

## **Associations Between Public Housing and Individual Earnings in New Orleans**

by

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**CES 15-32                      October, 2015**

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## **Abstract**

This study uses a sample of the civilian labor force aged 16-64 constructed from the Decennial Census and American Community Survey, along with data from the HUD dataset Picture of Subsidized Households, to compare the likelihood for job earnings in relation to public housing developments in the New Orleans MSA before and after Hurricane Katrina. Results from a series of hierarchical linear models (HLM) indicate significant relationships are altered between time periods, including those from public and mixed-income developments, suggesting a fluid relationship between neighborhoods and economic outcomes during physical, demographic and economic restructuring.

# 1 Introduction

Economic inequality for racial and ethnic minority groups, exacerbated by their spatial segregation, has been a central focus in urban studies. In the United States, the African American labor force has historically experienced more difficulty in achieving socioeconomic upward mobility than their white counterparts. Since many racial and ethnic minority workers, especially African Americans, are highly segregated in inner cities in the U.S., local geographies of the labor force and of jobs play particularly significant roles in economic outcomes for these groups (Wilson, 1987; Kain, 1968; Krivo et al., 1998; Jargowsky, 1996; Darden, 1987).

Neighborhoods shape local geographies of residence and employment divided along race, ethnicity, and class lines, contributing to economic and social outcomes for residents and providing the physical, social and cultural environments in which labor market processes operate (Wilson, 1987; Kain, 1968; Kaplan and Woodhouse, 2004; Galster, 2008). While there is accumulating research examining these socio-spatial attainment processes, studies continue to fail to account for these processes in examinations of individual social and economic outcomes (Ellen and Turner, 1997; Anil, Sjoquist, and Wallace, 2010; Swanstrom, Dreier, and Mollenkopf, 2002).

Additionally, embedded within neighborhoods, particularly those characterized by income inequality, are subsidized and public housing developments. Following established local relationships, subsidized housing is not merely the product of local socioeconomic conditions, but also interacts with processes of residential segregation and poverty concentration in forging economic outcomes across demographic and socioeconomic groups (Massey and Kanaiaupuni, 1993). What prior research has failed to identify,

however, is whether or how these developments impact individual outcomes similarly or differently from other neighborhood conditions.

Due to these core assumptions about the role of neighborhoods in individual outcomes, the local context is of particular importance in understanding labor market processes, especially as neighborhoods experience socioeconomic, demographic, and physical shifts over time. To advance our understanding of these processes, the objective of this study is to measure the association between individual job earnings and socioeconomic neighborhood characteristics, including the presence of public housing, in addition to individual controls for African Americans and whites as well as the vulnerable female and renter sub-segments of these groups. This analysis is conducted in the New Orleans metropolitan statistical area (MSA) using confidential microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau and a multilevel modeling approach to examine the associations between individuals and neighborhood characteristics, particularly the presence of public housing before and during or after mixed-income redevelopment.

New Orleans offers a unique case study area for this particular analysis due to the nearly simultaneous redevelopment of many of the metro's low-income neighborhoods, particularly those containing public housing, due to damage and the availability of recovery funds in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Rarely does a single event alter the physical, social and economic composition of a large number of neighborhoods in a single metropolitan area, and Katrina allows for outcomes related to a changing neighborhood context to be examined more effectively than is possible with tracking redevelopment projects over a period of time.

The discussion proceeds as follows. Section 2 describes the data and methodology employed in analyzing the likelihood for individual employment and job earnings in relation to neighborhood characteristics and subsidized housing programs. Section 3 summarizes results from the job earnings models and Section 5 offers conclusions from the analyses.

## **2 Data and methodology**

The current sample of interest is all full-time employed individuals between the ages of sixteen and sixty-four who are in the civilian labor force and who both live and work in the New Orleans MSA. Individual- and neighborhood-level characteristics are included in the study's models, with neighborhood variables measured at the census tract-level. Data are derived from two major sources: the U.S. Census Bureau and HUD. Confidential microdata are utilized for the 2000 decennial long-form Census and the 2007-2011 American Community Survey (ACS).

Along with confidential microdata, public housing data are utilized from HUD's A Picture of Subsidized Households (HUD 2000, 2011), which contains information on all households living in subsidized housing in the U.S. These data are incorporated in the study's models in two ways<sup>1</sup>. One variable measures the presence of traditional public housing developments taking a binary form, so a tract contains or is contiguous to a tract containing a public housing development, or a tract does not contain or is not contiguous to

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage of public housing units as a proportion of a tract's total housing units was initially included in the models but due to collinearity had to be removed. Since the present emphasis is on neighborhood conditions, and knowing the influence of public housing developments is not contained by tract boundaries, the decision was made to utilize the present public housing binary variable, which acknowledges influence spillover, instead of the percentage variable.

a tract containing a development. The other variable measures the percentage of Section 8 vouchers/HCVs<sup>2</sup> as a proportion of a tract's total housing units and is included as a control for a rapidly increasing subsidized housing program in the metro.

The present study utilizes multilevel models to measure relationships between individual earnings and neighborhood characteristics in the New Orleans MSA, particularly for demographic and socioeconomic sub-groups. Each set of models was run separately using the 2000 and 2007-2011 data; results should not be interpreted as longitudinal in structure. Relationships between job earnings and individual and neighborhood characteristics are examined for non-Hispanic African Americans and non-Hispanic whites separately, in addition to subsequent sub-group analyses for females, renters, and female renters to analyze effects for groups more likely to be impacted by concentrated poverty and the spatial distribution of public housing.

A multilevel linear model, or hierarchical linear model (HLM), is utilized to test individual- and tract-level data using a two-level approach, correcting for correlation errors among individuals within geographic areas (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002; Littell et al., 2006). This approach predicts the slope of individual-level independent variables and includes random errors to control for correlation among individuals in the same geography, allowing for simultaneous estimation of a full multilevel model with controlled individual-level variables which predicts an association between individual- and neighborhood-level variables (Cohen, 1998; Wang, 2010).

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<sup>2</sup> Between the time periods used in this study, HUD changed the name of the Section 8 program to the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. The programs are administered virtually identically, and the terms are used herein interchangeably.

### 3 Differences in job earnings levels for African Americans and whites

To measure the relationship between individual-level and neighborhood-level variables and the likelihood for individual job earnings, the HLM's level 1 equation takes the form:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}X_{1ij} + \dots + \beta_{kj}X_{kij} \quad (1)$$

where  $Y_{ij}$  represents the odds (in natural log form) of job earnings for an individual  $i$  in tract  $j$ .  $X_{1ij} \dots X_{kij}$  represent individual-level variables with associated coefficients  $\beta_{1j} \dots \beta_{kj}$ . Controlling for individual differences, variables at level 1 are centered around their grand means and the intercept equals the average job earnings at the mean of all model variables.

Simultaneously, variation across tracts in the probability of job earnings is estimated as a function of tract-level characteristics at level 2, taking the form:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}W_{1j} + \dots + \gamma_{0q}W_{qj} + \mu_{0j} \quad (2)$$

where  $\beta_{0j}$  represents the average (natural log) odds of job earnings for individuals in the New Orleans metropolitan area. As a fully interacted model, each tract variable,  $W_{1j} \dots W_{qj}$ , can be understood as an interaction term with the intercept.  $\gamma_{01}$ , the coefficient terms associated with  $W_j$ , represent the effect of tract characteristics on the individually adjusted odds of job earnings.  $\mu_{0j}$  represents the level 2 error term accounting for variability in the odds of job earnings.

*African Americans, 2000*

Due to space limitations, individual-level control variable coefficients are included in the model results tables but are not discussed in detail in the following section. The

models measure associations among African American job earnings and individual and tract characteristics; separate models measure relationships for African American females, renters, and female renters (Table 1).

At the census tract- or neighborhood-level, for African American females, living in a tract containing or adjacent to a tract containing a public housing development is associated with nearly 12% lower log job earnings compared to African American females who live further from these neighborhoods. Similarly, for African American female renters, living in or near a neighborhood containing public housing is associated with nearly 11% lower log earnings. The total African American population and renters as a whole do not demonstrate significant relationships with the public housing variable utilized in the models. The percentage of a neighborhood's total housing units utilizing a voucher is not significantly associated with log earnings for any of the groups.

Turning to the other neighborhood characteristics, the percentage of a neighborhood's total population living in female-headed households has a significant relationship with log earnings for all but the African American female renter sub-group, with a 1% increase in the proportion of female-headed households leading to almost 1% higher log earnings for all African Americans, females, and renters. Similarly, the percentage of a neighborhood's population with a high school degree or higher is positively associated with higher levels of log earnings for African Americans, females, and renters. A 1% increase in the percentage of neighborhood residents utilizing public transportation to travel to work is associated with almost 1% lower job earnings for African American renters, although this effect is not consistent among the other groups. A 1% increase in service sector employment in a neighborhood is associated with nearly 1% lower log job

earnings for African Americans, but this relationship is not significant for any of the sub-groups individually.

#### *Whites, 2000*

Similarly to the African American results for 2000, the public housing variable is significantly associated with white log earnings (Table 2). For white females, living in or near a neighborhood containing public housing is associated with nearly 11% lower log earnings than white females living further from these developments. White female renters' earnings are impacted even more, with earnings of those living in or near these neighborhoods associated with over 24% lower log earnings. Similarly to the African American model, the percentage of Section 8 vouchers in a neighborhood is not significantly associated with log earnings of whites or the white sub-groups.

Examining the remaining neighborhood characteristics, only the percentage of a tract with a high school degree or more is significantly associated with log earnings for whites. This variable is only significant for all whites (a 1% increase in educational attainment is associated with just over 1% higher earnings) and white females (1% increase is associated with almost 1% higher log earnings), with the renter sub-groups not significantly impacted by neighborhood-level educational attainment.

#### *African Americans and whites, 2007-2011*

The results for the 2007-2011 models (Table 3 and Table 4), for both the African American and white groups, are not as overwhelmingly significant as those observed in the 2000 models (with identical variables and coding strategies) at both the individual- and neighborhood-levels. For African Americans and whites in all groups, the presence of public housing in or adjacent to the neighborhood of residence is not significantly

associated with log job earnings, a different result of particular importance for females and female renters in both racial groups than was observed in 2000. The percentage of a neighborhood's housing units utilizing HCVs is not significantly associated with African American log earnings in 2007-2011; however, a 1% increase in HCVs is associated with nearly 2% lower log earnings for whites.

For the remaining neighborhood variables, associations are not consistent for African Americans' (Table 3) and whites' (Table 4) earnings. A 1% increase in the tract population with a high school degree or more is associated with nearly 1% higher log job earnings for African Americans. Surprisingly, greater educational attainment is not significantly associated with African American female or renter earnings. The only other neighborhood variable of significance for any African American sub-group is the percentage of service sector employment: a 1% increase in neighborhood employment in this sector is associated with 1% lower earnings for African American female renters but has no significant association for other groups.

Neighborhood variables appear to demonstrate slightly greater association with the job earnings of whites 2007-2011, with more significant variables at the neighborhood-level than were present in the 2000 models. A 1% increase in the percentage of female-headed households is positively associated with some of the white groups' log earnings levels: nearly 1% lower for whites and female renters and over 1% for renters. Higher neighborhood educational attainment is positively associated with white earnings as well as females', leading to 1% higher likelihood of earnings for each. A 1% increase in public transportation utilization is associated with almost 2% higher log job earnings for white females.

## 4 Conclusion

This study has attempted to demonstrate the importance of incorporating neighborhood characteristics into studies of individual economic outcomes, as local contexts have important effects as the locations of both residences and workplaces. The confidential microdata utilized allow for tract characteristics to be examined in addition to individual control variables, an approach that is not generally possible without the benefit of these particular datasets. Results indicate neighborhood characteristics do have effects on the job earnings of individuals. The observed differences in relationships in 2000 and 2007-2011 support the idea that the local context not only impacts economic outcomes, but these effects are somewhat fluid over time, adapting to and reflecting larger neighborhood change in metropolitan areas.

One particular component of neighborhoods this study has attempted to examine is the role of public housing and mixed-income developments in these local labor market processes. The preceding results do not tell us anything particularly groundbreaking regarding the relationship between these developments and earnings of either African Americans or whites in New Orleans. What the results do indicate, whether a result of HOPE VI efforts or general redevelopment of neighborhoods after Katrina, is that New Orleans' neighborhoods are different today than they were in 2000.

New Orleans neighborhoods appear to have less African American concentration since Hurricane Katrina, particularly in areas near mixed-income developments. Earnings levels in these areas and the entire metro appear to have increased, as has educational attainment, two positive indicators for New Orleans' recovery. In addition, earnings are no longer negatively associated with the presence of public housing developments in the latter

dataset, which likely is during or after their conversion to mixed-income. No positive associations between these developments and earnings are observed either, a result supported by at least one study that finds HOPE VI redevelopment fails to impact economic outcomes (Popkin, Levy, and Buron, 2009).

This study attempts to identify real, quantifiable relationships for individual job earnings and individual and neighborhood characteristics, including the role of public housing and mixed-income developments before and during or after their redevelopment and larger neighborhood revitalization efforts. This study cannot isolate effects from Katrina, HOPE VI, or any other major event on the likelihood for individual job earnings for African Americans, whites, females, renters, or any combination of these groups. This study can, however, point to relationships between an individual's earnings and their neighborhood characteristics, including their proximity to public housing or mixed-income communities. We learn the local context is significantly associated with individual earnings, and in the course of major redevelopment efforts, much like those employed under HOPE VI, some of these relationships are disrupted or altered significantly. As such, it is imperative for researchers to explicitly incorporate neighborhood characteristics into analyses of individual outcomes, as these conditions are ingrained in the processes that combine with individual characteristics to impact these outcomes.

There are several major limitations to interpreting these results. The biggest limitation is the confounding event of Hurricane Katrina and how neighborhood change observed in these models could in effect be wholly attributed to damage and redevelopment due to the storm. This possibility is not controlled for, and results must be read as a window into neighborhood processes at work before and after the disaster and

nothing more. The socioeconomic effects of Katrina are far too complex to be incorporated into the present study and warrant much future research with better localized “on the ground” data that is beyond the current scope, intentions or expertise. Further research could benefit greatly from additional examinations utilizing confidential microdata and the refined geographic scale they provide for defining and examining neighborhood-level processes at work in impacting individual outcomes.

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## Tables

Table 1: Regression results for African American job earnings, 2000

	<b>African Americans</b>	<b>African American females</b>	<b>African American renters</b>	<b>African American female renters</b>
<i>Female</i>	<b>-0.0720***</b>	--	<b>-0.1165***</b>	--
<i>Age</i>	<b>0.0114***</b>	<b>0.0142***</b>	<b>0.0108***</b>	<b>0.0146***</b>
<i>Married</i>	<b>0.1635***</b>	<b>0.0633**</b>	<b>0.2423***</b>	<b>0.1729***</b>
<i>High school</i>	<b>0.4766***</b>	<b>0.5121***</b>	<b>0.4119***</b>	<b>0.4705***</b>
<i>Public transportation</i>	<b>-0.0773*</b>	<b>-0.2247***</b>	-0.0692	<b>-0.1763***</b>
<i>Commute time</i>	<b>0.0009*</b>	<b>0.0047***</b>	<b>0.0012*</b>	<b>0.0036***</b>
<i>Homeowner</i>	<b>0.0632**</b>	<b>0.1203***</b>	--	--
<i>Female household %</i>	<b>0.0059*</b>	<b>0.0055*</b>	<b>0.0066*</b>	0.0057
<i>High school %</i>	<b>0.0104***</b>	<b>0.0097***</b>	<b>0.0102***</b>	0.0055
<i>Public transportation %</i>	-0.0045	-0.0007	<b>-0.0072*</b>	-0.0065
<i>Service sector employment %</i>	<b>-0.0075*</b>	-0.0069	-0.0045	-0.0059
<i>Voucher %</i>	-0.0086	-0.0054	-0.0078	-0.0169
<i>Public housing cont/adj</i>	-0.0644	<b>-0.1145**</b>	-0.0580	<b>-0.1059*</b>
<i>Constant</i>	9.6889***	9.6887***	9.6544***	9.6407***
<i>Tractvariance</i>	0.0379	0.0436	0.0468	0.0589
<i>Tractvariance (residual)</i>	2.6919	1.8390	2.2555	1.6670

legend: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 2: Regression results for white job earnings, 2000

	<b>Whites</b>	<b>White females</b>	<b>White renters</b>	<b>White female renters</b>
<i>Female</i>	-0.0381	--	-0.0026	--
<i>Age</i>	0.0011	0.0006	<b>0.0038*</b>	0.0039
<i>Married</i>	<b>0.1394***</b>	0.0080	<b>0.1148**</b>	0.0426
<i>High school</i>	<b>0.7030***</b>	<b>0.6340***</b>	<b>0.3753***</b>	<b>0.3802***</b>
<i>Public transportation</i>	<b>-0.1548*</b>	-0.1153	-0.1695	<b>-0.2655*</b>
<i>Commute time</i>	<b>0.0052***</b>	<b>0.0090***</b>	<b>0.0023**</b>	<b>0.0063***</b>
<i>Homeowner</i>	<b>0.0577*</b>	<b>0.0991**</b>	--	--
<i>Female household %</i>	0.0025	0.0004	-0.0077	-0.0101
<i>High school %</i>	<b>0.0102***</b>	<b>0.0097**</b>	0.0092	0.0010
<i>Public transportation %</i>	-0.0085	-0.0021	-0.0018	0.0047
<i>Service sector employment %</i>	-0.0080	-0.0088	-0.0092	-0.0086
<i>Voucher %</i>	0.0211	0.0073	0.0378	0.0022
<i>Public housing cont/adj</i>	-0.0247	<b>-0.1077*</b>	-0.0549	<b>-0.2429**</b>
<i>Constant</i>	9.8364***	9.8480***	9.7766***	9.8251***
<i>Tractvariance</i>	0.0660	0.0716	0.1903	0.2778
<i>Tractvariance (residual)</i>	5.7653	3.7495	4.5301	2.9862

legend: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 3: Regression results for African American job earnings, 2007-2011

	<b>African Americans</b>	<b>African American females</b>	<b>African American renters</b>	<b>African American female renters</b>
<i>Female</i>	0.0829	--	0.1539	--
<i>Age</i>	<b>0.0094***</b>	<b>0.0074**</b>	0.0060	<b>0.0081*</b>
<i>Married</i>	0.0330	0.0303	-0.0621	0.0257
<i>High school</i>	<b>0.3543***</b>	<b>0.5438***</b>	0.2411	<b>0.2558*</b>
<i>Public transportation</i>	<b>-0.3419**</b>	<b>-0.2969*</b>	<b>-0.3757*</b>	<b>-0.3459*</b>
<i>Commute time</i>	0.0017	0.0020	<b>0.0052*</b>	0.0024
<i>Homeowner</i>	<b>0.1903**</b>	0.1279	--	--
<i>Female household %</i>	0.0000	-0.0006	0.0042	0.0034
<i>High school %</i>	<b>0.0099*</b>	0.0053	0.0062	-0.0001
<i>Public transportation %</i>	-0.0056	-0.0043	-0.0070	-0.0040
<i>Service sector employment %</i>	0.0000	-0.0018	-0.0115	<b>-0.0102*</b>
<i>Voucher %</i>	0.0011	0.0079	0.0017	0.0035
<i>Public housing cont/adj</i>	-0.1323	-0.0584	-0.0883	-0.0586
<i>Constant</i>	10.0093***	10.0137***	9.8533***	9.9264***
<i>Tractvariance</i>	0.0621	0.0000	0.1504	0.0126
<i>Tractvariance (residual)</i>	3.1481	1.9624	3.0390	1.4929

legend: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 4: Regression results for white job earnings, 2007-2011

	<b>Whites</b>	<b>White females</b>	<b>White renters</b>	<b>White female renters</b>
<i>Female</i>	<b>0.1528***</b>	--	<b>0.1980*</b>	--
<i>Age</i>	<b>0.0039*</b>	<b>0.0045**</b>	0.0025	<b>0.0115**</b>
<i>Married</i>	<b>0.2556***</b>	<b>0.1710***</b>	<b>0.3669***</b>	0.1324
<i>High school</i>	<b>0.8025***</b>	<b>0.3855**</b>	<b>0.8622***</b>	0.3332
<i>Public transportation</i>	-0.2253	-0.1696	0.2229	-0.1500
<i>Commute time</i>	<b>0.0039***</b>	<b>0.0047***</b>	0.0016	0.0025
<i>Homeowner</i>	<b>0.1677**</b>	<b>0.1799***</b>	--	--
<i>Female household %</i>	<b>0.0065**</b>	0.0038	<b>0.0117*</b>	<b>0.0092*</b>
<i>High school %</i>	<b>0.0126***</b>	<b>0.0105***</b>	0.0093	0.0055
<i>Public transportation %</i>	0.0038	<b>0.0177**</b>	-0.0094	0.0047
<i>Service sector employment %</i>	-0.0008	-0.0004	0.0084	0.0012
<i>Voucher %</i>	<b>-0.0189*</b>	-0.0089	-0.0102	-0.0012
<i>Public housing cont/adj</i>	0.0720	0.0256	-0.0291	0.0286
<i>Constant</i>	10.2314***	10.3334***	10.0931***	10.1876***
<i>Tractvariance</i>	0.0194	0.0000	0.0657	0.0000
<i>Tractvariance (residual)</i>	5.0232	2.1011	4.5301	1.8857

legend: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$