, parental involvement in violent behavior, and exposure to family violence increase risk for adolescents' victimization, exposure to community violence, and involvement in delinquent or violent behavior (e.g., reviews by Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Salzinger et al., 2002). Accumulating evidence (see Chapter X, this volume) now suggests that families of delinquent girls are characterized by more conflict and overt deviance than the families of their male counterparts (see review by Kroneman, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2004). Characteristics of dysfunctional family settings among girls involved in delinquency and violence include heavy alcohol or other drug use in the family, physical and sexual abuse, lack of supervision or outright neglect, criminal involvement among parental caretakers or siblings, and predatory or aggressive relatives and associates of the family (e.g., Champion & Durant, 2001; Molidar, 1996). As with all studies involving disaggregation by gender or a focus on girls, more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

**Parent-Child Relationships.** Parenting is a particularly important moderator of neighborhood disadvantage on adolescents' risk for delinquency and violence (Kroneman, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2004; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Positive parent-child relationships may buffer the impact of neighborhood disadvantage or violence on children, while negative relationships may exacerbate it

(Garbarino, 2000; Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Children in female-headed families may be especially likely to suffer economic deprivation (O'Brien et al., 1999; Savolainen, 2000) and to lack adult monitoring and supervision if the head of household is working and there is no other parent available. Supervision and monitoring can be particularly challenging for parents living in poverty, when families need to devote long hours to work and may lack resources to provide alternate care, particularly during after-school hours (e.g., Reese et al., 2000; Salzinger et al., 2002). Sampson and Groves (1989) argue that single parents also experience greater strains in terms of time, money, and energy, hindering their ability to supervise children and communicate with other adults in the neighborhood. In discussing similar supervision findings, Margolin and Gordis (2002) note that, in the face of community violence, parents' caretaking abilities may be "negatively affected by their own feelings of helplessness, fear, and grief" (p. 452).

In their study using longitudinal data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to examine community-level influences ( $n=463$ ), Pratt, Turner, and Piquero (2004) indeed found that neighborhood conditions were significantly related to parental supervision, with parents in neighborhoods experiencing adverse conditions less likely to supervise their children. The few studies assessing this by gender suggest that girls tend to be supervised more closely by their parents and are kept closer to the home than boys (e.g., Pratt et al., 2004). Thus girls may be less exposed than boys to the street violence and deviant peers and activities found in some disadvantaged neighborhoods (Bottcher, 2001; Farrell & Bruce, 1997; Kim, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999; Kroneman, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2004; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Rosario et al., 2003).

Family connectedness and positive family expectations (e.g., expecting that a girl will do well in school or will finish school) also seem to be a significant moderator for girls. For example, in their analyses of Add Health data based on a sample of 20,704 youth, Blum and colleagues (2003) found that affective dimensions of families (e.g., family caring/connectedness, parental expectations)

appeared to be much more critical for adolescent girls in terms of involvement in violence than for adolescent boys. In a more specialized cross-sectional study of 667 predominantly Hispanic (65%) or Black (32%) 11- to 14-year-old inner-city students in Bronx Public Schools, Rosario and colleagues (2003) found that attachment to parents/guardians buffered the relationship between victimization by community violence and delinquency for girls, but did not moderate that relationship for boys.

Conversely, even relatively normative corporal punishment of children has been found to have negative effects on later outcomes, including behavior (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Durant et al., 1995; Gershoff, 2002; Margolin & Gordis, 2000). In their cross-sectional study of Black male and female 11- to 19-year-old urban adolescents in nine high-crime housing projects, Durant and colleagues (1995) reported that higher scores on a corporal punishment measure were associated with frequency of fighting by these children as teenagers. Fergusson and Lynskey (1997), following 1,025 of the cohort from their Christchurch, New Zealand, prospective study from birth to age 18, found that 18-year-olds who had experienced harsh or severe punishment as children were significantly more vulnerable to violent offending, suicide attempts, and substance abuse, even when effects of family and social context were taken into account. Empirical literature consistently indicates that girls are at greatest risk of physical victimization from family members and other intimates and are more affected by family dynamics such as harsh parenting and maltreatment than are boys (Caspi & Moffitt, 1991; see Garbarino, 2000 and Margolin & Gordis, 2000; see Chapter X for reviews).

**Peer Relationships.** Finally, literature from across disciplines indicates that peers may play a significant role in moderating the impact of disorganized or violent communities on delinquent and violent behavior for both girls and boys (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). For example, McNulty and Bellair (2003), in their study of data on 10,131 youth (7,310 White; 2,821 Black) from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health over a 2-year period, found that deviant peers

were *more* influential than family bonds in understanding associations between community characteristics and individual crime. In De Costa and colleagues' (2006) prospective study combining community data with panel data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (2006), youth who were more involved with deviant peers had a strongly elevated risk of violent delinquency. This was true even though their measure captured use of illegal substances in peers rather than violence. In examining moderating factors, in a city-based study using multilevel, longitudinal data from the PHDCN across 80 Chicago neighborhoods and a sample of 2,226 youth, having prosocial peers and/or supportive friends was significantly associated with lower levels of delinquent behavior for both girls and boys (Molnar et al., 2007). Rosario and colleagues' (2003) within-city cross-sectional study of 11- to 14-year-old Black and Hispanic students in Bronx Public Schools did find differences in effects of peer relationships by gender. Support from peers buffered the effect of witnessing community violence for boys, but not for girls. However, peer support amplified negative effects of being victimized by community violence in terms of delinquent behavior for both boys and girls.

## Conclusions

Research investigating effects of neighborhoods on the behavior of residents provides an enhanced understanding of the genesis and maintenance of delinquency and violence by youth. Despite differences in methodologies, the importance of neighborhood context to analyses of girls' and boys' delinquency is consistently demonstrated by cross-sectional and longitudinal studies across types of samples and disciplines, with important implications for prevention and social policy. Since the early 1980s, responses to offending in the United States have centered on law enforcement, sentencing, and incarceration (Browne & Lichter, 2001). Yet a growing body of criminal justice literature suggests that these investments may have disappointing results unless preconditions of community-concentrated disadvantage are addressed (e.g., MacDonald & Gover, 2005; Ousey &

Lee, 2002). Herrenkohl and colleagues (2000), Steffensmeier and Haynie (2006a), and others argue that identifying and modifying conditions of structural disadvantage and community risk offers our most promising option for producing social changes that reduce youth offending.

To date, relatively few neighborhood studies include a focus on or the systematic study of girls. This review of the extant literature found compelling evidence for differences *between girls* who are exposed and not exposed to structural disadvantage and violence in communities (e.g., PHDCN studies). There are less dramatic differences *between genders*, at least where overall patterns are concerned. For example, national-level examinations of linkages between youth offending rates and the structural characteristics of cities (Steffensmeier & Haynie, 2006a in the United States; Jacob, 2006, in Canada) found strong similarities by gender in the links between structural disadvantage and arrest rates. Social conditions affecting males appeared to affect females as well, although measures of disadvantage were more strongly associated with the arrest of boys than of girls (Steffensmeier & Haynie, 2006a). Similarly, the majority of studies that differentiate detailed findings by gender find that exposure to criminogenic neighborhoods and witnessing or experiencing violence are strongly related to delinquency and offending for both boys and girls.

Some gender differences are suggested in the literature, however. Girls seem to be less exposed to street violence than boys, more positively affected by family caring/connectedness and parental expectations, more negatively affected by discord and abuse at home, and more negatively affected by community violence when exposure does occur than are boys. A PHDCN study also found that the relationship between early maturation and perpetration of violence becomes significant only when girls live in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods (Obeidallah et al., 2004). Finally, studies of moves from structurally disadvantaged to nondisadvantaged neighborhoods in five U.S. cities demonstrated suppression effects for both boys and girls in perpetration of violence over time. However, suppression of property crime over time occurred only among girls (Kling et al., 2005).



Other positive effects of these moves (e.g., better performance in school and subsequent college attendance) were also found among girls but not among boys.

The critical lack of neighborhood-based studies with a focus on girls leaves more far-reaching conclusions without the necessary supportive empirical evidence. Particularly critical gaps in the current literature include:

- study of mechanisms underlying differential impacts of neighborhoods and moderating factors by gender,
- study of differential outcomes of neighborhood conditions among girls, and
- investigation of whether the impact of structural concentrated disadvantage on delinquency and violence differs for White girls compared to girls of other racial/ethnic backgrounds—a focus missing from empirical studies to date.

Methodological challenges noted at the beginning of this chapter also need to be resolved. As progress is made on these issues, researchers must expand their focus on the differential impacts of community structures on adolescent girls and boys. For example, the role of women in the institution of social control in neighborhoods needs elaboration. As recent studies suggest (e.g., Carr, 2003), women often play substantial roles in this regard. How the modeling of this affects daughters and sons in low-income structurally disadvantaged neighborhoods presents a new frontier in the study of gender differences in neighborhood effects on delinquency and violence.

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