EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Neighborhood Disadvantage and Perceptions of Social Support Among Adolescents

Sapna Swaroop, Michelle Pannor Silver, and Kathleen A. Cagney
The University of Chicago

A long tradition of social science research has demonstrated that supportive social relationships are vital for individuals' physical and mental well-being (e.g., House, Umberson, and Landis 1988). Much of the research on this topic has focused on the benefits of supportive relationships for older adults (e.g., Krause 1986), but social relationships are important throughout the life course (Kahn and Antonucci 1980) and may be particularly significant during adolescence as young adults have experiences and make decisions that affect their life trajectories. Indeed, previous research has shown that supportive social relationships are related to a host of positive outcomes for adolescents, including better educational outcomes, lower likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior, and lower levels of depression (Richman and Bowen 1997; Zigler, Taussig, and Black 1992; Barrera and Garrison-Jones 1992).

However, social scientists know less about the conditions under which supportive social relationships are created and maintained. For example, the physical, social, and cultural contexts in which adolescents live may be related to the amount and quality of social support young adults receive from their social networks. Some research has suggested that residents of poor urban areas have access to dense social networks that offer support for coping with the hardships of poverty and provide individuals with resources such as financial assistance, child care, and emotional support (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1996). However, these networks can detract from individuals' well-being because network members may be overly demanding in their expectations of support (e.g. Portes 1998). Additionally, network members may be involved in crime and violence, which can cause conflict and stress for individuals (Pattillo-McCoy 1999), thereby diminishing the quality of social support. Further empirical research is needed to better understand whether and why young adults living in poor neighborhoods view their personal relationships as supportive or stressful.

We draw on insights from scholarship on urban poverty to examine how adolescents evaluate the quality of social support available from their family and friends in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods. For these analyses, we utilize data from multiple components of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods.

Background

In poor neighborhoods, individuals and families are isolated from the socioeconomic resources and institutional infrastructure present in non-poor environments and suffer from compromised safety related to high levels of crime (Wilson 1987; 1996). In these environments, individuals may withdraw from social life out of fear (Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1987, 1996; Furstenburg 1993; Wilson and Kelling 1982) and focus on building safe, supportive social relationships with a small group of people. Residents may rely heavily upon these close, tightly-knit networks to provide help in navigating the material and emotional challenges of everyday life. These close support networks may be vital to individuals' survival in economically depressed communities (Edin and Lein 1996; Stack 1974). If this is the case, individuals may feel more supported by their social networks in poor neighborhoods compared to wealthier environments.

However, conditions in poor neighborhoods may also amplify the stressful aspects of close social relationships. The presence of crime and disorder may promote higher levels of social disorganization, or the breakdown of norms of trust, reciprocity, and informal social control (Shaw and McKay 1942; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999). If residents are generally wary of their neighbors and tend to mistrust one another, then these feelings may trickle down into their closer social relationships and compel individuals to keep a safe distance between themselves and network members, which could prevent the development of fully supportive social relationships.

Another possibility is that the structural conditions present in poor neighborhoods, along with social isolation, contribute to the perpetuation of multiple cultural codes, most notably "street" and "decent" orientations (Anderson 1991, but see also Hannerz 1969; Rainwater 1970). While a majority of residents adhere to "mainstream" values such as hard work, honesty, and following the law (Duneier 1992; Newman 1991), the neglect, political powerlessness, and discrimination experienced by residents of poor neighborhoods allow for the development of "street" culture, which treats engagement in crime and violence as necessary and therefore acceptable. If residents' social networks are comprised of people who engage in both "street" and "decent" activities, cultural conflict may arise between network members, which could result in feelings of diminished social support.

We empirically examine the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and adolescents' perceptions of social support. We first assess whether adolescents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods report more or less perceived social support from their family and friends than adolescents living in more advantaged neighborhoods. We then focus on some of the mechanisms through which neighborhoods might be related to perceived social support, including social organization and social network composition.

Data, Measures, and Analytic Strategy

We utilize data from two components of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods. Measures of perceived social support and social network composition come from the Longitudinal Cohort Study. We use data from 11 to 17 year olds at Wave 1 (conducted from 1995-1996), which consists of 1,517 individuals nested in 80 neighborhood clusters. A measure of neighborhood social organization comes from the Community Survey, which relies on information provided from an independent sample of adult residents in 1994-1995 nested within neighborhood clusters in Chicago. Neighborhood structural characteristics are measured using data from the 1990 U.S. Census.

Perceived family support is measured with a scale comprised of six items: whether the respondents believe their family (1) will always be there, (2) can be relied upon, (3) tells them they are valuable, (4) has confidence in them, (5) helps them find solutions to problems, and (6) will always stand by them. Reliability for this scale from a hierarchical measurement model is .41. *Perceived friend support* is measured with a scale comprised of seven items: whether respondents believe that they (1) are able to completely relax with their friends, (2) share the same approach to life as their friends, (3) know their friends enjoy doing things with them, (3) have at least one friend they can tell anything to, (4) feel very close to some friends, (4) believe their friends would take the time out to talk to them about their problems, and (7) feel alone even with their friends (reverse coded). Reliability for this scale from a hierarchical measurement model is .65. Respondents reported that each of these statements was not true at all, somewhat true, or very true (responses coded such that higher values indicate perceptions of more support).

At the neighborhood level, *neighborhood disadvantage* is measured using dummies based on quintiles of the percent poor in a neighborhood (the first quintile is omitted). We also control for residential stability (a scale comprised of the proportion of homeowners in the neighborhood and the proportion of residents who have lived in the neighborhood for longer than five years) and population density. Both these measures are standardized. To get at one aspect of neighborhood social organization, a measure of *social cohesion* is used to get at the level of trust and feelings of commonality among neighborhood residents. This scale is constructed using empirical Bayes residuals (for more details, see Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1997).

Two separate measures to assess the "street" versus "decent" orientations of family and friend network composition are included. To measure the composition of family networks, a dichotomous variable indicates whether a respondent has a *family member with a criminal record*. To measure the composition of friend networks, a categorical measure is constructed based on how many of the respondents' friends (a few, some, or many friends) engage in pro-social (e.g. participating in a school activity, school sport, community activity, or obeying school rules) versus anti-social (e.g. stealing an item worth less than five dollars, getting into fist fights, intentionally damaging property, and skipping school). We classify respondents' networks as characterized by (1) some friends who participate in pro-social activities and some friends who participate in anti-social activities, (2) many friends who participate in pro-social activities and many friends who participate in anti-social activities, (3) some friends who participate in pro-social activities and many friends who participate in anti-social activities, (4) many friends who participate in pro-social activities and some who participate in anti-social activities, with a reference category being (5) some or many friends who participate in pro-social activities and few who participate in anti-social activities. There were no respondents who had many friends participating in few pro-social activities.

Individual-level control variables include age, gender (female = 1), race/ethnicity (Latino omitted), immigrant generation (first and second generation immigrants versus third and higher), family structure (one biological parent and partner, single parent, and other family composition versus two biological parents), family size, and the primary caregiver's level of education, which is measured with categorical variables for less than high school, high school degree (omitted), some college, and college degree or higher.

Three-level random effects hierarchical linear models were estimated (item-level, respondent-level, and neighborhood cluster-level) for perceived family support and perceived friend support separately. The modeling strategy takes into account the non-independence of observations at each level.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables in the analysis. Adolescents report higher levels of perceived social support from their friends than they do their families.

Table 2 shows a series of models estimating perceived family support. Model 1 indicates that, without controlling for individual-level characteristics, neither neighborhood disadvantage nor any of the other neighborhood characteristics is significantly related to perceived family support. Adding individual-level characteristics in model 2 demonstrates that although certain characteristics (i.e., age, gender, family structure, and primary caregiver's level of education) are associated with perceived family support, including them in the model does not change the non-significance of the neighborhood-level characteristics. In model 3, social cohesion is not

associated with perceived family support. Model 4 shows that having a family member with a criminal record is associated with lower levels of perceived family support, but that neighborhood characteristics are still unrelated to perceived family support.

Table 3 shows results from models for perceived friend support. Model 1 indicates that individuals report lower levels of friend support as the level of neighborhood disadvantage increases. Population density is also associated with lower levels of perceived friend support. After adding individual-level characteristics in model 2, the coefficients for neighborhood disadvantage are reduced in size, and only the coefficients for the top two quintiles of concentrated disadvantage retain their significance. At the individual-level, being a girl is associated with more perceived friend support, although the opposite is true for perceived family support. Model 3 shows that social cohesion is unrelated to perceptions of friend support. In model 4, friend network composition is an important predictor of perceived friend support. Compared to adolescents who have networks in which some/many of their friends engage in pro-social behaviors and few engage in anti-social behaviors, adolescents who have the following network compositions report lower levels of friend support: some friends with pro-social and some friends with anti-social behaviors; many friends with pro-social behaviors and many friends with anti-social behaviors, and some friends with pro-social behaviors and many friends with anti-social behaviors. However, having a network in which many friends participated in pro-social activities and some participate in anti-social activities is no different with relation to perceived friend support than the reference category. Accounting for friend network composition reduces the coefficients for neighborhood disadvantage to non-significance.

Conclusion

Our analysis shows that, net of individual characteristics, there is no association between residence in a disadvantaged neighborhood and adolescents' perceptions of family support, but that adolescents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods report less support from their friends compared to their counterparts in better-off neighborhoods. Neighborhood social organization, here measured as the amount of trust and commonality residents feel with one another, is unrelated to perceptions of friend or family support for adolescents.

The behavioral composition of adolescents' social networks is related to perceptions of friend support and accounts for the negative relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and perceived friend support. Compared to adolescents with network compositions that are primarily positive, adolescents with friend networks with a high degree of behavioral heterogeneity (i.e., some friends practice pro-social behaviors and some friends practice anti-social behaviors; and many friends practice pro-social behaviors and many friends practice anti-social behaviors) report less support. However, the same is not true for adolescents with moderately heterogeneous networks: adolescents whose social networks have a more anti-social orientation (i.e., some friends participate in pro-social behaviors and many friends participate in anti-social behaviors) report less friend support, but those whose social networks have a more pro-social orientation (i.e., many friends participate in pro-social behaviors and some participate in anti-social behaviors) report no less social support than individuals which largely pro-social networks. Thus, it may be that adolescents in disadvantaged neighborhoods report less friend support both because of conflicts within their behaviorally heterogeneous networks (e.g., "street" versus "decent" orientations) as well as the stresses of having a number of friends who engage in anti-social behaviors.

We plan to refine and extend our analysis in several ways. We will more closely examine the issue of scale reliability with respect to the two dependent variables in light of the fact that reliability of family support was relatively low. We plan to introduce analyses that take into account residents' own participation in negative activities, as well as analyses that include a larger set of controls for stressful life events. We also plan to look more closely at how racial/ethnic segregation is implicated in perceptions of social support.

References

Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: Norton.

Barrera, M., Jr. and C.V. Garrison-Jones. 1992. "Family and Peer Social Support as Specific Correlates of Adolescent Depressive Symptoms." *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 20:1-16.

Duneier, Mitchell. 1992. *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Edin, Kathryn, and Laura Lein. 1997. *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Welfare and Low-Wage Work.* New York: Russell Sage.

Furstenberg, Frank F., Jr. 1993. "How Families Manage Risk and Opportunity in Dangerous Neighborhoods." Pp. 231-58. *Sociology and the Public Agenda*. William J. Wilson, editor. Sage Publications.

Hannerz, Ulf. 1969. *Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community*. New York: Columbia University Press.

House, James S., Debra Umberson, and KR Landis. 1988. "Stuctures and Processes of Social Support." *Annual Review of Sociology* 14:293-318.

Kahn, R.L., and T. Antonnuci. 1980. "Convoys over the Life Course: Attachment, Roles and Social Support." in P. Baltes and G. Brim (Eds.), *Lifespan Development and Behavior*, pp. 253–286. New York: Academic Press.

Krause, N. 1986. "Social Support, Stress, and Well-Being Among Older Adults." *Journal of Gerontology* 41(4):512-519.

Massey, Douglas, and Nancy Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid:Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Harvard University Press.

Newman, Katherine S. 1999. *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor and the Inner City*. New York: Knopf & Russell Sage Foundation.

Pattillo-McCoy, Mary. 1999. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black*

Middle Class. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL.

Portes, Alejandro. 1998. “Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:1-24.
Rainwater, Lee. 1970. *Behind Ghetto Walls*. Aldine.

Richman, J., and G. Bowen. 1997. “School Failure: An Ecological-Interactional-Developmental Perspective.” in *Risk and Resilience in Childhood* in ed. M. Fraser, pp. 95–116.

Sampson, Robert J., Jeffrey D. Morenoff and Felton Earls. 1999. “Beyond Social Capital: Spatial Dynamics of Collective Efficacy for Children.” *American Sociological Review* 64: 633-660.

Shaw, Clifford, and Henry McKay. 1942. *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*. University of Chicago Press.

Stack, Carol. 1974. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper and Row.

Turner, R.J., Frankel, B., & Levin, D. (1983). "Social support: Conceptualization, measurement, and implications for mental health." In J.R. Greenley (Ed.), *Research in Community and Mental Health* (pp. 67-111), vol. III, Greenwich: JAI Press.

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

_____. 1996. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. Knopf.

Wilson, James Q., and George Kelling. 1982. “The Police and Neighborhood Safety:Broken Windows.” *Atlantic Monthly* 127:29-38.

Zigler, E., C. Taussig, and K. Black. 1992. “Early Childhood Intervention: A promising Preventative for Juvenile Delinquency.” *American Psychologist* 47: 997-1006.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Individual- and Neighborhood-Level Variables: PHDCN Longitudinal Cohort Study, PHDCN Community Survey, and 1990 U.S. Census

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Outcomes				
Perceived Family Support	2.04	.33	1.14	3
Perceived Friend Support	2.52	.36	.33	2.33
Neighborhood-Level				
1st Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	.20	.40	0	1
2nd Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	.20	.40	0	1
3rd Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	.20	.40	0	1
4th Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	.20	.40	0	1
5th Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	.20	.40	0	1
Residential Stability	0	1	-3.70	3.68
Population Density	0	1	-1.47	5.65
Social Cohesion	3.35	.25	2.78	3.96
Individual-Level				
Age	13.53	1.54	10.80	16.91
Female	.51	.50	0	1
White	.14	.35	0	1
Latino	.37	.48	0	1
African American	.45	.50	0	1
Other Race	.04	.19	0	1
1st Generation Immigrant	.14	.35	0	1
2nd Generation Immigrant	.30	.46	0	1
3rd Generation or Higher	.56	.50	0	1
Two Biological Parents	.44	.50	0	1
One Bio. Parent, One Non-Bio. Parent	.20	.40	0	1
Single Parent	.26	.44	0	1
Other Family Structure	.10	.30	0	1
Less than High School	.44	.50	0	1
High School Degree	.12	.33	0	1
Some College	.31	.46	0	1
College Degree or Higher	.09	.29	0	1
Family Size	5.27	1.97	2	14
Some Pro-Social, Some Anti-Social	.30	.46	0	1
Many Pro-Social, Many Anti-Social	.13	.34	0	1
Some Pro-Social, Many Anti-Social	.11	.31	0	1
Many Pro-Social, Some Anti-Social	.38	.48	0	1
Some/Many Pro-Social, Few Anti-Social	.08	.27	0	1
Family Member with Criminal Record	.31	.46	0	1

Table 2. Person- and Neighborhood-Level Predictors of Perceived Family Support from HLM: PHDCN Longitudinal Cohort Study, PHDCN Community Survey, and 1990 U.S. Census

	(1)		(2)			(3)			(4)		
	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Coeff.	Std. Err.		Coeff.	Std. Err.		Coeff.	Std. Err.	
Neighborhood-Level											
2nd Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	-.008	(.021)	-.013	(.021)		.004	(.009)		.004	(.009)	
3rd Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	-.024	(.026)	-.031	(.025)		.010	(.052)		.012	(.052)	
4th Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	-.036	(.022)	-.028	(.021)		-.012	(.021)		-.013	(.021)	
5th Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	-.043	(.027)	-.029	(.028)		-.030	(.024)		-.029	(.024)	
Residential Stability	.003	(.005)	.000	(.005)		.000	(.005)		.000	(.005)	
Population Density	-.043	(.027)	-.029	(.028)		-.030	(.024)		-.029	(.024)	
Social Cohesion						-.026	(.023)		-.024	(.024)	
Individual-Level											
Age			-.025	(.005)	***	-.025	(.005)	***	-.025	(.005)	***
Female			-.030	(.013)	**	-.030	(.013)	**	-.030	(.013)	**
White			.001	(.025)		.000	(.025)		.001	(.025)	
African American			.031	(.023)		.031	(.024)		.030	(.024)	
Other Race			-.052	(.046)		-.052	(.046)		-.053	(.046)	
1st Generation Immigrant			.026	(.025)		.027	(.026)		.022	(.026)	
2nd Generation Immigrant			-.011	(.022)		-.010	(.022)		-.014	(.022)	
One Bio. Parent, One Non-Bio. Parent			.001	(.004)		.001	(.004)		.001	(.004)	
Single Parent			-.044	(.020)	**	-.043	(.020)	**	-.040	(.020)	*
Other Family Structure			-.077	(.019)	***	-.077	(.019)	***	-.074	(.019)	***
Family Size			-.001	(.004)		-.001	(.004)		-.001	(.004)	
Less than High School			-.006	(.021)		-.006	(.004)		-.001	(.020)	
Some College			.054	(.023)	**	.054	(.023)	**	.056	(.023)	**
College Degree or Higher			.056	(.029)	*	.056	(.029)	*	.058	(.029)	**
Family Member with Criminal Record									-.024	(.014)	*
Intercept	2.902		2.903			2.903			2.903		

***p<.01, **p<.05, *p<.10, n = 1,443 individuals in 78 neighborhood clusters

Table 3. Person- and Neighborhood-Level Predictors of Perceived Friend Support from HLM: PHDCN Longitudinal Cohort Study, PHDCN Community Survey, and 1990 U.S. Census

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Coeff.	Std. Err.
Neighborhood-Level								
2nd Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	-.076	(.010) ***	-.028	(.030)	-.028	(.030)	-.020	(.028)
3rd Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	-.099	(.028) ***	-.041	(.027)	-.041	(.026)	-.029	(.026)
4th Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	-.106	(.029) ***	-.047	(.025) *	-.047	(.028) *	-.038	(.026)
5th Quintile Nbhd. Disadvantage	-.133	(.027) ***	-.062	(.032) *	-.061	(.033) *	-.049	(.030)
Residential Stability	-.004	(.006)	-.002	(.006)	-.002	(.007)	-.002	(.006)
Population Density	-.133	(.027) ***	-.062	(.032) *	-.061	(.033) *	-.049	(.030)
Social Cohesion					.005	(.011)	.004	(.011)
Individual-Level								
Age			.018	(.006) ***	.018	(.006) ***	.024	(.007) ***
Female			.120	(.017) ***	.120	(.017) ***	.117	(.018) ***
White			.108	(.044) **	.108	(.045) **	.095	(.044) **
African American			.027	(.025)	.027	(.026)	.020	(.025)
Other Race			.008	(.051)	.007	(.052)	-.007	(.050)
1st Generation Immigrant			-.010	(.031)	-.010	(.033)	-.009	(.032)
2nd Generation Immigrant			.007	(.029)	.007	(.030)	.010	(.030)
One Bio. Parent, One Non-Bio. Parent			.012	(.005) **	.012	(.005) **	.011	(.005) **
Single Parent			-.041	(.030)	-.041	(.030)	-.024	(.029)
Other Family Structure			-.023	(.028)	-.023	(.028)	-.019	(.027)
Family Size			-.012	(.005) **	-.012	(.005) **	-.011	(.005) **
Less than High School			-.017	(.027)	-.017	(.028)	-.012	(.027)
Some College			.014	(.032)	.014	(.032)	.015	(.031)
College Degree or Higher			-.012	(.035)	-.012	(.036)	-.018	(.036)
Some Pro-Social, Some Anti-Social							-.144	(.036) ***
Many Pro-Social, Many Anti-Social							-.134	(.038) ***
Some Pro-Social, Many Anti-Social							-.185	(.040) ***
Many Pro-Social, Some Anti-Social							-.046	(.031)
Intercept	2.656		2.656		2.656		2.656	

***p<.01, **p<.05, *p<.10, n = 1,396 individuals in 78 neighborhood clusters