

indicated that neighborhoods with a higher proportion of children relative to adults, fewer adult males and fewer elders showed a higher likelihood of child maltreatment and other adverse outcomes. The most obvious explanation is that these neighborhoods have more households with single mothers with multiple children and without other adults around to help care for them, but that is not the only explanation

Ethnographic Analysis

The ethnographic analysis pointed to another dimension of child care burden that reflected collective efficacy—neighbors' sense that there is local obligation and responsibility for each other and for one another's children (Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls' "Neighborhoods and violent crime," *Science* 277:918-24). In the ethnographic interviews, the issue of supervision of and intervention with neighborhood children emerged as an important concern of neighborhood residents and amplified the findings related to child care burden from the aggregate analysis. Neighborhood residents expressed concerns that if they intervened in the behavior of other people's children, they could expect retaliation not just from other parents but from children, even young children. For example, one woman reported:

Just a few days ago, there was a woman walking down the sidewalk by our house. She had a little boy with her who was throwing rocks at our dogs. I told the boy to stop it, and the mother turned around and said all kinds of words I can't repeat. Then the little kid repeated exactly what she said.

These two perspectives, one from an aggregate and one from an ethno-

graphic approach, suggest different policy and practice solutions, one engaged with overburdened mothers isolated from assistance with household management and child care and the other engaged with the importance of collective efficacy and children's socialization within a wider neighborhood context. Solutions, of course, lie in both interpretations, and it is the combination of approaches that offers the greater potential.

The combination of epidemiologic and ethnographic methods also can

gave ethnographers the opportunity to informally observe the neighborhood contexts.

Children's Perspectives

An additional component of our neighborhood research was a study of children's perceptions of their neighborhoods. Most conceptualizations of neighborhood social capital rely on adults providing assistance to children in need of intervention. Children must contend with sometimes conflicting messages that

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be advantageous for ethnographic sampling strategies. In large urban areas, how does one know where to start an ethnographic study? The epidemiological analyses identified neighborhoods with variation in rates of child indicators, including child maltreatment, and different profiles of neighborhood conditions. This provided a systematic way to construct ethnographic samples that allowed for meaningful comparisons and addressed questions of representativeness and generalizability. We first selected neighborhoods (census-defined tracts or block groups) based on profiles of neighborhood characteristics and indicators of child well-being, and then randomly ordered addresses within those neighborhoods. Members of the ethnographic research team (mostly anthropology graduate students) approached eligible household addresses until the sample was recruited. While systematic, this sampling strategy was labor intensive. For example, to recruit one of our samples of 400 parents or guardians, ethnographers approached 2448 occupied housing units, speaking with an adult in 2098 households. Although labor intensive, this sampling strategy

adults in their neighborhoods can both help and hurt them. Children suggested that certain categories of adults were preferred should the child be in need of assistance. Women, particularly mothers, and preferably mothers with strollers (as a signifier of maternal status) were the favored adults from whom children sought help. Just as adults expressed fears of children, children expressed fears that adults might kidnap them or otherwise do them harm. What results is an ongoing mental appraisal and initial negotiation in which both children and adults gauge the risk of offering, seeking and accepting help.

Neighborhood research using census data by necessity defines "neighborhood" using aggregate statistical categories. To better understand the meaning of neighborhood to its residents, we asked parents to draw maps of their neighborhood boundaries. We speculated that the smaller census-defined block group category, rather than the larger census tract category, might more closely approximate how parents would describe their neighborhoods. However, residents did in fact identify census-tract sized geographic areas, though not

necessarily matching the boundaries of their own census tracts! Children also were asked to identify their neighborhoods' boundaries, which varied from boundaries identified by both the census and their parents.

For addressing the many problems facing children and families, the neighborhoods in which children and families reside provide a potentially useful entry point for understanding contextual influences on child well-being. That poor neighborhoods vary from one another in the conditions they provide for children and in indicators of child well-being offers an opportunity for anthropology to be engaged in efforts to improve children's lives through ethnographic and multi-method collaborations.

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Understanding New Hope

A Successful Antipoverty Program for Working Poor Adults and Their Children

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Anthropological theory and methods can provide important evidence on how to support US working poor families and their children. Anthropologists are representing the voices, stories, experiences and local contexts of working poor families; describing the political and structural contexts of family and child

policies and supports; and advocating for social justice and political change. Morgan and Maskovsky (2003) review work on US poverty and emphasize the political context and effects of recent policy changes (*Annual Review of Anthropology* 32:315-38). Newman's *No Shame in My Game* (1999), Edin and Lein's *Making Ends Meet* (1997) and Strauss' work on US cultural models of poverty ("Not-so-rugged Individualists" in Piven et al's

Work, Welfare and Politics, 2002) are recent examples of excellent empirical work in this field.

We also can unite with other disciplines to better understand whether, how and why working poor families and children might benefit from improved supports. The New Hope study, published in Duncan, Huston and Weisner's *Higher Ground* (2007; www.newhopebook.com) is such an effort.

New Hope: A Positive Social Contract

The New Hope Project (www.newhopeproject.org) was an antipoverty program initiated by community activists and business leaders in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that improved the lives of working families and their children. New Hope was a *positive social contract*, not a

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welfare program. In return for 30 or more hours of work, New Hope provided vouchers for child care services, HMO health care benefits for children, an income supplement raising earnings well above the poverty threshold and job supports.

Working poor families vary widely in their backgrounds and circumstances, and their income and work trajectories change, especially during early and middle adulthood. Partly for this reason, meaningful supports must be flexible and continuously available, such as those New Hope offered.

Welfare programs were originally designed to support low-income parents in caring for their children, but current programs are less focused on child well-being than on adult work. The safety net of the Earned Income Tax Credit, minimum wage, food stamps and other programs are helpful, but they fail to lift most families from poverty. The proportion of poor families in the US has remained relatively stable at around 14% since the mid-1970s. Amid this seemingly intractable problem, could New Hope help? Would it benefit children or would the stresses of work and family management leave children worse off? New Hope had a positive impact on parents and children, but why, how and which families benefited most is a more complicated story.

Some 1,360 residents of two low-income neighborhoods in Milwaukee signed up for the New Hope selection lottery. Half were randomly assigned to be eligible for New Hope and half were followed as a control group. About 50% of participants were African-American, 27% were Hispanic and the rest were Native American, Hmong and white. About 85% were single mothers. Child assessments, teacher ratings, extensive parent surveys and employment records were collected, and a family ethnographic study provided a rich, contextual understanding of New Hope's effects during and after the three-year intervention (1995–1998). The ethnography included 44 randomly selected families (22 controls and 22 in the program) followed during one year and up to five years after the end of New Hope.

Program Results

New Hope ethnographic research identified a number of signifi-

cant “barriers” that affected work outcomes, such as lacking a high school diploma or having little work experience. Participants with many identified barriers either did not work as much or could not use the New Hope benefits as effectively. In contrast, New Hope was most effective for families with one

identified barrier (about 40% of all families), relative to their control-group counterparts. Families in the New Hope group with no barriers to work actually worked somewhat less than their control group counterparts on average to spend more time at church, with their children or to cut back from long hours at a second job. Our ethnographic team helped to understand which families took advantage of the New Hope benefits, and why some families had only selective use. Our findings also identified which families required supports in addition to those available from New Hope.

Working poor adults are diverse in work trajectories; these different work trajectories lead to different outcomes for parents and children. Hiro Yoshikawa found five different employment trajectories in the full sample: (1) stable jobs and wage growth, (2) stable jobs but no wage growth, (3) rapid cycling from job to job, (4) fairly stable work but low wages and (5) and intermittent employment but at low wages. The stable work and wage growth groups' children were assessed as having better school behavior and higher achievement. Mothers in this group reported higher academic expectations, goal achievement and more effective monitoring of these children. New Hope helped move families onto this employment path. The ethnographic evidence suggested why some parents were able to move into more successful work trajectories. Such parents were younger and had a better understanding of when and how to change jobs to reach positive employment outcomes. They had more engaged social networks, stronger skills within their fields of work, more generalizable job skills and educa-

tional goals. Other parents were often thwarted, whether by the often harsh and unpredictable low-wage job market or other difficulties, from achieving a balance in parenting, family and work goals.

New Hope increased the use of center-based child care from 29% to 41%. Furthermore, children with

parents in the New Hope program showed gains in academic achievement and school behavior compared to the control group. An unexpected finding was that boys in New Hope families showed strong gains in school behavior and achievement relative to control group boys, while girls with parents in New Hope showed few such effects compared to control group girls. The ethnographic study offered some insights into this finding of positive impacts on boys in New Hope. Parents feared more for their sons in

often dangerous neighborhoods, more often enrolled them in extracurricular programs and monitored them more closely.

Diverse as working poor families are, the great majority share similar goals and values. As one participant said, “I want what everyone wants”—decent and stable work, safety and a good future

for their children. Parents struggled to *sustain* family routines that were stable and relatively free of conflict, and meaningful for their own goals and values. New Hope parents were less often thwarted in achieving this balance than control group parents, though it was hardly easy for them. New Hope was a work support program for adults; it did not provide direct benefits or services to children. Yet, the package of New Hope supports translated into gains for children. Clearly, improving the family and community contexts *around* children can significantly increase the odds of benefiting children in working poor families.

Any intervention or policy, no matter how well designed and implemented, cannot be effective if it is not used by its intended participants. It will not be used if it fails to fit into family daily routines, or fit with cultural models, ethnotheories and practices that guide parenting and

child development. Our ethnographic and mixed method studies extended beyond program impacts benefiting children and parents to understand a wider range of topics, including why work trajectories vary, characteristics of low wage work such as job quality, the 24/7 economy (where about 25% of the adults worked non-standard schedules), race and gender discrimination, families' goals and values, household budgeting beliefs and practices, marriage and partnering, social support networks and child care choices, as described in Yoshikawa, Weisner and Lowe's *Making It Work* (2006).

The research team was multidisciplinary and shared a common goal: we cared about understanding whether, how and why New Hope improved parents' and children's lives. We were interested in what could be learned about helping families leave poverty through applying multiple methodologies to a shared goal, combining different kinds of quantitative and qualitative data and different research perspectives. Through press and scholarly writing, the success of the program is becoming increasingly known. New Hope was recently featured in a 2007 Brookings Institution forum—the Hamilton Project—at the National Press Club on promising proposals to support working poor families (www.brookings.edu/papers/2007/12_work_gennetian.aspx). Funders and policymakers alike are ready to listen.

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