Coercive Sexual Environments: What MTO Tells Us About Neighborhoods and Sexual Safety

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Abstract

Earlier research on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Moving to Opportunity (MTO) for Fair Housing Demonstration identified sexual environments as an important dimension of neighborhood quality for young people. The study presented in this article uses survey data and new indepth interviews with young women in MTO households to present the perspectives of women experiencing harassment in their neighborhoods and to deepen our understanding of how harassment relates to other aspects of their lives. Indepth interview respondents (N = 40) describe what it is like to live with chronic violence and predatory threats and how the violence and threats constrain community life. Women in these communities describe daily life with catcalls, grabbing, sexually suggestive language, and violence toward women and even very young girls. Our nonexperimental analysis of girls in the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey data (N = 2,183) supports a link between chronic violence and disadvantage and the existence of a coercive sexual environment (CSE) that further undermines the well-being of women and girls. We use multivariate ordinary least squares regression to identify contextual, social and emotional, and economic and demographic factors that are correlated with reported harassment. We observe a positive, statistically significant relationship between reported harassment and indicators of chronic neighborhood disadvantage. We argue that policy interventions aimed at improving the lives of young women in low-income neighborhoods need to identify and address CSEs.

Introduction

> *If I went to a neighborhood where men didn't treat females disrespectful, I would be like, "Wow, are you serious?" Like, you know, I would think that that was foreign because I'm so used to, you know, something else. When something greater comes it would just be like real foreign to me. So, I believe growing up in a different situation and environment, it affects who you become.*
>
> —Kenesha, youth interview

Young women like Kenesha, growing up in low-income, racially segregated, urban communities, view the world through a lens shaped by decades of poverty and racism. The risks for youth of growing up in concentrated poverty and disadvantage are well documented: developmental and cognitive delays; poor physical and mental health; and the likelihood of dropping out of school, engaging in risky sexual behavior, and becoming involved in delinquent and criminal activities (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Ellen and Turner, 1997; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2004; Sampson, 2012; Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Sampson, Sharkey, and Raudenbush, 2008; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert, 2011). In many of these neighborhoods, inadequate or nonexistent local institutions, such as poorly performing schools, inadequate health care, and a weak labor market, compound negative outcomes. Concentrated disadvantage contributes to lowered expectations in many areas (Anderson, 1991; Edin and Kefalas, 2005), including respect. As Kenesha suggests, it is more than the challenges and risks young girls face; it is an environment of concentrated and chronic disadvantage—"it affects who you become."

Neighborhoods mired in chronic disadvantage suffer a range of social ills, including high rates of violent crime, social disorder, and domestic violence (Kawachi, Kennedy, and Wilkinson, 1999; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997). In these disadvantaged communities, chronic violence is pervasive, both within and outside the home (Benson and Fox, 2004; Hannon, 2005), both stemming from and helping to perpetuate low levels of collective efficacy; that is, "social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good" (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997: 918). In the Urban Institute's previous work, we have theorized that when disadvantage and violence are great and collective efficacy and social control are minimal, a gender-specific neighborhood mechanism can emerge that has differential effects on male and female youth. To be specific, some communities develop what we have termed a *coercive sexual environment* (CSE), wherein harassment, domestic violence, and sexual exploitation of women and even very young girls become part of everyday life (Popkin, Acs, and Smith, 2010; Popkin, Leventhal, and Weismann, 2010; Popkin and McDaniel, 2013). For girls in the inner city, experience with early and coerced sex can combine with structural deprivations to promote a life trajectory marked by school dropout, early motherhood, little or no connection to the labor market, and unstable family formation (Dunlap, Golub, and Johnson, 2004).

Earlier work addressed the question of why outcomes for inner-city male and female youth were so strikingly different in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Moving to Opportunity (MTO) for Fair Housing Demonstration Interim Impacts Evaluation, with girls faring unexpectedly better in terms of mental health and engagement in risky behavior (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010; Popkin, Leventhal, and Weisman, 2010). That work suggested key

differences in how neighborhood safety matters for male and female adolescents, with girls in high-poverty, high-crime communities also coping with pervasive sexual harassment and constant fear of sexual violence—in essence, a CSE (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010; Popkin, Leventhal, and Weisman, 2010). This article builds on this earlier research by exploring what a CSE looks and feels like to those experiencing it and by creating a measure that can be used to learn more about the relationship between a girl's environment and her experiences of harassment.

A major goal of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the experiences of girls and women in low-income, racially segregated, urban communities. The first research question is, "How do women and girls in MTO experience sexual pressure and harassment in their neighborhoods?" To address this question, we use new qualitative interview data to explore how sexual harassment and pressures in chronically disadvantaged neighborhoods feel for girls and women. The second research question is, "What are the neighborhood-, family-, and youth-level correlates of sexual harassment?" To address this question, we use data from the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011) about girls' regular experiences of harassment and about their communities, homes, and individual characteristics that previous literature has suggested is associated with greater risk of exposure to harassment.

We begin by reviewing key findings from earlier work on MTO and other research on harassment to illustrate how the current analysis extends our understanding of a gender-specific neighborhood mechanism. After describing our methods, we present results from our analysis of indepth interviews to illustrate how girls and women perceive their neighborhoods. We then present an analysis of MTO survey data that explores the correlates of harassment. The discussion of our findings raises a number of issues about how sexual harassment feels, how girls navigate it, and how it relates to other socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. We then present the limitations and policy implications of our study, which highlight the importance of addressing coercive behaviors and harassment as a key component of strategies to reduce risk and improve the life chances of low-income women and girls.

Moving to Opportunity

HUD launched the MTO demonstration in 1994 in five sites: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City. MTO was a voluntary relocation program, targeted at very low-income residents of distressed public housing in high-poverty neighborhoods in the five cities (Orr et al., 2003; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). About 4,600 families, largely African American and Hispanic, were randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups: (1) a control group, in which families retained their public housing unit and received no new assistance related to MTO; (2) a Section 8 comparison group, in which families received the standard counseling and voucher subsidy for use in the private housing market; and (3) an experimental group, in which families received special relocation counseling, search assistance, and a voucher designed to incentivize relocating to a low-poverty neighborhood for at least 1 year. Slightly less than one-half of families in the experimental group successfully took advantage of the special voucher.

The MTO Interim Impacts Evaluation (Orr et al., 2003) was conducted in 2002, approximately 5 to 7 years after families relocated. Although MTO designers hoped to show that helping families who lived in some of the nation's most disadvantaged neighborhoods (distressed public housing)

move to lower poverty communities would help address some of the toughest problems of deep poverty, the Interim Impacts Evaluation findings were generally disappointing. MTO had no significant effect on employment for adults or educational attainment for youth, and many families did not stay in low-poverty neighborhoods. An exception to the apparently limited effect of the experimental voucher, however, was that adolescent girls whose families had moved were faring better in terms of mental health and risky behavior, whereas adolescent boys in the experimental group were no better off than those who remained in public housing.

The Three-City Study of MTO (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010) used nonexperimental and qualitative methods to probe some of these puzzling findings from the MTO Interim Impacts Evaluation research.[1] This study, which was the basis for our earlier research, involved interviews with 122 parent-child dyads in Boston, Los Angeles, and New York conducted from 2004 through 2005 and involved ethnographic observations of a subset of these dyadic households. The MTO Final Impacts Evaluation, conducted for HUD by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), interviewed families from 2008 to 2010, approximately 10 to 15 years after the MTO families' initial moves (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). This article addresses relevant results from the Three-City Study and MTO Final Impacts Evaluation research.

The Female Fear: How Neighborhoods Affect Girls

The most surprising finding from the MTO Interim Impacts Evaluation research was the gender difference in mental health and behavioral outcomes for boys and girls—especially surprising because preliminary single-site studies seemed to indicate that boys were faring better overall. Instead, the interim findings showed dramatic improvements for adolescent girls in terms of mental health and reduced delinquency but no benefits for boys. Our analysis of data from the Three-City Study suggested that the key mechanism underlying this gender-specific difference was neighborhood safety. Basing our analysis on this work, we argued that the main factor underlying the difference was that MTO girls who moved to safer, lower poverty communities experienced a substantial reduction in "female fear," Gordon and Riger's (1989) term (from their comprehensive study of women and violence) for the fear of sexual harassment, coercion, and rape and the ways in which it impedes women's lives. Although Gordon and Riger suggested that *all* women experience this fear to some degree, women in neighborhoods with high levels of chronic violence and disadvantage are most vulnerable (Popkin, Leventhal, and Weisman, 2010).

The comments of the MTO mothers and daughters we interviewed for the Three-City Study research were striking, clearly documenting that safety has meaning for adolescent girls beyond less exposure to gang violence and drug trafficking. Girls whose families used their vouchers to move from high-poverty public housing communities to lower poverty neighborhoods indeed benefited from a dramatic change in the level of their female fear. Adolescent girls and their mothers who moved to lower poverty neighborhoods were very aware of the dangers they left behind in public housing and cognizant that they felt less stressed and scared. Lower poverty communities

[1] Another study looking at these puzzles was conducted by Clampet-Lundquist, Kling, Edin, and Duncan and involved interviews with MTO dyads in Baltimore and Chicago (see Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2011).

offered a chance for girls to move about more freely and take advantage of their improved ability to make new social connections (Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2011). By contrast, those who were still living in—or who moved back to—high-poverty communities spoke of their fears, the daily threat of humiliation or violence, the often extreme strategies they used to protect themselves (or their daughters), and the consequences—pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault. Parents in high-poverty communities were concerned about their daughters not only being victimized, but also succumbing to pressures or temptations that might lead them into risky situations, often describing girls as "fast" because of their behavior or dress. We hypothesized that these gender-specific differences in neighborhood safety were the major factor underlying the positive outcomes for MTO girls who moved to low-poverty neighborhoods.

We continued to explore the question of how neighborhood environments might have differential outcomes for girls and boys with a small exploratory study in Washington, D.C. (Smith et al., 2008). We conducted three focus groups with parents and teens living in public housing, asking them targeted questions about dating patterns, sexual relationships, and the way men and boys treat women in their community. The findings from these groups supported our hypothesis that, in these very distressed communities, harassment and oversexualization of even very young girls was both normalized—that is, part of everyday life—and still traumatizing. Participants spoke about the difficulty in distinguishing flirting from harassment, especially with the pressures commonplace in a community fraught with widespread violence. Respondents told stories of older boys and men hanging around outside schools to attract young girls, girls trading sex for favors like cell phones, and the acceptance that boys would have multiple girlfriends. As we found in the Three-City Study research, participants frequently cited girls' own behavior and provocative dress as one source of the problem.

Although intriguing, this work was very exploratory and raised new questions about whether it was possible to demonstrate measurable differences in coercive sexual behaviors across neighborhoods and to more rigorously explore how these differences might affect the life chances and well-being for adolescent girls.

The most recent additions to the body of literature related to MTO are those associated with the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey. Like the MTO interim research, the MTO final research found significant differences in mental and physical health and well-being between adult women and girls who moved to lower poverty neighborhoods and those who remained in public housing (Ludwig et al., 2011). The MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey also included a set of questions intended to measure experiences of gender-based harassment and fear. Analysis of the final survey finds that girls in the experimental group were significantly less likely than those in the control group to report frequent unwanted sexual attention (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011).

Understanding Coercive Sexual Environments

As outlined previously, our work exploring the gender differences in outcomes for MTO youth led us to define a specific neighborhood mechanism, a CSE, that we believe undermines the life chances of adolescent girls growing up in distressed communities. These neighborhoods are mired in what Sampson (2012) refers to as concentrated disadvantage—places with high poverty, high

crime, and distress that blight the life chances of the families who live there. He argued that, because of their history of disadvantage, these communities suffer from low levels of collective efficacy, which in turn are associated with a range of ills, including violence, poor health, and infant mortality. Other evidence suggests that the risk of sexual violence is greater in disadvantaged communities, even among couples with higher incomes (Fox and Benson, 2006). Distressed, central-city public housing communities like those in which MTO families lived are some of the most racially and economically segregated communities in the nation, where the worst aspects of concentrated disadvantage are plainly evident—physical decay, violent crime, drug trafficking, drug and alcohol addiction among adults, high rates of incarceration, and the absence of even the most basic amenities, such as grocery stores and laundromats. Many adults who live in those communities are disconnected from the labor market and suffer from high rates of physical and mental illness; many of the children and youth are in danger of injury, neglect, and educational failure (Popkin et al., 2000; Popkin, Acs, and Smith, 2010).

Ample evidence suggests that children growing up in such troubled communities experience developmental delays, suffer serious physical and mental health problems, and are at greater risk for delinquency, early sexual initiation, and teen parenthood (Popkin, Leventhal, and Weismann, 2010). In addition, existing research supports the idea that girls and boys experience the effects of chronic disadvantage in very different ways, especially as they enter adolescence. In the 1990s, Anderson argued that young men in inner-city neighborhoods felt pressured to act tough to maintain respect, following the "code of the street," and girls gained status and respect through getting pregnant (Anderson, 1990). In a more recent example, one study of African-American youth growing up in high-crime communities found that young men focus on maintaining respect and avoiding the risk of gun violence, whereas young women focus on the fear of being the object of predatory behavior (Cobbina, Miller, and Brunson, 2008). In her graphic portrayal of life for low-income, urban, African-American girls, Miller (2008: 149) emphasized how neighborhood environments place girls at risk, writing that the "broader patterns of girls' neighborhood mistreatment, visible violence against women, crime and delinquent peer networks, and the prevalence of sexual harassment in schools all coalesced to create social contexts that heightened young women's risks for sexual victimization." As in our research on MTO and with Washington, D.C. public housing residents, Miller noted that teens often believe that the girls are to blame because of the way they behave or dress, explaining that "gendered status hierarchies and the sexualization of young women meant that a number of youths looked to young women's behavior or dress in explaining their neighborhood risks" (Miller, 2008: 39).

Understanding Individual Perceptions of Coercive Sexual Environments

Our own research, combined with our review of the literature, suggests it is not, as some residents suggest, the way girls dress that puts them at risk, but neighborhood characteristics and other environmental factors that put them at risk. Youth living in high-poverty, disadvantaged neighborhoods are exposed to a variety of neighborhood conditions, interactions, and stresses that potentially affect developmental and academic outcomes. The effect of neighborhood environments—often referred to as neighborhood effects—on life outcomes can vary considerably, however (Harding et al., 2010). Girls' perceptions of harassment and unwanted attention are likely shaped by their age, ethnicity, and family background, in addition to their gender. Our previous research highlighted

one of the challenges of measuring individual perceptions—whereas the women and girls in our studies consistently described a threatening environment rife with harassment, oversexualization, and unwanted attention, we also found that these phenomena are viewed as part of everyday life rather than as a problem. It is also difficult to predict which girls might be at greater risk, given that many demographic and social characteristics can potentially be both risk factors for and results of CSEs. The factors discussed in the existing literature as associated with CSEs fall into three broad categories.

1. *Contextual factors.* Family routines and parental involvement can be central to understanding how youth experience their environments and relationships in neighborhoods and schools.
2. *Social and emotional factors.* Adolescents and teenagers experience a great deal of physiological and emotional development. How young people navigate the freedoms and responsibilities of young adulthood and how their peers influence them may protect them or make them more vulnerable to harassment. For example, young people are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as early sexual initiation, smoking, marijuana use, and truancy if their peers have done so as well (Card and Giuliano, 2011).
3. *Economic and demographic factors.* Economic and demographic characteristics of youth may make them more vulnerable to harassment (or more likely to report it). Young people in single-parent households spend more of their time unsupervised; many come home from school to empty households while their parent works (Flannery, Williams, and Vazsonyi, 2010).

Evidence from the MTO evaluation suggests that neighborhoods influence young girls' lives, and other research suggests that coercive sexual norms and harassment are additional risks that women in areas of concentrated disadvantage face. Critical dimensions missing from this body of work, however, are the perspectives of women experiencing CSEs and a more thorough understanding of how harassment relates to other aspects of the lives of women in distressed areas. What do pervasive fears of sexual violence and regular encounters with harassment look and feel like to those who face it, and which neighborhood-, household-, and individual-level factors are most associated with elevated reports of harassment? Although the young women who cope with CSEs may shed critical insight on both of these questions, the latter demands more systematic analysis. Our study addresses this problem by drawing on the insights and observations of women and girls who face CSEs from indepth interviews and by complementing their perspectives with an analysis of survey data that examine key correlates of harassment.

Methods

This article draws on survey data collected as part of the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation and on new data from a set of indepth interviews with mother-daughter dyads in Los Angeles conducted in the summer of 2011. The University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research collected the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey data between June 2008 and April 2010 under its contract with NBER. The database includes 3,273 adult household heads and 5,105 youth who were ages 10 to 20 years at the end of 2007 (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). The response rate was approximately 90 percent for adults and youth. Using these data, we identified 2,374 girls ages 13 to 20 whose

families participated in MTO between 1994 and 2008. Some of these girls had missing data for one or more key measures, leaving us with an analytical sample of 2,183 girls.[2] Exhibit 1 presents the characteristics of girls in the national survey sample and the indepth interview sample.[3]

Exhibit 1

Survey and Indepth Interview Samples

Variable Name	Survey Sample	Interview Sample
Sample size	2,183	20 dyads
Girls' reported harassment		
Mean (SD)	3.89 (2.95)	4.15 (3.03)
Girls' age 17–20 (%)	52.3	30.0
Race and ethnicity (%)		
African American, non-Hispanic	60.0	50.0
White, non-Hispanic	1.4	5.0
Other, non-Hispanic	2.3	0.0
Hispanic	31.4	30.0
Missing	4.90	15.0
Household income (%)		
≤ $11,000	28.5	35.0
$11,000–$25,000	28.0	45.0
≥ $25,000	28.5	20.0
Missing	14.9	0.0
Adult has GED or equivalent (%)	53.5	45.0
Missing	6.6	5.0
City (%)		
Baltimore	12.9	0.0
Boston	20.2	0.0
Chicago	21.3	0.0
Los Angeles	23.4	100.0
New York	22.2	0.0
Neighborhood poverty (%)		
Mean (SD)	29 (12)	30 (8)

GED = General Equivalency Diploma. SD = standard deviation.

Sources: MTO Final Impacts Evaluation Survey (2008); U.S. Census Bureau

Analytic Approach

We use the data from our indepth interviews to explore how girls and women perceive and describe the gender dynamics in their neighborhoods. We also take advantage of the neighborhood- and individual-level data from the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey to conduct a nonexperimental, exploratory analysis of the factors associated with individual perceptions of sexual harassment.

[2] To maximize our sample size, we used the sample mean to impute parental education and median household income for less than 10 percent of the girls. We also used the race and ethnicity of a girl's parent to impute a number of cases in which the girl's race and ethnicity were not available.

[3] Four girls in the indepth interview sample were not within the age range (13 to 20) for many of the survey items that we included in our quantitative analysis, and so they are not included in the sample for the regression analysis. They are nonetheless included in the Interview Sample column in exhibit 1, and their interview responses are included in the qualitative analysis portion of the study.

Indepth Interviews

The new interviews conducted for this project sought to better understand how MTO program participants experience sexual pressure and harassment in their neighborhoods and to have them describe accepted neighborhood norms about respect, romantic relationships, commitment, and sexual activity. Interview questions prompted respondents to identify sexual pressures in their neighborhoods, compare their experiences (or expectations) of how men treat women in different communities, and discuss how they navigate potentially unsafe neighborhood situations. Although harassment is often a very personal experience, the interview guide prompted reflection on these issues often through a neighborhood lens. We conducted indepth interviews with 20 mother-daughter dyads[4] (40 separate interviews) from the Los Angeles MTO sample in the summer of 2011. We selected Los Angeles because we hoped to recruit respondents from neighborhoods with different poverty levels, and the Los Angeles MTO site was the most successful in moving families to low-poverty neighborhoods. It was also a potentially promising site to find respondents with experience in different types of neighborhoods, because shifts in the rental market caused a number of families who moved to lower poverty neighborhoods during the demonstration to move back to higher poverty areas. Finally, Los Angeles was one of the Three-City Study sites, enabling us to build on our indepth familiarity with the site. We identified 241 eligible MTO households with a female 13 to 24 years of age in the household who was not the head of household. We sent recruitment letters to all eligible households introducing the project, describing their opportunity to participate, and providing a toll-free number to call to register or ask questions. These introductory letters were followed up with attempts to reach all eligible households by telephone.[5] The first 20 dyads to complete interviews were included in the study.

For this research, we developed semistructured interview guides that cover topics including housing mobility, neighborhood sexual safety and harassment, friends, school, peer pressure, teenage relationships, sexual activity, and pregnancy. Most respondents were very forthcoming on these sensitive topics, with many offering detailed thoughts and opinions.[6] Teams of two experienced researchers with training in qualitative data collection conducted the interviews. Interviewers were matched to respondents on gender (all female) but not on race or ethnicity. Spanish-speaking respondents were given the opportunity to conduct the in-person interview in Spanish.[7] Separate

[4] In one dyad, the adult portion of the dyad was the grandmother. The mother was not present in the home and the grandmother performed the role of primary caregiver.

[5] We hoped to interview young women in a variety of neighborhood situations (high and low poverty; more and less reported harassment). To that end, initial recruitment strategies divided eligible families into different categories based on neighborhood poverty level and response to the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey questions regarding harassment and fear. We conducted recruitment activities in waves, hoping to secure interviews with respondents in different situations. Difficulty in finding willing respondents led us to abandon this tiered recruitment strategy and offer all eligible families the opportunity to participate.

[6] Given that we were interviewing two members of a family, we were able to compare responses to help gauge how forthcoming each respondent was to the interview questions. We also reviewed transcripts for internal consistency. Interviewers made notes in internal family profiles on their impressions of a respondent's cooperation and understanding of the interview.

[7] Four adult female household heads chose to be interviewed in Spanish. The female youth in each of these dyads chose to be interviewed in English.

but concurrent interviews were conducted with the head of household and one eligible female youth. Interviews were held in the homes of respondents and lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes.[8] Each respondent (adult and youth) was given $40 to compensate them for their time.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the content was coded for analysis using NVIVO.[9] We identified emergent trends and other key responses thematically related to girls' experiences of harassment and exposure to CSEs. We gave special attention to girls' perceptions of harassment and respect in specific settings, such as schools, neighborhoods, and the home.

Survey Analysis

To measure sexual harassment and unwanted sexual attention, we use items added to the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey. NBER, which conducted the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation, adapted questions from MADICS, or the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study, about how often girls face unwanted or rude comments and unwanted sexual attention from their peers or are afraid to go places because of unwanted attention or pressure (Goldstein et al., 2007). The MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey asked adolescent girls how often (never, a couple of times each year, a couple of times each month, once or twice a week, or every day) they experienced the following—

1. How often do people make unwanted or rude comments to you?
2. How often do people give you sexual attention that you do not want?
3. How often are you afraid to go places because you worry about unwanted attention or pressure?

We used the responses from these three items to create a harassment index that ranges from 0 (respondent never experienced any of the three types of harassment) to 12 (respondent experienced all three types of harassment daily). Among girls in our study sample, one-fourth have harassment indices of 0 to 1; one-fourth have harassment indices of 2 or 3; one-fourth have harassment indices of 4 to 6; and the remaining one-fourth have harassment indices of 7 to 12. Each point on the harassment index reflects increased frequency or type of harassment and assumes that experiencing harassment more frequently is similar to experiencing multiple types of harassment.

To determine whether reports of harassment, as measured by the harassment index, vary for girls with different characteristics, we calculated bivariate descriptive statistics to examine differences according to contextual factors at home, at school, and in the neighborhood; social and emotional factors; and economic and demographic factors. Then, we assess the extent to which certain factors are more strongly associated with harassment than others, using an ordinary least squares regression model in which the harassment index is regressed on all the factors. Exhibit 2 presents descriptions of the measures used.

[8] We offered respondents the option of meeting at a public place, but all chose to have the interviews conducted in their homes.

[9] NVIVO is software that enables researchers to organize and report on qualitative data like those from the indepth interviews used in this study.

Exhibit 2

Descriptions of Study Variables (1 of 2)

Variable Name	Item Wording or Description	Scale
Contextual variables		
Presence of gangs	Are there any gangs in your neighborhood or where you go to school?	Dummy variable representing yes/no response.
Perceived neighborhood safety	How safe do you feel on the streets near your home at night?	Four-point scale recoded as a dummy variable.
Neighborhood poverty rate	Derived from tract-level U.S. census data.	Decimal between 0 and 1 representing share of households, weighted by individual's time living in neighborhood.
Neighborhood White population	Derived from tract-level U.S. census data.	Decimal between 0 and 1 representing share of households, weighted by individual's time living in neighborhood.
Positive school climate	Fraction of positive responses to five school quality statements.	Decimal between 0 and 1, average of five items recoded as dummy variables.
Peers dropped out of school	Did your [friend/friends] ever drop out of school?	Dummy variable representing yes/no response.
Peer drug use	[Has your close friend/Have your close friends] ever used marijuana or other drugs?	Dummy variable representing yes/no response.
Peers value studying	Among most of your close friends you hang out with, how important is it to your friends to study?	Four-point scale recoded as a dummy variable.
Peers extracurricularly involved	[Has your close friend/Have your close friends] ever been involved in school activities like school clubs, teams, or projects?	Dummy variable representing yes/no response.
Domestic violence in household	Did you ever witness serious physical fights at home, like a father beating up a mother?	Dummy variable representing yes/no response.
Parent-child involvement	Fraction of positive responses to three items reflective of parent's involvement in the youth's life.	Decimal between 0 and 1, average of three items recoded as dummy variables.
Witnessed drug use/ sales	Have you seen people using or selling illegal drugs in your neighborhood during the past 30 days?	Dummy variable representing yes/no response.

Exhibit 2

Descriptions of Study Variables (2 of 2)

Variable Name	Item Wording or Description	Scale
Social and emotional variables		
Educationally on track	Youth is enrolled in age-appropriate grade or has GED equivalent.	Dummy variable for whether youth is on track or not.
In gifted and talented program	Have you ever been enrolled in a program for the gifted and talented?	Dummy variable representing yes/no response.
Ever experienced mood disorder	Child met five conditions established by MTO study as signaling a mood or depression-related disorder.	Dummy variable, equals 1 when youth meets conditions signaling mood disorder.
Ever experienced anxiety disorder	Child met four conditions established by MTO study as signaling generalized anxiety disorder.	Dummy variable, equals 1 when youth meets conditions signaling anxiety disorder.
Index of delinquent behaviors	Fraction of nine delinquent behaviors in which youth reported ever engaging.	Decimal between 0 and 1, representing number of behaviors in which youth has engaged.
Index of risky behaviors	Fraction of four risky behaviors in which youth reported ever engaging.	Decimal between 0 and 1, representing number of behaviors in which youth has engaged.
Regular social activity	During the hours when you are not at school, how often do you either talk on the phone, hang out, or get together with at least one friend?	Dummy variable representing whether youth spends time with at least one friend per week.
Extracurricular involvement	Have you participated this year in school sports, or any other group or club, including honor society?	Dummy variable representing yes/no response.
School suspension/ expulsion	Have you ever been suspended or expelled from school?	Dummy variable representing yes/no response.
Economic and demographic variables		
Youth is age 17–20	Based on date of birth of youth provided by head of household, age at time of final survey.	Dummy variable, equals 1 for older youth in the sample.
African American, non-Hispanic	Based on race and ethnicity of youth provided by head of household.	Dummy variable, equals 1 for African-American, non-Hispanic youth.
White, non-Hispanic	Based on race and ethnicity of youth provided by head of household.	Dummy variable, equals 1 for White, non-Hispanic youth.
Other race, non-Hispanic	Based on race and ethnicity of youth provided by head of household.	Dummy variable, equals 1 for other race, non-Hispanic youth.
Parent educational attainment	From adult survey, has head of household attained a high school diploma or GED?	Dummy variable, equals 1 for those who obtained a GED or equivalent.
Total household income	From adult survey, sum of household income from all sources.	In 2009 U.S. dollars.
Presence of older sister	From MTO family roster, does youth have an older sister?	Dummy variable, equals 1 if the household includes an older sister.

GED = General Equivalency Diploma. MTO = Moving to Opportunity.

Sources: MTO Final Impacts Evaluation Survey (2008); U.S. Census Bureau

Results

This study builds on our earlier research on the gender difference in outcomes for MTO adolescents. The goal of the work is to explore the extent to which girls' perceptions of their neighborhoods, particularly their perceptions of sexual safety, are related to contextual factors such as poverty and crime, individual-level economic and demographic factors, and social and emotional factors. Together, the survey analysis and the indepth interviews present a framework for understanding how girls' experiences of harassment are related to their neighborhood context and individual characteristics. The qualitative interviews lend depth to our understanding of what it means to grow up in an atmosphere rife with sexual harassment and threats. Exhibit 3 presents the key characteristics of survey sample members and levels of reported harassment among subgroups. The average harassment index for the sample was 3.89. Differences in reported harassment are identified among subgroups defined according to contextual, social and emotional, and economic and demographic characteristics.

Exhibit 3

Descriptive Statistics for Survey Sample (1 of 3)

Study Variable	Percent of Sample	Mean Harassment
All	100.0	3.89
Contextual		
School climate		
Very negative	4.3	5.29†
Moderate	25.6	4.55*
Very positive	70.1	3.56***
Peers dropped out of school		
Yes	19.7	4.66***
No	80.3	3.70
Peer drug use		
Yes	31.0	4.87***
No	69.0	3.45
Peers value studying		
Yes	46.1	3.67**
No	53.9	4.08
Peers extracurricularly involved		
Yes	79.9	3.86
No	20.1	3.99
Parent-child involvement		
Very little involvement	23.5	4.40†
Some involvement	27.2	4.23
Significant involvement	49.3	3.46***
Domestic violence in household		
Yes	16.6	4.85***
No	83.4	3.70
Perceived neighborhood safety		
Streets feel safe	51.0	3.16***
Streets do not feel safe	49.0	4.64
Presence of gangs		
Yes	65.4	4.39***
No	34.6	2.94

Exhibit 3

Descriptive Statistics for Survey Sample (2 of 3)

Study Variable	Percent of Sample	Mean Harassment
Contextual (continued)		
Witnessed drug use/sales		
Yes	36.0	5.01***
No	64.0	3.26
Neighborhood poverty rate		
≤ 10%	1.8	2.88†
10–40%	87.3	3.86*
≥ 40%	10.9	4.32**
Neighborhood White population		
≤ 7%	33.3	4.34†
7–23%	33.4	3.87**
≥ 23%	33.4	3.46***
Social and emotional		
In gifted and talented program		
Yes	23.3	4.52***
No	76.7	3.70
Extracurricular involvement		
Yes	31.5	3.97
No	68.5	3.85
School suspension/expulsion		
Yes	18.4	4.48***
No	81.6	3.76
Educationally on track		
Yes	86.4	3.86
No	13.6	4.06
Index of delinquent behaviors		
Zero or one	77.2	3.52†
Two or three	17.8	4.95***
Four or five	4.2	5.91***
More than five	0.8	5.82***
Index of risky behaviors		
None	27.0	2.75†
One or two	41.0	3.86***
Three	18.0	4.66***
Four	14.0	5.19***
Regular social activity		
Yes	49.6	4.16***
No	50.4	3.63
Ever experienced mood disorder		
Yes	20.2	5.40***
No	79.8	3.51
Ever experienced anxiety disorder		
Yes	14.8	5.27***
No	85.2	3.65

Exhibit 3

Descriptive Statistics for Survey Sample (3 of 3)

Study Variable	Percent of Sample	Mean Harassment
Economic and demographic		
Age		
13–16	47.7	3.66
17–20	52.3	4.10***
Race and ethnicity		
African American, non-Hispanic	60.0	4.06***
White, non-Hispanic	1.4	3.77†
Other race, non-Hispanic	2.3	3.46
Hispanic	31.4	3.47
Missing	4.9	4.78***
Total household income		
≤ $11,000	28.5	3.92†
$11,000–25,000	28.0	3.99
≥ $25,000	28.5	3.75
Missing	14.9	3.90
Presence of older sister		
Yes	69.0	3.83
No	31.0	4.02
Parent educational attainment		
Has GED/HS diploma	53.5	3.96
No GED/HS diploma	40.0	3.75

GED = General Equivalency Diploma. HS = high school.

**p < .10. **p < .01. ***p < .001. †indicates reference group for variables with more than two categories.*

Sources: MTO Final Impacts Evaluation Survey (2008); U.S. Census Bureau

Indepth Interviews

The indepth interviews provide personal accounts of harassment and violence in neighborhood life. In the beginning of the interview, we asked respondents more generally about their neighborhoods. Interview respondents confirmed that where you grow up—your neighborhood—matters. When prompted about the differences of living in various neighborhoods, one mother discusses how neighborhoods have fundamentally defined how her daughter developed.

> *[Neighborhoods] define or contribute to the way everything is or how each child is coming along and how they develop, how they think, how they feel. The environment, it has a lot to do with it.*
>
> —Brianna, adult interview

Respondents also suggested that how people are treated and what they see of life directly influence how they view the world. For our respondents living in communities of concentrated disadvantage, violence has been a part of everyday life. Women spoke about the commonality of physical violence in their communities, related to both incessant fighting (with a regular fear of "getting beat") and instances of gun violence.

> *In worse neighborhoods, girls are trying to jump you because of a color you have on or you look like you from somebody, you somebody I knew or whatever, you can't get a mistake, ask someone, and you'll get hurt, even shot or beat up.*
>
> —Dania, adult interview

Expectations for what constitutes a "safe" neighborhood vary. Many respondents openly said they have lived in places of danger, and oftentimes those reporting a move to a "better" area also offered examples of activity reflecting an acceptance of dangerous activities that might not be tolerated in a less vulnerable community. One mother's mention of "only" one homicide on her new street in 6 years and another's boast that her current neighborhood is safe with little violence—"just the shooting that we hear at night" and "a lot of gang activity"—reflect how violence and norms are interpreted by life experiences.

Seemingly random violence is common and particularly troubling for adults and youth. The fear of being in the wrong place at the wrong time or getting caught in the crossfire promotes a sense of helplessness and futility.[10] It is not surprising that when asked about "safety," some respondents responded first with concerns about gangs, shootings, stabbings, and fights.

> *I keep my surroundings open and watch my back, and, you know, because you never know when someone want to act crazy day or night. If they're going to do it, they're going to do it.*
>
> —Keeanna, adult interview

Multiple respondents described a very sexualized neighborhood environment—discussing sexualized elements in their neighborhoods such as active prostitution, men trying to recruit girls to prostitute for them, men regularly on the corner making suggestive comments and gestures to women, and older men "dating" younger girls—but they speak of these situations as "just the way it is."

> *If I try to walk to the shopping center, it's like I walk and guys would be all, 'hey,' and honking the horn, or they be hanging out like they be, oh man, being perverts sometimes like. So I don't walk places, I try to get rides wherever I go."*
>
> —Amanda, youth interview

After one young respondent, Chantal, said it is commonplace for men and boys in her neighborhood to make rude comments about females' bodies, she explained she had heard comments about "my butt or whatever" the day before but "you've got to get used to it." When asked if males grab females, she said, "yeah" but explained that it isn't "uncomfortable" because "I know everybody around here. … I know all these dudes want to talk to[11] me, because they all try to talk to me."

When asked how men treat women in their neighborhood, respondents said everything from "good" to "like dogs." It was not uncommon for respondents to reflect on their neighborhood or other places they lived and share harrowing stories of verbal and physical abuse.

[10] This assertion is consistent with other studies linking neighborhood processes—chronic violence and fear—to lower levels of self-efficacy for young people (see Dupere, Leventhal, and Vitaro, 2012).

[11] Some respondents used the term "talk to" as a euphemism for a more prolonged connection, such as dating or sexual activity.

> *They call the girls hoes and B's and, like, some girls I know, like, they have sex with the boys over here and then the boys will go around and tell everybody and then call the girls out … like they just have no respect for women.*
>
> —Chantal, youth interview

> *[Signs of disrespect]. If they hit you. If they call you out by name, and if they bring other females or cheat on you.*
>
> —Keeanna, adult interview

Respondents speculated on why these situations happen. A common theme offered by Keeanna is that women might have low self-esteem and feel "that's the only [man] you can get, and so they just put up with it rather than being alone." She feels it could be particularly true for women "in the projects. … Sometime they're not working, you know, all that plays a factor into it, getting welfare, you know, want some money, things like that … it can bring you down." She went on to say that one reason it is worse for women in some neighborhoods (like her old public housing community) is because "seeing a lot of the violence and things that are going on, … being hit and things like that."

Imagining neighborhoods in which such sexualized activities are not present was challenging for youth whose neighborhoods and everyday lives are rife with such pressures. When asked about other neighborhoods and how men might treat women differently in other places, one young woman said she did not know but seemed sure that it would be different from, and better than, her own neighborhood. As Kenesha said when thinking about a neighborhood where men did not treat women disrespectfully, "… it would just be like real foreign to me."

Respondents described strategies of isolation and "not getting involved" as ways to protect themselves (or their children) from potential violence and harassment.

> *I don't try to make problems with anybody, and I don't want problems with anybody. So I pretty much stay to myself and just deal with me, and my kids, and my grandkids. ... It's a lot of people that will stay to theirself or either don't want to get involved. You know, that ain't my child or whatever, or that ain't got nothing to do with me.*
>
> —Dania, adult interview

> *I also taught them you have no friends, [only] associates. If you have a friend, you know, they will just die with you in a hardcore way. … If that associate, you know, does something wrong, then you just cut that associate off and keep on moving. So it's kind of weird teachings, but it, like I always say, it's a dog-eat-dog world out there.*
>
> —Imani, adult interview

One teen, Simone, told us how, after seeing men grabbing and disrespecting women "out of my window," she does not "want to call the police in, because that's their business. So I just stay out of it. I just close the window, play music, just ignore it. Stay to myself." She went on to say how she feels about the guys she sees: "You just feel hate towards them, you know."

Mothers shared specific advice on how to avoid sexualized activities and dangers, including how to behave to avoid unwanted attention.

> *I told my kids if they ever was approached like that [harassing, making comments], that just to keep walking and don't pay it no mind. Don't show no smiley faces that you're interested, and don't be walking slow like you're waiting for them to catch up with you.*
>
> —Jasmine, adult interview

> *One rule my mom always told me and my sisters, and I remember this from, man, when we were like babies, … always respect your body so that everybody else can.*
>
> —Michelle, youth interview

Adult and youth interview respondents concurred with the importance of an involved parent to youth success. Many felt strongly that "parents got to take more control what goes on in their kid's life" and suggested that many youth problems are the result of "just a lack of paying attention to your kids." In addition to being plugged in, parents gave examples of house rules to promote safety and protect kids from neighborhood violence.

Correlates of Harassment

Exhibit 4 presents results from the multivariate regression analysis of girls' reported harassment. We review the results according to the three broad categories of factors that we outlined previously: contextual factors, social and emotional factors, and economic and demographic factors.

Contextual Factors

Several contextual variables had statistically significant relationships with reported harassment. Both gang activity and drug use in girls' neighborhoods were positively correlated with harassment, and the presence of either one corresponded to an increase in the harassment index of approximately 0.5 point on a 12-point scale. Perceived neighborhood safety was associated with less reported harassment, by about 0.8 point. Of the peer influences included in the model—whether peers dropped out from school, used drugs, or valued studying—only peer drug use had a statistically significant relationship with harassment, which was positive but modest. Positive school climate had a large, negative, and significant relationship with reported harassment. Greater parental involvement and a greater share of White households in the neighborhood were both associated with slightly lower harassment indices. Neighborhood poverty and household domestic violence did not have statistically significant relationships with reported harassment.

Social and Emotional Factors

Most of the social and emotional variables in the model had a statistically significant and positive relationship with reported harassment. Girls who had ever experienced a mood disorder or anxiety disorder were more likely to have reported harassment, as were girls who engaged in risky and delinquent behaviors or were suspended or expelled from school. Although the parameter estimate is modest in magnitude, a positive and statistically significant relationship emerged between participation in a gifted and talented school program and reported harassment. The relationships between reported harassment and regular social activity, extracurricular involvement, and being on track to graduate on time were not statistically significant.

Exhibit 4

Regression of Reported Harassment on Study Variables

Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	t Value
Intercept	3.35	0.41	8.22***
Contextual			
Presence of gangs	0.48	0.13	3.71***
Perceived neighborhood safety	– 0.80	0.12	– 6.66***
Neighborhood poverty rate	0.16	0.46	0.36
Neighborhood White population	– 0.61	0.29	– 2.10*
Positive school climate	– 1.31	0.25	– 5.28***
Peers dropped out of school	0.16	0.15	1.05
Peer drug use	0.38	0.14	2.73**
Peers value studying	– 0.14	0.11	– 1.21
Peers extracurricularly involved	0.13	0.15	0.91
Domestic violence in household	0.17	0.16	1.10
Parent-child involvement	– 0.16	0.07	– 2.37*
Witnessed drug use/sales	0.61	0.13	4.77***
Social and emotional			
Educationally on track	0.25	0.17	1.44
In gifted and talented program	0.39	0.14	2.87***
Ever experienced mood disorder	0.92	0.15	6.19***
Ever experienced anxiety disorder	0.44	0.17	2.63**
Index of delinquent behaviors	1.26	0.42	3.00**
Index of risky behaviors	0.97	0.21	4.66***
Regular social activity	0.15	0.11	1.30
Extracurricular involvement	0.11	0.12	0.90
School suspension/expulsion	0.30	0.15	1.93*
Economic and demographic			
Youth is age 17–20	0.19	0.13	1.39
African American, non-Hispanic	0.44	0.12	3.61***
White, non-Hispanic	0.26	0.48	0.55
Other race, non-Hispanic	0.77	0.60	1.28
Parent educational attainment	0.19	0.12	1.61
Total household income	0.00	0.00	– 1.22
Presence of older sister	– 0.04	0.12	– 0.31

*$p < .10$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

Notes: The N for the model is 2,183, and the adjusted R squared is .24. The reference category for race and ethnicity was Hispanic.
Sources: MTO Final Impacts Evaluation Survey (2008); U.S. Census Bureau

Economic and Demographic Factors

We included five economic and demographic measures in the model as control variables: age group, race and ethnicity,[12] parent's education, total household income, and whether a subject

[12] The dummy variable for the Hispanic group was omitted as the reference category. As exhibit 1 shows, the final sample is almost exclusively Hispanic and non-Hispanic African American. When we used non-Hispanic White or other non-Hispanic as the reference category for race and ethnicity in our regression analysis, we found that the Hispanic and non-Hispanic African-American dummy variables were collinear, so we selected Hispanic as the reference category for our final model. The dummy variable for the group of younger (ages 13 to 16) girls was also omitted as the reference category.

has an older sister. Of these measures, only the dummy variable for the non-Hispanic African-American group was statistically significant. Compared with the reference group, which was the Hispanic group, non-Hispanic African-American girls reported slightly more harassment.

Discussion

This study sought to illustrate the perspectives of women experiencing CSEs and to deepen our understanding of how harassment relates to other aspects of the lives of women and girls in distressed areas. Interview responses describing neighborhood life tell us how women and girls in the MTO study experienced sexual pressure and harassment in their neighborhoods. They vividly relate stories of rude gestures, sexual comments, and predatory behavior. The matter-of-fact recitation of disrespectful behavior, lewd acts, and low relationship aspirations is poignant. These voices paint a picture of low life expectations, pervasive violence, and acceptance of sexual threats consistent with previous work (Edin and Kefalas, 2005; Gardner, 1995; Miller, 2008; Popkin, Leventhal, and Weismann, 2010).

Although physical attacks can (and do) have an element of sexual threat, when some girls discuss safety, their first concern is the threat of flying fists and bullets. Experience with chronic violence is important to understanding how people perceive and report harassment and sexual violence. The downgrading of sexual threats as a safety concern seems linked to (1) the immediacy of permanent repercussions from gun and physical violence and (2) the acceptance of sexual intimidation, harassment, and degradation as a part of everyday life, both of which were common themes discussed by interview participants. This acceptance of the victimization of women is fed by wider violence and related, socially accepted relationship dynamics (Anderson, 1999, 1990; Cobbina, Miller, and Brunson, 2008; Miller, 2008) and may be part of what Wilson (2011: 20) noted as, "distinct cultural frames in the inner city have not only been shaped by race and poverty but, in turn, often shape responses to poverty including responses that may contribute to the perpetuation of poverty."[13]

Our respondents' stories illustrate what it is like to live with chronic violence and predatory threats and how those conditions constrain community life. The most common strategy for keeping safe is to ignore, isolate, and disassociate—to "keep to yourself." Whereas it may keep individual residents safe, staying indoors and avoiding engagement further undermines community cohesion, collective efficacy, and social control. Good neighborhoods, according to our respondents, have "nice people" who look out for each other—a willingness of neighbors to intervene on behalf of others in the neighborhood. When residents are afraid to intervene, however, social control erodes, creating the ideal conditions for the emergence and growth of a CSE. A violent and chaotic environment can promote sexual harassment and the abuse of women and girls by normalizing violent activities, degrading women and girls, and stifling community response.

[13] It is instructive to note Wilson's definition of cultural traits (frames) as "shared outlooks, modes of behavior, traditions, belief systems, worldviews, values, skills, preferences, styles of self-presentation, etiquette, and linguistic patterns—that emerge from patterns of intragroup interaction in settings created by discrimination and segregation and that reflect collective experiences within those settings" (Wilson, 2011: 20).

Our nonexperimental analysis of the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey data supports a link between chronic violence and disadvantage and the existence of a CSE that further undermines the well-being of women and girls. In this article, reported harassment emerges as one potential individual-level marker of CSE at the neighborhood level. We observe a positive, statistically significant relationship between reported harassment and several indicators of chronic neighborhood disadvantage. Neighborhood characteristics are not the only factors to emerge from our multivariate analysis, but they are among the strongest factors.

Girls living in neighborhoods with disorder and crime report more harassment. As we discussed previously, our earlier work suggests that a CSE is a reflection of chronic violence and disadvantage, and that it is associated with poor collective efficacy and social control. Our analysis, which finds that girls reporting gang activity and recent drug sales or use in their neighborhoods are more likely to report harassment, is consistent with the hypothesis that violence and social disorder play roles in creating communities with pervasive harassment and fear.

Our analysis also reveals a number of nonneighborhood factors that are related to reported harassment. Unsafe or unsupportive school environments may facilitate harassment. Between classes and before and after school, young women and their peers are often loosely supervised or unsupervised, creating opportunities for harassment to occur. Our analysis finds that having a more supportive school environment is associated with less reported harassment. In fact, school climate is the factor that is most strongly correlated with reported harassment for girls in our sample.

The home environment is a central context for young people, and involved parents make a difference. Children benefit from healthy families with parents who provide supportive environments and closely monitor their emotional, social, and academic well-being; they suffer in violent and chaotic home environments. It is not surprising that our analysis indicates that girls with more parental involvement, including parental help with homework, establishment of a curfew, and parental familiarity with friends, report less harassment than girls with less parental involvement. Parents who are involved in their children's lives may also observe neighborhood dynamics and offer advice on how to behave to avoid unwanted attention, including attention with a sexual connotation. This advice may help youth identify and navigate neighborhood influences.

Poor mental health is related to reported harassment. Young women with mood disorders or other mental health concerns may find it particularly challenging to navigate or avoid problematic people or places. They may also be more likely to experience symptoms of mood disorders if they have experienced harassment. This analysis finds that girls who have been diagnosed with a mood or anxiety disorder are more likely to report harassment than girls who have not had such a diagnosis. Differences between girls with and without mood or anxiety disorders emerge in our bivariate analysis and persist in our multivariate analysis. It is unclear, however, whether existing mental health issues make girls more vulnerable to harassment or whether the trauma of experiencing such harassment induces mood disorders (Hailey and Saxena, 2013).

Having friends who use drugs increases girls' risk of harassment. Although peers are typically very influential for teens, girls in this study whose friends have negative influences (for example, dropped out of school) or positive influences (for example, value studying or are involved in school activities) are no more or less likely to report harassment. One exception is that girls who report that their friends use drugs are more likely to report harassment.

Girls' own risky and delinquent behavior is associated with their reports of harassment. The indices summing youths' reported delinquent and risky behaviors are positively associated with reported harassment. Girls who engage in risky behaviors such as smoking, alcohol use, marijuana use, and sex are more likely to report harassment. Likewise, girls who engage in delinquent behaviors such as carrying a gun, belonging to a gang, stealing, or selling drugs are also more likely to report harassment. In fact, our bivariate and multivariate analyses suggest that girls who engage in risky behaviors or delinquent behaviors have a harassment index that is about 1 point higher than those girls who do not report such behaviors. Again, it is difficult to discern whether harassment causes or is caused by risky and delinquent behavior.[14]

Our analysis paints a more complex picture than the stereotype of a disruptive girl with a string of suspensions being more likely to experience sexual harassment than her academically on-track peer. For example, being suspended or expelled in the past 2 years is not associated with reported harassment, and neither is being educationally on track or participating in school clubs or groups. Participation in a gifted and talented program has a moderate positive relationship with reports of harassment, however. These findings highlight the complicated interplay between experiencing harassment, recognizing it as harassment, and letting others know that it has happened.

Limitations

Our study has two important limitations. First, sexual harassment may be more prevalent among our sample than our harassment index suggests, because many incidents of sexual harassment and sexual abuse go underreported, perhaps because victims who report incidents are often stigmatized. One-half of all students nationwide who are harassed do nothing about it, whereas one-third talk about it with a family member and a much smaller proportion report the incident to an authority at school (Hill and Kearl, 2011). Moreover, the pervasiveness and subsequent normalization of sexual violence in some communities can make it difficult for some people to identify and report harassing activity. To address this challenge during the indepth interviews, interview guides included questions asking respondents to describe neighborhood situations and relationships (such as "how men treat women" and "what does respect/disrespect look like") rather than labeling certain activities or experiences as harassment.

Second, the neighborhoods of girls in the MTO sample are almost exclusively moderate- to high-poverty communities. Nearly all (97 percent) of the girls in our study live in neighborhoods with a poverty rate in excess of 10 percent, and the vast majority (80 percent) of the girls live in a neighborhood with a poverty rate of 17 to 40 percent. As a result of this limited variation in neighborhood poverty, our analyses are unable to detect whether girls in low-poverty neighborhoods report less harassment. Therefore, although our regression and bivariate analyses using the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey does not suggest significant relationships between poverty and reported harassment, we cannot conclude that poverty is not correlated with girls' experiences of harassment. Racial

[14] See Lauritsen, Sampson, and Laub (1991) to review the difficulty in understanding victimization risk apart from delinquent lifestyle behaviors.

and ethnic composition, however, emerges as a statistically significant factor; girls living in neighborhoods with greater proportions of White residents report less harassment, equal to approximately 0.6 point on the harassment index. This relationship may have been able to emerge because of more variation in the proportion of White residents in sample members' neighborhoods. Sampson (2012) included racial segregation as one of the core components of what makes a chronically disadvantaged community, so it is perhaps not surprising that race plays a key role here.

Policy Implications

Results from the MTO Interim and Final Impacts Evaluation surveys show that adolescent girls who move from distressed public housing to neighborhoods with lower poverty rates, less crime, more educated and employed adults, and stronger social institutions fare better in terms of their mental health than girls who stay in their distressed neighborhoods (Kling, Liebman, and Katz, 2001; Orr et al., 2003; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). Findings from this study and previous indepth ethnographic and qualitative studies of MTO suggest that neighborhood sexual context—specifically, less harassment, violence, and pressure for early sexual initiation—in lower poverty neighborhoods may be a significant part of the explanation for why girls benefited so much from moves to these neighborhoods (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010; Popkin, Leventhal, and Weismann, 2010). This study used the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey to conduct a nonexperimental, exploratory analysis to document the way that girls and women describe how harassment looks and feels in their own words. We used the MTO Final Impacts Evaluation survey data to identify the factors associated with individual perceptions of harassment, one marker of a CSE.

Women in these communities describe daily life with catcalls, grabbing, sexually suggestive language, and violence toward women and even very young girls. This study identifies a number of contextual, social and emotional, and economic and demographic factors associated with reported harassment. In our analysis, we find that girls reporting the presence of gangs and drugs in their neighborhood—which are markers of violence and loss of social control—are more likely to report harassment, an individual marker of a CSE. Conversely, girls who perceive their neighborhood as a safe place or describe their school environment as positive report less harassment. Family and friends also seem to influence reported harassment, with greater parental involvement associated with less reported harassment and friends who use drugs connected to more reported harassment. Young women with mental or behavioral health issues are also more likely to report harassment. Harassment, pressure, and violence are shaming and traumatizing for young women and contribute to poor outcomes, including early pregnancy, early parenthood, and sexually transmitted diseases, associated with youth living in concentrated disadvantage.

We need sustainable solutions to address these realities. Successful interventions will address the violence that starts and perpetuates victimization and will build collective efficacy to strengthen community ties and positive social norms. Influencing social norms includes addressing prevailing attitudes toward masculinity, femininity, and healthy relationships. Increased community discussion of harassment and abuse may uncover existing and previous instances of such activity experienced by individuals and necessitate interventions to deal with trauma in the wider community. We believe effective approaches to combat CSEs will support residents in the development

of community interventions that empower female and male youth and their families to no longer accept "just the way it is" and create a new set of expectations for their neighborhood that directly deal with gender roles, sexual mores, and behaviors.

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