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Housing Choices Among Homeless Families in Child Welfare: A Mixed Methods Study

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Housing Choices Among Homeless Families in Child

Welfare: A Mixed Methods Study

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Biography

The author was born in LaGrange, Illinois, on May 8, 1987. She graduated from Lyons Township High School in 2005 and received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology, with a minor in Philosophy, from The University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in 2008. She received a Master of Arts degree in Clinical Psychology at DePaul University in 2012. She is currently completing her Predoctoral Internship in Clinical Psychology with the Central Texas Veterans' Healthcare System in Austin, Texas.

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Abstract

A growing body of research has identified a link between housing instability and involvement with child welfare services for families. For some, inadequate housing situations lead to parent-child separations or delayed reunification. Housing assistance may be one option for these families to avoid these outcomes; however, little research examines existing housing services for inadequately housed families in contact with the child welfare system. Public housing assistance represents the primary source to connect low-income families with affordable housing; however, a number of barriers challenge navigation of this system, including long waitlists, stigmatization of voucher use, and stringent eligibility requirements for all living in the household. The homeless service system also provides a safety net that many families try to avoid. In addition to difficulties securing housing through these systems, inadequately housed families in contact with child welfare must also address family needs for child safety and stability. Thus, it is important to understand how families choose housing when they receive assistance.

The present study employed a mixed methods design to examine the housing choices of families who are inadequately housed and in contact with child welfare services and perceptions of their neighborhoods. A qualitative substudy ($n = 19$) of a larger, randomized-controlled trial survey study examined housing choices and the role of safety in these choices. Quantitative analyses supplemented the qualitative analyses by using data from participants within the larger survey study to examine the relationship between participants' fear of crime, perception of neighborhood problems, and archival data (i.e., concentrated disadvantage, crime rates). Results indicated caregivers' housing choices are influenced by time constraints, affordability, and access to support and services, with safety taking less priority. Caregivers live in neighborhoods

with high rates of poverty and crime, while perceptions of these problems are generally not related to actual rates. Similarity of experiences between those referred for subsidized housing and those receiving service-as-usual is related to additional constraints that present themselves when attempting to use housing assistance. Caregivers' report of prioritized factors in housing decisions and challenges faced may inform child welfare service providers in identifying appropriate housing services, as well as apprise policies for existing housing programs. Furthermore, this study adds to the growing body of research suggesting those in disadvantaged neighborhoods who receive housing assistance remain in areas with high poverty and crime, indicating a need to examine and address broader systemic issues.

Child Welfare and Housing

Recent research has drawn attention to the link between housing instability and child welfare involvement for families. Inadequate housing may be a reason in and of itself for a parent-child separation if it increases the risk of maltreatment, if children are living in a physically unsafe or insufficient housing situation. The goal then of removing the child from the home is to mitigate any ill effects homelessness may have on the child's well-being. Unfortunately this is an all too common occurrence. Using data from a national survey of families involved with the child welfare system, Fowler and colleagues (2013) estimated that for families at-risk of their child being placed out-of-home, approximately 16% of families reported inadequate housing contributed to the risk of removal from the home. Similarly, qualitative research illuminates stories of parents and children separated only due to substandard housing conditions (Shdaimah, 2009). The relationship between families involved in child welfare services and those struggling with housing instability is clear and concerning.

A growing body of research has begun to shed light on the relationship between housing instability and child welfare involvement. A five-year study of homeless youth in New York City indicated only slightly less than a quarter of youth living in shelters also had involvement with child welfare at some point, and 18% of homeless youth had their first child welfare involvement following their first stay in a homeless shelter (Park, Metraux, Brodbar, & Culhane, 2004). Ongoing housing instability resulting in recurrent use of homeless shelters was further predictive of child welfare involvement (Park et al., 2004). Another study of child welfare involved families in Milwaukee County compared housing experiences over the past year in families with an out-of-home placement and those receiving supportive services to prevent removal from the home. For those families receiving services in response to an out-of-home placement, 41.9%

reported having to move in with family or friends over the past year and 29.1% had been

homeless in the past year, compared to families receiving in-home services to prevent out-of-

home placement of whom 21.6% moved in with family or friends and 10.2% were homeless

(Courtney, McMurtry, & Zinn, 2004). Of note, families in both groups said they did not have

enough money for their rent or mortgage over the past year (45.7% and 40.4%), suggesting

significant housing concerns for many families in contact with the child welfare system.

Homeless families are likely to experience a multitude of difficulties, particularly

poverty. To further disentangle the factors contributing to child welfare involvement for

homeless families, many studies have compared those who are inadequately housed with

families who are classified as low-income, but are able to maintain stable or permanent housing.

In a one-year birth cohort study conducted in Philadelphia and lasting for five years, researchers

found that 37% of mothers who had at least one report of homelessness since their child's birth

were also involved in child protective services, a percentage much greater than those families

who were low-income but housed (9.2%) and all other participants (4%) (Culhane, Webb, Grim,

Metraux, & Culhane, 2003). Similar findings were found in another study, with 44% of homeless

mothers having a separation from one or more of their children compared to 8% of poor-but-

housed mothers (Cowal, Shinn, Weitzman, Stojanovic, & Labay, 2002). These findings suggest

the relationship between housing instability and child welfare is not better explained by low-

income status, rather it is related to homelessness and other housing concerns specifically.

Housing concerns are not only linked with out-of-home placement for children, but may

also delay reunification of children and families. In one study, families with children in out-of-

home placements who reported they were ever homeless in the past year were 46.3% less likely

to have achieved reunification (Courtney et al., 2004). Furthermore, housing standards set by

child protective services often require housing to be not only physically and structurally safe, but also to have sufficient room for a child to reside. Families who are able to "double up" with other family or friends still may not meet criteria necessary for their children to return to their care (Shdaimah, 2009). Font and Warren (2013) found that families who had reported homelessness or doubling up were no more likely to have a case substantiated; however, for those families who did have a case substantiated and were inadequately housed, they were less likely to have their case closed. It is possible the cases remained open due to need, as these families were more likely to receive and use provided services (Font & Warren, 2013). At times, services may prove successful for all other needs and yet families, their caseworkers, and other advocates still struggle to find them housing, such that the families are ready for reunification yet have no home in which to do so (Shdaimah, 2009). Regardless, it is clear housing concerns pose a real threat to both keeping families together and reuniting them once they are separated.

Housing Interventions: Previous Research and Lessons Learned

Low-Income Housing Assistance: An Abbreviated History

A number of housing services have been provided for low-income families. The earliest models were typically project-based, or public housing units. The first public housing units were built in 1937, and created in the hopes of providing affordable housing and assistance for those who could not afford to buy or rent a home independently. In order to receive assistance, the family had to live in a subsidized building or unit. Project-based housing units were developed in two phases: from the 1930s through the early 1970s the federal government provided one-time funds to public housing agencies (PHAs) to both build and manage the buildings, and from the 1960s through the early 1980s the federal government contracted housing developments directly (Orlebeke, 2000; Turner & Kingsley, 2008). However, over time it became clear this model of

housing the poor had many shortcomings. These buildings became areas of concentrated poverty, and housing authorities were unable to maintain the physical structure of the properties as they commonly lacked funds. Not only did the housing itself become unsafe and unsanitary, many public housing buildings also fostered chronic crime and disorder such that families often experienced or were witnesses to violence and victimization.

An alternative to housing assistance moved away from project-based housing to allow families more choice in where they lived. In 1974, housing vouchers were introduced as a scattered and tenant-based form of housing (Orlebeke, 2000; Turner & Kingsley, 2008). Households receiving these vouchers are not bound to a specific building or unit, and instead are able to move to an apartment and neighborhood of their choosing while retaining the voucher. Families receiving vouchers pay 30% of their income, with the rest of the rent covered by the government up to a maximum appropriate for the local fair market rent (Turner & Kingsley, 2008). Thus, families are able to use vouchers in any housing that their income plus the highest amount of the subsidy will afford, and that will accept them. One purpose in creating this program was to attempt to dismantle the tendency for people to live in concentrated poverty, instead allowing families to live where they choose and foster mixed-income neighborhoods. The housing choice-voucher program continues to be the most widely used form of housing assistance, with 2.1 million low-income households receiving housing vouchers (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2014), compared to 1.2 million households residing in public housing units (HUD, 2014d).

More recent housing policies have focused on place-based initiatives. The Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) initiative aimed to further improve housing assistance provided for families in need. Begun in 1992, HOPE VI sought to

demolish some of the most distressed public housing projects across the country and replace these buildings with other buildings that are better designed, economically-mixed, and better integrated into the community around them (Goetz, 2011; Turner & Kingsley, 2008). Within the first decade, HUD awarded 446 HOPE VI grants within 166 cities across the country, with 63,100 units demolished and an additional 20,300 units planned for redevelopment (Holin, Buron, Locke, & Cortes, 2003). More recently, HOPE VI grants have targeted smaller, older urban centers with what they call Main Street revitalizations, meant to renovate these areas and turn office and commercial buildings that are no longer in use into rent-producing affordable housing units (HUD, 2014c).

To further support the goals of HOPE VI, the Choice Neighborhoods initiative advanced by the Obama administration seeks to further improve communities by enhancing services provided and community development within at-risk neighborhoods. These newer housing interventions are meant to recognize the importance of neighborhood and community in outcomes for individuals and families. In this initiative, community members work together to develop a comprehensive strategy (i.e., Transformation Plan) outlining how they will revitalize not only public housing, but also the surrounding neighborhood (HUD, 2014a). Eight cities received funding to implement programming since 2010, and another 38 are currently planning implementation (HUD, 2014a). While this strategy is hopeful, it requires a great deal of buy-in for both community members and agencies, which may or may not be readily available in the most distressed areas. Research has yet to evaluate the implementation or impact of the Choice Neighborhoods initiative on communities.

Barriers to Housing Assistance

A number of systematic barriers impede access to housing assistance for low-income households. Currently, the need for housing assistance is widespread and results in extremely long waitlists for housing vouchers that can last many years to a decade in some areas (Carlson, Haveman, Kaplan, & Wolfe, 2012). Less than one third of families that are eligible and in need of assistance actually receive it (Turner & Kingsley, 2008). Waitlists for vouchers have become so long they frequently remain closed from accepting new names or requests. Due to the length of these lists, many programs employ a lottery approach, such that some families may be on the waitlist for a short period of time while others wait years for their name to be picked. In a qualitative study of low-income black households in Mobile, Alabama over four years (2009 to 2012), one participant reported she missed the call from the housing authority telling her she had been picked while she was at work, and by the time she called the following day she had lost her spot (DeLuca, Garboden, & Rosenblatt, 2013). This represents the precariousness many low-income families experience to secure housing assistance.

Waitlists have only increased in length with the HOPE VI initiative. Residents were often forced to leave these buildings so they could be demolished, and many received vouchers in order to find housing while the new buildings were being built. However, the number of units and housing built has typically not matched the number of units that were demolished, ultimately increasing the number of people seeking housing assistance through vouchers long-term (Popkin, Levy, Harris, Comey, Cunningham, & Burton, 2004; Turner & Kingsley, 2008). The value of a housing voucher was further illuminated in a study of the HOPE VI initiative in Atlanta, six years after residents had been displaced; the majority of participants who had received vouchers opted not to apply to live in the revitalized housing unit for fear they would lose their voucher

and be unable to get it back if they were unsatisfied with the new housing (Brooks, Lewinson, Aszman, & Wolk, 2012). It is clear that the need and desire for housing vouchers among those seeking housing assistance far surpasses the amount of resources currently available.

One factor that contributes to the length of housing voucher waitlists is the cycle of economic reliance that often occurs for these families. It is hoped that providing families with housing assistance with increase stability and economic self-sufficiency. Improvement in one's economic situation could come by way of having the ability to focus on education and work goals if one no longer has to worry about finding or keeping housing, and that ultimately they will increase their income through employment and increased ability to save money. A study of 1,000 housing choice voucher program recipients in Columbus, Ohio from 1999 to 2005 suggested there is little incentive for families to increase their income, as doing so would require them to either pay more within the program or fail to meet eligibility requirements all together (Teater, 2009).

Similar results were found in Moving to Opportunity (MTO), a longitudinal five-city study of the effects and outcomes of voucher use on families (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). Families in these cities were sampled from some of the most distressed public housing in the nation and randomly placed into one of three groups: the experimental group, who received a housing voucher to be used in areas with poverty rates below 10 percent as well as housing counseling; the voucher-only group, who received a housing voucher that could be used anywhere it would be accepted and did not receive counseling; or the control group, who received services as usual. At long-term evaluation, occurring 10-15 years after baseline, the majority of participants continued to receive some form of housing assistance across all groups, with slightly higher rates among the voucher-only group. What did differ between groups was

that more experimental and voucher-only participants were using housing vouchers, as opposed to greater use of public housing in the control group (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). In regards to economic self-sufficiency, there were improvements in employment, incomes, and decreased welfare receipt; however, these changes were not significantly different between groups, suggesting MTO did not have an effect on these outcomes (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). It appears those who receive housing assistance continue to have these needs over time, and as it is now the assistance does not provide any significant support to improve one's economic situation.

Families receiving housing vouchers often note they are very rushed to find housing once receiving assistance. Voucher programs often require families to find acceptable housing within an allotted period of time, such that decisions may be affected by simply being able to find housing that meets requirements of the voucher program, in addition to finding a home that meets their needs. Families are typically given 60 days to find an appropriate unit that will accept their vouchers; if they are unable to find housing in that timeframe they are allowed to apply for an extension, but if it is not granted they risk losing their voucher all together. Families may feel pressed for time as many may work, take care of children, and have limited access to transportation, in addition to the time it may take to find housing that will accept a voucher and receive a response from the landlord (DeLuca et al., 2013). Given the brief time allotted to find housing, many families may make compromises or pick housing that is first available, only to later find they are not happy in the housing they found. Some reported later finding problems with the unit, building, or landlord, while others state they moved into neighborhoods with which they were not familiar and ultimately do not feel comfortable (Fisher, Mayberry, Shinn, & Khadduri, 2014). The time constraint under which these households are placed sometimes causes

them to lose their voucher or make quick decisions, ultimately living in homes or neighborhoods with which they are not happy.

Perhaps the time constraints and quick decisions families must make are related to evidence suggesting households may continue to experience housing instability even while receiving assistance. In Teater's (2008, 2009) study of housing voucher recipients in Columbus, a higher instance of residential mobility existed for these individuals and their families. Mobility occurred more frequently for Black participants, as well as those who are younger, female, and have more children (Teater, 2008; Teater, 2009). One of the primary reasons families find themselves moving frequently is that they are under time restrictions to find housing or risk losing their voucher. This time restriction tends to be stressful for all voucher recipients, including highly functioning adults who have employment or educational obligations that make it such that they are unable to find much time to search for housing (Pashup, Edin, Duncan, & Burke, 2005). For those households that do find a place that will accept the voucher, it must pass an inspection by the local housing authority. If the housing fails to remain up to par and is not fixed in a timely manner, families may have to move in order to retain their voucher. In one qualitative study, a key theme for housing voucher recipients was the reluctance to notify Section 8 of problems with housing because a failed inspection would mean they would have to move (DeLuca et al., 2013). Although it is arguably positive that housing must meet certain standards in order for vouchers to pay for them, households may be reliant on landlords to fix problems. When these issues go unresolved, the family may be forced to move, or risk losing their voucher.

The rental market and landlords may also pose barriers to those using housing vouchers. Ideally, voucher holders would consistently be able to lease up in units of good quality with attentive landlords. Instead, ease of finding housing using a voucher may differ based on

neighborhood. In those areas with lower poverty rates, rent is often higher and landlords may feel more confident they can find someone to rent for the same amount of money without having to go through the processes involved in renting out through the voucher program (DeLuca et al., 2013). Some have reported ease of obtaining housing using subsidies; however, this is most common in high-poverty neighborhoods. In these areas, landlords may be eager to accept those renters with housing vouchers because they have many vacancies, and also the subsidy increases the likelihood that they will receive rent payments (Dickson-Gomez, Cromley, Convey, & Hilario, 2009). Individuals who are using these vouchers may then find themselves in crime-ridden neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, calling into question how useful voucher programs have been in dismantling the concentration of poverty seen in the initial public housing assistance programs.

Other assumptions about voucher holders can further create barriers to finding housing. Many voucher holders and those who advocate for them have noted some landlords carry a stigma about these residents, assuming they will not be good tenants for a variety of reasons (DeLuca et al., 2013; Dickson-Gomez et al., 2009; Varady & Walker, 2000). In one qualitative study, families using HCV reported landlords may assume their need for housing assistance also means they will treat the home poorly or engage in criminal behaviors (Teater, 2011). Some voucher holders have noted that landlords assume those who use vouchers are also on welfare or are unemployed, and are more willing to lease apartments to those who are employed and not receiving welfare (Varady & Walker, 2000). This is an unfair assumption, as a national study of housing choice voucher participants in the 50 most populous metropolitan areas suggests the majority of voucher holders are in fact employed and only a minority receive TANF (Devine, Gray, Rubin, & Taghavi, 2003). Even so, it is common for families to come across landlords

during their housing searches who will not accept vouchers (Fisher et al., 2014; Pashup et al., 2005). There is also concern that institutional racism and segregation may interact with the ability for voucher holders to secure housing; however, this is difficult to disentangle as black residents make up 46% of public housing residents and 43% of voucher holders, shares which are larger than any other racial or ethnic group (Turner & Kingsley, 2008). It is often unclear if these families are discriminated against for their voucher status, or for their race.

Eligibility requirements and other standards that are required by housing authorities even further limit the ability of some families to use housing assistance. In addition to the stigma surrounding voucher holders, landlords have also expressed concern with the program itself. For example, some report it takes a long time to receive payments, and they may be unwilling to make necessary repairs identified during inspections (Pashup et al., 2005). For landlords who are willing to rent to those using housing vouchers, they may require application fees, credit checks, and background checks that are both costly and increase an individual's risk of being denied housing based on bad credit and criminal backgrounds (Dickson-Gomez et al., 2009). This barrier is not unique to landlords, as federal laws now prohibit ex-offenders from qualifying and many local public housing authorities have policies forbidding ex-offenders from being added to the lease as members of the household (Popkin, Cunningham, & Burt, 2005). These individuals and their families are what Popkin et al. (2005) refer to as the hard-to-house. While many typically think of this term as related to the homeless population, they define the hard-to-house as "public housing residents who are at risk of losing their housing for reasons that go beyond affordability" (Popkin et al., 2005, p. 5). These individuals and households may have difficulty using any available housing services, and this population appears to be growing with transformations in housing assistance.

Housing standards are often cited as a barrier to finding housing. For example, larger households often have a difficult time finding housing. A standard outlined by HUD is that families must have enough room to live. For example, a family of five could not choose to live in a one-bedroom apartment in order to save money because there would not be enough space for all family members. Large families note that this is often a barrier to finding housing because there are often not many affordable places that also meet the specific room requirement (Pashup et al., 2005), and these apartments and houses are particularly difficult to find in tight rental markets (Popkin et al., 2005). While it is arguably beneficial for HUD to hold standards to this housing, some evidence suggests these standards are not always met. In terms of the housing quality, participants in a qualitative study expressed a lack of consistency in inspections, such that some housing failed standards while others with health hazards or infestations passed inspections (Teater, 2011). It is clear the systems through which families must navigate to find and retain appropriate subsidized housing are tricky, and all the more difficult for families who are already struggling.

Homelessness Services System

Families experiencing significant housing problems fall back on the homelessness services system. Coordinated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the system serves homeless families, those at imminent risk of homelessness (e.g., doubled up or in other temporary situations without the means to remain stably housed), families fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, as well as unaccompanied minors up to the age of 25 years who have been unstably housed for 60 days or more (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012; HUD, 2014b). Families receive a range of housing services through the

homelessness system, such as emergency shelter, as well as temporary and permanent housing; however, it is not the sort of housing families typically desire.

Emergency shelters cater to those who are in immediate housing need and would otherwise live on the street. Shelters often run out of beds and have other barriers that make it difficult for families to remain together; for example, some shelters do not allow men or boys over a certain age, leaving some families to either separate or struggle to find housing that will accommodate all family members. Additionally, they often hold stringent rules requiring families to be in the shelter by a certain time and awake for chores early in the morning. These rules may get in the way of many day-to-day activities for families, including working and searching for employment or other housing. Families who live in transitional housing typically receive supportive services as well and are able to remain in this housing while looking for employment or housing options. However, these services also come with a time limit that may or may not accommodate a family's needs. Finally, there are permanent housing options; however, these are often available only for elderly residents or those who are disabled.

Concern exists that the homelessness service system may perpetuate a cycle of housing assistance and homelessness service use due to limited service availability (Burt, 2001). In a survey of homeless individuals, one in four reported continuously being in and out of homelessness, and families with children are believed to be a large portion of this population (Burt, 2001). An all-too-common experience for families may be those who are on a waitlist to receive housing assistance and, while waiting are no longer able to maintain their current housing situation and seek homelessness services. They may go to an emergency shelter and stay there for as long as they are able, or may be referred to transitional housing where they will also aim to stabilize their income and secure housing. The services the family receives are likely to be

just enough to get them housed (Burt, 2001), and they may then have some stability as they continue to wait for more consistent housing assistance, such as housing choice vouchers; however, if it does not come they may again risk homelessness and go through the entire cycle again.

Experiences of Families Receiving Subsidized Housing

Numerous housing interventions have been studied to understand both the effects of housing on families, as well as whether the intervention changed housing experiences over time. A number of lessons have emerged from studies of low-income housing interventions regarding the characteristics of the neighborhoods in which families live when using housing assistance.

Segregation and Poverty. Research has sought to clarify whether or not families will use their housing vouchers to move to neighborhoods that are less impoverished and more racially diverse. There is some research to suggest some families are able and choose to use housing assistance to move to improved neighborhoods. Using the local public housing authority database, a study of families receiving housing choice vouchers in Buffalo, New York, found that between 2004 and 2008 African American voucher users were moving to neighborhoods that were less impoverished and more racially diverse than those in which they previously lived (Patterson & Yoo, 2012). This finding is consistent with reports of voucher recipients in a Midwestern city who noted that with their voucher they lived in neighborhoods and even apartment buildings that were both economically and racially diverse (Teater, 2011). Other studies have shown families were more likely to live in low-poverty neighborhoods through use of their voucher (Newman & Schnare, 1997; Teater, 2008) but did not show a change in racial composition of their neighborhoods after moving (Teater, 2008). A study of 41 HOPE VI families in Philadelphia found that those who were displaced and chose to receive a housing

voucher moved to neighborhoods that were significantly less poor than the public housing in which they had lived (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010). While some suggest low-income families provided with vouchers typically move to neighborhoods that are as distressed as their neighborhoods of origin, this is not consistent across all studies. In fact, in one study only 21% of households restricted their search to nearby or similarly disadvantaged neighborhoods, although this trend varied by city (Varady & Walker, 2000). It appears that those receiving and using housing vouchers are able to move to neighborhoods with less poverty than those in which they formerly resided.

Similar findings existed in the MTO study. Rosenbaum and Harris (2001) conducted telephone interviews with MTO families in Chicago to examine the neighborhoods into which families moved, particularly to determine if the mobility experiences of those in the experimental group and those in the voucher-only group differed. While the neighborhoods chosen by experimental group members were most advantageous of all groups, it appears those in the voucher-only group also did move to neighborhoods with lower levels of concentrated disadvantage and racial segregation, although they could still be considered moderately disadvantaged. These neighborhoods were 90% Black with an average poverty rate of approximately 37% and about 30% of households receiving some type of assistance (Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001). When considering these results, authors note two important contextual factors: first, there was a wide range of new neighborhoods by voucher-only movers, such that some appeared to move to much-improved neighborhoods while others did not benefit at all; and second, all families were moving from Chicago public housing, known to be some of the most distressed in the entire country. Thus, most moves would place families in neighborhoods better than that in which they had lived (Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001). Another study of those in the

experimental group of MTO in Baltimore reported a greater likelihood of living in mixed-race neighborhoods compared to other groups (Bembry & Norris, 2005). It is notable that experimental movers moved to generally more advantaged neighborhoods than their peers placed in other groups, as this trend may provide evidence for the use of housing counseling in guiding choices.

While families may move to less distressed neighborhoods compared to those in which they had lived and compared to other poor renters, voucher holders continue to live in disproportionately disadvantaged neighborhoods when compared to renters more generally speaking (Devine et al., 2003; Newman & Schnare, 1997; Pendall, 2000; Popkin et al., 2004). Of voucher recipients in Mobile, Alabama, approximately 25% of these households resided in some of the highest-poverty neighborhoods (DeLuca et al., 2013). Notably, research suggests families using vouchers often live and move in areas largely populated by other voucher holders. Multiple studies identifying where voucher recipients live have noted neighborhood clusters where voucher holders live (Patterson & Yoo, 2012; Wang & Varady, 2005). These neighborhoods tend to contain predominantly black residents and are located in some of the tracts with the highest poverty (Hartung & Henig, 1997; Wang & Varady, 2005). They additionally may be areas that have many low-cost properties available (Hartung & Henig, 1997), although in one study conducted in Cincinnati this trend was only true for those who moved within the city, and not those who moved to neighboring suburbs (Wang & Varady, 2005). Thus, reasons for remaining in distressed neighborhoods include a disproportionate amount of rental housing available in these neighborhoods, such that families are simply able to find housing in these areas (Pendall, 2000). It is possible neighborhoods to which voucher holders move are less distressed than those

from which they moved; however, the clustering that occurs may signal a decline of the neighborhood either presently or in the future (McClure, 2008).

Research is mixed on whether gains in neighborhood quality for voucher receivers have been maintained over time. At the time of the MTO interim evaluation, which took place between four and seven years after the baseline surveys, findings suggest some change between the neighborhoods the families lived in and those to which they moved. Those who initially moved to a racially integrated tract were much more likely at this time to live in both racially-integrated and lower-poverty tracts (Briggs, Comey, & Weismann, 2010). These effects are found longer-term as well. Long-term findings in MTO were measured 10 to 15 years after baseline. Although experimental group compliers did move to lower-poverty neighborhoods, long-term evaluation identified significant narrowing in the gap between poverty rates of control group neighborhoods and experimental group movers (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). A similar pattern was found in longitudinal research of MTO families in Baltimore, which indicated that while experimental movers were more likely to initially move to areas that were low- or moderate-income and less segregated, over time families in all groups lived in similar areas as each other (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012). What differed for Baltimore participants was that these experimental movers did continue living in areas with lower poverty rates as compared to those in other conditions, but they were just as likely to live in highly segregated neighborhoods similar to those in the control and voucher groups (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012). Another program requiring participants to engage in upward mobility has shown additional moves from the initial housing, and of those many return to highly segregated neighborhoods with high poverty rates (Boyd, Edin, & Clampet-Lundquist, 2011).

Neighborhood Crime. Families in need of housing assistance often live in neighborhoods with higher rates of crime, leading researchers to wonder if these households are able to move to safer neighborhoods when provided with assistance. One study of voucher holders indicated many of the participants moved to areas with a much lower crime index than their neighborhoods of origin (Patterson & Yoo, 2012). Families displaced from public housing in Philadelphia through HOPE VI also moved to neighborhoods with significantly lower crime rates than their public housing unit, regardless of whether they moved to another public housing development, scattered-site public housing, or received a housing voucher (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010). Similar findings were found in another study, such that compared to other poor renters using other types of subsidized housing, their new neighborhoods had slightly less crime; however, when examining the safety of these neighborhoods compared to all households, they lived in areas with significantly higher crime (Lens, Ellen, & O'Regan, 2011). The authors go on to further suggest that the choice of where to live is key, as voucher holders tend to live in neighborhoods with similar rates of poverty and racial compositions, but significantly lower crime. With all variables taken together, Latino voucher holders lived in neighborhoods with the least crime while Black voucher holders lived in neighborhoods with the highest crime rates (Lens et al., 2011). Analyses suggest that White and Latino voucher holders tend to live in higher crime neighborhoods than poor and rental households within their race, whereas the reverse is true for Black voucher holders (Lens et al., 2011). When looking at neighborhoods in which voucher holders live, crime rates are higher than compared to all other households and change in amount of neighborhood crime varies by race or ethnicity of the voucher holder.

If families are moving to neighborhoods with less crime, it is further likely they will have less exposure to violence or crime. In a study of youth ages 8 to 19 at interim evaluation of the

MTO study, those in the experimental group were found to experience less neighborhood danger, characterized by less exposure to gangs and hearing fewer gunshots, compared to youth in the control group (Zuberi, 2012). However, these experimental-group youths did not report significant decreases in witnessing or experiencing violence (Zuberi, 2012). Those in the voucher-only group similarly reported hearing fewer gunshots compared to control group youth, although they did not exhibit significant differences in exposure to gangs or witnessing or experiencing violence (Zuberi, 2012). However, when comparing experimental and voucher-only youth, the latter were twice as likely to indicate problems with drugs and violence in their neighborhoods compared to experimental movers (60.5% and 27.8%, respectively), and that these problems were serious (Bembry & Norris, 2005). While youth in the experimental group may live in areas with less crime generally speaking, it appears they continue to report similar rates of violence in their communities.

Perceptions of Neighborhood Safety. While it is important to consider safety in terms of crime rates, it is also imperative to understand how safe families perceive their communities, or how safe they feel in them, as this is likely to more closely affect their housing decisions. Overall, many families tend to report increased feelings of safety when using a housing voucher. At the time of both the interim and long-term evaluations of the MTO study, both experimental and voucher-only participants were more likely than the control group to report feeling safer in their neighborhoods (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). Another study of MTO families in the experimental and voucher-only groups indicated both groups reported increased perceived safety in their new neighborhoods, with experimental group mothers statistically exceeding voucher-only mothers in two instances: feeling safe or very safe near the local school and on the streets near home at night. Not only do they perceive this difference, but also significantly fewer

experimental mothers reported they or a family member had been a victim of violence since moving (Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001). These findings are found for families using vouchers in other interventions as well. The majority of families who were required to use their housing voucher in specifically identified neighborhoods through the Gautreaux Two program noted these new neighborhoods were safer, with less violence and gang activity than their previous neighborhoods (Boyd et al., 2011). Even families who use vouchers without any limits on where they must move perceive greater safety. In a study of voucher recipients in four cities across the country, 84% of respondents reported feeling safe near their new homes (Varady & Walker, 1999). Furthermore, an 8-site study of HOPE VI families suggested participants who had been relocated perceived less crime in their communities (Popkin et al., 2004). In general, it appears many families move to neighborhoods that they perceive as safer.

One trend in perceived safety is that families who leave public housing often feel safer in their new neighborhoods compared to those who remain in public housing. A study of families affected by the HOPE VI initiative were generally satisfied with their neighborhoods and housing regardless of whether they were now using a voucher or living in new public housing. However, 75% of those who received vouchers felt safer in their neighborhoods and only 16% expressed dissatisfaction with the safety of their neighborhood, compared to 43% of those in revitalized public housing who were satisfied and another 43% who were dissatisfied with the safety of the neighborhood (Brooks, Zugazaga, Wolk, & Adams, 2005). For some, this is not the case. In one study of families displaced during the HOPE VI revitalization project in Philadelphia, approximately half reported they felt less safe in their new neighborhoods, although the crime rates were in reality much lower than their original public housing development (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010). Although many families feel safer after leaving public

housing, this is not always the case, suggesting there other factors are affecting these families aside from simply crime rates.

It is important to recognize there are many mechanisms through which families determine whether or not they feel safe. Qualitative results from semi-structured interviews with relocated HOPE VI families in Philadelphia generally indicated that both parents and adolescents acknowledged the violence and crime in their original public housing community; however, they felt more secure because they had many social connections, whereas in their new neighborhoods they felt vulnerable and isolated (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010). A phenomenological study of adolescents in Phoenix, Arizona who returned to revitalized HOPE VI public housing further highlighted this difference in how residents may perceive safety. Some youth stated the redevelopment was safer than before, as evidenced by more secure physical structures (e.g., inclusion of gates) and restrictions disallowing convicted felons from living there; however, one participant noted that while the housing itself had changed, it remained in the same community and therefore she did not perceive it as any safer than before (Sullivan & Lietz, 2008). Perceived safety is defined and affected by many factors. For example, many families defined their neighborhood as the block that they live on, such that a neighborhood with higher crime may not feel as unsafe if they felt their block was safe (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012). Other neighborhood factors include hearing fewer gunshots during the day and night, less loitering, and having neighbors that are more involved in their communities and organize crime watch groups (Varady & Walker, 1999). Families have also reported an increased sense of safety due to physical aspects of housing, such as housing quality (Austin, Furr, & Spine, 2002) or security features such as improved lighting, gates and fences, and more competent security guards (Varady & Walker, 1999). Personal experiences may also affect one's perception of safety. In a study of

neighborhood perceptions of 232 adults in Louisville, Kentucky, those who were women or reported past victimization had lower perceived safety, and lower income was associated with higher reported victimization (Austin et al., 2002). It is imperative to consider these neighborhood and housing conditions, as well as personal experiences, when considering how families perceive safety and how this affects their housing decisions.

How Low-Income Families Choose Housing

Housing interventions employing vouchers suppose families will be able to choose their housing much like other families. Families receiving housing assistance are indeed faced with many housing decisions, including whether or not to utilize the assistance available to them in addition to decisions about a variety of housing and neighborhood factors.

Uptake

Although housing assistance is highly sought after, families do not or are not always able to use their vouchers. In the MTO study, of those in the experimental group, 48% used their voucher and moved to a lower-poverty neighborhood. Comparison of those who did use their MTO-provided voucher and those who did not indicated experimental compliers were on average younger, more dissatisfied with their neighborhoods of origin, and had fewer children (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). Of those in the group that received the voucher and were able to move wherever they were interested and able, 63% used the voucher provided through the study (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). Thus, there appears to be a difference in likelihood of voucher use when families are told they must move to specific types of neighborhoods.

Families participating in MTO are not the only ones with variable uptake of housing assistance. In another study requiring families receiving vouchers to lease-up in lower-poverty neighborhoods (i.e., "opportunity areas"), only approximately one-third of families found a unit

within the 18 months following initial sessions orienting them to the program (Pashup et al., 2005). In addition to the programmatic and personal barriers to use of the program, some simply were not interested in the programs goals and requirements to move to an identified opportunity areas (Pashup et al., 2005). It appears families will decide not to use housing assistance if it means they must move to specified types of neighborhoods. Thus, it is important to understand what sorts of neighborhoods these families are typically choosing when provided assistance.

The uptake of housing assistance also varies for families experiencing homelessness. The Impact of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families, more commonly referred to as the Family Options Study (FOS), recruited families from emergency shelters across 12 cities and randomly placed them in one of four conditions. Three experimental conditions varied the forms of housing assistance provided: a permanent housing subsidy, a temporary housing subsidy, or project-based transitional housing. The fourth group received care as usual as provided by the shelter (Fisher et al., 2014; Gubits, Spellman, Dunton, Brown, & Wood, 2013). Cities were selected by identifying areas that had sufficient enrollment in emergency shelters to meet recruitment goals, the interventions to be studied were present, and housing assistance programs in the area were willing to engage in implementation of the evaluation (Gubits et al., 2013).

Preliminary findings from the FOS illuminate the complications that arise for families who require and receive housing assistance. Random assignment options were restricted for 20% (n = 463) of families due to ineligibility, with the majority ineligible for project-based transitional housing programs (n = 356), followed by community-based rapid re-housing (n = 86) and permanent subsidies (n = 30). Thus, following a pre-screener for eligibility only 68% of families could be randomly assigned among three of the intervention groups due to eligibility

alone (Gubits et al., 2013). In addition to eligibility barriers, characteristics of the available services further affected the likelihood families would use them.

A qualitative study of families in the FOS suggested some program restrictions forced families to make difficult decisions, including family separations (Fisher et al., 2014). For example, some project-based transitional housing facilities did not allow male residents, and many housing subsidies did not allow anyone in the home to have a criminal history. While some families may have made these trade-offs, others decided to dropout and not receive such services. After considering ineligibility, lack of available services, and family dropout, findings from the FOS interim evaluation indicated 45% of those assigned a temporary housing subsidy, 29% assigned to project-based transitional housing, and 72% assigned a permanent housing subsidy received their assigned intervention (Gubits et al., 2013). Further analysis indicated the low uptake of project-based transitional housing was often due to the trade-offs families decided they were not willing to make (Gubits et al., 2013). In addition to the inability for all family members to live in this housing, families also reported they were only allowed to bring one bag per person and some did not believe it was a good environment to raise children (Fisher et al., 2014). Thus, even those families in most need of a place to live make housing choices appropriate for their needs, which at times includes denying available housing assistance.

Social Services. Homeless mothers randomly assigned to different housing assistance programs reported unique considerations related to service receipt (Fisher et al., 2014). Temporary housing subsidies proved to be stressful for families due to the limited time they were able to receive such services (18 months, with re-evaluation every 3 months) and a requirement to demonstrate income shortly after receiving assistance. Failing to find employment and demonstrate income caused one to become ineligible, and some participants chose to remain in

school even though it meant losing assistance. Families involved in multiple social service systems experience additional challenges beyond lack of affordable housing that complicate housing choices. Variation in rates of uptake of subsidized vouchers highlight that even for those families in most need, choosing housing and services is a challenging decision. Programmatic supports and barriers must be considered to design effective models of intervention.

Location

After considering the many barriers families face, there are some trends regarding what families report is important to them when choosing housing. One of the most prominent factors identified by families is location. A qualitative study of FOS families in four different cities across all conditions 3 to 10 months after they had been assigned indicated location was important for families across study conditions, including permanent housing subsidies, temporary housing subsidies, project-based transitional housing, or usual care (Fisher et al., 2014). Families' reasons for identifying location as important varied by condition. For example, those who received a permanent housing subsidy were restricted to the providing public housing authority area for the first year, after which they were able to move to a different service area. Some families determined to take the voucher even though they anticipated moving again later to be in a location more desirable or convenient for them (Fisher et al., 2014). Broadly speaking, families prefer to live in areas with which they are familiar, where they can be close to what and who they know and in which they are comfortable navigating (Pashup et al., 2005). Location appears to be important to families for two primary reasons: access to social support and transportation.

Social Support

Remaining near friends, family, and other sources of social support is a key factor in the decisions families make about their housing. In a study of voucher recipients in four cities across the country, one-third noted a desire to be near their friends and family, their children's schools, or church (Varady & Walker, 2000). Maintaining social ties is cited as an important factor in choosing housing in families receiving various types of services (Fisher et al., 2014; Pashup et al., 2005). Not only is this important when choosing housing, it may also cause families to leave better neighborhoods. Of the participants in Boyd et al.'s (2011) qualitative study of Gautreaux Two families, approximately one-third were motivated to leave their placement neighborhood because they did not have family or friends nearby. Not only did this cause them to feel isolated, but for some families caused practical challenges if they relied on family members for childcare or had obligations towards family members, such as caring for sick relatives (Boyd et al., 2011). Families in the FOS assigned to project-based transitional housing stated they were unlikely to accept these services in the housing units were too far from social supports or in undesired neighborhoods (Fisher et al., 2014). Interestingly, interviews with MTO program families in Baltimore indicated staying in neighborhoods near their family was important for those who received vouchers, although the same was not true for those who received both vouchers and counseling (Bembry & Norris, 2005). Families in the MTO study who reported limited social attachments and obligations in the poorer inner city tended to be luckier in the marketplace and able to move to lower poverty neighborhoods (Briggs et al., 2010). It appears many families report social support is important to them, and will make a trade-off to choose proximity to their friends, family, and communities over potentially finding housing in a lower-poverty neighborhood.

Transportation

Another key aspect of location for many families is access to transportation. For many families, this means being near public transportation, as this may be their only means of getting around (Varady & Walker, 2000). Research suggests many families using housing assistance may not be able to afford a car and rely on public transportation to get to work or take their children to school (Boyd et al., 2011). This need is important to note when considering why families struggle to move to lower-poverty neighborhoods, such as suburbs, where public transportation may be much sparser. A similar finding was identified in MTO, such that many families did not have cars or personal modes of transportation. Thus, access to public transportation limited where families were likely and able to move (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012). For example, MTO mothers were significantly more likely to report insufficient public transportation is a problem in their new neighborhood, perhaps because these families were more likely to have relocated to the suburbs of Chicago (Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001). Lack of transportation has affected use of services for some families. For FOS families required to live in a particularly area, some declined services because there was no available public transportation in the required service area (Fisher et al., 2014).

Housing Qualities

Various housing qualities are important to families. While many of these qualities are identified as HUD standards, it is important to note that families report they are important to them as well. For example, not only are families using housing vouchers required to have a certain amount of space for all family members, but space was also important to families beyond this standard. For some, they wanted space to comfortably fit all their family, even if it meant

staying in public housing where they would pay less for the same amount of space (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012).

Some families using housing assistance identify their relationship with their landlord as a strong predictor of how likely they are to choose and remain in stable housing. In a study of voucher holders in Southern California, 44% of these residents reported they perceived reluctance on the part of landlords to rent to them. This number was even higher for Black participants, with 71% stating they felt landlords were an obstacle in obtaining housing (Basolo & Nguyen, 2005). In a qualitative study of families who were provided vouchers that could only be used in identified opportunity areas, 68% of those who had an additional move within a year of the original move cited problems with their landlord as a main reason for relocating (Boyd et al., 2011). These issues ranged from poorly maintaining or being unresponsive to maintenance needs to being too intrusive, and for some they reported their landlords refused to renew their lease or sold the building to someone who was unwilling to continue leasing to them (Boyd et al., 2011). Those families who did not move often reported the opposite, stating that a reason for staying in their new housing was due to their relationship with their landlord (Boyd et al., 2011). Families are likely to make many decisions about whether to move based on interactions with their landlord and if able may choose housing based on this factor as well.

Neighborhood Demographic Preferences

Research on the general population's housing preferences indicate individuals tend to want to live in neighborhoods populated by members of their similar racial or ethnic background. Prior research suggests white heads of households prefer to live in neighborhoods that are predominantly white (Clark, 1991; Krysan, Couper, Farley, & Forman, 2009) whereas those who are black or Latino prefer at least 50% populated by others of their same race (Clark, 1991;

Clark, 1992; Krysan et al., 2009). Further, Latino and black families often prefer to live in neighborhoods not populated by the other (Clark, 1992). Some critics suggest these racial preferences are actually reflective of assumptions regarding the poverty level of the neighborhood. In a survey study of white and black adults in Chicago and Detroit, participants of both races did indicate preference for upper-class or middle-class neighborhoods; however, preferences based on racial composition continued to be significant after controlling for social class of neighborhoods (Krysan et al., 2009). These preferences have also been noted by voucher recipients. In a study of mothers within the MTO study, approximately half stated they preferred to move to an area with a mix of backgrounds (Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001). This preference may be in part due to perceived discrimination from neighbors. Families using housing vouchers have noted that while they may feel discriminated against by landlords in regards to their voucher status, they were more likely to perceive racial prejudice from the families in the buildings or nearby neighborhoods where they moved (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012). These preferences are important when considering housing choices of voucher holders, as 40% of voucher holders are black residents (Pendall, 2000), and black renters disproportionately live in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Thus, it is possible that voucher holders feel limited in their housing choices to search in neighborhoods that have more members of their racial or ethnic background.

Neighborhood Safety

The neighborhoods to which families move are often identified as very important to housing decisions. In a study of voucher recipients in four cities across the country, most reported they wanted to use their voucher to find better quality housing in a safe neighborhood (Varady & Walker, 2000). For some families, the desire to live in safer neighborhoods may be a key reason they have taken part in housing interventions or sought housing assistance. In a

qualitative study with the experimental movers of the MTO study, families tended to identify improved neighborhoods as a benefit and motivation for taking part in the program. Specifically, they hoped for safer neighborhoods in which to raise their children, where they did not have to worry as much about their children playing outside or going to school (Pashup et al., 2005; Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012). Although families report safety is important, for some they may not be choosing their neighborhood based on how safe it is; rather, some research suggests families view safety as an avoidance factor. They are not necessarily moving to neighborhoods due to qualities of that community or for its specific resources, but they move out of neighborhoods to distance themselves and their children from unsafe situations, including drug dealing and violence (Briggs et al., 2010).

While many families report that safe neighborhoods are important to their housing choices, some have reported they did not or could not emphasize neighborhood safety in their housing choices. For many, unsafe neighborhoods were persistent in their own upbringing, such that it became a normal part of their life. When it came for these families to weigh pros and cons or make trade-offs, they state that they are able to manage and negotiate that sort of environment if necessary in order to meet other housing needs (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012). Of perhaps more concern is research suggesting families may not consider safe neighborhoods a viable option. In a qualitative study of HOPE VI families in Mobile, Alabama, one participant provided a rather telling quote in which one woman stated, "all neighborhoods are bad" (DeLuca et al., 2013, p. 19). For families who are receiving housing assistance, particularly those who had lived in public housing, they have grown up in neighborhoods with a great deal of crime and violence. When choosing housing, many express that they want to live in safer areas, but if there is another aspect of housing that is also important they may see safety as a trade-off that they are better able

to manage (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012). Many families in poverty have existed in that setting and cycle for their whole lives, and possibly for generations prior. Neighborhoods that are not disadvantaged may be perceived as unrealistic options for them.

Housing Interventions in Child Welfare

Housing assistance for inadequately housed and homeless families involved in the child welfare system has been emphasized to keep families together (ACF/HUD, 2014). Services aim to address needs that led to child welfare involvement and make access to public housing assistance more difficult. Housing interventions for the child welfare population are particularly crucial given the variety of needs experienced by these families. Many have the high service needs, living in low-income neighborhoods and struggling to make ends meet. As described above, housing inadequacy and homelessness may put families at risk of child welfare involvement, such that housing interventions could improve chances of avoiding out-of-home placement or speed up the process of reunification. However, one concern may be the difficulty in helping families move from disadvantaged neighborhoods when using housing assistance, as there is a link between neighborhood-level factors and child maltreatment. A review of the literature examining the relationship between child maltreatment and neighborhood factors indicated child welfare cases are often clustered in neighborhoods marked with disadvantage. It is not clear why this trend exists though, as there are fewer studies examining the relationship between the neighborhood and parenting behaviors (Coulton, Crampton, Irwin, Spilsbury, & Korbin, 2007).

A study of rates of maltreatment within a neighborhood and a parent's potential for maltreating their own child exhibited a significant correlation between the two, and further investigation suggested neighborhood child maltreatment rates are predictive of its members

likelihood towards child abuse (Merritt, 2009). However, when other covariates were included, living in impoverished communities and child care burden accounted for the variance in potential towards child abuse (Merritt, 2009). It appears disadvantages found within neighborhoods affect those who reside within them increase the potential for child abuse, as opposed to qualities specific to the parent. This theory is further supported by Coulton, Korbin, and Su (1999), as potential for child abuse scores tend to be distributed throughout disadvantaged neighborhoods evenly, while actual maltreatment rates are not. Research does suggest a relationship between the neighborhoods in which families live and their child welfare experiences. For example, in a study of child welfare involved families in Milwaukee County, a slight relationship was found between caregivers' positive ratings of the quality of their neighborhoods and reunification following an out-of-home placement (Courtney et al., 2004).

Outcomes of housing interventions for families have been widely studied; however, some unique effects may be found for families whose housing instability is intertwined with child welfare involvement. Unfortunately, many public assistance services are stretched very thin, and other programs may require recipients to be living in a shelter or on the streets to meet eligibility criteria (Shdaimah, 2009). Thus, there are families whose housing is not sufficient for criteria set by child welfare, but they are not considered homeless such that they qualify for more urgent services. Although the link between child welfare and housing has been clearly identified, researchers have only recently begun to examine the services families receive and to which they have access to address these overlapping concerns. One example is the Supportive Housing for Families (SHF) program in Connecticut. This program receives referrals of families risking out-of-home placement and delayed reunification due to housing problems from the state's Department of Children and Families (DCF). Both SHF and DCF then provide services in

collaboration, such as housing assistance and case management and access to child welfare resources, respectively (Farrell, Britner, Guzzardo, & Goodrich, 2010). The purpose of such a program is to promote efficiency in service provision for families involved in child welfare, as well as providing acknowledging the dire need for availability of housing services and support for these families.

A study of SHF including 1,717 families referred for services over 10 years (1999-2008) found 73% of families were deemed "successful" at discharge, defined by an overall improved situation including readiness for family reunification and secured permanent housing. Of families living in temporary housing when they were referred to the program, 68% had achieved permanent housing upon discharge. Furthermore, families involved in the program for 12 to 18 months and more than 18 months were significantly more likely to live in permanent housing at discharge (95.5% and 94.8%, respectively) compared to those with shorter lengths of stay (Farrell et al., 2010). The projected costs of supportive housing services versus foster care suggests these housing services may be 70% less to maintain, indicating significant financial savings (Harburger & White, 2004), particularly if we are to assume the ability to secure permanent housing through these services will decrease recidivism into child welfare, in addition to decreased chances of future homelessness (Farrell et al., 2010).

A study of the effects of supportive housing services on child outcomes in Minnesota indicated families using these services had decreased involvement with child protective services overall, compared to homeless families who had no change in involvement (Hong & Piescher, 2012). Homeless families exhibited increased involvement in child welfare, with increased maltreatment reports and removal from the home over time. These findings suggest a

collaborative approach between a housing intervention and child welfare services improves housing, readiness for reunification, and overall declining child welfare involvement over time.

It is important to consider how housing interventions can or should be modified in order to appropriately serve a population struggling with housing and additionally marked by child welfare involvement. Another housing intervention provides permanent housing for child welfare families across the U.S. Begun in 1992, the Family Unification Program (FUP) is funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and aims to promote coordination between child welfare and public housing agencies (Turner & Kingsley, 2008). Families whose child welfare involvement is either directly related to inadequate housing or homelessness, or those whose housing situation delays reunification of families, are referred for the Housing Choice Voucher Program (formerly Section 8). Through FUP, families may receive priority housing assistance so as to quickly identify the needs of these families. By giving these families priority in housing assistance, it is hoped they will be able to remain together and mitigate the expensive costs of foster care (Turner & Kingsley, 2008). Although more extensive research is necessary to identify outcomes of such programs, initial evidence of FUP suggests families exhibit less mobility and are more likely to avoid out-of-home placements (Fowler & Chavira, 2014; Rog, Gilbert-Mongelli, & Lundy, 1998). Research of families with housing subsidies further suggests lower risk for homelessness later on (Fowler et al., 2013). Understanding the housing and service experiences of these families is important to further improve them for families in need.

A Complex Problem

In addition to the difficulties faced by families experiencing housing instability, those who are also involved with the child welfare system have many unique challenges and

considerations when choosing what services to use and where to live. The most pressing issue for these families is likely choosing housing that will enable their family to remain together, such that they will prioritize elements that increase these chances when making compromises. However, this assumption has yet to be tested, and in fact the opposite could be true. For some families, if they have already been separated from their children they may make housing choices without consideration of reunification, such that their involvement in child welfare services continues. These families are not only struggling with their own needs and the many barriers families face in obtaining and using housing assistance, but are also faced with the added burden of making decisions such that they will be able to keep their family intact. With this added consideration, it is possible they will make decisions somewhat differently as they navigate unique considerations and trade-offs.

Rationale

While research has identified how families using housing assistance choose their housing, less is known about how families also involved with child welfare services differ in these decisions, if at all. Housing is incredibly important, as it may contribute to the risk of parent-child separations or delayed reunification (Fowler et al., 2013; Park et al., 2004; Shdaimah, 2009). Families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness may live in conditions deemed unsuitable for youth. For example, those who are "doubled up" may not meet housing criteria by child welfare services due to space restrictions in the home (Font & Warren, 2013; Shdaimah, 2009). It is clear these families are in need of housing assistance so as to avoid out-of-home placements and delayed reunification specifically related to the family's housing situation.

Housing assistance has taken many forms over the years and continues to evolve. Currently, the most popular form of housing assistance is Housing Choice Vouchers, used by

approximately two million households (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2014). Due to

their popularity, there are many barriers for those in need of this service. Waitlists are extremely

long, with some areas reporting a decade-long list (Carlson et al., 2012), and one-third of eligible

families in need receiving them (Turner & Kingsley, 2008). Additionally, people receiving

housing assistance often continue to need these services over time (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011),

such that resources do not become available for those on the waitlist. Other barriers include a

brief time window to use the voucher once one receives it, landlords who hold biases against

voucher users and refuse to rent to them (DeLuca et al., 2013; Dickson-Gomez et al., 2009;

Varady & Walker, 2000), and eligibility requirements disallowing voucher holders to have a

criminal background or anyone with such a background in the home (Popkin et al., 2005). Due to

the difficulty of receiving housing assistance, many families struggle to maintain housing and

may become homeless. The homeless service system may provide temporary assistance for

families in need, but may be only enough to stabilize them temporarily (Burt, 2001). Thus, as

they remain on the housing assistance waitlist they may cycle through this system many times.

When families do receive housing vouchers, research suggests they continue to live in

neighborhoods marked by disadvantage. It appears families are able to move to neighborhoods

with lower poverty rates than those in which they previously lived (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010;

Newman & Schnare, 1997; Patterson & Yoo, 2012; Teater, 2008), but these neighborhoods are

disproportionately disadvantaged compared to renters in the general population (Devine et al.,

2003; Newman & Schnare, 1997; Pendall, 2000; Popkin et al., 2004). Furthermore, research is

mixed regarding whether families in these studies maintain what gains they have made over

time. While some have continued to live in racially-integrated and lower-poverty tracts (Briggs

et al., 2010), others show no appreciable gains compared to their control group counterparts over time (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011).

Similar to poverty rates, it appears those who receive housing assistance are able to move to neighborhoods with lower crime rates compared to their neighborhoods of origin (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010; Lens et al., 2011; Patterson & Yoo, 2012) but higher crime when compared to all households (Lens et al., 2011). Due to the change in crime rates for these families, many feel safer in their neighborhoods (Boyd et al., 2010; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011; Varady & Walker, 1999). However, families do not necessarily equate lower crime with more safety. For some families, although they acknowledge there is likely less crime in their neighborhoods the lack of social networks and familiarity with the neighborhood may make them feel less safe (Clampet-Lundquist, 2011). When considering housing choices and safety, it is important to consider the many factors that affect how comfortable one is in a given community.

Research on families' housing choices indicates many may choose not to use housing assistance if it does not fit their needs. For example, families who are required to move to certain areas in order to use assistance may choose not to if that neighborhood does not have other, more important elements, even if the family is homeless or at risk of homelessness (Fisher et al., 2014; Gubits et al., 2013; Pashup et al., 2005). Key factors that research consistently identifies are location (Fisher et al., 2014; Pashup et al., 2005), social support (Boyd et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2014; Pashup et al., 2005; Varady & Walker, 2000), access to transportation (Boyd et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2014; Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001; Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012; Varady & Walker, 2000), and housing qualities such as sufficient space (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012) or attentive landlords (Boyd et al., 2011).

Research on housing choices must also take into consideration neighborhood-level preferences. For example, research suggests families make decisions based on racial preferences (Clark 1991; Clark 1992; Krysan et al., 2009) and many report they want to be able to move to safer areas (Pashup et al., 2005; Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012; Varady & Walker, 2000). Although safety is important, some families reported they are unable to factor this preference into their decision due to other barriers to housing or more important trade-offs. Many families requiring housing assistance have grown up in disadvantaged neighborhoods such that they feel they are able to navigate unsafe spaces (DeLuca et al., 2013; Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012). Although these families report a desire to live in safer neighborhoods, research suggests they may be willing to make trade-offs when it comes to safety, and may perceive themselves as safer even when crime rates remain high.

Given the barriers and difficult decisions families in need of housing assistance must make, it is likely those who are also involved with child welfare services will have additional barriers and challenges to using housing assistance. It appears child welfare cases often cluster in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Coulton et al., 2007) and rates of maltreatment are related to predictive measures of residents' potential for child abuse (Merritt, 2009). A relationship was found between caregivers who rate their neighborhoods as higher quality and increased chances of reunification after an out-of-home placement (Courtney et al., 2004). This evidence suggests these families are not only in need, but also show benefits when able to move to less disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Little research has identified the effects of housing assistance specifically for child welfare involved families. However, one study of supportive housing in Connecticut, which eased communication between housing and child welfare services and provided assistance to

those in need indicated greater housing stability for these families (Farrell et al., 2010). Another study indicated families in Minnesota receiving housing services had decreased child welfare involvement (Hong & Piescher, 2012). It appears research on housing assistance for families involved in child welfare have promising results to date. These findings support use of a recent initiative, the Family Unification Program (FUP), which provides child welfare involved families who are identified as at-risk for homelessness with housing assistance. However, further research on this program is necessary to understand the experiences of these families.

The present study employed a mixed methods design to examine the experiences of families receiving either FUP services or services-as-usual in Chicago, Illinois. Primary analyses were qualitative to answer research questions regarding how these families are choosing housing, and what role safety has in their decisions, including considerations of safety both within the home environment and in the neighborhood. Secondary quantitative analyses were employed to further understand how caregivers experience their neighborhoods, specifically considering their fear of crime and reported neighborhood problems. The relationship between these perceptions and archival crime records further illuminated caregivers' experiences of safety and supplemented qualitative data to understand responses given. Mixed methods allowed a more comprehensive understanding of the constructs being studied, giving both individual experiences and explanation, as well as quantitative data to illustrate those experiences and processes.

Statement of Research Questions

Research Question I. What factors do inadequately housed caregivers involved in the child welfare system describe as important when making housing choices with FUP assistance or services-as-usual provided through the child welfare system?

Research Question II. How do safety concerns factor into housing decisions among families involved in the child welfare system? Do considerations of child safety within and outside of the home influence decisions on where to live?

Research Question III. Do caregivers perceive the homes and neighborhoods in which they live as safe, and do caregiver perceptions of safety relate with neighborhood rates of crime and concentrated disadvantage over time?

Research Question IV. Does referral for FUP vouchers influence how caregivers involved with the child welfare system assess perceived neighborhood safety in the context of structural violence, and do these assessments change over time?

Method

Participants

Participants included caregivers in contact with child welfare services whose involvement in this system was further complicated by inadequate housing. Caregivers represented a subset of households referred to the Family Unification Program (FUP), a housing intervention in the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) serving inadequately housed families. Eligibility for the study matched eligibility to receive FUP vouchers according to HUD guidelines; families met family income requirements, had an open child welfare case, and lacked adequate housing that threatened to place children into out-of-home care. However, families whose housing delayed reunification of children already placed out-of-home were excluded from the study due to small sample size. Eligible families were recruited to participate in the study after DCFS established FUP eligibility. A longitudinal randomized controlled trial compared 75 intact families who received child welfare services plus referral to FUP to a control condition of intact families eligible for FUP who received services-as-usual (n = 75). Assessments occurred

two months after randomization to groups at baseline, four months, 10 months, 16 months, and 28 months following baseline. This study used baseline and 10-month follow-up assessments, as qualitative interviews took place most proximally to this follow-up assessment and allowed for a snapshot of experiences at that time.

A randomly selected subsample of caregivers participated in a qualitative interview. In addition to study eligibility requirements, these caregivers completed the follow-up assessment of the longitudinal survey study, occurring approximately10 months after baseline, and consented to be contacted for an additional interview. Included caregivers were required to be primarily English-speaking, as qualitative interviewers were not fluent in Spanish. Caregivers were recruited from both the group assigned to receive vouchers and the group receiving services as usual for a total of 20 families. Interviews were completed with 19 female caregivers, nine assigned to the services-as-usual condition and 11 assigned to receive a FUP housing voucher .

Procedure

Qualitative Substudy. Qualitative interviews were conducted among a randomly selected subset of families participating in the panel study. Families selected for the qualitative substudy were recruited after completing the third assessment of the parent study, approximately 10 months following the baseline assessment. Caregivers were selected for participation using a stratified random selection procedure that balanced families on treatment assignment (FUP or child welfare services-as-usual), as well as month of recruitment into the parent study (October, 2011 through March, 2012) to ensure variation in experiences with FUP and address potential systematic differences related to when families were interviewed. Once random numbers were assigned, cases were ranked from highest to lowest. The highest three ranked cases from each condition were contacted for participation. Cases were removed where no children were

currently living in the home and the next ranked case was contacted. Study staff recruited families over the phone and through home visits. All participants agreed to participate upon contact. Families were recruited until the sample goal of 20 participants was met. One participant agreed to be interviewed but was unable to be contacted again resulting in a sample size of n = 19.

In home face-to-face interviews were conducted and participants were compensated with $40 gift cards in appreciation for their time. Interviews took place in participants' homes at a time convenient for the participant. Each interview lasted for approximately two hours. In addition to the primary interviewer, a second interviewer was also present to gather fieldnotes and provide a second set of ears to ensure all questions were asked and information was gathered thoroughly. Throughout this process, the second interviewer remained quiet to the extent possible, so as not to disturb the natural flow of the interview. Fieldnotes included possible emerging themes, behavioral observations of the participant, as well as notes about the structure of the interview. Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed through a professional and confidential transcription service. To ensure that audio files were properly transcribed, the transcripts were checked for accuracy by research staff. Edits were then incorporated to form final versions of transcripts.

Survey Study. Families were identified and recruited for this study from child welfare caseworker referrals to the DCFS Housing and Cash Assistance Office, which provides services to families in the child welfare system identified as inadequately housed. DCFS staff determined FUP eligibility. Families were randomly assigned to receive FUP referrals or services-as-usual on a 1:1 ratio using a table of random numbers maintained by research staff. Services-as-usual included referrals to other service systems, such as mental health, and/or housing support

services provided by the DCFS Housing Advocacy Program (HAP). HAP provides emergency cash assistance, housing locator assistance, and training on housing search and attainment. Families in the treatment condition also received services-as-usual, plus a FUP referral. All eligible families were contacted by research staff and asked to participate in the study after eligibility was determined. After recruitment, interviews were conducted face-to-face with current caregivers and children to gain information on caregiver, child, and family functioning.

Current caregivers were interviewed in their homes by trained interviewers to provide information about their children (health and disabilities, services received, behavior problems, social skills), themselves (housing history, mental health and substance abuse, physical health, services received, relationship with child, disciplinary techniques, social support), and about their family and community (domestic violence, neighborhood environment, parental involvement with the law).

The study complied with ethical procedures involved in human subjects research. Initial institutional review board (IRB) approval was received by DePaul University and subsequently Washington University in St. Louis where the study oversight was transferred. Non-identifiable data were used in analyses, and thus, DePaul University did not require IRB approval. Consent and, where appropriate, child assent were collected from caregivers and children for assessments they complete. All interviews were conducted using laptop computers and are checked for accuracy and completeness. Family interviews were scheduled around convenient times and locations for the family. Caregivers received $50 for their participation.

Instruments

Qualitative. Qualitative interviews followed a semi-structured guide with questions developed by the principal investigator, research staff, and community representatives. The

interview protocol was developed to assess participants' experiences across various domains to supplement the larger quantitative program evaluation of FUP. The interview guide included open-ended questions about housing arrangements, housing services, family processes, social support, and for any who had a parent-child separation in the past year an additional section queried them on how housing experiences related to reunification. For the present study, participant responses from the housing arrangements section were analyzed. In this section, families were asked about housing choices they made over the course of the study and what trade-offs they made during the decision-making process. Other sections were reviewed for information pertinent to housing choices and perceptions of safety and excerpts throughout the interview in which families described these decisions were analyzed.

The interview protocol was tested with research staff and study consultants to verify the clarity of the language and garner suggestions about the appropriateness of the questions. Recommendations and suggestions were discussed among the research team and questions were reevaluated for culturally appropriate language prior to finalizing the semi-structured interview. See Appendix A for the full interview protocol.

Quantitative. Measures administered as part of the panel study are presented in Appendix B. To improve understanding of housing choices, selected measures examined caregiver-reported perceptions of the neighborhoods in which they lived, as well as the structural characteristics of neighborhoods assessed through archival data.

Fear of Crime. Caregivers were asked to report the extent to which fear of crime affected them within their homes and neighborhoods. As shown in Appendix C, this measure consists of 15 items within three main categories: how fearful the respondent is of being attacked or robbed in various settings (*not fearful, a little fearful, somewhat fearful, very fearful*); whether fear of

crime has caused the respondent to place limits on their activity or increase security measures (*yes, no, don't know*); and whether they have a rifle, shotgun, or handgun in the home (*yes, no, don't know*). Internal consistency for the measure is good for questions about fear of crime (α = .86) and actions to cope with that fear (α = .77) (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry, 2000; Henry, Gorman-Smith, Schoeny, & Tolan, 2014).

  Neighborhood Problems. Caregivers reported on perceived problems in their neighborhood, such as abandoned buildings and vandalism. This measure includes six items and is measured on a 5-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, as displayed in Appendix D. The scale was developed as part of the Neighborhoods Matter Study (Henry et al., 2014). Items were chosen through intraclass correlations to guide selection of included items. Reliability was based on agreement among persons in the neighborhood to index reliability and was r = .59 (p < .001). Regarding validity of the scale, no associations between the scale and police reports of crime were significant after controlling for neighborhood population and poverty levels, but all were positive in direction.

  Structural Characteristics of Neighborhoods. Structural indicators of neighborhood characteristics were obtained based on geocoded residential addresses at baseline and follow-up interviews. The neighborhood was defined at the level of the census tract. Concentrated disadvantage measured the extent of poverty within the neighborhood based on typical markers of impoverished communities. An index aggregated the percentage of (a) families living below poverty, (b) renter-occupied housing, (c) unemployment, and (d) female-headed households (Sampson, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Summed percentages were then converted to *z*-scores across all Census tracts in the across the United States, with higher scores indicating greater disadvantage. Violent crime was measured as the incidence per 100,000

residents of violent crime in the census tract as recorded by the Chicago Police Department (U.S. Department of Justice, 2013). Violent crimes included murder, criminal sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault/battery collected for the 2012 calendar year.

Caregiver Demographics. Caregiver age in years at baseline was self-reported. Caregiver gender was both self-reported as well as coded by interviewers. Caregiver's self-reported race/ethnicity at baseline, choosing all descriptions that applied. For the purposes of these analyses, caregiver race was categorized: African American, Latino/a, White.

Analytic Approach. An embedded correlational mixed methods design was used to guide data analysis. Qualitative analyses were conducted first and then supplemented with quantitative analyses (i.e., QUAL → quant) in order to answer research questions and test hypotheses (Aarons, Fettes, Sommerfeld, & Palinkas, 2012). The design allowed pairing of qualitative themes with correlational quantitative data in order to further understand relationships between variables (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Analysis of qualitative data was completed with steps inspired by grounded theory in order to identify key themes between respondents. More specifically, analysis followed the following phases: initial coding, focused coding, and axial coding (Charmaz, 2006). The researchers and a research assistant took part in each phase of coding and discuss emerging themes after each phase to ensure agreement of emerging themes and limit bias. In the first phase of coding, coders went line by line to identify and label emerging phenomena and themes found in the text. During the second phase, the initial codes were reviewed and particularly prevalent codes identified and discussed between the two coders. The third phase of coding consisted of reviewing the themes from the second phase and fitting them together, with some themes nesting under more prominent, core themes to explain the phenomena being addressed.

Throughout the coding process, qualitative interviews for families that received the housing choice voucher were coded together with families that received housing services-as-usual. Treatment conditions were coded together to allow the emergence of themes across all participants, as well as to allow for themes to emerge specific to treatment group. The entire housing arrangements section was coded first and other sections were read to determine if they contained pertinent information to be coded. After each meeting of coders, both wrote memos about the key themes and discussion points of that meeting. These memos are a useful tool to ensure the analytic process is well-documented and to aid in development and solidification of codes (Charmaz, 2006). Coding was completed using NVivo data analysis software. Benefits of using this software were ease of collecting and sorting codes.

Quantitative analyses included descriptive statistics on key instruments for the full sample of families. Correlations between scores on measures of neighborhood perceptions (i.e., neighborhood problems and fear of crime), structural neighborhood characteristics (e.g., concentrated disadvantage and violent crime rates), caregiver characteristics, and treatment condition were conducted within and across waves. Next, correlations between these variables were analyzed within the treatment and control conditions, separately. Patterns of significance were compared across conditions to determine if perceptions of safety, crime rates, and concentrated disadvantage differed between the two conditions. Paired sample t-tests further assessed for within variable differences across waves.

Mixed methods integrated information from qualitative and quantitative analyses to address research questions. Themes developed through qualitative analyses around housing choices and perceptions of safety (Research Question 1 and Research Question 2) were probed using survey and archival data that assessed neighborhood characteristics (Research Question 3

and Research Question 4). Findings across methods were synthesized for final interpretation. It was assumed families' housing choices related with perceptions of safety, which would be influenced by structural characteristics of the neighborhoods. However, the complexity of how families experience housing instability required further investigation into potential unanticipated effects of housing experiences. Mixed methods allowed exploration of convergence and divergence between housing choice themes, perceptions of safety, and neighborhood characteristics.

Results

Sample Description

Participants in the longitudinal follow-up included caregivers referred for housing services through the child welfare system. Caregivers ranged in age from 18 to 53 years, were typically in their early 30's, and predominately female. As shown in Table 1, the majority identified as ethnic minority with approximately two-thirds African American and one-fifth Latino. Most participants had no history of separations from their children, and education level mainly fell into three categories with one-third of participants falling into each: some high school, high school degree, or some college. Table 2 shows baseline comparisons of families randomly assigned to receive permanent housing plus services-as-usual ($n = 75$) versus services-as-usual ($n = 75$). Only one significant difference existed between treatment conditions on baseline characteristics: families referred to receive permanent housing reported slightly more behaviors as a response to crime (e.g., changing routines to avoid crime, owning firearms) compared to those receiving services-as-usual. Moreover, attrition analyses showed no differences in demographic or baseline housing characteristics between caregivers who completed follow-up interviews ($n = 123$) and those who could not be located ($n = 27$) as shown

in Table 3. Evidence suggested adequate representation of child welfare-involved caregivers referred for housing services across study conditions and time.

The qualitative sub-study interviewed 19 randomly selected caregivers after the 10-month follow-up survey. As shown in Table 1, racial composition differed in caregivers who participated in qualitative interviews plus surveys ($n = 19$) and those who participated in surveys only ($n = 131$), with fewer Latina participants and more White caregivers who completed qualitative interviews. This difference is likely related to inclusion criteria for participation in the qualitative study to those who were primarily English-speaking, thus potentially excluding primarily Spanish-speaking Latina caregivers. No other significant baseline differences existed in demographic characteristics between groups. Caregivers were primarily African American single mothers in their early 30's. Table 4 presents caregiver pseudonyms and housing situation at the time of the interview by treatment condition.

Research Question 1: What factors do inadequately housed caregivers involved in the child welfare system describe as important when making housing choices with assistance provided through the child welfare system?

Qualitative analyses examined how child welfare-involved caregivers evaluated housing options. Results suggested three broad themes emerged as key factors in decisions: timing and availability, unaffordable housing markets, and decisions based on access to routines and various types of support (i.e., services and social support). Table 5 summarizes themes and subthemes described below.

Timing and Availability

Last Minute Decisions. Due to the occasional urgency participants reported in finding housing, many found themselves making last minute decisions to take their current home. The

reasons for needing housing quickly were widespread. Angela, a woman who previously lived with her children's father's parents, described her current housing as an "emergency apartment" due to ending the relationship with her children's father. She went on to say, "…it was, um, really fast thing that I just wanted to get out of here. I don't want to deal with the situation. I don't even care what it was." Yvette similarly described her housing as an "all-of-a-sudden apartment." While timing was particularly relevant to those bound by the restrictions of the housing vouchers, various factors in previous housing played a role in the timeframe with which participants were able to search for a home. The difficulties listed above often combined to create a difficult and time-limited housing search, in which participants found they had to leave or lost previous housing and ultimately chose whatever option was best in the time they had.

Many who reported their current apartment was a last minute decision also went on to state that they were planning to move again. Often, this appeared to be related to having to find a place quickly, without much time to consider other factors. Sarah summed this pattern up when she said, "…since I couldn't find nothin' I got to take whatever I was getting. …I really don't like it here. I'm already lookin' for somewhere else to move. It's not a good place for me." Some appeared to see the current housing as a transitory setting, such as Tiffany, who had previously been in a shelter. She noted:

> …the main thing was being able to be out of that shelter when I chose this place. But I already knew that it was it was gonna be – you know, I wouldn't be here for long. So before I even moved in." Marla, who had to move back in with her mother, said she was "going to be moving out because of the, you know, for, for me and my son.

Issues with housing quality and the neighborhood not only dictated the need to move from previous housing, but also inspired the desire to move from *current* housing. When asked how she felt about her current housing, Danielle stated:

> Well right now, I'm ready to move outta here. It's fallin' apart, as the other apartment. And then this landlord again wants to just come and take my money every month, and don't' wanna do nothin'. …Like I said, at the spur of the moment. I just took it quick.

Similarly, Katherine reported that while she liked her current housing, the upstairs had begun leaking and so she anticipated she would soon need to move out of the apartment. Related to the neighborhood, Samantha noted, "I'm tired of people yellin' outside my window all night long. Just all you hear is people outside back and forth, back and forth" and told interviewers that she was already in the process of getting moving papers.

These issues with timing appeared to lead to a troubling cycle: the participants described having to move for some reason, they find they have limited options, and ultimately must choose an apartment with little time to spare; however, they then find the home does not meet their desired preferences or issues with it arise, and so they decide to move again. Unfortunately, they find similar difficulties in finding and choosing a new home, and so the cycle continues, perpetuating further instances of residential mobility and a lack of stability in housing.

Lack of Options. Participants tended to have difficulty responding to some questions, because many stated they felt they were out of options or otherwise constricted. Those who opted to live with family often had not received a housing voucher and were not able to afford housing otherwise. Hence, they felt they did not have any options other than to live with family members. When prompted with various factors that may have contributed to the decision, Gwen repeatedly responded, "Wasn't an option" after explaining that she chose to live with family to help with costs, and given their space felt it "wouldn't be too combative." Additionally, some of those who did not receive housing vouchers felt as though they were stuck, unable to afford rent otherwise and not receiving any services once their DCFS cases closed.

Even for those families who did use a voucher or otherwise lived on their own, there was generally a perception that there were not many options available to them. Some described instances where caseworkers or housing advocates assigned to help them find housing appeared to disregard their preferences. One woman felt that because she previously lived in her car and then in a shelter, her caseworker expected her to take any housing that was available and that she could afford. After seeing an apartment that she felt was in an unsafe neighborhood, near a liquor store and with people smoking marijuana in the halls, she noted, "I mean, even if I'm payin' you a dollar for rent. That's how much you want it, but I still expect to be – be able to be safe when I come to my home" (Monique).

These limited choices were also clear in how participants reacted to our questions. For example, we asked participants if it was a hard or easy choice to live in their current housing, which many stated was some combination of the two. The choice was easy because they had no other options, or it was hard because the housing did not fit their preferences, but they had no other choice. This confusion was perhaps most clear when asked what trade-offs the family made in choosing their housing. While we described and defined what we meant by a trade-off, many were unable to identify any. Instead, participants would note that their housing was all-around better or worse. In some instances, families denied making trade-offs; however, they described prioritizing cost or timing over other choices. It is possible that these choices were not perceived as options, but rather as necessities.

Unaffordable Housing Market

In addition to constraints related to the timing and availability of housing, issues related to affordability and quality of housing were factors frequently identified by participants as important to their housing decision.

Cost. Many noted that in general the rent in Chicago is high and difficult to afford. Both

Barbara and Tracy, who received housing vouchers, described the cost of housing as

"ridiculous," indicating why it was important for them to receive assistance. For those living

with family members, cost was the most important factor causing them to make the decision to

live with family, and at times made them feel they had no other options. Gwen was living with

her family and noted that although she contributed to the funds, living with family could be free

and they were willing to work with her. This was important because she stated, "I don't have any

money, so I needed some kind of assistance or someone that was gonna assist me." Similarly,

Candace, who was homeless before her mother invited her to move in with her two years before

noted that she contributed to the household but did not pay rent due to unemployment: "…I get

Illinois Link. So I provide all the food for the house and like I'll – I, um, I provide the food and I

pay the cable bill every month… But, uh, as far as rent, no, I don't pay." Without assistance

many struggled to find and maintain housing.

In addition to simply affording rent and other costs of living, participants noted cost as

important in the hopes of saving money, particularly to spend on their children. Carol, who was

not receiving assistance, said, "I mean I can't really afford the rent here, but you gotta do what

you gotta do, so, you know. I don't like it. My kids – see, I have to give up a lot of things that my

kids should have so we can live here." This mother went on to describe wishing she could afford

to buy her children additional clothing and items they want. Angela also described the

importance to her of providing financially for her children, such that she delayed plans to move

until after the holidays, stating, "'Cause when Santa Claus comes, if Santa Claus comes, then the

budget gets tighter, a little bit. If Santa Claus leaves, mid-January, I get everything, like updated,

then I could probably find a better place." Sarah noted that the little extra money she may have

each month is spent on her children: "It's kinda hard, working whatever little money I do get, but I got the budget; I'm always broke once I pay my rent and whatever bills. I never have none left. It's spent on my kids."

Space. The importance of space varied across participants, with some currently living in much more crowded conditions than others. Often the parent or an older child would use the living room as a bedroom due to either what was available while living with family, or what was affordable for the family. Candace had been living with her mother for approximately two years after becoming pregnant while homeless. She noted, "…it's a one-bedroom apartment with three people, and four when my son comes, so it's very tight." In her case, she slept on a pull-out couch while her daughter slept in a crib, both in the living room. Gwen, who was living with family after losing her job and own apartment said, "Well, it's smaller, 'cause I was in a three-bedroom with my kids. So it's smaller, 'cause now we're resigned to one bedroom together, and my son sleeps on the couch, in a chair, or something else." For some, there were enough bedrooms, yet simply having so many people in one home created clutter in the living spaces, as was the case for Marla: "But it's just crowded; there's like a lot of stuff. There's like, um, my clothes on top of the table; it's just getting crowded in here." Although Candace, Gwen, and Marla were all living with family members, other participants similarly reported making the trade-off of less space for a more affordable cost. Angela sought a one-bedroom apartment so her two daughters could share the bedroom while she stayed in the living room. Danielle reported enough space when queried by interviewers; however, she reported quite a few people routinely staying in the apartment, and during the interview it was observed there were multiple mattresses in the main living area for people to sleep.

Parents consistently note that they wanted their children to have space and their own toys. It was important for some parents that their children have their own rooms, as was the case for Carol: "We need three bedrooms and we couldn't – we were looking and we found one that was a two bedroom, but I couldn't go with that; I had my daughter needs a room and my son needs a room, so." While she had difficulty affording the apartment, this was important to Carol. While some did not have enough bedrooms for all family members, Angela, who was staying in the living room of their apartment noted, "But it's my daughters' space. They don't have to argue to no other kid, or they don't have to fight, because my mother-in-law's place has four kids more around their age." For her, their current situation was an improvement compared to all three of the family members staying in one bedroom and sharing living space with many others. This was particularly true for parents who lived in a shelter at some point, or living with other families where their children had to share space and toys. Monique stated that while she was living in the shelter, a rule was to share whatever was brought in: "I couldn't even bring in – like if my kids wanted to drink some juice, I couldn't even bring them a juice in, uh, because they're like, 'Oh, well you need to bring in some for everybody.'" The desire to have space thus appeared to be in part due to what the participants wanted for their children.

Space tended to be important to parents as a means of increased privacy and independence, benefiting their own well-being. For example, space is often lacking when participants are living with family, and as such many report difficulties with emotional and mental health. Monique lived with her family and noted that even with ample space it is still a difficulty situation in which to be: "They help me by letting me live here, but every day they let me know that they don't want me here. … I mean, it's a big place, but physically it's big, but

mentally it's very small." As Gwen said, "I'm not happy. I'm used to living on my own and my kids having their own rooms…So, and grown people need to have their own."

The expectation that being a grown-up includes having one's own place was common. Having moved into her own apartment, Cynthia said, "So I mean I love it; I'm on my own with my son. And I had to grow up." Furthermore, living with others impacted one's ability to feel independent and in control. This tension was described well by Barbara, who had previously lived with family and now was on her own through the help of housing assistance:

> …previous ones I had, I was always staying with someone. And now that I'm on my own, I like being on my own better because I don't got – most of the people I stayed with, even though I was grown and I had my kids, you know, I had to abide by their rules still because it was their apartment. Now I got my own crib, I abide my own rules….

All of these concerns and tensions were addressed by Samantha, who said:

> …you know like living with other people it's like not that really good on your mental stability. Being stable on your own, you got a clear focus. …Being in your own home, you know, you're able to have a clear mind. Right, you don't have to worry about if you've gotta leave or and if the kid's gonna be safe, if they gonna be mistreated, you know. You there, you – this is yours. This is y'all home, so it's like then that, like really messed my head up, you know, not being – having your kids having to sleep on the floor, or sleep in somebody else bed while you all hop around up in one room, you know? And that wasn't like probably a good place like not – I'm not saying – even the place physical, but like place like, you know, like mental. Like it wasn't a good place for me, so, you know, of course, they like take a toll on the kids, not even like purposely, but even just unknowingly, you be like frustrated and being like just tired and, you know, stuff like that.

Poor Housing Quality. The quality of the housing was at times described as being quite poor, and a reason families chose or had to move. For some, conditions were such that they or their DCFS caseworker deemed the housing inappropriate or unsafe. Katherine, who received a housing voucher through DCFS, said, "…I mean the apartment that I was in it used to flood…Because of the flood, that's why I guess DCFS stepped in and moved me and my family out because of, because of the water damage…." Another, Jaqueline, had to leave a previous

living situation because there was no hot water, and as she noted, "And you know if there's no hot water there's not any heat." The concerns with quality many participants had were not an issue of appeal, but rather health and safety needs. On rare occasions a participant identified good quality as a reason they chose their housing; unfortunately, many reported their initial impressions changed, with growing disappointment in the quality of their housing. Samantha moved quickly due to safety concerns and initially found the housing to be of acceptable quality, but stated, "Later, I found it was like real cosmetic, though… The outside's nice, but up under all this, it's just like cheap crap." For this participant, the growing quality concerns were made worse as the property management and landlords were described as inattentive.

Many others concurred that part of the problem with the housing quality was the lack of attention to maintenance. Participants described water heaters that did not work, trouble with vermin, or stairs that appeared to lack stability. Along with these issues often came difficulties communicating with the landlord or others in charge of maintenance of the home. Yvette was content with her previous housing, but was forced to move when the landlord "…wanted to sell the house…She was just, you know, rushin' me to move, pressuring me, so, you know, I left." In more extreme cases, participants reported that failure to maintain the home caused the landlord to lose the housing. Danielle described the difficulties she had in her previous housing as a reason to leave quickly: "Uhm, because the landlord had a lot – when I moved in he didn't tell me that he had so many violations on the buildin'….Then he took my door. He cut my lights off. He cut my gas off. From however he did in the buildin', he did. It was just like a headache." While quality issues were a concern, they almost inevitably coincided with unresponsive property managers or poor relationships with their landlords that added to the desire to leave that housing situation.

Access and Support

Caregivers expressed the importance of access to various routines, services, and social support as important to deciding where to seek housing that would also meet the above criteria.

Location. Location mattered in caregivers' consideration of housing options. For some the location was chosen to maintain routines, such as being near childcare, schools, family, and other services. Angela described how helpful her in-laws were in helping with childcare so that she could maintain her job: "The location, reason I stayed here, was because they live half a block. They've helped me out a lot with my oldest." Tiffany also noted the benefits of living close to social supports who can help with childcare, saying, "The location, ah, was okay, because my mother-in-law lives near here…she watches the baby while I work." Other participants more generally identified social support as a benefit of location. When Marla left her previous housing she chose to move in with family, saying, "…I'm close with my family, that's why." She prioritized being close to friends and family as opposed to using a voucher, commenting:

> …My name wasn't picked in the Cook County area. I could probably have moved out to like a different county, like I forgot what county, um, they said, um. But like it was too far, yeah, I like would have nobody, no family, no friends. I mean me and my son would be like out there all alone. So, uh, so that's why I ended up staying here also.

For others, location was an important factor in order to be further away from family or stressful situations. Tiffany was initially linked with child welfare services after drugs were found in her system during childbirth. She decided not to live with or near her parents when given the option because "my parents are big enablers when it come- came to my problem." Cynthia also left the neighborhood in which she grew up and where her family continued to live due to her and family members' legal trouble, saying, "there's a new start for me and my son." Decisions to move away from social supports and familiar spaces were not easy, with Cynthia adding, "…if you

would go outside everybody'd know everybody. So this was completely, this is completely different."

Others noted access to transportation as important, as they did not have their own car or transportation otherwise. Therefore, it was not only proximity to services that was important, but also accessibility. While some did move to a new neighborhood, this occurred for a minority of participants and was typically in the hopes of distancing themselves from unsafe situations and people (e.g., one woman leaving an abusive relationship, another who was moving away from family and friends who she deemed were a bad influence, etc.).

Social Support. The importance of location was identified often related to being close to social supports for both practical support needs (e.g., help with childcare) and emotional support. Social supports were additionally helpful in making housing decisions. Although many participants reported choosing their housing on their own, there were some elements of others' input that were notable. Some did mention receiving help from family members to varying degrees. For example, Barbara talked about how her sister provided a great deal of help in her housing search by knowing what questions to ask and what to look for in a home:

> Well, she mainly helped me – went and looked for apartments, and she was telling me to pick the apartment that had mostly had heat included…'cause you know, at first before I was working, I was just receiving social security, and she wanted to make sure I was able to, you know, pay my rent, pay my bills, and still provide for my children with the little income that I was getting.

Not only did family members provide help regarding choosing a specific apartment, but also provided feedback regarding the area in which to live, as was the case for Carol: "My husband, um, currently going – we're separated; we're getting a divorce. But, uh, it mostly him, because he grew up in this neighborhood. So he said it would – it would be safe for the kids, so." In this

way, social supports aided participants in choosing housing by providing input on important financial factors to consider, as well as neighborhoods.

Family members were also integral to the decision of where to live for those families who were able to reside with others. Marla, who moved in with her mother said, "My mom wanted me to, [of] course. You know, when I had her first grandchild. She, you know, figured that I'd be safer here and it'd be more convenient for me." Candace and Pamela also reported family members offered a place for them to live. Candace noted her mother offered to let her live with her when she was homeless, while Pamela was invited to live with her aunt when her previous housing situation "wasn't working anymore." The housing choices of these participants were guided by their families' willingness to provide a place for them to live.

Research Question 2: How do safety concerns factor into housing decisions among families involved in the child welfare system? Do considerations of child safety within and outside of the home influence decisions on where to live?

Table 6 presents themes and underlying subthemes in the ways safety influenced perceived housing options among child welfare-involved mothers. Most caregivers did not directly attribute housing choices to safety; families moved to available housing regardless of housing or neighborhood problems. Instead, safety emerged as an indirect influence on child well-being that permeated housing considerations. Important domains included: child well-being, schools, and neighborhoods.

Child Well-being

Participants frequently reported the safety of housing was important for the well-being of their child above all else, but not necessarily for oneself. Carol perceived that many of the places she could have used her housing voucher were in less safe neighborhoods, and noted that she

specifically decided not to live there for her children's safety: "…the house was beautiful; I really wanted it, you know, 'cause it had three bedrooms. But even my husband at the time, he was like, 'We can't live in this kind of area.' So if it wasn't for the kids I would've took it." Yvette, when prompted about the extent to which safety played a role in her decision, reported, "For my kids, yes…Yeah, safety. I kept that in mind."

Participants were particularly concerned with safety for young boys due to fears of gang recruitment. Tracy, a mother of a teenage boy, noted this concern in choosing a housing location, saying:

> Because when you have kids you have to be careful where you have to move 'cause schools and, uh, the gangs they're so bad today and I got boys. So a 15 year old. You got to worry about gangs and stuff like this. So I couldn't just move anywhere. I have to be careful where I, where I chose to move.

A similar sentiment was shared by Jaqueline, a mother of two young sons, who responded, "I worry about my kids. Especially, I worry about them being teenagers. You know, how they doing now, like, oh, if they goin' to live past 15." However, concerns such as these were shared and relevant even prior to their children's teenage years. Monique, while describing the frequent violence in her old neighborhood, said:

> …they started killing each other and it was like you couldn't go outside. …They were trying to recruit my four year old. …I don't know what you think you're gonna do with a four year old, but he was outside playing and a bunch of little Hispanic kids, they were like about ten. They're like, 'Oh, you're gonna join us.'

Various living situations engendered concern for parents in addition to school and neighborhood safety. When Tiffany was living in a shelter, she expressed concerns regarding the childcare that was available:

> …when I'd pick her up, she would be strapped in a stroller in a corner, screaming because they couldn't possibly take care of all those kids. …I came to pick up [my daughter] one day, ah, a baby, like a four year old like pushed her back, and the floors in

there are concrete with linoleum on top. And she got a concussion. I had to take her to the hospital.

Samantha reported concerns as well when her children were removed from her care, saying, "'Cause you know nobody gonna pay attention to your kids the way you would. Nobody will care for them the way you would." Parents concerns for the safety of their children extends to many different situations, and appears to be heightened when they are not in their care.

Schools

Safety and violence within schools was identified as a concern for some mothers. These concerns extended beyond school into avoidance of extracurricular activities for some as well, such as for Sarah's children: "Well, they don't really go to the Boys and Girls Club. So to get into any club…Some of them we have and it's so dangerous, you can't sit them nowhere. You gotta – you barely can keep them safe at school." Dasha noted that after moving to a neighborhood with a safer school her son's performance improved: "He, uh, his schooling is, uh, better because he can concentrate. When you're – when you're not harassed by gangs that don't have that fear you tend to concentrate I – I've learned a little bit more in school because the fear is not so big." Additionally, Tiffany noted that better schools tended to be both safer and in better neighborhoods. "Safety is important, too, but I mean when you got a good school, usually safety comes along with it, because the kids that are goin' to those schools are usually good neighborhoods." In this way, participants often recognized that improvements in one domain (e.g., safety, schools) tended to be linked with other, favorable aspects in another.

Some parents reported concerns regarding getting to and from school and reports of violence within the school. Samantha was very upset by the amount of people she observed loitering around the school grounds:

…it'd be like people standing on the corner right across the street from the school at 8:00 in the morning. Like why are y'all out here intimidating the kids? Like you know, you don't even know what's fixing to happen when you're walking your babies to school, and it's gonna be a big shootout. That's why I don't want them there. … and then after school, oh, my God. They just be like a swarm – a flock of birds or something just be out there and it's ridiculous.

For others, their concerns were less related to people near the school, but rather those along the route home, such as Yvette: "…when I moved I saw a lot of people hanging out on the corner, and I didn't really like that, 'cause I know my kids have to walk past and go to school. So I take them school and I pick 'em up, or I have somebody do that." Not only did the presence of these individuals concern Yvette, it has impacted her life in that she feels either herself or someone else must be available to escort the children to and from school.

Neighborhoods

Some participants noted not taking safety into account and later learning they moved into a neighborhood with higher crime rates. This was true for Tiffany, who noted that she was not from the area and initially unaware of safety issues in her neighborhood: "And then, you know, I saw on the news about, you know, how it was like a high murder rate or whatever, and I'm like, 'Oh, that, that' where we live,' you know, so but we're here and we're not – you know, we don't really go out much." It is possible the pressure to find housing, given other factors that may constrain them, caused the safety of the neighborhood to take lower priority.

It was common for participants to express that while the neighborhood they lived in may not be particularly safe, this challenge is managed by simply staying inside and not spending much time out in the neighborhood. Danielle noted that her housing seemed safe initially, but her concerns grew over time such that she wanted someone to be home at all times:

…at first it seemed like a quiet block…but after I moved here again I saw, I noticed that I seen a lot of break-ins over here. They go in people's houses stealing they stuff, so it kind

of had me nervous sometimes. Like do I wanna leave my house, or can I leave it? So
most of the time I try to always make sure somebody still here.

To address safety concerns, participants noted protections they put in place. Katherine said, "I

feel, you know, when I'm in, that's why I have to put locks and stuff on the door because I

wanted to make sure I felt safe and stuff." When asked about the safety of her home, Cynthia

also referenced the safeguards of the housing as well: "So, um, I was just looking for something

safe, secure, pretty much locked. As you can see, the front bolt door is locked; the back gate's

always locked. We all have kids in this building; the neighbors are very nice. And, uh, yeah, so

that, I felt more comfortable here." In lieu of living in a neighborhood where participants would

feel safe, it appears many find ways to increase their sense of safety through security measures or

perceived control over their situation.

As described above, some were unable to leave unsafe neighborhoods due to other factors

more pressing for their housing decisions, such as affordability or use of a housing voucher.

Tiffany expressed this desire to find a better neighborhood, but noted making trade-offs in this

regard: "…the places that I would have liked – I would have made the trade-off for, ah, not so

little apartment for a better neighborhood. But, um, they weren't – they didn't wanna take the

Section 8." Carol similarly noted difficulty in using a housing voucher in neighborhoods with

lower crime, stating, "…that's the problem I was having. Um, the only way I was going to get

Section 8 is if I went to a bad neighborhood, be – you know, the neighborhood that I don't want

to live in." It is likely the use of safeguards, described above, appeared to be the best option for

participants as there were other barriers and trade-offs in the way of prioritizing neighborhood

safety in their housing choice.

Some families linked privacy with safety, noting that when others would hang around the

neighborhood or near their home they perceived less safety. Some address this concern by

spending more time in their homes. As mentioned above, Katherine improved her sense of safety by adding locks on her doors. She elaborated by saying, "Yeah, well when I come in, when I come in my apartment I feel safe." While the surrounding neighborhood may not feel safe, people find a way to feel safe within their homes. Jaqueline reported a sense of safety in her neighborhood; however, it was contingent on the relationship she had within the community: "I don't feel unsafe around here. They protective over women, uh, women over here anyway. …They sit, and they're very helpful. If you've got groceries and you by yourself they help you, so it – it's – it's a community." There was a feeling of a lack of privacy, with people hanging around one's home, and perceived safety once one was inside and in what was considered a private atmosphere.

Familiarity appeared to impact feelings of safety, either through their own experience or taking the word of their families. Angela expressed that safety and the neighborhood were not of much concern to her. She elaborated, "I mean I know this neighborhood for like what, um, about 6 years already, 7 years…." Dasha, who was very concerned with safety, described looking into the neighborhood herself, but also trusting the say of a family member: "I came by at night and I sat and, y'know, watched, y'know, and then I have a cousin that stay around the corner right down the street and she said it wasn't so bad…." Some families expressed feeling used to living in rougher neighborhoods. When probed for more information regarding why safety was or was not important to her decision, Yvette said, "Well, because I've been living in not so good neighborhoods before and I'm kinda used to, you know, the environment." Similarly, Jaqueline said, "I'm kind of safe, 'cause I'm prepared" and further noted, "You know, you just get used to it. … Plus, uh, I grew up in the hood anyways." It was not that they failed to recognize the safety

concerns within their neighborhoods; rather, they appeared to feel prepared to manage threats to safety due to lifelong experience doing so.

Research Question 3: Do caregivers perceive the homes and neighborhoods in which they live as safe, and do caregiver perceptions of safety relate with neighborhood rates of crime and concentrated disadvantage over time?

The full survey sample ($n = 150$) was used to examine whether caregiver perceptions of neighborhood safety related with structural characteristics of neighborhoods. Table 7 presents average perceived and structural neighborhood characteristics at baseline and follow-up, as well as paired samples *t*-tests that examined change in neighborhood characteristics over time. Caregivers generally reported positive perceptions across neighborhood indicators. Caregivers self-reported little fear of crime at baseline with average scores falling between response options of 'not at all' and 'a little fearful', and scores decreased slightly (i.e., perceptions improved) at the 10-month follow-up. Few caregivers were motivated to respond to fear by limiting time outside or accessing weapons. Similarly, caregivers endorsed few concerns regarding neighborhood problems, such as unkempt and abandoned homes, crime, and drug traffic. There was no significant change in perceived response to crime or neighborhood problems.

Structural characteristics suggested that the neighborhoods in which participants lived had relatively high rates of both disadvantage and crime. Concentrated disadvantage is presented as *z*-scores relative to the national average. For this sample, at both baseline and follow-up participants lived in census tracts with disadvantage approximately two standard deviations above the national average. Crime rates in the census tracts were also elevated compared to the Cook County rate of 121.1 per 100,000 residents. Paired samples t-tests conducted with the full

sample suggested no significant changes in safety and neighborhood perceptions across time. Thus, families remained in similarly disadvantaged areas across the follow-up.

Correlations of neighborhood indicators showed greater correspondences among self-reported measures than between perceived and structural neighborhood characteristics. Table 8 presents correlations across neighborhood characteristics at baseline (below the diagonal) and follow-up (above the diagonal). Caregivers self-reported neighborhood safety and problems moderately correlated at both time points, as did concentrated disadvantage and crime rates. Thus, caregivers who felt less safe also reported greater neighborhood problems, and those living in higher crime areas lived in greater disadvantage.

Perceived and structural neighborhood characteristics related at baseline but not follow-up. As indicated in the shaded area below the diagonal in Table 8, significant positive correlations existed across perceived and structural neighborhood indicators at baseline except for perceived response to crime and crime rate, which was positive but not significant. Caregivers who lived in more disadvantaged and higher crime neighborhoods felt less safe and noted problems in neighborhoods at baseline. Correlations between perceived and structural neighborhood characteristics at follow-up presented in the shaded area above the diagonal in Table 8 showed only one significant relation; more perceived neighborhood problems related with greater crime rates, while perceptions of safety were unrelated with disadvantage and crime. The pattern suggested perceptions of neighborhoods diverged with structural characteristics over time. Given families remained in similarly disadvantaged and violent neighborhoods across the follow-up, evidence suggested the divergence related with perceived safety rather than changes in neighborhood types.

Lagged correlations presented in Table 9 explored the nature of change in perceived and structural neighborhood characteristics over time. In particular, correlations tested whether baseline neighborhood indicators (rows) related with follow-up indicators (columns). All self-reported indicators related significantly and positively across waves, as did structural indicators. Extending results of paired samples *t*-tests, caregiver perceptions of neighborhoods and neighborhood environments remained stable over time. Less consistency existed in relations between perceived and structural characteristics. Caregivers who perceived more neighborhood problems at baseline lived in more disadvantaged and violent neighborhoods at follow-up, while families who lived in more disadvantaged areas at baseline reported more response to crime at follow-up. This alluded to some reaction of caregivers to experiences in the neighborhood; however, the majority of correlations were not significant and did not indicate causation.

Research Question 4: Does referral for FUP vouchers influence how caregivers involved with the child welfare system assess perceived neighborhood safety in the context of structural violence, and do these assessments change over time?

Additional analyses tested whether referral for subsidized housing vouchers influenced caregiver assessments of neighborhoods characteristics. Caregiver reports were of interest to provide additional context to the housing choices and emergent themes regarding neighborhood safety reported by qualitative participants. Prior quantitative results suggested stability in perceived and structural neighborhood characteristics over time, while assessments of neighborhoods diverged. The randomized controlled trial allowed a rigorous test of whether the divergence in neighborhood assessments was attributable to the voucher. In particular, correlations between perceived and structural neighborhood characteristics by intervention condition at baseline explored how anticipation of vouchers influenced assessment of

neighborhoods given families knew whether they received referral for housing vouchers but had not received vouchers. Correlations at follow-up indicated assessments after receipt of subsidized housing.

Correlations between variables at baseline and follow-up, and for each treatment condition are presented in Table 10. For families receiving services-as-usual (i.e., case management), significant positive correlations existed for five out of six associations between perceived and structural neighborhood characteristics. In general, caregivers who lived in more disadvantaged and violent neighborhoods reported significantly greater levels of unsafety and neighborhood problems. In contrast, caregivers who were referred but had not received vouchers reported only one of out of six significant correlations; living in more disadvantaged neighborhoods related with more reported neighborhood problems. At follow-up, only one significant correlation existed for families receiving services-as-usual between higher crime rates and more perceived neighborhood problems. No correlations existed among families referred for vouchers.

Supplemental Qualitative Findings

Additional themes emerged from qualitative analyses that illuminated systemic barriers to intervening with homeless families involved in the child welfare system. Summarized in Table 11, the themes and subthemes addressed challenges with housing assistance, supportive services, and housing vouchers. Findings provided additional insight into the context families struggle to secure stable housing. Given qualitative and quantitative findings suggested few direct benefits between families referred for housing vouchers in regards to both perceived and structural neighborhood characteristics, these supplemental results informed intervention improvements.

Inconsistencies in Housing Assistance. Participants in the qualitative study noted various experiences with the assistance they received. While some aspects of housing assistance were useful, such as helping to alleviate costs and instances in which housing advocates and caseworkers were helpful, many also reported dissatisfaction with their options or support received, finding that even with assistance their options were limited.

Subsidy. Those who were receiving assistance, or in the process of gaining it often noted that it was imperative to their ability to afford housing. Katherine reported gratitude to her caseworker for helping with the housing assistance, stating:

> …I'm thankful for them getting me the service that I needed as far as the Section 8. And that's why I told, I thanked her for doing that for me 'cause if it wasn't for her I don't know where I would be, you know, would have been at. I probably would have been still there, you know, struggling with that.

Samantha reported a similar consideration of where she would be without the assistance: "I'm still like maintaining. It not like we got eviction notice on our door. So the voucher's like keeping us going. If I had to pay rent right now, I don't know what I'd be doing." This quote further illuminates that while the voucher makes a big difference, many are still living on a budget and only able to save modestly. For those who did not have the voucher, cost was a key factor and created a ripple effect in the utility of other assistance provided. Candace did not receive a housing voucher and struggled to use the other resources provided because she was unemployed and could not afford them. For example, some participants in her situation noted that housing advocates would send them housing listings far outside their budget, particularly without any help in paying the cost of rent. When asked how to improve housing assistance, Candace noted, "…it's not necessarily I think the housing should be any better, 'cause I mean the programs that they do have work for people who have the means to m-make them work for them." Thus, it may be that if a housing voucher is not an option, families would benefit from

increased support in realms to help them afford housing, rather than finding housing that is unattainable.

Supportive Services. The aid participants received from their caseworkers and housing advocates was described with much variability in the amount and types of support given. Some reported a great deal of help from their caseworkers or housing advocates, such as Katherine (see above) who expressed gratitude for her caseworker's help. Cynthia described the help she received when she did not have much time, saying:

> …they knew that I was kind of on drugs and they were trying to find me – I was sent to a couple maybe several apartments and we had a time limit on our voucher. And I had to move out of that apartment as soon as possible. So – and they were very helpful by sending me to plenty of places.

In addition to sending many options, caseworkers and/or housing advocates are supposed to do housing searches with the participants. Not all participants reported this to be the case, but for those who did they reported positively on the support they received. Danielle noted that her caseworker "came and looked at the apartment with me and did a safety check and make sure everything was at safety – you know, good enough for them to live here." Angela reported similar help in looking for an apartment:

> …my advocate took the time to come all the way over here, even though she worked at town, to look at apartments, like she knew what she was looking for. She would – I would just look at her when every time she would ask questions, the janitor, whoever. She would ask safety questions, um, lead questions, how old was the apartment, stuff like that. She would look for small things that could harm the kids.

In another instance, Samantha noted that when she was under stress to find new housing due to safety concerns, her caseworker found a place for her, "…my caseworker had chose this place for me. Him and the property manager from my last building had kinda like worked together. 'Cause I was working a lot and so it was like I wasn't able to, like, go around and search for an apartment. So he helped me out."

Unfortunately, many participants also reported failing to receive what would have been appropriate help from caseworkers and housing advocates. For Samantha, described above, many aspects of the housing that were important to her were not included:

> …like I told him area. I didn't wanna be around like what I was explaining to you. So he didn't take that into consideration 'cause I'm here. Um, I definitely didn't wanna be on the third floor because, you know, I have a lot of babies, and whenever I travel, I have them, so every time you leave the house you're luggin' that.

Some noted that they felt their caseworkers were encouraging them to live in unsafe neighborhoods. In describing the apartments her caseworker took her to see, Danielle said, "One of them I knew for a fact that the block was bad, and there was a lot of shootin' and killin' over there. I know for a fact. He tried to tell me different, but I knew." Monique, who felt similarly regarding the areas in which the caseworker was suggesting housing expressed additional frustration, saying,

> …this is what I feel like she felt. Because I was in the situation where I was living in the shelter and, y'know, before that I was living in my car that I would be willing to take anything and I don't feel like… I don't wanna say that I'm, I'm snooty, but I have…I don't know what you call 'em. Morals. You know what I mean. I have standards that I expect when I'm paying you, even if I – I mean, even if I'm paying you a dollar for rent. That's how much you want it, but I still expect to be – be able to be safe when I come to my home.

Not only was Monique displeased with the quality of homes and neighborhoods in which she was directed; she also seemed to be offended that the caseworker would think she would be willing to live in such settings, simply given her previous circumstances.

Housing Voucher Barriers. The restrictions inherent in gaining and using housing vouchers often contributed to feeling a lack of choice in housing, both in how participants felt limited in their options as well as how others responded to them. Participant preferences coupled with housing vouchers limited choices as many mentioned the places that would take the

vouchers were lacking in the quality of the units, and were often located in neighborhoods they

deemed unsafe. Carol chose not to use the housing voucher due to safety concerns:

> …I would get excited about a place until I would go look for it and then realize, you know, it's like gang-related area, you know. And you could just tell if it's a bad area right away. So I could not find a place in this area…when you go for the meeting they have this huge map and it shows you the good areas. Well, I don't think you can use Section 8 in that kind of area.

Many participants reported feeling rushed to find housing in order to use their housing

voucher. This was often related to the timeframe in which families must find housing. When

asked why she chose her apartment, Selina said, "I went on and just took it, so yeah, 'cause I

wouldn't a had enough time to look for something else when I had only one month left…If you

ain't find nothing within that time, then the voucher would have just went to waste…So I just

went on and took this." Tiffany reported a similar experience when seeking housing with her

voucher, stating, "I almost ran out. They only give you 90 days to find a place when you get a

voucher issued to you. And we had like two weeks left," and Barbara noted, "To be honest with

you, the reason why I moved was because my Section 8 time was running out" after the

interviewer queried for various factors related to her housing choices.

Others agreed that it was difficult to find housing within the time constraints, particularly

after factoring in the time it would take for the paperwork to be completed. While families can

apply for extensions, the complications in gaining one were such that some families did not

attempt to do so. For example, Carol was one participant who was offered a voucher but

ultimately did not use it. While there were many reasons she did not use the voucher, the effort to

get an extension was a final straw:

> I just couldn't do it; I kept looking and looking and then my time ran out. And, you know…they even said I need to go down there and they told me what to do to keep my Section 8, not to lose it, but I didn't do it…you know, write it out, and I have to tell them

why I didn't find a place, stuff like that. I had to go down there and talk to them in person....

Participants often noted difficulties with the processes required within the housing voucher system that delayed one's ability to move into housing in a timely manner. For some, delays were related to failed inspections, such as with Samantha, who reported that both her current and past apartment failed the inspections three times each. Another participant, Cynthia, described having to bounce between housing situations while waiting for the inspections to pass:

> ...I was living, during the process of waiting for the, uh, approval, um, I had to sleep on the floor with my son at my sister's house 'cause she has a one bedroom with her baby. Uh, we had to stay in a hotel room, with my dad. Um, we had to go stay with my aunt all the way in [central Illinois]...So moving around was like, the worst thing. The wait was the worst thing.

While many families who received housing vouchers were pleased with the services and assistance, clearly the process created challenges.

Overall, participants were faced with decisions forcing them to juggle their personal preferences with systemic barriers. These included apartments that failed inspections, sometimes multiple times, and discrimination against vouchers. The reasons for refusal to accept the voucher varied, and many participants did not question this refusal, such as Cynthia who stated:

> Oh yeah, there was a lot of people don't want to take, didn't want to take Section 8 housing vouchers. Um, I don't understand why but, uh, I guess from past experience they stopped letting people do it. So, uh, it was very difficult to find an apartment. I had went through over 20 apartments, called, and, uh, as soon as I said Section 8 housing voucher they said no.

Thus, even those participants who did receive housing vouchers found their choices to be limited.

Discussion

This study employs a mixed methods approach to investigate key factors in housing choices among inadequately-housed families involved with child welfare services, with a focus

on the role of safety. A subsample of caregivers participating in a longitudinal randomized-controlled trial completed qualitative interviews from which themes were derived to indicate what factors are most important to housing decisions. Particular attention was given to factors related to safety. Quantitative data from baseline and 10-month follow-up in the larger survey study provided context in regards to perceptions of safety and neighborhood characteristics often related to safety. Through the course of study, additional themes emerged regarding experiences in use of housing assistance, which are presented as supplemental findings useful to understanding how the data fit together.

Caregivers generally report limitations to their housing choices, largely related to issues of availability and affordability, with little room to make housing choices based on other factors. Safety is considered when possible, although typically specific to protecting their children's well-being, consistent with caregivers reports that they feel more or less safe in their neighborhoods and perceive a moderate number of problems, although their neighborhoods are marked by high rates of poverty and violent crime. Caregivers' perceptions of their neighborhoods during baseline interviews are related to the poverty level and documented crime rates. At follow-up their perceptions are consistent, but do not relate to poverty and crime. Further, across time their perceptions of neighborhood concerns relate with neighborhood qualities at follow-up. Few differences exist between caregivers referred for subsidized housing vouchers and caregivers receiving case management alone on perceptions and characteristics of neighborhoods, with some discrepancies at baseline and problems observed in their neighborhoods.

The present study emphasizes the push-pull dynamics involved in housing choices of low-income families (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012), and are presented in Figure 1. Push factors

refer to elements of housing from which families aim to avoid or leave, while pull factors are those elements of the sought-after housing that are desirable and likely to entice one towards making certain housing decisions. Push factors are prominent in housing choices among inadequately housed child welfare-involved families; many caregivers note they had to leave prior housing due to various issues, such as poor housing quality. They also are "pushed" by time constraints of leaving other housing through evictions or time limits in using housing vouchers. The tendency to choose housing related to push factors is particularly salient in choices related to safety. When caregivers identify safety as a factor impacting housing choice, it is more frequently as a push factor, with families choosing to leave unsafe situations, similar to past research in which families identified avoidance of drug dealing and violence as a reason to leave neighborhoods (Briggs et al., 2010).

Pull factors appear somewhat less important, as families' options and time were limited such that prioritizing typical pull factors was simply not an option. The impetus to move is typically related to escaping something else: an unresponsive landlord, unlivable housing conditions, inability to afford housing any longer, or time limits requiring them to leave and find the first place available and affordable. Rarely do participants describe desirable qualities that pull them towards their current housing. When they do caregivers within child welfare services in need of housing assistance report similar priorities in their housing choices as other low-income families, including having enough space (Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012), living in a convenient location (Fisher et al., 2014; Pashup et al., 2005), and being near social support (Boyd et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2014; Pashup et al., 2005; Varady & Walker, 2000). Pull factors typically relate to a reactive process from push factors. with the push of time leading to a pull towards housing that is available or will take a housing voucher. Housing choices are constrained

as caregivers struggle to navigate limited availability of affordable housing and necessary supports, typically without much time. The choices families make largely focus on securing affordable housing that has enough space to accommodate themselves and their children. In addition, caregivers struggle with poor housing quality that often pressures subsequent moves

Safety is less commonly identified as a pull factor, and few caregivers report seeking safe accommodations explicitly. Results suggest many obstacles make it difficult to prioritize these decisions, but when caregivers are able to do so their decisions focus on child well-being, safety within schools, and neighborhood safety. Prior research indicates that while families using housing assistance want to move to safer neighborhoods, they may trade-off safety for other choices (Pashup et al., 2005; Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012; Varady & Walker, 2000). Findings in the current study indicate a similar trend. While families often identify safety as important, it is not consistently named as a factor in how housing choices are made. It is common for families to have many other considerations, as well as barriers to seeking their ideal housing situation, and so affordability, ability to use a housing voucher, or remaining close to family for both social and practical support may override decisions that would lead to families to a focus on safety as their focus turns to more practical, everyday needs. Future research should focus further attention on how safety plays a role in housing choices, and the processes that direct these families relationships to safety.

In addition to the cyclical relationship of many push and pull factors for these families, additional factors contribute to a cycle that keeps caregivers within their neighborhoods. While in some instances location is a pull factor for families, facilitating access to services, jobs, transportation, and social support, in many cases it overlaps with factors that support remaining where they are. Often social supports, jobs, and services already exist where they are living and

their needs may be such that it would do more harm than good to leave these areas. For example, they may be unable to afford or do not have access to transportation should they move away, or may benefit from the help of social supports nearby. Related to safety, their perceptions of their neighborhoods are such that crime and poverty are moderate, compared archival evidence suggesting they are in fact quite higher in crime and concentrated disadvantage. Their familiarity with their neighborhoods appears to be another reason families are less inclined to prioritize safety. Familiarity may be either their own or by someone they trust, which has been reported in other studies as well (DeLuca et al., 2013; Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012).

The lack of options and cyclical nature of the options families do have at least in part explains why families in this study tend to live in the same or similar neighborhoods to those from which they originally lived, often marked by concentrated disadvantage and high crime rates. Past research suggests those receiving housing assistance are able to move to neighborhoods with lower poverty rates (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010; Newman & Schnare, 1997; Patterson & Yoo, 2012; Teater, 2008) as well as crime rates (Clampet-Lundquiest, 2010; Lens et al., 2011; Patterson & Yoo, 2012) compared to the neighborhoods from which they moved, although these neighborhoods tend to be more impoverished (Devine et al., 2003; Newman & Schnare, 1997); Pendall, 2000; Popkin et al., 2004) and have higher crime rates (Lens et al., 2011) when compared to renters in the general population. It does not appear that participants in this population of child-welfare involved families are able or chose to make such moves. The present study adds insights into caregiver perceptions of these neighborhoods. While perceptions of neighborhoods relate with concerns regarding crime, they do not consistently relate with structural characteristics. It seems continued experiences of structural disadvantage calibrate perceptions of neighborhoods.

When taken separately, caregivers referred for subsidized housing differ from those referred for services-as-usual in the relation between perceived and structural characteristics at baseline. For those referred for a housing voucher, caregivers' perceptions of problems relate to markers of poverty, but not to crime rates. It is possible those referred for subsidized housing move to neighborhoods with which they are unfamiliar and thus unaware of the extent of crime or other problems in the neighborhood, unlike their counterparts receiving services-as-usual. The perceptions of caregivers receiving services-as-usual do relate to structural characteristics of the neighborhood at baseline, unlike those referred for the housing voucher. Further, their perceptions of problems in the neighborhood continue to relate to perceptions at follow-up. Families' perceptions are reported differently, or may temporarily worsen, once they realize they will not be referred for additional vouchers due to disappointment or desire to convey need for these services.

Additional qualitative themes regarding the experiences of families seeking or using housing assistance support prior research that documents difficulties securing subsidized housing based on the restrictions of the subsidy (Carlson et al., 2012; DeLuca et al., 2013; Pashup et al., 2005; Varady & Walker, 2000). Caregivers describe struggling to find housing within the time limits while juggling other responsibilities, with some reporting low quality housing or neighborhoods where they were unwilling to live, and others reporting difficulty finding landlords who would accept the voucher. Further, caregivers report discrepancies in the extent to which they receive support from caseworkers and housing advocates. These findings highlight not only the barriers families face, but also the variability in experiences they have while using the same services. Additionally, these reports further clarify what keeps families from living in neighborhoods with less poverty and crime than those in which they began, as even those who

receive referral for a voucher note difficulty finding housing in different neighborhoods, and those without the voucher are unable to afford housing in better neighborhoods.

Across these themes and caregivers' experiences emerges a meta-theme of a lack of power or control over housing choices, as seen through the push-pull cycle and additional constraints that not only impact housing decisions but also bar families from moving to less impoverished or crime-ridden neighborhoods, should they want to do so. Participants continue to express difficulty making housing choices due to the constraints they are managing. Based on their descriptions, it is likely many families are prioritizing needs of location, social support, and cost, which often leads to families staying near where they were previously living. Experiences with housing assistance programs further add to the difficulties families have in finding housing at all, let alone to different neighborhoods. Caregivers suggest the difficulties in searching for housing and using their voucher in diverse neighborhoods make these options impossible. Furthermore, many report that there were some places eager to take the voucher that were in areas they deemed more unsafe than where they were living before.

Implications

Findings from this study suggest inadequately housed families with child welfare involvement face similar challenges when making housing decisions as others who are in need of or eligible for housing assistance. Reports from caregivers in the current study suggest there may be additional stressors, and greater urgency when making these decisions, as well. For example, some caregivers are put in the position of needing to find new housing due to caseworkers deeming their housing inadequate for their children. While this is a part of the job of child welfare services caseworkers, it appears that they do not have the services to offer all families living in such conditions additional help, and in this way their housing becomes an additional

stressor they must repair or risk separations from their children. Furthermore, time constraints on using housing vouchers should be reevaluated, and the time allotted to caseworkers to aid housing searches increased or better considered within a typical caseload.

On the other hand, some caregivers report that caseworkers and housing advocates are helpful to them in finding housing and their use of housing services. In this way, families involved with child welfare services benefit from the aid of others in order to secure and use their housing assistance. It may be useful for child welfare services to ensure that families are receiving this help more uniformly through performance evaluations or by ensuring housing advocates are working with all identified families. In order to do so, these services likely require additional support of their own such as through decreasing caseload size and increasing the number of caseworkers and advocates in efforts to avoid potential burnout. Caregiver reports also make it clear that services provided may be marked by biases of caseworkers and advocates, indicating there would be benefits of additional training. Specifically, service providers would benefit from greater focus on the needs and stated values of those they are serving. Not only would this improve satisfaction with assistance provided, but families would likely have greater satisfaction with their housing, ultimately decreasing residential mobility and instability.

During qualitative interviews, families identify areas in which they felt housing services could improve. For example, some caregivers who did not receive housing vouchers note that as their names were not picked in the lottery, they were left with no services at all. It may be unrealistic to provide housing for all families in need of housing help; however, there may be services that could be useful to aid families in other ways with a longer-term goal of securing housing. The aid provided by housing advocates is typically considered inadequate, as participants described receiving apartment listings for housing beyond their price ranges, and

with no options for financial assistance. In lieu of housing assistance, other services may similarly benefit caregivers, including help finding employment or seeking other assistance that improve their ability to seek appropriate housing. Furthermore, others note that in order to receive assistance, there was a burden on the families to put forth certain efforts in order to use the services, including time to search for housing. Even for those families whose names are picked in lotteries for housing vouchers, some are not able to use these services, or unwilling given certain trade-offs.

For those families who referred for housing assistance, they continue to live in impoverished neighborhoods with high crime rates. Current practices in child welfare services are such that problems with the housing itself (e.g., crowding, physical issues that may be unsafe, etc.) are identified as reasons for family to be at need of housing assistance; however, the surrounding environment does not hold the same weight for these decisions. Many research studies focus attention on the role of the neighborhood context in predicting juvenile delinquency or later violence by those who live within them, yet many other outcomes are impacted as well. One study in particular suggests families living in neighborhoods marked by concentrated disadvantage experience diminished social connection and "neighborliness" such that it negatively impacts the family and youth in those neighborhoods (Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2003). Other studies indicate neighborhood disadvantage is related to substance use disorders (Handley, Rogosch, Guild, & Cicchetti, 2015), and negatively impacted cognitive development (Alvarado, 2016; Brownell et al., 2016). The role of the neighborhood in child development is a policy issue important to consider, in addition to the restrictions on housing already in place to provide better support to children and their families.

Affordability is not the only factor determining where families live. Many participants note they are unable to find housing in better neighborhoods, in part because they were refused or lost contact with a landlord after expressing plans to use a housing voucher. In fact, as described in the results, participants at times find that the only housing they can find that would accept their housing vouchers is in neighborhoods that appear more impoverished and crime-ridden than their current housing. Through this cycle, it appears families are stuck with few options. In order to address these issues, it is imperative landlords be better held accountable, and that families seeking housing are appropriately educated about these policies to better advocate for themselves. Further, there may be additional policy changes to the housing markets aimed at desegregating neighborhoods by socioeconomic status.

It is unclear if housing vouchers do or do not help families. Some who receive vouchers express relief, and some who do not receive them perceive them as necessary to helping them save money and afford housing. However, it is important to note that, although they are helpful in some ways, the idea that a voucher would provide choices to families is somewhat of an illusion. Given the many difficulties families face, it is clear housing assistance programs must improve. The role of housing advocates would be more effective if it were expanded. While it is helpful to provide direct aid to families in navigating these systems, it is necessary to consider these broader systemic issues and target them directly. Advocates are well-positioned to take on this role through using their personal experiences to identify areas of weakness and push for policy change to more widely improve experiences of inadequately-housed families.

Future Directions

While this study sheds light on housing choices made by child welfare-involved families struggling with inadequate housing, it also raises additional questions and themes that require

additional examination. It is crucial that we better understand the factors that would promote positive housing experiences for inadequately-house families, particularly when their housing puts them at risk for separations from their children through child welfare services. In particular, how can we expand the ability for families to make housing choices with fewer restrictions, both relating to the housing itself, as well as at the neighborhood level?

On the part of the caregivers, it is important to determine what factors would encourage them to prioritize safety and better understand what specifically gets in the way of these decisions. It is likely factors exist at various levels, in addition to structural characteristics related to issues of systematic inequality and segregation. For example, it is possible that caregivers who have victimization histories may be more likely to choose housing based on safety as a result. While many report feeling able to navigate their neighborhoods, this perception may change if one has a firsthand experience of violence or threatened safety. On the other hand, caregivers' reported fear of crime was not a global measure, but rather their current fear of crime within their neighborhoods. Perhaps these caregivers had already chosen to live in a place where they felt safer and would feel less fearful. Future research may look at this relationship in more detail to determine how decisions are impacted by such experiences. Additionally, fear of crime as a construct may be a target of study to better understand what factors are most predictive of reported fear of crime, as well as how these fears functionally impact decision-making.

It is also possible family characteristics impact housing choices. In the qualitative study, many noted the impact of school and how it relates to safety, such that these factors were not considered when children were younger, but became important as they reached school-age. One participant acknowledged that she may have taken housing in a neighborhood she believed to be less safe if she did not have to consider her children's needs. While this is positive from a child

welfare standpoint, it is telling that participants may be more inclined to live in unsafe

neighborhoods, and may be beneficial to determine whether this sentiment is shared more

broadly. Additionally, gender of caregivers' children impacts housing decisions. Participants

with sons often mentioned concerns regarding gangs and how this may impact their decisions,

particularly in regards to the neighborhood. Thus, it may be useful to determine if the sex of

one's child impacts how these decisions are made.

Limitations

While the current study draws from grounded theory, it is not a true use of this

methodology. For example, typically interviews are completed concurrently with analyses so as

to further hone questions for future interviews. Interviews are completed until the analyses have

reached saturation, meaning themes from interviews are in line with those already identified and

no significant new information is gained. The themes outlined in this study represent frequently

described experiences of those interviewed, but the focus of this study draws from already-

gathered data and all participants interviewed prior to analysis. Thus, it is unclear if true

saturation was met. Furthermore, wording and presentation of questions was informally honed

over the course of completing interviews in order to best gather meaningful data, but the

questions were not specifically adjusted for the purposes of this study.

In addition, the questions were formed to be open-ended, but did query for specific

factors. Many participants shared their experiences openly and added to what was asked;

however, it is possible asking more open-ended questions or probing more for safety may have

yielded richer results and explanations, as well as additional themes and factors. The quantitative

analyses allowed further hypotheses of elements that may have impacted these decisions, but

should not be considered all-encompassing. Conclusions are possible explanations to better

understand qualitative themes through patterns of relationships and do not indicate predictive or causal relationships. Future research may build upon these findings by exploring changes over time and nuances in these relationships.

A sample of child welfare involved families adds complexity to the research, as there are many potential moving parts. For example, this study focuses on many caregiver-reported measures. This information is relevant as the focus is on housing decisions, which are largely made by caregivers. Also, examination of quantitative data is impacted by the many housing experiences families are in, regardless of treatment condition. The small sample size limits the ability to determine whether voucher use influenced quantitative measures, as did slow lease-up with many families assigned to the treatment condition not yet receiving or using their vouchers at the time of follow-up and qualitative interviews. Further, a small number of families that were referred for a FUP voucher chose not to use it, and others who were randomized to the services-as-usual group received housing assistance through other means (e.g., the broader housing lottery, inherited by family members, etc.). Thus, delineating who in fact received the "treatment" is not clear. Furthermore, the number of stressors families in this study experience adds many potential factors that likely impact relationships between variables not included in the current study. Inclusion of additional variables in future research focused on quantitative analysis will provide added information relevant to policies supporting these families.

At the community level, results show families lived in similar neighborhoods as each other, and across waves. The lack of variability in neighborhood experience, coupled with the small sample size, precludes the ability to sensitively note differences between groups. Additionally, it is unclear if families in more affluent neighborhoods benefitted more from the intervention compared to those who began and remained in higher crime and disadvantaged

neighborhoods. Increased variability and a larger sample size in future research will allow greater sensitivity to differences at the neighborhood level and may shed light on the relationships families have to their neighborhoods.

Conclusions

Improving the housing experiences of inadequately-housed families involved with the child welfare system is rife with complexities. The difficulty in obtaining housing creates a barrier for some families, and uptake of assistance varies based on the varying family situations. Caregivers report many factors in their decisions, including cost, space, availability, location, and social support. Although many report that safety is important to their decision, similar to past research they may feel unable to prioritize it in their decisions. This difficulty is true not only for those who were not referred for housing vouchers; for those who do get a referral, both systemic and political barriers further impede their choices. Truly improving housing experiences for these families will require meeting other needs as well, and may even require changes in policy to best afford opportunities and multitudinous choices for those using such assistance.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Full (*n* = 150), Qualitative (*n* = 19), and Non-Qualitative (*n* = 131) Samples with Comparison

Variable	Full *M* (*SD*) or %	Qualitative *M* (*SD*) or %	Non-Qualitative *M* (*SD*) or %	*t* or χ^2	*p*
Caregiver Age	31.4 (8.1)	33.3 (8.3)	31.1 (8.0)	-1.13	0.26
Caregiver Race (%)				6.19	0.05
African American	66.7	68.4	66.4		
Latino/a	20.7	5.3	22.9		
White	12.0	26.3	9.9		
Caregiver Gender (%)					
Female	93.3	100.0	92.4	1.55	0.21
Condition (%)					
Treatment	50.0	57.9	48.9	0.54	0.46
Education Level (%)				1.75	0.63
Less Than High School	36.0	26.3	37.4		
High School Degree	28.7	26.3	29.0		
Some College	32.7	42.1	31.3		
Associates' Degree	2.7	5.3	2.3		
History of Separations (%)				1.08	0.30
1+	19.3	10.5	20.6		

Notes. Chi-square analyses compared categorical outcomes, while t-tests were used for continuous variables. Inclusion dummy coded as *qualitative* = 1 and remaining *non-qualitative sample* = 0.

Table 2. Comparison of Baseline Characteristics among Control Condition (n = 75) and

Treatment Condition (n = 75) Participants

Variable	Control M (SD) or %	Treatment M (SD) or %	t or χ^2	p
Caregiver Age	31.2 (8.1)	31.6 (8.1)	-0.30	0.77
Caregiver Race (%)			0.29	0.87
African American	65.3	68.0		
Latino/a	20.0	21.3		
White	13.3	10.7		
Caregiver Gender (%)			0.43	0.51
Female	94.7	92.0		
Education Level (%)			2.53	0.47
Less Than High School	40.0	32.0		
High School Degree	30.7	26.7		
Some College	26.7	38.7		
Associates' Degree	2.7	2.7		
History of Separations (%)			0.39	0.54
1+	21.3	17.3		
Fear of Crime	1.8 (0.8)	2.1 (0.9)	-1.72	0.09
Response to Crime	0.3 (0.3)	0.4 (0.3)	-2.05	0.04
Neighborhood Problems	2.8 (1.1)	3.0 (1.1)	-1.28	0.20
Concentrated Disadvantage	1.8 (1.3)	1.9 (1.2)	-0.44	0.66
Crime Rates	191.4 (134.6)	197.9 (122.6)	-0.31	0.76

Notes. Chi-square analyses compared categorical outcomes, while t-tests were used for

continuous variables. Inclusion dummy coded as *control* = 0 and *treatment* = 1.

Table 3. Comparison of Baseline Demographic Characteristics among Families who Attrited (*n* = 27) and Followed-Up (*n* = 123)

Variable	Attrited *M* (*SD*) or %	Included *M* (*SD*) or %	*t* or χ^2	*p*
Caregiver Age	29.7 (7.9)	31.8 (8.1)	-1.24	0.22
Caregiver Race (%)			0.51	0.78
African American	59.3	68.3		
Latino/a	22.2	20.3		
White	14.8	11.4		
Caregiver Gender (%)			0.47	0.50
Female	96.3	92.7		
Condition (%)			3.66	0.06
Treatment	33.3	53.7		
Education Level (%)			0.90	0.83
Less Than High School	37.0	35.8		
High School Degree	29.6	28.5		
Some College	33.3	32.5		
Associates' Degree	0.0	3.3		
History of Separations (%)			0.92	0.34
1+	25.9	17.9		
Fear of Crime	2.9 (0.9)	1.9 (0.9)	-0.00	1.00
Response to Crime	0.4 (0.3)	0.4 (0.3)	0.51	0.61
Neighborhood Problems	2.8 (1.0)	2.9 (1.1)	-0.44	-0.66
Concentrated Disadvantage	1.6 (1.3)	1.9 (1.3)	-1.12	0.27
Crime Rates	193.2 (152.7)	195.0 (123.2)	-0.06	0.95

Notes. Chi-square analyses compared categorical outcomes, while t-tests were used for continuous variables. Inclusion dummy coded as *included* = 1 and *attrited* = 0.

Table 4. Demographics of Qualitative Participants

Participant	Age	Race	Current Housing Assistance
Treatment			
Barbara	27	African American	Living on own with voucher
Katherine	47	African American	Living on own with voucher
Angela	23	Latina	No assistance
Pamela	25	African American	Living with family
Jaqueline	43	African American	No assistance
Selina	27	African American	Living on own with voucher
Yvette	38	African American	Living on own with voucher
Cynthia	21	White	Living on own with voucher
Carol	42	White	No assistance
Samantha	22	African American	Living on own with voucher
Sarah	40	White	No assistance
Control			
Candace	33	White	Living with family
Gwen	36	African American	Living with family
Tracy	39	African American	Other assistance
Danielle	27	African American	No assistance
Marla	33	White	Living with family
Monique	27	African American	Living with family
Tiffany	37	African American	Living on own with voucher
Dasha	46	African American	Living on own with voucher

Table 5. Summary of Qualitative Themes Regarding General Housing Choices

Category	Key emergent themes	Description
Timing and Availability	Last minute decisions	Participants described their housing as "last minute" due to an urgent need to leave previous housing, or time constraints to use assistance.
	Lack of options	Quick decisions often limited participant's ability to make choices about housing. Those who did not receive housing assistance or have the means to live on their own stated living with family members was their only option.
Unaffordable Housing Market	Cost	With or without housing assistance, cost was important for all participants. While primarily important in regards to affordability, many also referenced the importance of finding housing that would allow them to have some money to save or spend on their children, if possible.
	Space	Finding enough space was difficult for many participants, with some trading off less space for a more affordable apartment. However, space was consistently noted as important for the children in the household, as well as to afford privacy and independence for participants.
	Poor housing quality	Participants reported this as a reason to leave apartments, often due to poor maintenance on the part of landlords and property managers. Many also reported poor housing quality in the houses to which they moved.
Access and Support	Location	Participants had many reasons to prioritize location, including access to services and transportation and remaining close to family and friends, who sometimes provided additional support to families (e.g., daycare).
	Social Support	Family and friends often helped participants make housing decisions, at times offering that they could stay in their homes when needed.

Table 6. Summary of Qualitative Themes Regarding Housing Choices Specific to Safety

Key emergent themes	Description
Child Well-being	When safety was factored into housing decisions, it was often specific to protecting their children from potential harm.
Schools	Participants identified safety within and en route to schools as a concern.
Neighborhoods	Safety within neighborhoods was important, but participants noted methods to avoid danger or comfort of familiarity.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Quantitative Variables and Results of Paired Samples T-Tests

Across Waves for the Full Sample

Variable	Baseline		Follow-Up			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Perceived Fear of Crime	1.93	0.88	1.78	0.85	1.65	0.10
Perceived Response to Crime	0.37	0.32	0.33	0.32	1.23	0.22
Perceived Neighborhood Problems	2.91	1.14	2.82	1.03	0.79	0.43
Structural Concentrated Disadvantage	1.92	1.26	1.94	1.21	-0.20	0.84
Structural Crime Rates	191.46	118.94	207.75	126.21	-1.62	0.12

Notes. Caregivers reported the perceived measures, indicating their concerns with safety in their

neighborhoods (Fear of Crime, Min = 1, Max = 4), behaviors in response to crime such as

avoiding or owning firearms (Response to Crime, Min = 0, Max = 1), and markers of

disadvantage (Neighborhood Problems, Min = 1, Max = 5). Responses to items were averaged to

create scaled scores, and higher scores indicate more fear, responsive behaviors, and problems.

Concentrated disadvantage and crime rates were taken from census data at the tract level.

Concentrated disadvantage is presented as *z*-scores, compared to the national average. Crime

rates refer to rate of violent crimes per 100,000 residents.

Table 8. Correlations Between Perceived and Structural Neighborhood Characteristics ($n = 150$)

	Perceived			Structural	
	Fear of Crime	Response to Crime	Neighborhood Problems	Concentrated Disadvantage	Crime Rates
Fear of Crime	--	.46***	.47***	-.05	-.02
Response to Crime	.58***	--	.36***	.09	.11
Neighborhood Problems	.56***	.42***	--	.12	.23*
Concentrated Disadvantage	.22**	.22**	.41***	--	.67***
Crime Rates	.23**	.16	.27***	.63***	--

Note. *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .001$ Below the diagonal shows baseline correlations; above the

diagonal shows correlations between variables measured at follow-up. Shading highlights

correlations across perceived and structural neighborhood characteristics

Table 9. Lagged Correlations Between Perceived and Structural Neighborhood Characteristics at

Baseline and Follow-Up (*n* = 123)

| Baseline | Follow-Up | | | | |
	Fear of Crime	Response to Crime	Neighborhood Problems	Concentrated Disadvantage	Crime Rates
Fear of Crime	.38***	.31***	.35***	-.04	-.02
Response to Crime	.31***	.39***	.20*	.03	.08
Neighborhood Problems	.22*	.26**	.36***	.23**	.19*
Concentrated Disadvantage	.01	.18*	.10	.70***	.49***
Crime Rates	-.08	.18	.13	.36***	.61***

Notes. *$p \le .05$, **$p \le .01$, ***$p \le .001$. Shading highlights correlations across perceived and

structural neighborhood characteristics over time

Table 10. Correlations Between Key Variables among Families Referred for Services-as-Usual

(n = 75) and Housing Subsidy Plus Services-as-Usual (n = 75)

| | | Services-As-Usual | | Housing Subsidy | |
		Concentrated Disadvantage	Crime Rates	Concentrated Disadvantage	Crime Rates
Baseline	Fear of Crime	.31**	.24*	.13	.23
	Response to Crime	.23*	.09	.20	.22
	Neighborhood Problems	.44***	.34**	.37***	.19
Follow-Up	Fear of Crime	-.04	.08	-.06	-.10
	Response to Crime	.14	.06	.10	.22
	Neighborhood Problems	.25	.31*	-.02	.16

Notes. *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .001$.

Table 11. Summary of Supplemental Qualitative Themes

Category	Key emergent themes	Description
Inconsistencies in Housing Assistance	Subsidy	Participants receiving housing assistance note that it is necessary to afford their housing, and even with it they struggle financially. While other support or assistance may be available, without a voucher participants may be unable to use them.
	Supportive Services	Caseworkers and housing advocates were described variably. Some reported positive experiences, receiving appropriate support and guidance, while others described difficulty keeping in contact with them. Still others described negative experiences, noting they did not receive the expected services or felt unsupported.
Housing Voucher Barriers		Many participants referred for housing vouchers had difficulty using them, related to the time constraints and other regulations of the system, as well as discrimination on the basis of the voucher or choosing not to use the voucher given their housing options.

Figure 1. Cycle of "Push" and "Pull" Dynamics Impacting Housing Choices

High Crime Rates

Push Factors	"No Change"	Pull Factors
Timing	Perceptions	Availability
Poor quality	Familiarity	Cost / Space
Safety	Social support	Location
		Accepts vouchers

Concentrated Disadvantage
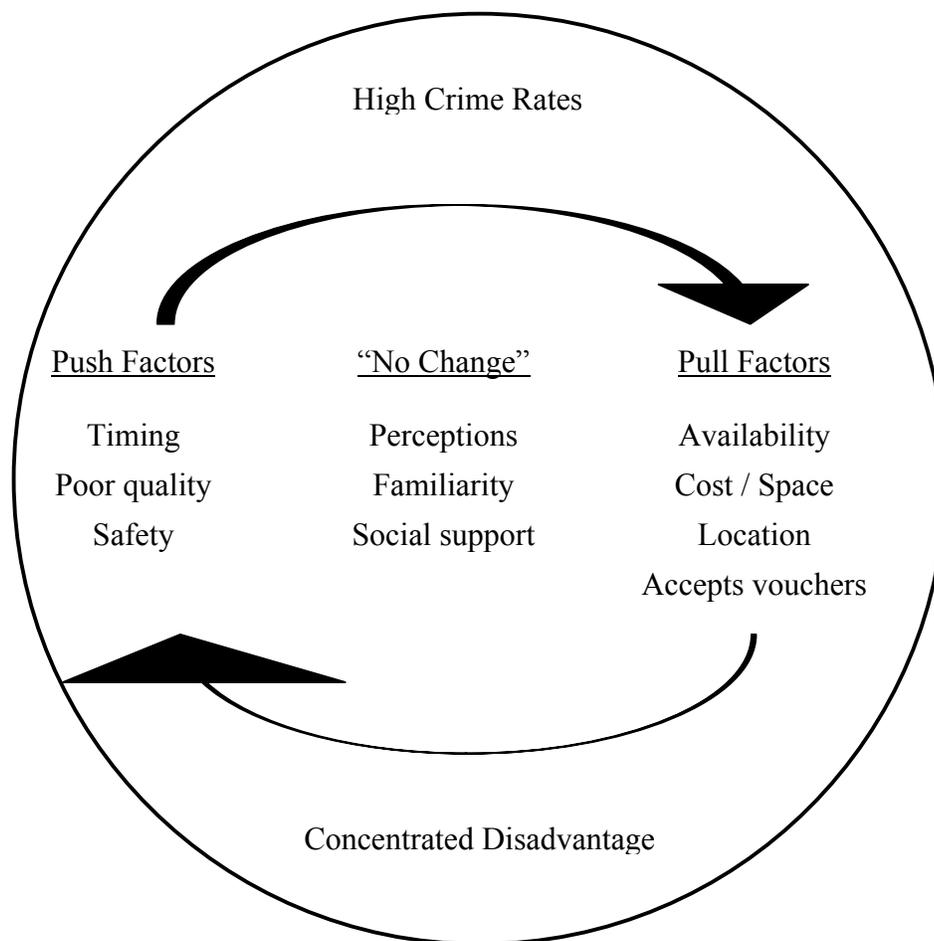
Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview for Family Housing Study

FAMILY HOUSING STUDY
QUALITATIVE CAREGIVER INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY:
Hello my name is (<u>Interviewer Name</u>). Thank you very much for being willing to help us with our research. This is my associate (<u>2nd Interviewer Name</u>). His/her job is to be a "second set of ears" and to help me keep track of the time.

The goal of this interview is to find out more about what families need to secure safe and stable housing through the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). We want to understand more about what services have been helpful, what assistance is needed, and how living arrangements affect their daily routines with kids.
Your participation in this interview is voluntary. The interview should last about two hours and you will be paid $40 in appreciation for your time. Some of the questions on the interview bring up sensitive topics that might make you uncomfortable or even upset. You can stop the interview at any time and you can choose not to answer any question. Your decision of whether or not to participate will have no effect on your housing assistance or any other assistance you may be receiving.
As you can see, I have an audio recorder. We want to use it to make sure that we remember and understand all of the information you give us. The information you provide will be kept confidential and only used for this study. The audio recording will include your first name only and the transcribed version will replace your name with an anonymous identifier (e.g., Participant #1). No one outside the research staff will be allowed to listen to the files and they will be destroyed at the end of the study. Any information you provide will be combined with the responses of the other families we are talking with and summarized. Your name will not appear in any reports from the study.
CONSENT FORM:
Before we begin, I need to go over this consent form with you. It gives you more information about the study and a telephone number you can call if you have questions later. I will give you a copy to keep.

INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERVIEW:
You will see that I have a list of questions to follow for this interview. This list is to help me remember all of the important questions to ask you. My associate will take notes to make sure I cover everything in a timely manner.

The questions are divided into sections about your housing, your family, and your family routine. If you think that a question isn't clear or doesn't make sense for your family, please let me know. Some questions may seem like they are asked more than once. This is because we want to get your full story.

This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. Please let me know now if you do not

agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time.
[START RECORDER]

[Each issue begins with an open-ended initial question, followed by probes used as needed depending on what is shared initially, to prompt further elaboration. It is anticipated that caregivers will have more or less to say about an issue depending on their interest and background—with corresponding variability in how much time is spent on each issue in the interview.]
[All throughout the interview, clarifying questions will be asked such as, "tell me more", "what else have you experienced", and "is there anything else you wanted to add". These more general follow up probes will be used, and are not discussed further in this protocol.]
[Other questions that follow the same spirit and purpose of this interview protocol may also be asked as the interview unfolds.]

Section 1: HOUSING ARRANGEMENTS

"For the first part of this interview, we are interested in learning about your housing. We want to know how it meets your and your child(ren)'s needs, and the reasons that you chose this place over any other choices you might have had."

1) Why did you decide to move here?
   a. What factors were most important in selecting this place?
      i. Location
      ii. Housing unit quality
      iii. Cost
      iv. Space
      v. Privacy
      vi. Availability/timing (could move in right away)
      vii. Neighborhood
      viii. Schools
      ix. Safety
      x. Other reasons
   b. Who, if anyone, helped you make the decision to live here (family, friends, caseworkers, etc.)?

2) Families often talk about making trade-offs when moving, like choosing to live in a smaller place in a better location. What trade-offs did you make in choosing to live here?
   a. Was it a hard choice to live here? What made it hard/easy?

3) How do you feel about your housing situation?
   a. Do you have enough room for your family?
   b. Is the apartment safe and clean?
   c. Do you feel that you have privacy for yourself in your current home?
   d. Can you afford it?

4) How does this living situation compare to previous housing situations? In what ways?

"Thank you for sharing with us about your housing situation. Before we move on to talk about your family, is there anything else you would like to tell us about your living arrangements and housing decisions over the last few months?"

Section 2: HOUSING SERVICES

"For this part of the interview, we want to know about housing assistance you recently received. We are especially interested in services provided through the DCFS Housing Advocacy Program. This is the program that aims to help families find affordable housing in order to keep families together."

1) How did you connect with the DCFS Housing Assistance Program ("Norman Services")?
   a. What were the circumstances that required housing assistance?
      i. Where were you living? Were you homeless?
      ii. Were you worried about the safety of your kids?
   b. How did you find out about the program?
      i. Did your caseworker tell you about it?
      ii. Did you tell your caseworker?

2) How would you describe your experience with the DCFS housing services? [CLARIFY IF FAMILY REFERS TO HOUSING ADVOCATE, DCFS WORKER, OR CHA WORKER]
   a. Were the Housing Advocates helpful?
   b. How well did Housing Advocates meet your family needs?
   c. How well did Housing Advocates link your family with resources?
   d. What types of services did you receive?[PROBE: referrals to shelters, talk to landlords, help find apartment listings, visit apartments with you, apply for TANF, apply for Section 8, get furniture, referrals to community resources]
   e. Did Housing Advocates help you buy things needed for your family? [PROBE security deposit, first month's rent, utility payment, food, clothing, furniture/equipment, transportation]
   f. Did you get income assistance, such as TANF or EBT Link Card?

3) How long did it take to get connected to housing assistance?
   a. Did you get help when you needed it?
   b. Were there any delays in getting help? What happened?

4) How do you afford the rent here? Do you pay rent? How much?
   a. Do you pay the whole rent? If not, how is your proportion of the rent determined?
   b. What resources do you use to pay your rent?
      i. Own income?
      ii. Help from family or friends?
      iii. Voucher? [If yes] How does that work?
      iv. Another public program? [If yes] What sort of program? How did you hear about it? How does the program work?
      v. Do you receive Section 8?

5) **[IF RECEIVED SECTION 8]** How has your experience been with the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program?
   a. In your search for a unit, did you find any apartments for which you couldn't use the voucher?

b. Tell me about any issues you ran into while looking for a unit for which you could use your voucher.
c. Did you decide on your own not to live in any units that would accept the voucher? Why?
d. How long did it take until you were issued a voucher?
e. How long was it until you moved into a housing unit with the voucher? Is this your current address?

6) Did you get other help connecting to housing, such as paying your security deposit, getting utilities connected, or furnishing your place?
a. Who provided these resources?
b. Was/is the assistance sufficient to afford your housing expenses for your family?
c. Are there any things you can think of that would make assistance like this work better for people in your situation?

7) How has the housing assistance changed your family's economic situation?
a. Was/is the assistance sufficient to afford your housing expenses for your family?
b. Do you notice having more money to spend on your children? [IF YES] What do you spend it on?
c. Are you able to save money due to housing assistance?

8) Are there any things you can think of that would make housing assistance like this work better for people in your situation?

"Thank you for sharing with us about your housing situation. Before we move on to talk about your family, is there anything else you would like to tell us about your housing decisions or experiences over the last few months?

Section 3: FAMILY PROCESSES

"Now, I am going to ask you some questions about what it is like to be a parent in different types of living situations."

1) In your current living situation, can you tell me about a typical day with your children? INTERVIEWERS: BE SURE TO MOVE SLOWLY TO AVOID OVERLOADING CAREGIVERS WITH QUESTIONS]
    a. For instance, who usually wakes your children up in the morning, what time, how do they get to and from day care/school, when do you have meals, who prepares the meals, and when is the children's bed time?
    b. In a normal week, how many days are you able to keep the routine you just described?
    c. How is this routine different from that of previous living situations?

2) Is there anything about your current housing situation that makes it difficult to carry out a typical day with your children? What are some of your biggest difficulties as you try to get these tasks completed the way you plan?

3) How does your current housing situation affect your child's school situation?
    a. Which school attends?
    b. School quality?
    c. Teacher/administrative support?
    d. Ability to do homework?
    e. Child success?
    f. Extracurricular activities?

4) How does this compare to the effect that previous living situations had on your child's school situation?

5) How has your current living situation affected your children's behavior or emotional well-being?
    a. [If children of different ages]: Is this different for younger v. older children? Is this different from the effect that previous living situations had on your child's/children's behavior? How?

6) Some families say that some things about their living situation make it difficult to be a parent. In what ways does your current living situation makes it difficult for you to be a parent?
    a. [IF YES]: Can you tell me what about your current living situation that makes it hard for you to be a parent?
    b. Is this different from the effect that previous living situations had on your parenting? How?

7) Is there anything about your current living situation that makes it easier to parent [than previous living situations you might have lived in]?

"Thank you for sharing with us about your family. Before we move on to talk about supports in your life, is there anything else you would like to tell us about being a parent and decisions or experiences over the last few months?

Section 4: SOCIAL SUPPORT

"Now I'm going to ask you to list the people you can think of that give you support. I will ask you to list all the people who give you a certain type of support. Please just give their first name or initials.

[PROMPT]*: List as many people as you want, including any service providers that give you support. If someone provides a lot of different types of support you can say their name more than once.* [**REPEAT AS NECESSARY**]

1) Who are the people that you would go to if you needed help? These could be people who might help you fix something in your home, give you a ride, or who you might ask to borrow money.

2) Who are the people who let you know you're okay; that tell you when they like your ideas, how you are, or the things that you do? Like tell you that you are a good person, have done something very well, or that you are clever or funny?

3) Who would you talk to about something that was very personal or private? For instance, if you had something on your mind that was worrying you or making you feel down, who would you talk to about it?

4) Who are the people you get together with to have fun or to relax? Who might you look to for having good times?

5) Who are the people that would help you if you couldn't afford housing, or needed a place to stay? People who would take you in or help you find someplace to go?

[**RECORD FIRST NAMES IN CORRESPONDING AREA ON "SOCIAL SUPPORT FORM**"]

"Thank you for this information. I have written down each person. Now I'm going to ask you a little more about each of them." [**REPEAT FOR EACH PERSON NAMED ABOVE. DO NOT OBTAIN INFORMATION MORE THAN ONCE FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL PERSON NAMED.**]

So for the first person you mentioned: [PERSON'S FIRST NAME].

6) How or where do you know [FIRST NAME/INITIALS] from? You may name more than one group if you know a person in more than one way.
   a. Family
   b. Child's School
   c. Neighborhood
   d. Through other friends
   e. Church
   f. Work
   g. Spouse/partner/boyfriend/girlfriend
   h. Social Group
   i. Other: Specify

7) How long have you known [PERSON'S FIRST NAME]?
   1=LESS THAN A MONTH
   2=BETWEEN 1-6 MONTHS
   3=6-12 MONTHS
   4=MORE THAN A YEAR

8) How often do you see or talk to [PERSON'S FIRST NAME]?
   1=At least once every day
   2=At least once every week
   3=Less than once a week

9) Who does [FIRST NAME/INITIALS] know on the list? first name/initials?

[PLEASE VERIFY INFORMATION ON THE SOCIAL SUPPORT FORM AND PUT AWAY.]

10) How has the list of people who support you changed since receiving housing assistance from DCFS and/or CHA (over the past 6-12 months)?
    a. Are there more or less people you go to for support?
    b. Do you go to different people or types of supports now?
    c. Do you feel more supported after receiving housing assistance?
    d. Do you get along with these people more or less than before you received assistance? Do you see them more or less?

11) Who did you rely on most before receiving housing assistance from DCFS and/CHA?
    a. Is this the same person(s) you rely on most now?
    b. How has your housing situation affected this relationship?

12) So you said you feel [More/Less] supported now, how does your current housing situation influence the support you receive?
   a. How does your housing now make this easier?
   b. How does it make building support more difficult?

13) Some parents feel it is difficult to be a parent when they are isolated from other parents. Not having a support system of other parents is difficult. Is this a problem for you and your family in your *current living situation*? How?

14) You've had to deal with a lot since struggling to find housing, and we've discussed a lot of challenges today. What are you most proud of as you've dealt with all these challenges?

15) What are some of your successes as a family?

[IF SEPARATED FROM CHILD, GO TO NEXT SECTION]

"That was the last question I have for you today. Thank you so much for sitting to talk with me about your family and your experiences. I know that some of these questions may have been difficult for you to answer, and I appreciate your time. Is there anything that you would like to add about any of the things we have discussed today?"

--INTERVIEW COMPLETE—
SAY GOODBYE

SUPPLMENT Section: CHILD SEPARATION

"I want to ask you some specific questions about separations from your child(ren), even if they have moved back in again. You indicated that you and [CHILD'S NAME] have experienced a separation since your first interview."

1) How did your housing situation affect the decision to separate? PROBE:
   a. Was there not enough space?
   b. Were housing conditions unsafe for children,
   c. Did rules not allow children –e.g., teen boys not permitted in shelter

2) What has the separation meant to you and your family?

3) Do you think that the separation was the best option for [CHILD's NAME] at the time? Why or why not?

4) [**IF REUNITED**] How helpful were any services or housing programs in getting your child back?
   a. Did you and [CHILD'S NAME] reunite because of a change in housing situation (e.g., new place no longer had rules about who could live with you)?
   b. What changed about your housing situation that allowed the child to rejoin the family?

"That was the last question I have for you today. Thank you so much for sitting to talk with me about your family and your experiences. I know that some of these questions may have been difficult for you to answer, and I appreciate your time. Is there anything that you would like to add about any of the things we have discussed today?"

--INTERVIEW COMPLETE—
SAY GOODBYE

Appendix B

Complete List of Administered Measures

Measures In Order of Administration	Citation	Reliability
Household Roster		
Housing Timeline	Fowler et al., 2009, 2011	
Cohabitation Timeline		
Living Arrangements		
Housing Quality	Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011	
Neighborhood Problems	Henry et al., 2014	
Fear of Crime	Henry et al., 2014 Gorman-Smith et al., 2000	.77-.86
Confusion, Hubbub, and Order (CHAOS) Scale	Matheny et al., 1995	.79
Family Cohesion	Tolan et al., 1997	.54-.87
Income	Dowd et al., 2012	
Services Received	Dowd et al., 2012	
Affordable Housing	Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011	
Housing Services Received	Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011	
Voucher Status	Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011	
Duke-UNC Functional Social Support Questionnaire (FSSQ)	Broadhead et al., 1988	.66
Physical Health – Short-Form Health Survey	Ware, Kosinski, & Keller, 1996	.89
CIDI-Depression	Kessler et al. 1998	
Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)	Saunders et al., 1993	.86
Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST)	Cocco & Carey, 1998; Skinner, 1982; Yudko et al., 2007	.74-.94
Victimization – Physical and Sexual Victimization Scale	Stewart et al., 2004	.95
Involvement with Law	Dowd et al., 2012	
Domestic Violence – Conflict Tactics Scale Second Edition (CTS2) Physical Assault subscale	Strauss et al., 1996	.55
Verifications & Payment		
Home Observation	Caldwell & Bradley, 1984	.41-.74

Appendix C

Fear of Crime Scale

FEAR OF CRIME

Now I am going to read a list of situations where people sometimes are afraid of being attacked or robbed. Please look at Card 10 and tell me how fearful you are of being attacked or robbed in each situation. CIRCLE RESPONSE.

Items	Responses					
FEA_1. ….at home in your house or apartment?	Not fearful	A little fearful	Somewhat fearful	Very fearful	DK	R
FEA_2. …on the streets of your neighborhood during the day?	Not fearful	A little fearful	Somewhat fearful	Very fearful	DK	R
FEA_3. …out alone at night in your neighborhood?	Not fearful	A little fearful	Somewhat fearful	Very fearful	DK	R
FEA_4. …out with other people at night in your neighborhood?	Not fearful	A little fearful	Somewhat fearful	Very fearful	DK	R
For the next set of questions, please answer "yes" or "no." Has fear of crime caused you to….						
FEA_6.…limit the places or times that you will go shopping?			Yes	No	DK	R
FEA_7. …limit the places or times that you will work?			Yes	No	DK	R
FEA_8. …limit the places that you will go by yourself?			Yes	No	DK	R
FEA_9. …purchase a weapon for self-protection?			Yes	No	DK	R
FEA_10. …install a home security system or install protective devices, such as bars on the windows, buzzers on windows and/or doors, etc.?			Yes	No	DK	R
FEA_11. …think about moving to a different place to live?			Yes	No	DK	R
Do you have any of the following in your home?						
FEA_13. …rifle?			Yes	No	DK	R
FEA_14. …shotgun?			Yes	No	DK	R
FEA_15. …handgun?			Yes	No	DK	R

Note. Responses scored as follows: 1 = *not fearful*; 2 = *a little fearful*; 3 = *somewhat fearful*; 4 =

very fearful. For items 6 – 15: 0 = *no*; 1 = *yes*.

Appendix D

Neighborhood Problems Scale

NEIGHBORHOOD PROBLEMS

Now I want to ask you some questions about your neighborhood. Please look at Card 9 and tell me how well you believe each statement describes your neighborhood. CIRCLE RESPONSE.

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
NEI1. **Dirty or unkempt front yards are a problem in this neighborhood.**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	DK	R
NEI2. **Night noise is quite irritating in this neighborhood.**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	DK	R
NEI3. **Abandoned or boarded up homes are a problem in this neighborhood.**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	DK	R
NEI4. **Vandalism is a problem in this neighborhood.**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	DK	R
NEI5. **Graffiti is a problem in this neighborhood.**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	DK	R
NEI6. **Drugs are a problem in this neighborhood.**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	DK	R

Note. Responses scored as follows: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 2 = *disagree*; 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*; 4 = *agree*; 5 = *strongly agree*.