

Community  
Environment

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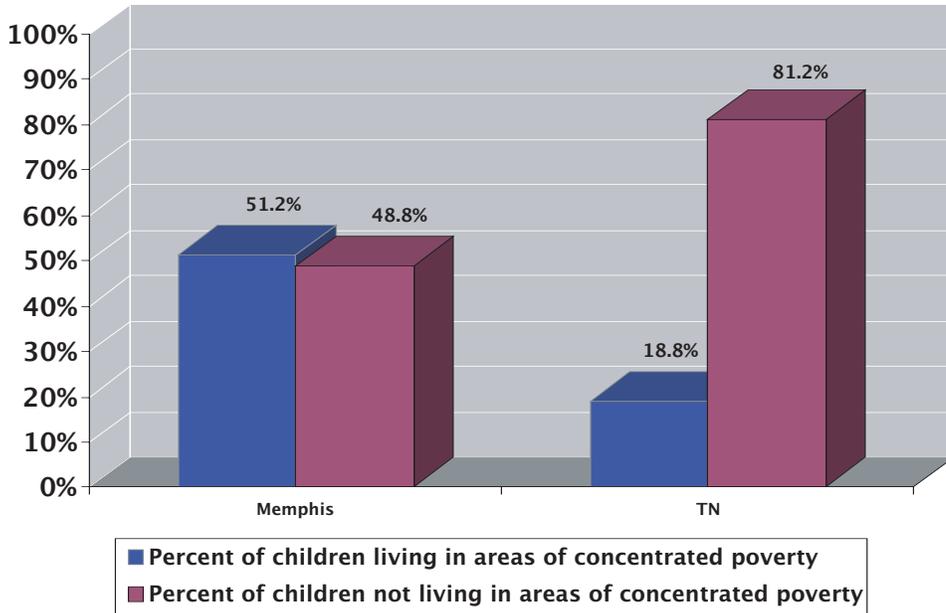


**why it's important:** Social support systems and peer influences can mitigate or aggravate risk factors such as poverty and undermine or reinforce the effects of parenting on child development. Many of these influences are brought to bear at the neighborhood level, where children experience “neighborhood effects” on their health, education and general welfare. New statistical methodologies enable us to identify “high vulnerability” neighborhoods where interventions might be introduced. We also can identify poor neighborhoods where child outcomes are better than expected, enabling us to understand better how neighborhoods can counter family-level risks.

Twenty-two percent of neighborhood-level census tracts in Shelby County are at high risk for early childhood development. Within the city of Memphis 40 percent are at high risk.

*Sources: Basic demographic data is from Census 2000. Special tabulations on neighborhood vulnerability are from the Child and Family Research Center and from the Mid-South Social Survey. Specific sources are noted below, and annotations to these sources are included in a references section at the end of the data book.*

Percentage of Children Living in Poverty Areas in Memphis vs. Tennessee, 2000



**Key Concept:** Neighborhood Social Capital

The larger community, including peer influences and neighborhood support systems, has as much effect on child outcomes as the immediate family environment.<sup>1</sup> Poverty is a risk factor not only because poor families may lack personal resources for effective parenting, but because challenges from a high poverty neighborhood environment make parenting more difficult and resources that support parents may be less accessible.

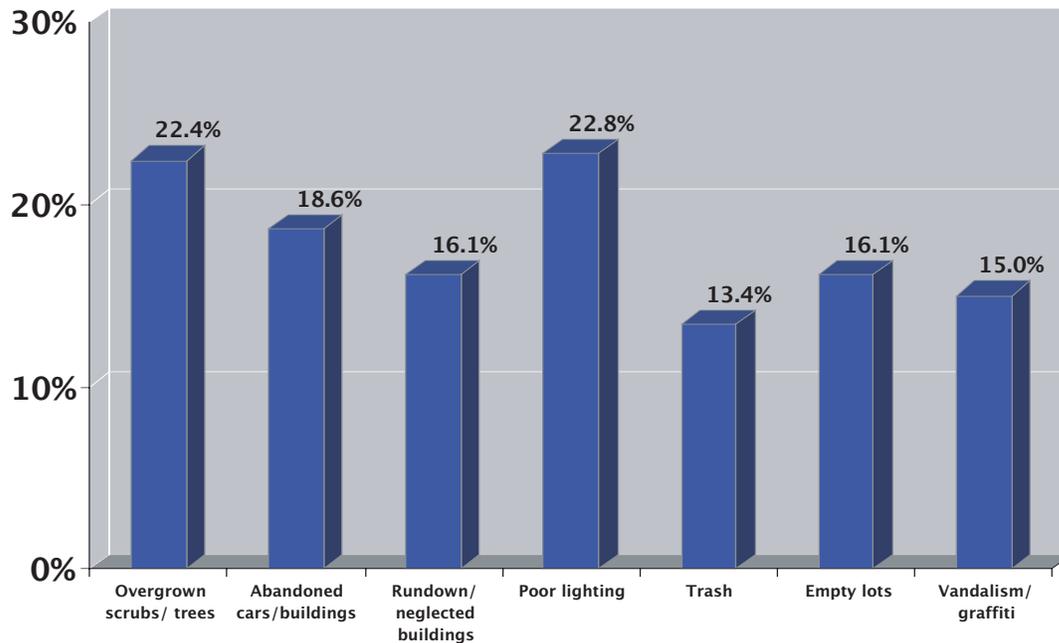
- When neighborhoods provide a supportive environment that reinforces effective parenting and offers complementary opportunities for positive child development, and/or offers surrogate supervision, nurturance, and positive stimulation for children, such neighborhoods have high “social capital.”
- Neighborhoods with concentrated poverty and physical blight tend to have low social capital, but those with high evidence of social capital can counter risks to health child development that are generally associated with poverty.
- Poverty and blight mean poor living conditions and high rates of residential mobility. Neighbors are less likely to know, and look out for, one another than in more stable neighborhoods.

<sup>1</sup> Felton Earls and the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, along with The Urban Institute’s “Moving to Opportunity” studies of HOPE VI neighborhood redevelopment strategies continue to inform our understanding of community and neighborhood effects and the role of social capital in neighborhoods and child outcomes.

- Over half of Memphis children live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, while only 18 percent for Shelby County as a whole live in such neighborhoods.
- Half of the children in high poverty neighborhoods change schools at least once a year. Changing schools is associated with academic under-performance.
- Poor families needing the most parental support, such as high quality child care, are the least likely to have access within their immediate Memphis neighborhood.
- Informal neighborhood support systems in poor neighborhoods may be weak, and peer culture may include self-destructive or anti-social behaviors. Concentrated poverty means low labor force participation, especially among young adult males.
- Low labor force participation is associated with absent role models, weak connections to outside resources and anti-social behavior.
- When neighborhood support systems and social capital are strengthened, families and children are more likely to overcome challenges associated with poverty.
- Physical and social disorder can be associated with low social capital.
- Social surveys measure resident perceptions of social capital and threats to social capital using a standard set of questions such as those illustrated below.

### Percent Residents Reporting Physical Disorder in Their Neighborhoods

Source: AEC Kids Count



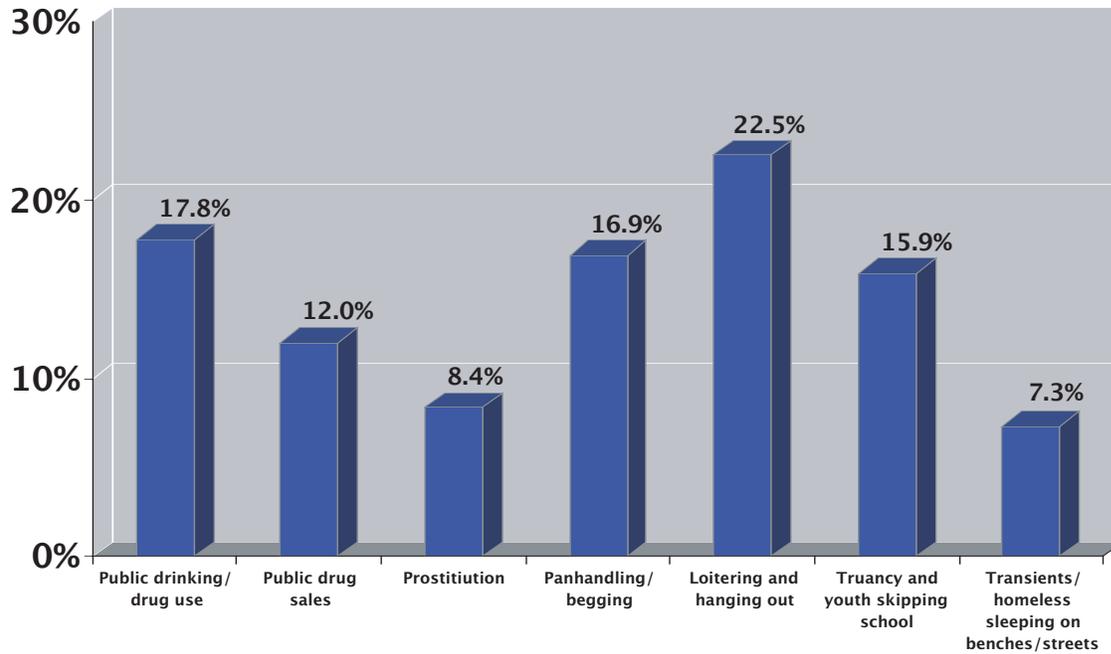
**Key Finding 1:** One out of every five-to-six households in Shelby County is in a neighborhood where signs of neglect signal a lack of care and concern.<sup>2</sup>

- Data from the American Housing Survey for Memphis and Shelby County reveal that blighted neighborhoods are concentrated in the City of Memphis.
- Asked to describe what they thought of in relation to the terms “healthy” and “unhealthy,” middle school children in a TUCI-sponsored “Health Information Project” in north Memphis focused on neighborhood blight. They described the redeveloped “Uptown” neighborhood as healthy, and the neighborhood surrounding Humes Middle School as unhealthy.
- National research from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods documented the relationship between blight and diminished social capital, which in turn appears to be related to parental stress.

<sup>2</sup> Data on resident perceptions of physical and social disorder and social capital is from the Mid-South Survey Social Survey: Memphis and Shelby County Criminal Victimization Survey, 2003-2005.

## Percent Residents Reporting Social Disorder in Their Neighborhoods

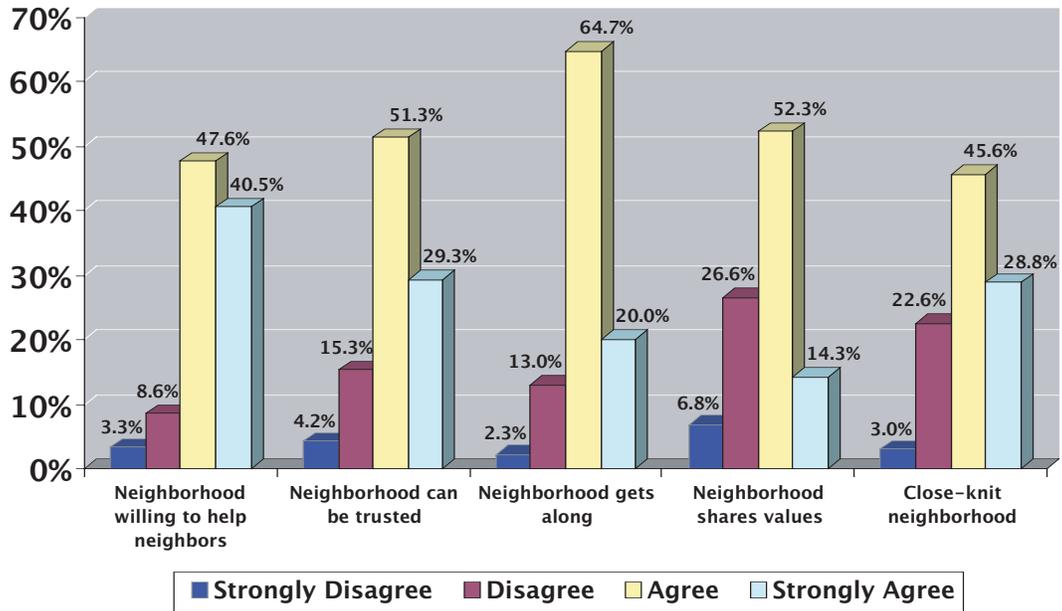
Source: AEC Kids Count



**Key Finding 2:** One out of every five-to-six households in Shelby County is in a neighborhood where social disorder poses special challenges for parents.

### Resident Perceptions of Social Support from Neighbors, 2004

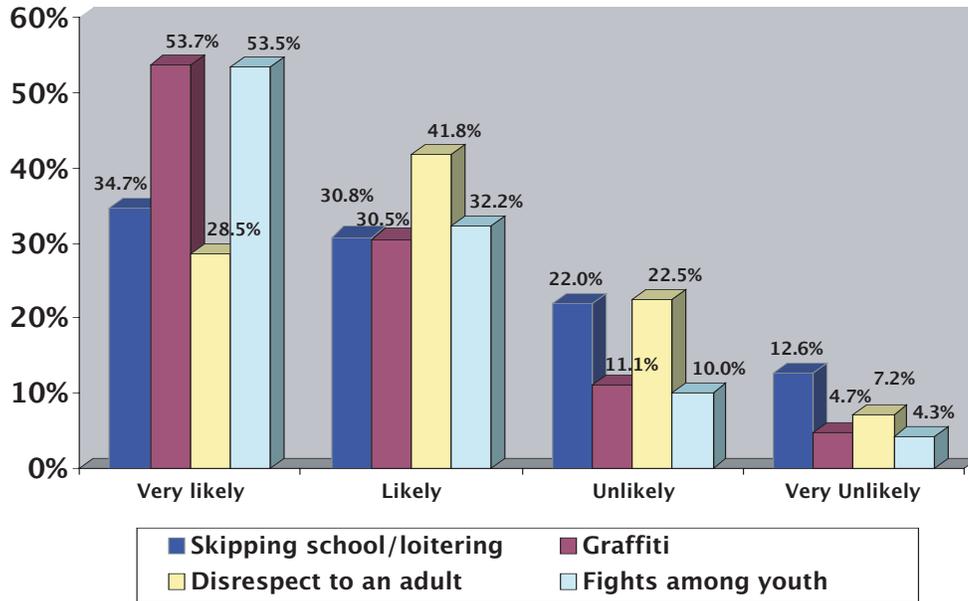
Source: AEC Kids Count



**Key Finding 3:** Social support varies widely among neighborhoods. Some parents and families perceive themselves in resource-rich environments while others experience isolation.

### Resident Perceptions of Neighbors' Willingness to Intervene, 2004

Source: AEC Kids Count



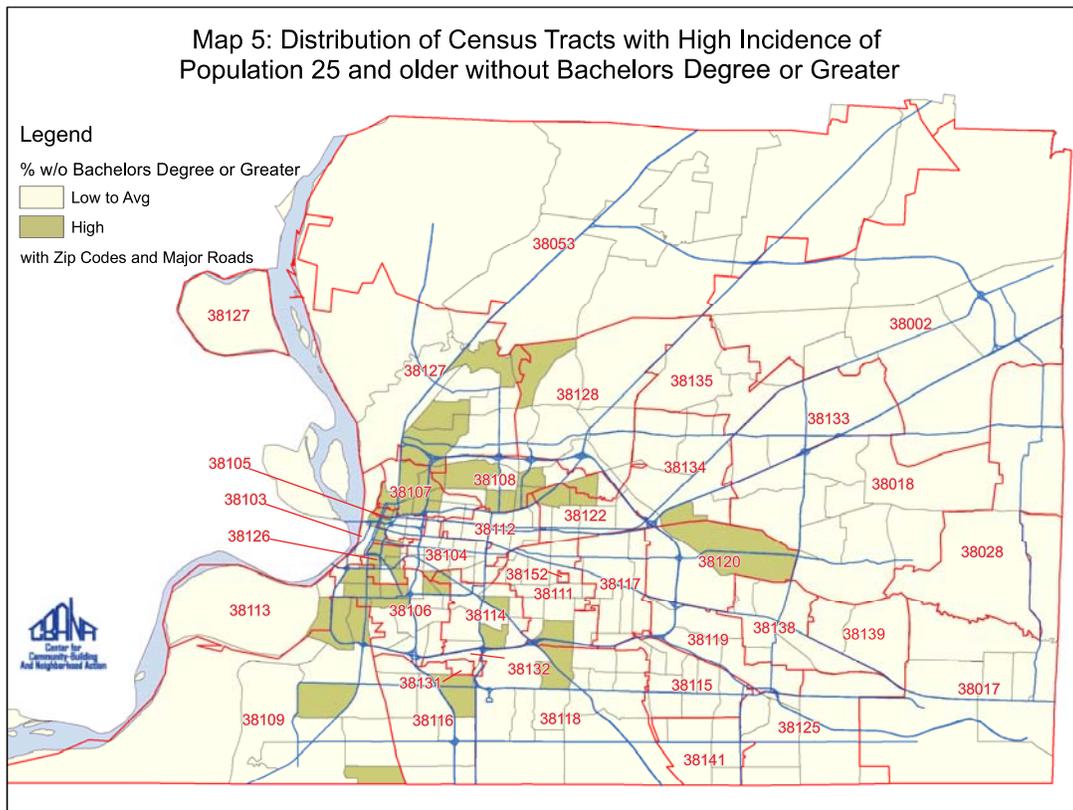
**Key Finding 4:** Little more than half of adult respondents envision their neighborhoods as environments where clear standards of behavior are likely to be enforced by neighbors.

## Key Concept: Measuring High Risk Neighborhood Environments

- The Child and Family Research Center, in conjunction with The Urban Institute's Annie E. Casey supported "Making Connections" initiative, developed an index of neighborhood-level risks for early child development. The index is based on statistical indicators that have been related to neighborhood effects on child outcomes in the literature on child development.<sup>3</sup>
- Each of the more than 68,000 U.S. census tracts was coded in comparison to nationwide norms on 10 indicators. Vulnerable census tracts vary significantly from the national statistical norms for indicator characteristics.<sup>4</sup>
- Indicators capture a high probability of healthy or unhealthy outcomes partly because of the family environment that is associated with different kinds of neighborhoods, but a growing body of research suggests independent effects from the neighborhood environment itself.
- High poverty neighborhoods are often identified as high risk neighborhoods. In Memphis, over half of children live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, where at least 20 percent of the population lives in households with income below the poverty threshold. This means that nearly 93,000 children are in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty.
- Poverty is associated with vulnerability index indicators but was not included as an individual indicator. This enables researchers to grasp better the more specific circumstances that undermine healthy child development.
- When we compare neighborhoods with concentrated poverty to neighborhoods high on the Child Vulnerability Index we narrow our focus by about 50 percent, to 48,000 children in the 48 high-risk census tracts mapped in the demographics introduction. The highest risk census tracts represent over one out of five census tracts in Memphis (22%). This smaller, but higher risk-group of neighborhoods may require different kinds of supportive interventions than other high poverty neighborhoods.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *Managing to Make It: Urban Families in High Risk Neighborhoods*.

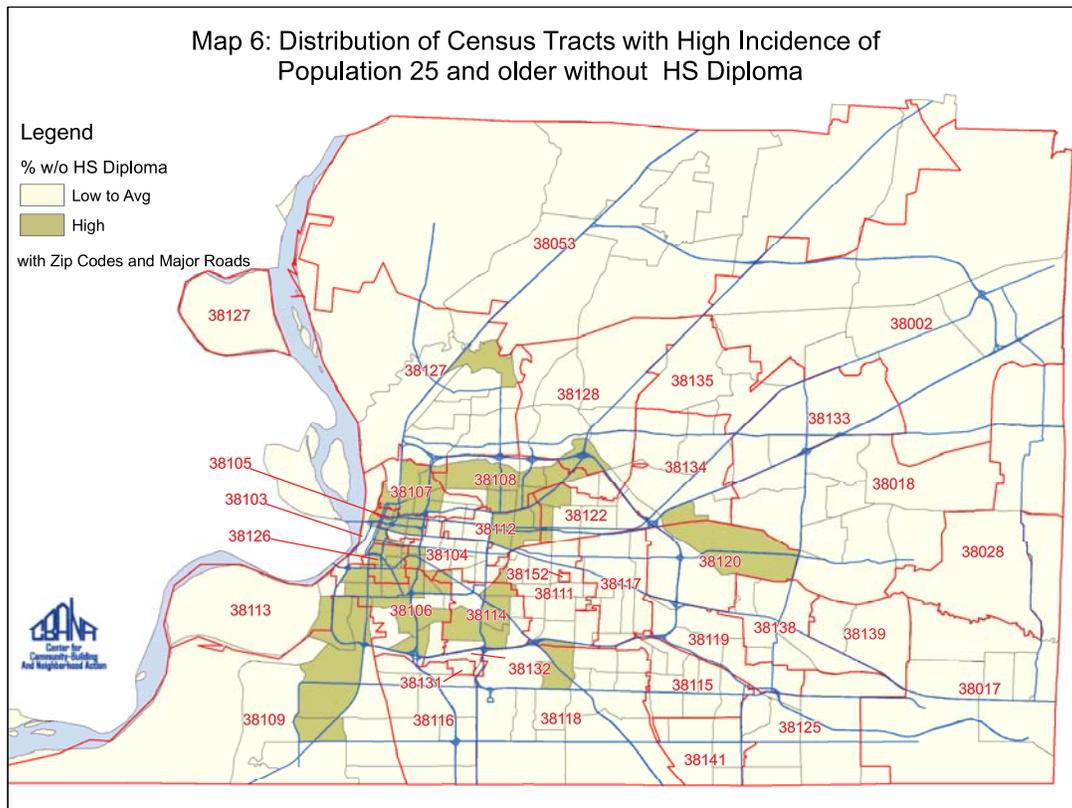
<sup>4</sup> Descriptive percentages falling outside of one standard deviation above or below the mean percentage for all 68,000 US census tracts are considered outside the norm. Nationally, only 6.7% of census tracts are high vulnerability, compared to 40% of tracts in Memphis and 22% for Shelby County as a whole.



Source: Child and Family Policy Center for the Urban Institute, National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership. From Census 2000.

**Key Finding:** One in four Memphis census tracts (42 tracts) has very low representation of adults with a college degree. Census tracts outside the city in suburban and unincorporated Shelby County are all within the national norm.

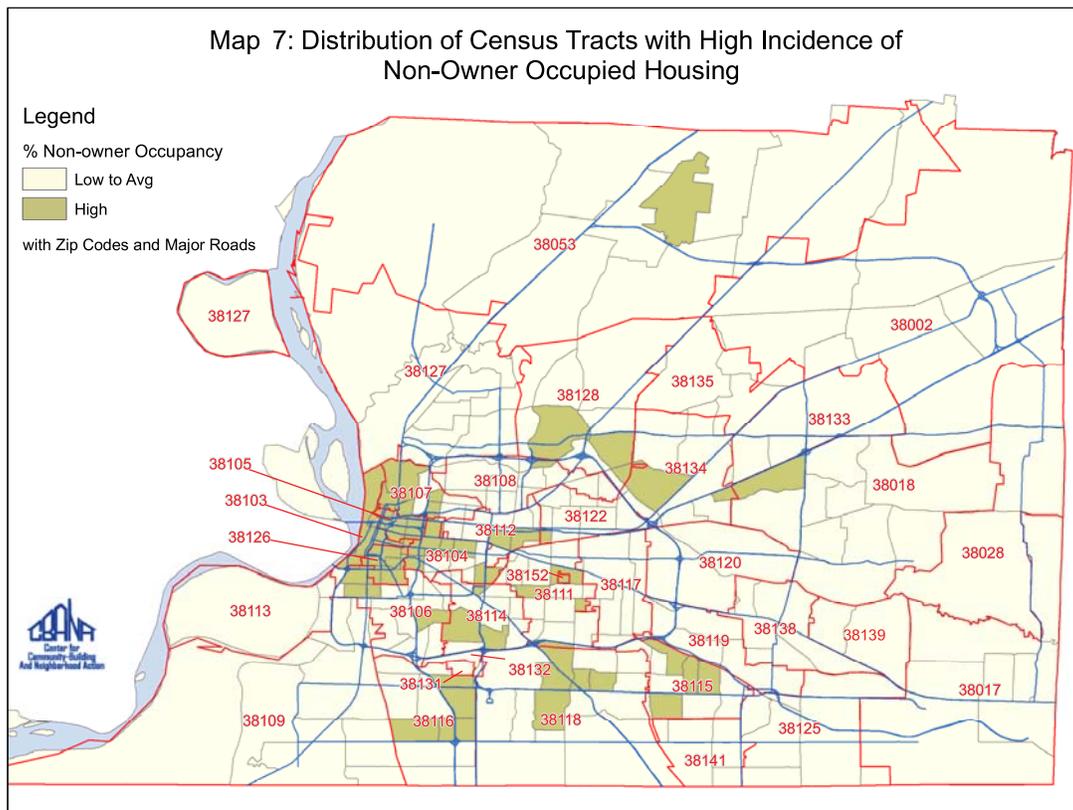
- The relative absence of better-educated adults means less exposure to highly verbal child-rearing environments, and for older children, fewer connections with potential role models and employment opportunities.
- The more widely scattered distribution of high-risk neighborhoods on this factor (compared to other risk factors mapped below), demonstrates that college-educated adults are relatively well-represented in many neighborhoods. These adults may be a resource that has not been tapped adequately to support healthy child outcomes.



Source: Child and Family Policy Center for the Urban Institute, National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership. From Census 2000.

**Key Finding:** One in three Memphis census tracts (55 tracts) has very high representation of adults without a high school diploma, more than the number and percentage of tracts low on college graduates. This suggests that some neighborhoods are especially heterogeneous, with college graduates and high school drop-outs living in close proximity.

- Census tracts outside the city in suburban and unincorporated Shelby County are all within the national norm for high school drop-outs.
- Statistical data on drop-out rates for Memphis City Schools and Shelby County schools present some methodological problems, but it is safe to say that drop-out rates overall are at least 30 percent in Memphis.



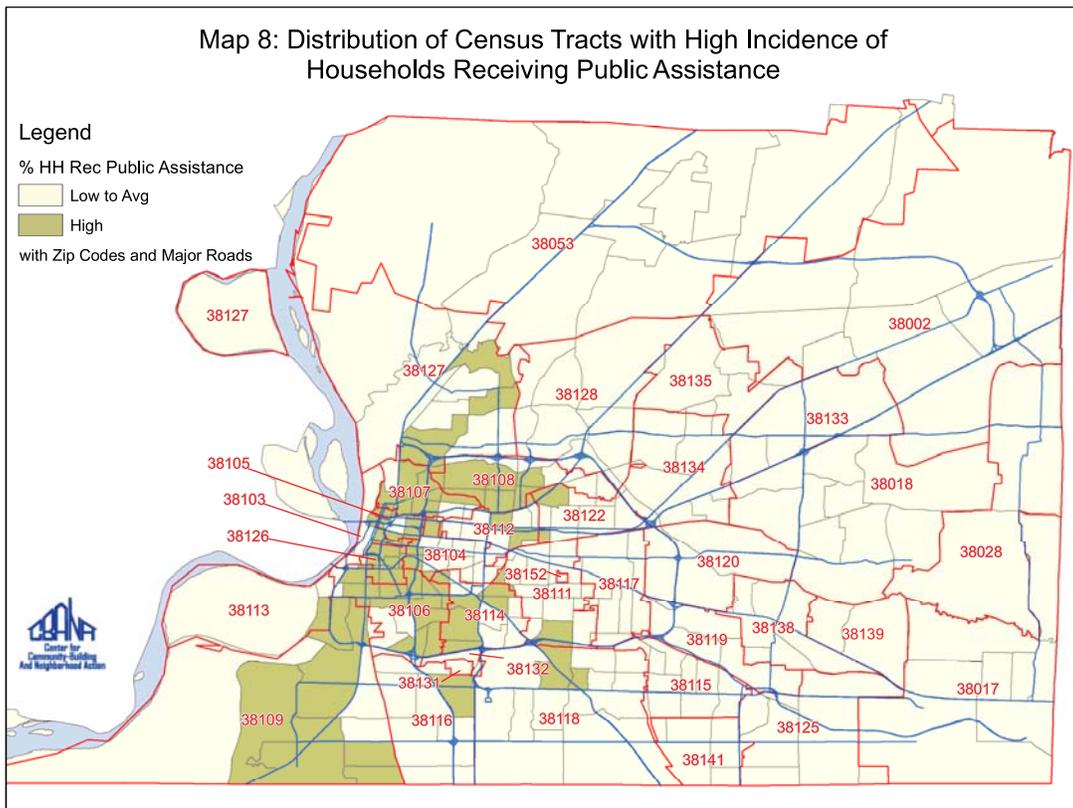
Source: Child and Family Policy Center for the Urban Institute, National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership. From Census 2000.

**Key Finding:** One in three Memphis census tracts (54 tracts) has a low rate of home ownership, typically associated with high concentrations of multi-family housing.

- The overall home-ownership rate for Memphis households is 56 percent, with 60 percent of all housing units in single-family properties.
- Neighborhoods with high concentrations of apartments, compared to single-family rentals, are higher on most indicators of neighborhood risk and also are associated with clusters on criminal incident maps for Memphis.
- Home ownership in single-family neighborhoods averages 75 percent,<sup>5</sup> but for some neighborhoods high foreclosure rates increase transience and undermine the social capital that is typically associated with home ownership. In high foreclosure neighborhoods at least one out of five families will be threatened with foreclosure over a five-year period.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Based on tax assessor's data where tax bills are sent to addresses other than the assessed property.

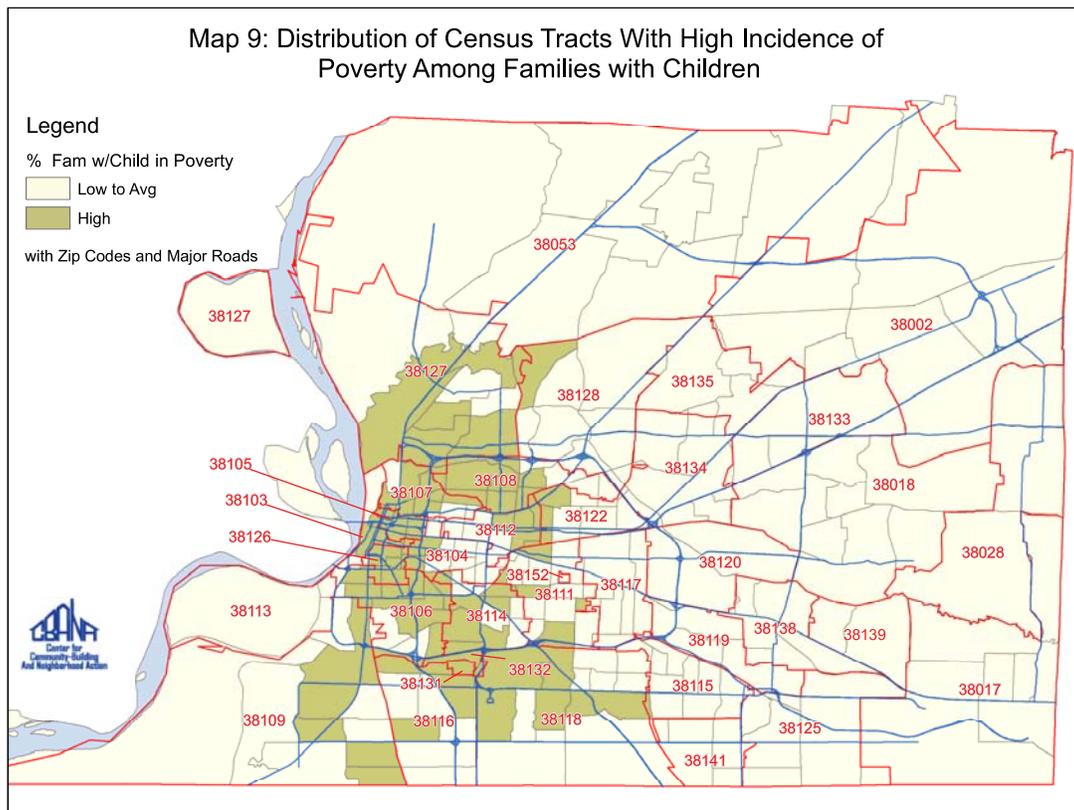
<sup>6</sup> See discussion on "Economic Hardship and Income Support Systems" in the Family Economic Well-Being section for more on housing.



Source: Child and Family Policy Center for the Urban Institute, National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership. From Census 2000.

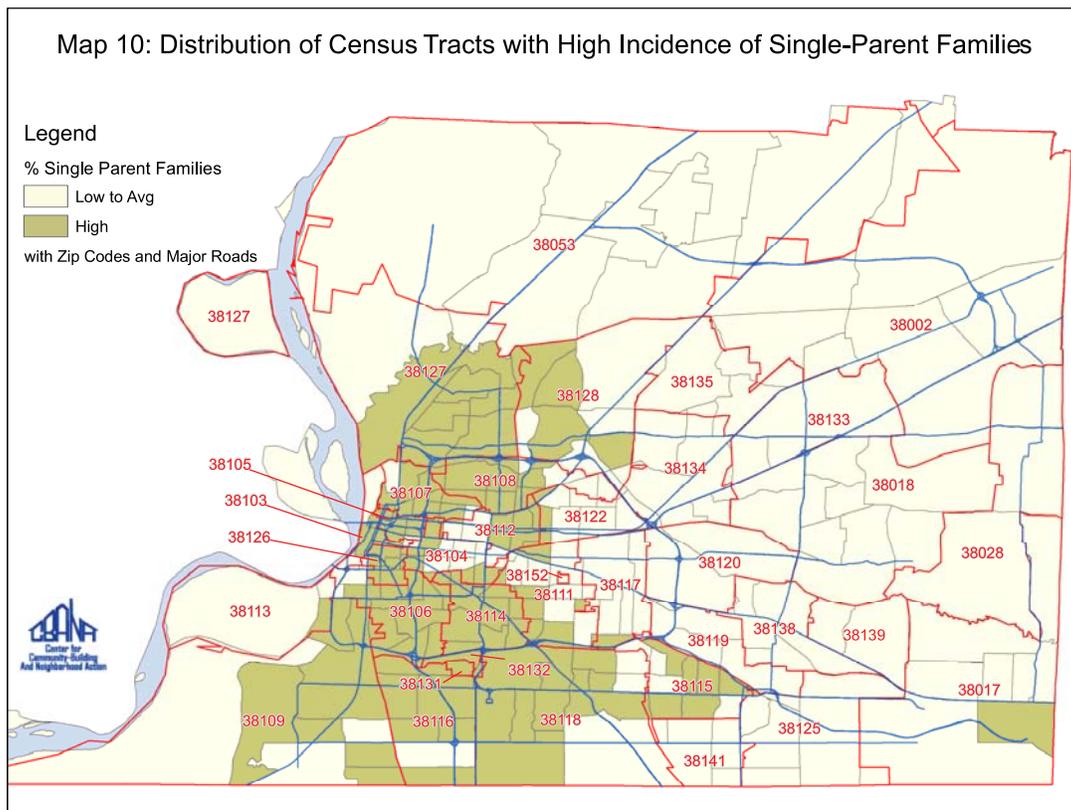
**Key Finding:** Over one in four Memphis census tracts (62 tracts) has a high incidence of families receiving public assistance.

- Most families are NOT Families First participants, but instead are receiving disability benefits through the Supplemental Security Income program (SSI), which is available to both adults and children.
- About five percent of Memphis households receive Families First, but figures for SSI are not available.
- Self-reported disability rates are as high as 30 percent in some low-income census tracts in Memphis. Another five percent of households received SSI in 2000 based on census self-reports.



**Key Finding:** Nearly half of Memphis census tracts (74 tracts) have a high concentration of poverty among families with children.

- This pattern should not be confused with census tracts having large actual numbers of poor and low-income children. This particular risk factor means that there is little variation among families with children in the neighborhood, which is important in terms of peer influences.
- The larger actual numbers of poor (and low-income) children are increasingly outside of these tracts, however, in tracts with high proportions of single-parent families (Map 10) who have moved out of the highest poverty neighborhoods in response to demolition of public housing and other low-cost housing.



**Key Finding:** Nearly two out of three Memphis census tracts (106 tracts), and one suburban tract, have high incidences of single-parent families.

- The difference in the appearance of Map 10 compared to Map 9 represents the decentralization of poverty and the changing geographic dynamics of reaching higher-risk families.
- Neighborhoods absorbing poor-or-low-income families are lower risk overall on the Child Vulnerability Index and generally have greater institutional and organizational resources, but there may be an absence of support systems for single parents in neighborhoods where single-parent families traditionally have been less represented.





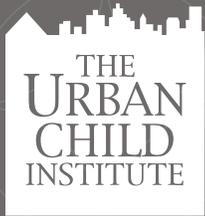
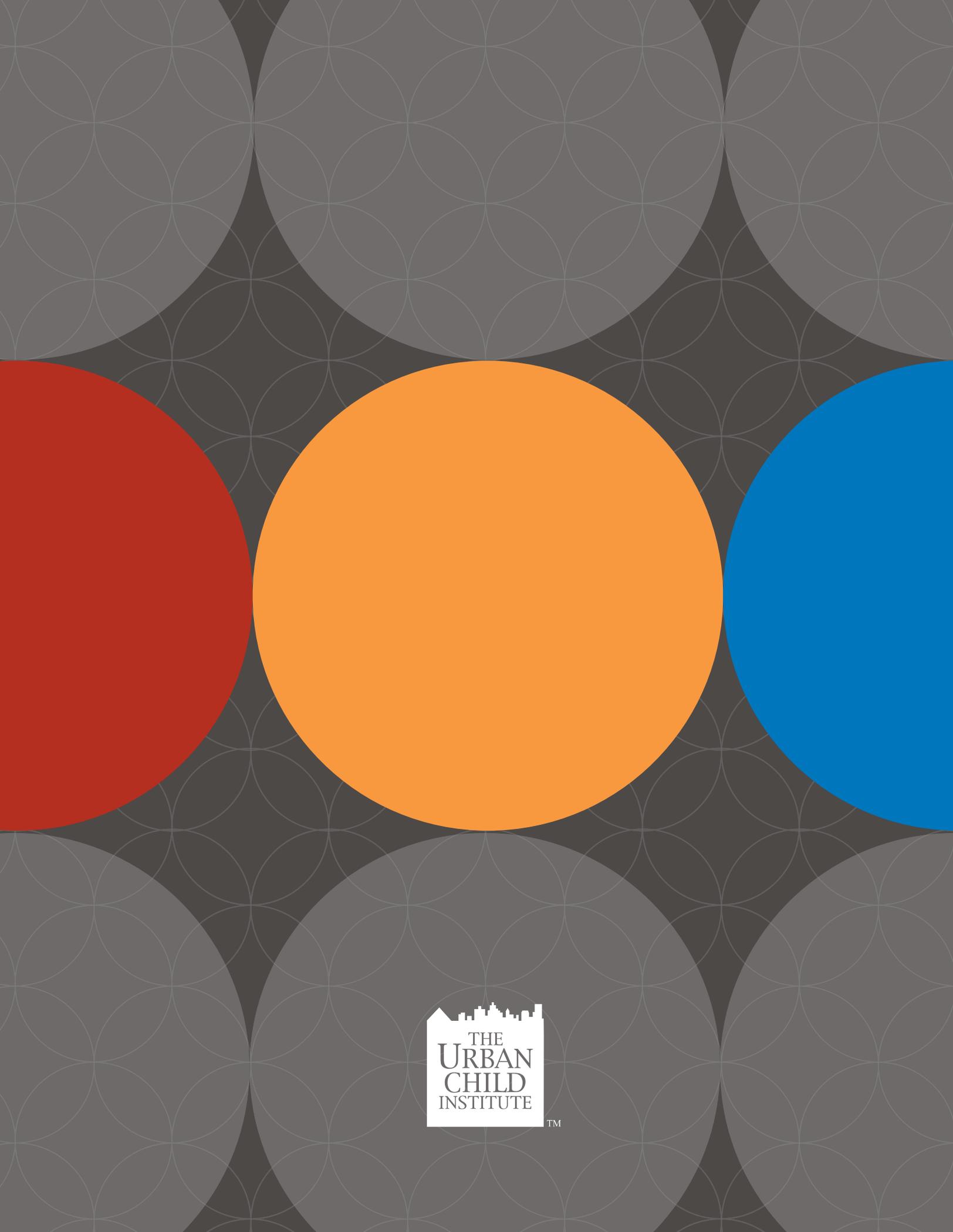
**Critical Issue:** Patterns for neighborhood risks are changing in Memphis, requiring new forms of outreach and posing new challenges to community support systems.

- High vulnerability census tracts in Memphis today, unlike in the past where densely populated tracts of public housing meant large numbers and concentrations of children in poor neighborhoods, are in “hollowed-out” neighborhoods where non-family households predominate and populations are diminished because of a high incidence of vacant and abandoned housing. In fact, the higher the risk on the Vulnerability Index for Memphis, the lower the percentage of children in the neighborhood.
- It is the moderate-risk census tracts that are absorbing growing numbers of low income families in a pattern where poverty is decentralizing from inner-city Memphis to transitional neighborhoods, where poor children are increasingly concentrated.
- Decentralization of poverty has been associated with positive outcomes for children in some studies, but if decentralization becomes re-concentration in new neighborhoods, we would not expect the same positive results.<sup>7</sup>
- For example, crime mapping analysis from the Center for Community Criminology at the University of Memphis reveals clustering of crime incidents around high density apartment developments where new concentrations of low income families are evident from a comparison of 1990 and 2000 census data.

<sup>7</sup> See “Moving to Opportunity” research in References, and the discussion of “Segregation and Opportunity” in the Demographics section.

## What we need to know:

- How can we reach out to the most vulnerable children in Memphis?
- What are the identifiable safety nets for kids living in high-risk communities and neighborhoods?
- How do parents themselves rate the safety and support of their own communities?
- Do people feel safe and supported in Memphis?
- What accounts for positive feelings of safety and support, and what accounts for negative feelings of safety and support?
- How can we address risk factors such as high mobility of families, poverty and lack of community connection which might be steps on the path to criminal behavior?
- What preventions and interventions are available and work (according to best practices) for young children in these contexts?
- What is the unemployment rate in Memphis? How many people are under-employed?
- What impact would a living wage (as an ordinance, city council resolution and/or in practice) have on working families in Memphis?
- What are the average savings, total net-worths (including assets and income) for families in Memphis?
- What are the rates of debt (from myriad causes, including medical-related debt) and bankruptcy in Memphis?
- What are identifiable best practices for building safe, healthy communities for children in Memphis whose lives are vulnerable, precarious, insecure and complicated by high-risk indicators?



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