

Depending on the Kindness of Strangers: Current National Data Initiatives and Developmental Research

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This article provides a brief review of current large-scale, longitudinal data collection initiatives focusing on children. These studies will be available for secondary data analyses in the twenty-first century. In addition to child outcome data, process-oriented information is being collected on child–parent interactions, quality of child care, elementary school teacher reports and classroom observations, accessibility and use of health, educational and social services, parental mental health, family violence, fathering, parental residence patterns, income and income sources, child support, employment patterns, and community characteristics. Several of these studies are randomized trials of the efficacy of early childhood intervention services and housing mobility programs. The usefulness of these efforts for exploring policy-relevant issues (child support enforcement, work requirements for welfare recipients, antipoverty strategies, housing subsidies and relocation, availability of child care, child-care subsidies) are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

About a decade ago, several of us were asked to write an article for *Developmental Psychology* on approaches to studying lives through time that take advantage of the national and local data sets available for secondary data analyses (Brooks-Gunn, Phelps, & Elder, 1991). We and two of our colleagues in economics and sociology (Cherlin, 1991; Duncan, 1991) tried to make the argument for a higher profile of developmentally oriented behavioral scientists in the mining of these national resources. Part of the reasoning involved the desirability of using such sources for examining age, period, and cohort effects; interconnections between lives (especially among family members); connections among transitions (school, fertility, work, moving); connections between life phases; intergenerational processes; variations in ethnic and social class groups; and precursors of relatively infrequent events. All of these topics are ideally suited to large, either multisite or nationally representative samples of families studied longitudinally. At that time, most of the developmentally focused archived data sets were the classic early longitudinal studies that were initiated in the 1920s and 1930s (e.g., the Terman Study, the Fels Study, the Harvard Medical School Study of Adult Development).

In the 1960s, a number of large-scale, often nationally representative studies were begun by economists and sociologists who were interested in (1) labor market experiences (the National Longitudinal Studies, NLSs; Wolpin, 1987); (2) income and work (the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, PSID; Duncan & Morgan, 1985); or (3) educational achievement and attainment

(High School and Beyond and the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1972, 1980). These were long-term longitudinal studies of individuals or families, typically starting with adolescents or adults. These studies did not focus on children in the first decade of life (Chase-Lansdale, Mott, Brooks-Gunn, & Phillips, 1991). A major breakthrough occurred when the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY) added a child supplement (NLSY-CS). Here, for perhaps the first time in the United States, was a sample of children who were being assessed through the childhood years, as females in the NLSY (started in the late 1970s) who became mothers were followed in conjunction with their offspring. While limited in the amount of information collected on developmental processes, this data set highlighted children's lives on a large scale (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). These data have been used to study effects of income, child care, maternal education, parental work status, receipt of child support, welfare receipt, family structure, birth of siblings, and neighborhood residence upon children's math and reading achievement as well as on their behavior problems (as reported by their mothers). The fact that siblings are seen allows for fixed effects modeling (i.e., controlling for unmeasured parental characteristics) as well as estimates of shared and nonshared environment. Changes in child achievement and behavior as a function of changes in family characteristics also have been examined. In brief, this data set has been more useful than we

dreamed it would be a decade ago. Those of us who have been busily mining the NLSY are appreciative of the kindness of so-called strangers—those individuals at Ohio State University, National Opinion Research Corporation, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and, later, at the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development—who made the NLSY-CS possible.

Since that time, other national data collection efforts became longitudinal, added child assessments, or embedded child substudies. In 1995, Brooks-Gunn, Brown, Duncan, and Moore, with funding from the NICHD Research Network on Child and Family Well-Being and at the urging of the Board on Children, Youth and Families at the National Research Council, prepared a synthesis of the then current national initiatives. Additionally, recommendations were made vis-à-vis steps that those running the national data collection efforts could undertake to render their studies more relevant to developmentally oriented scholars. Most of our suggestions were made with an eye to cost—they were relatively modest and easy to implement. In the last section, however, we presented a wish list. At the top was the design of a new longitudinal study of child and adolescent development that would use a national probability sample of at least 30,000 children under age 18 and expectant parents, with an oversample of Black and Hispanic families. Multiple children within families would be seen yearly or every other year. Our request seemed to be a “pie in the sky” at the time.

Consequently, we have been astonished at what has happened in the past 5 years, vis-à-vis new nationally representative or multisite longitudinal initiatives. Although the study of 30,000 has not materialized, in its place are at least seven national studies of children or young adolescents (Survey of Program Dynamics, SPD, which is part of Survey of Income Participation and Programs, SIPP; the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten Cohort, ECLS–K; Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Birth Cohort, ECLS–B; Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study; Panel Study of Income Dynamics–Child Supplement, PSID–CS; new NLSY; and Adolescent Health Study), and these do not include studies from the National Center for Health Statistics. Again, the kindness of strangers is providing a foundation for national snapshots of children and families in the new century, as well as the opportunity to see how these children change over time.

A series of multisite longitudinal studies are underway as well; even though not nationally representative, they provide large samples of families from across the country. Some were designed to assess the

efficacy of specific intervention programs (i.e., Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project, EHS; National Head Start/Public School Early Transition Study; Moving to Opportunity Program, MTO), while others are describing low-income families' experiences under different policy climates given variability in state welfare, child support, and child-care provisions (i.e., National Study of Child Care for Low-Income Families; Welfare Reform in Three Cities; Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey, FACES). A few single-site studies are sampling thousands of families by neighborhoods, to examine more specifically community-level contributions to child outcomes (Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, PHDCN; and the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Study).

In this article, some of these initiatives are described in order to inform students and scholars about the opportunities for secondary data analysis in the twenty-first century, with a focus on children. They represent the state of the art with respect to blending more macro- and micro-approaches to behavioral science. An extensive report of 20 studies (including theoretical underpinnings, measures, design, timing of data availability, sample selection, attrition, possible methodological approaches, and, where relevant, preliminary findings) will be published in the year 2000 (Brooks-Gunn & Berlin, in preparation). Table 1 provides descriptions of seven of these initiatives (EHS, Fragile Families, ECLS–K, PSID–CS, MTO, Welfare Reform in Three Cities, the PHDCN). These include studies of early childhood interventions; transitions to school; child care; welfare reform; neighborhood and residence patterns; fatherhood and fathering. The design of each study, as well as the sample, measures, data collection schedule, principal investigators, and funders are summarized. In the following sections, we discuss theoretical and policy issues for which these data sets are ideally suited. The topics roughly correspond to the categories just mentioned.

EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTIONS

Current early childhood interventions include Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (Table 1), National Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Study (about 8000 families of former Head Start children were randomly assigned to receive transitional services in kindergarten through third grade), and Nurse Home Visitation Programs (three randomized trials in Elmira, Memphis, and Denver assessing efficacy of nurse home visitation prenatally and postnatally; Olds et al., 1999). Sample sizes are quite large, allowing for analyses of subgroups of fam-

Table 1 Description of Seven Current Initiatives**Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (EHS)**

Design	Seven-year, national study employing a randomized design with 2 conditions: EHS program group and a control group including eligible families who applied to EHS at one of the 17 research sites (control group does not receive an offer of EHS services but can receive any other community services). Design includes (a) implementation study, (b) impact evaluation, (c) local research studies, (d) policy studies, and (e) father studies.
Sample	Approximately 3,000 low-income families from 17 local EHS sites with children born between September, 1995 and July, 1998.
Measures	<i>Child:</i> Health, motor, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development, includes standardized assessments (e.g., Bayley Scales, PPVT-3, MCI, CBCL) and videotaped child–parent interactions (e.g., Nursing Child Assessment Teaching Scales). <i>Mother:</i> Household demographic information, education, employment, work and family issues, mental and physical health, the home environment, family routines and conflict, stress, social support, parenting attitudes and knowledge about child development, discipline, child care, parent–child activities, the parent–child relationship, and verbal ability. <i>Fathers:</i> Fathers interviewed or interviewed and observed with the children in 3 sub-studies (Core Father Study, Fathers of Newborns Study, and Practitioners Study). <i>Parenting behavior:</i> (via videotaped child–parent interactions): Includes ratings of sensitivity, intrusiveness, detachment, and mutuality. <i>Neighborhood:</i> Program coordination with other community service providers, parental perception of community services, qualitative descriptions of the community, and assessments of community child care quality. <i>Child care:</i> Observations and provider interview in formal and informal settings.
Data collection	From 1996 to 2001, children are being assessed and parents interviewed when children are 14, 24, and 36 months old; parents are also interviewed at 6, 15, and 26 months after enrollment and when they exit the program. A follow-up study of the children and families is being planned. Public use files will be available after the project impact report has been submitted to Congress.
Principal investigators	John Love, Ellen Kisker, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. Helen Raikes and Louisa Tarullo are the project monitors for the national research; Esther Kresh is the project monitor for the local research studies.
Funders	Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF). ACYF, NICHD, and the Ford Foundation for the father studies.
Internet site	http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/EHSTOC.HTM

Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Project

Design	Longitudinal design following a representative panel of children of unmarried and married parents (includes both mothers and fathers). Families drawn from 21 cities selected based on welfare and child support policies and labor market strength.
Sample	A hospital-based sampling procedure was used to enroll 4,800 families including 3,675 unmarried couples and 1,125 married couples.
Measures	<i>Child:</i> Health, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development. <i>Mothers and fathers:</i> Mothers' prenatal care; parental health, education, employment, knowledge about local policies and community resources; mother–father relationship; attitudes about marriage and about fathers' rights and responsibilities; social support and extended kin. <i>Neighborhood:</i> Census data and information on community resources and institutions (schools, day care facilities, churches, health and social services, neighborhood organizations).
Data collection	In 1998–1999, parents were interviewed at the birth of their first child. Follow-up interviews with both parents are scheduled for when the child is 12, 30, and 48 months old.
Principal investigators	Sara McLanahan and Irwin Garfinkel; Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Marta Tienda are co-investigators.
Funders	NICHD, the Ford Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the William T. Grant Foundation, the Public Policy Institute of California, the California HealthCare Foundation, the Hogg Foundation, the St. David's Hospital Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund, the Fund for New Jersey, the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, the Foundation for Child Development, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Kronkosky Charitable Foundation, the A.L. Mailman Foundation, and St. Vincent Hospitals and Health Services.
Internet site	http://www.opr.princeton.edu/crcw/ff

Moving to Opportunity Program (MTO)

Design	Randomized design with 3 conditions: a treatment group receiving Section 8 housing vouchers and special assistance to move to low-poverty neighborhoods ("MTO experimental group"), a control group receiving only Section 8 housing vouchers ("Section 8 comparison group"), and a second control group receiving no special assistance ("in-place controls").
Sample	Approximately 4,600 families, predominately minority and low-income, drawn from public housing in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City.

(Continued)

Table 1 Continued

Measures	<p><i>Child:</i> Schooling/child care, behavior problems, and disabilities.</p> <p><i>Primary caregiver:</i> Household demographic information, education, employment, social networks, parental monitoring/supervision, home learning environment, and involvement in schools/preschools.</p> <p><i>Neighborhood:</i> Census demographic data, social cohesion, informal social control, exposure to violence, physical and social disorder, and availability of resources.</p>
Data collection	Baseline data were collected by Abt Associates in 1994–1998. Limited follow-up data were collected in 1997 and will be gathered again in 2000 (both times by Abt Associates). Follow-up data focusing on child and family well-being have been collected in Baltimore, Boston, Los Angeles, and New York by individual research teams. HUD will sponsor a final 10-year impact evaluation.
Principal investigator	John Goering
Funder	HUD
Internet site	http://www.huduser.org
Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN)	
Design	Design includes (a) a longitudinal study (with an embedded intensive study of infants); (b) a community survey (with a repeated cross-sectional design); (c) an observational study of neighborhoods; (d) a neighborhood expert survey; and (e) administrative data. Neighborhoods were operationally defined as 343 clusters of city blocks from Chicago's 847 populated census tracts and then census data were used to define 2 stratification variables; SES (3 levels) and racial/ethnic composition (7 levels). Neighborhoods clusters (NC's) were cross-classified by these 2 variables, and a stratified probability sample of 80 NC's was drawn for the longitudinal study.
Sample	<p><i>Longitudinal Study</i>—$N = 6,234$: Accelerated, longitudinal design with 7 cohorts from the prenatal period to age 18, separated by 3 year intervals (0, 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 18 years old at Wave 1); each cohort has approximately 1,000 children, equally distributed by gender and of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p><i>Community Survey</i>—$N = 8,782$: Approximately 25 residents were interviewed from each of the 343 NC's with the number varying by whether the neighborhood was sampled for the longitudinal study (20 in non-sampled neighborhoods and 50 in sampled neighborhoods).</p> <p><i>Observational Study:</i> Videotaped data of NC's (27,000 blocks) subsequently coded by trained observers.</p> <p><i>Neighborhood Expert Survey:</i> 2,800 interviews with 6 categories of experts.</p>
Measures	<p><i>Child:</i> Exposure to violence, verbal IQ, reading achievement, behavior problems, efficacy and competence, provision of social relations, physical health and functional limitations, parent-child conflict, temperament, diagnostic interviews for depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, offending/delinquency.</p> <p><i>Primary Caregiver:</i> Household demographic information, education, employment, partner/spouse conflict, family conflict and cohesion, physical and mental health histories, provision of social relations, parental monitoring, the quality of the home environment.</p> <p><i>Neighborhood:</i> Census demographic data, collective efficacy (social cohesion and informal social control), perceived violence, physical and social disorder, community organization and political activity, crime levels, morbidity and mortality rates.</p> <p><i>Child care:</i> Child-care provider and parent interview focusing on child care; child-care observations for a subsample of families; Census demographic data on child-care providers.</p>
Data collection	<p><i>Longitudinal Study:</i> Wave 1 was conducted in 1995–1996 and Wave 2 in 1997–1998; Wave 3 is scheduled for 2000–2001.</p> <p><i>Community Survey:</i> 1995 and 2000.</p> <p><i>Observational Study:</i> 1996 and 2001.</p>
Principal investigator	Felton Earls
Funders	John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Institute of Justice, NIMH, ACYF, U.S. Department of Education Office of Education Research and Improvement.
Internet site	http://www.phdcn.harvard.edu
Panel Study of Income Dynamics Child Development Supplement (PSID-CS)	
Design	Longitudinal survey of a nationally representative sample of children and their families.
Sample	3,563 children ages zero to 12 in 2,300 families, with an oversampling of disadvantaged children; about 300 immigrant and 1,450 African-American children.
Measures	<p><i>Child:</i> Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement-Revised, grade failure/progression, highest grade completed, verbal and math ability, literacy, self-esteem, behavior problems, physical health, temperament, and time use diaries of children's activities.</p> <p><i>Mother:</i> Employment and earnings, economic strain, physical and mental health, the the quality of the home environment; parental monitoring, food security, economic strain, childrearing values and rules, parenting styles, parent involvement in schools, and verbal ability.</p> <p><i>Father:</i> Employment and earnings, physical and mental health, attitudes about family and parental roles, and involvement with child.</p>

(Continued)

Table 1 Continued

	<i>Child care:</i> Provider interview on classroom environment, teaching philosophy, child care characteristics, parent contact, time use diaries on child care activities, levels of learning strategies and literacy development, ratings of child behavior, and separate director interview.
	<i>School:</i> Teacher interview on classroom environment, teaching philosophy, school characteristics, teacher preparation, parent contact, time use diaries on school activities, level of learning strategies and literacy development, ratings of child behavior, and separate administrator interview.
Data collection	Data collection was conducted in 1997; a follow-up is planned for 2001.
Principal investigators	Sandra Hofferth. Frank Stafford, Greg Duncan, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn are co-PI's.
Funders	NICHD, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Education, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the William T. Grant Foundation.
Internet site	http://www.isr.umich.edu/src/child-development/home.html
Welfare Reform and Children in Three Cities	
Design	Four-year study in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio employing a rolling panel design; cohort 1 includes two groups: families receiving public assistance and low-income working families; cohort 2 includes low-income young families. Design includes (a) longitudinal survey, (b) embedded developmental study, and (c) comparative ethnographies.
Sample	Cohort 1: 2,400 low-income families with children in either infancy / preschool (50% ages 0–4 years) or early adolescence (50% ages 10–14 years); Cohort 2: 1,200 low-income families with children in either infancy / preschool or early adolescence.
Measures	<i>Child:</i> Physical, social, and emotional development; achievement assessments. <i>Mothers:</i> Household demographic information, education, employment, work and family issues, family functioning, quality of family life, parenting, type and quality of child care / school, experience of welfare reform, use of social services, and children's daily experiences. <i>Fathers:</i> Employment and earnings, physical and mental health, attitudes about family and parental roles, problem behaviors, and experiences of welfare reform obtained via interviews with fathers. <i>Neighborhoods:</i> Systematic social observations of neighborhood organizational features assessed in the ethnographies. <i>Child care:</i> Child care provider and parent interview focusing on child care; child care observations for a subsample of families. <i>Services:</i> Information from social service agencies and advocacy groups regarding the implementation of welfare reform at each site assessed via ethnography.
Data collection	The longitudinal survey, embedded developmental study, and ethnography began in March, 1999.
Principal investigators	Ronald J. Angel, Linda M. Burton, P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, Andrew J. Cherlin, Robert A. Moffitt, and William Julius Wilson.
Funders	NICHD, the Boston Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Hogg Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, the Mott Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Woods Foundation.
Internet site	http://www.jhu.edu/~welfare/
Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS–K)	
Design	Based on a nationally representative sample of approximately 19,000 kindergarten students who will be followed through fifth grade. Data at the child, family, and school level are collected.
Sample	The sample of approximately 900 schools is clustered in 100 Primary Sampling Units across the U.S. About 24 children in each public school and 18 children in each private school were sampled.
Measures	<i>Child:</i> ECLS–K assessments of reading, mathematics, and general knowledge, Peabody Achievement Tests, Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Primary Test of Cognitive Skills; height and weight, fine and gross motor development; teacher ratings of academic progress, classroom behavior, and approaches to learning; parent completion of the Social Skills Rating System and ratings of child's time use and activities during summer between kindergarten and first grade. <i>Parent:</i> Household composition, parent education level, employment status, occupation, family income and welfare status; home environment; aspiration for child's schooling and educational activities with the child; child care, history of child's preschool and Head Start attendance; food sufficiency, parenting styles; marital quality; mental health; information about non-resident biological parents. <i>School:</i> Teacher-rated classroom characteristics and resources; services for low-performing children, grouping practices, instruction for LEP children, time allocation; classroom management; school administrators' ratings of school and staff characteristics, policies in grouping; school record abstracts.
Data collection	Kindergarten data were collected in 1998–1999. Public use files are scheduled to be released in the spring of 2000. The sample is being followed up in the first, third, and fifth grades.
Principal investigator	Nicholas Zill. Jerry West is the project officer.
Funders	U.S. Department of Education, ACYF, NICHD, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
Internet site	http://www.nces.ed.gov/ecls/

ilies that have been difficult in single-site and small-sample evaluations. The same measures are being gathered on children repeatedly, allowing for growth curve modeling of treatment effects. Baseline measurement is more extensive than in the past, allowing for better modeling of attrition bias. Instrumental variable approaches are being used, taking advantage of random assignment. More attention is being paid to parental outcomes and mediators of child outcomes, as well as the actual program components being offered and received in different sites.

Parental and family-level data are being collected to study the ways early childhood programs influence aspects of parental behavior (including parent-child interactions as assessed via videotape as well as measures of mental health, coping, stress, and verbal ability), whether the efficacy of early programs for child well-being are mediated by their effects on parental behavior, and whether mediated effects occur for some subgroups of families or children. Such analyses will raise policy questions such as the following: How is success in early intervention programs to be defined in order to include parental well-being as an outcome? Will policymakers be satisfied if a program lowers child abuse, punitive childrearing practices, parental depressive symptomatology, and/or social isolation? How much importance will be placed on such outcomes if programs do not also decrease, to a substantial degree, low achievement test scores, grade retention, or behavior problems such as aggression? What are the policy implications of (potential) findings (see Brooks-Gunn, Berlin, & Fuligni, *in press*; Burchinal, Campbell, Bryant, Wasik, & Ramey, 1997) that the program effects on children are not mediated by parental behavior?

The current studies will allow for a more detailed look at program content and family receipt of services than previously. For example, the EHS evaluation includes a detailed implementation study, which addresses service implementation and quality at each of the 17 sites. Additionally, staff are asked to describe their expectations for program effects (i.e., in terms of the outcomes of most importance to their program) as well as their theories of change (i.e., the practices and philosophies of the program that theoretically will lead to change). Detailed service receipt data are collected frequently on both experimental and control families (see Leventhal, Brooks-Gunn, McCormick, & McCarton, *in press*, for a discussion of service receipt in the context of early intervention). Studies are also focusing on the factors associated with parental engagement in the program, because previous evaluations have reported huge variation in uptake, dosage, and interest (Baker, Piotrkowski, & Brooks-Gunn, 1999; Barnard, 1998;

Gomby, 1999; Liaw, Meisels, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Wagner & Clayton, 1999).

NEIGHBORHOOD AND RESIDENCE PATTERNS

New studies using neighborhood-based sampling frames will allow for more precision in examining neighborhood effects on child development, over and above family effects, than previously. Processes through which neighborhood residence may influence children are also emphasized. Social science concerns about the effects on youth of residence in a poor neighborhood date back over fifty years (Shaw & McKey, 1942). Current interest has been spurred by the increasing concentrated poverty at the neighborhood level in the 1970s and 1980s (Wilson, 1987) as well as community social disorganization theory as an explanatory model for youth crime (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson & Morenoff, 1997). Research in the past decade (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997) has focused on child and parent as well as adolescent outcomes, employing collective socialization and neighborhood resource frameworks to organize findings. Virtually all of the neighborhood research, however, is plagued by the fact that unmeasured characteristics of families may account for any neighborhood effects seen (Tienda, 1991). Experimental designs of housing mobility programs permit random assignment of families to neighborhoods, which will provide a better estimate of true neighborhood effects by minimizing selection as a problem; the MTO program is an example (Table 1).

Another strategy for addressing the selection problem is to sample by neighborhood to ensure that certain types of neighborhoods are included, that a reasonable number of families within each neighborhood are seen, and that a representative sample of neighborhoods is drawn. The PHDCN and Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Study (Rand, 1999) are prototypes of this approach, lending themselves to hierarchical analyses (Raudenbush & Sampson, *in press*). Both studies will follow families as they move to new residences, and the Los Angeles study will add families who move into the neighborhoods during the study.

The processes through which neighborhoods might influence children are also being addressed in the new studies. Of particular interest is the PHDCN community survey in which residents (in a sample separate from the longitudinal child and family study) in all 343 neighborhoods were interviewed to tap various potential dimensions of theoretical inter-

est (Table 1); these include collective efficacy, child-centeredness, perceived violence, and physical and social disorder (Sampson, Earls, & Raudenbush, 1997; see also the community observational techniques of Spencer, McDermott, Burton, & Kochman, 1997). Ethnographic work on neighborhood characteristics was central to the current studies (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1997; Jarrett, 1997; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, in press).

The studies also allow for more direct comparison of neighborhood effects for different-aged children and youth than previous studies. Neighborhood effects may be mediated through family processes for younger children but not for youth, for example. And different neighborhood processes may be important at one age but not another (i.e., family socialization at younger ages and social disorganization at older ages). A difficulty in these studies, however, will be separating out effects of neighborhood residence from effects of school attendance.

FATHERHOOD

Studies interviewing fathers as well as mothers, which allow for the examination of the influence of both on family formation, marriage, cohabitation, and paternal involvement in childrearing, include Fragile Families, ECLS-B, PSID-CS, EHS, and Welfare Reform in Three Cities. This family of studies will allow for comparative work on the antecedents and correlates of marriage and cohabitation patterns, the associations between mother-father relationships and paternal involvement in wed and unwed couples with young children, and the links between father-child relationships, mother-father relationships, and paternal involvement on the one hand and child well-being on the other.

Nearly a third of all children born in the United States today are born to unmarried parents, with proportions even higher among poor and minority populations (Ventura et al., 1995). In some instances, the parents of these children are living together in marriage-like relationships. In others, they have a close relationship but the father lives in a separate household. In still other cases, the father has virtually no contact with either the mother or child. A major purpose of some new studies is to learn more about the nature of the relationships in these families, to determine the extent to which unwed parents see themselves as families in the traditional sense of the word, to understand the forces that pull them together and push them apart, and to describe the types of paternal involvement that are positive for children.

Earlier studies often included few cases of children

born outside marriage, had unequal representation of wed and unwed couples within ethnic groups and social groups, did not interview the fathers (or only interviewed married fathers), and did not distinguish between marriage and cohabitation. The current studies address all of these limitations. Additionally, several of the studies are videotaping father-child interactions across sites, ethnic groups, and marital and residence status.

TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

Current initiatives focusing on the transition to elementary school, as well as the progression through the early grades, include ECLS-K and PSID-CS (Table 1) as well as National Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Study (described earlier), NICHD Study of Early Child Care, and Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES, with about 2400 children in 40 Head Start programs who are being followed from Head Start entry through the end of kindergarten). All look at the quality, variety, and amount of various early elementary school experiences, and, in some studies, preschool experiences as well. They also include classroom observations or teacher time use diaries rather than relying on teacher, parent, or principal report, unlike most previous work. A challenge is to identify relevant dimensions of elementary school experiences (*vis-à-vis* links with child outcomes).

Developmental scholars will also be able (at least in the Head Start Transition Study) to test the premise that effects of early childhood interventions are often not sustained (or are reduced in size) after children enter school in part because the schools are of relatively poor quality (Lee, Loeb, & Lubeck, 1998; Zigler & Styfco, 1996). Even in the nonexperimental studies, links between the quality of schooling from age 4 or 5 years through age 10 years may be examined, as well as whether changes in school quality are associated with changes in children's achievement.

These initiatives also will provide some purchase on the issue of whether parental involvement in school activities (and what types of involvement) is associated with school quality and/or changes in children's achievement. It is also possible that links between family-level demographic and SES variables and children's school achievement are in part due to parental behavior such as involvement in school (which could be seen as a mediator of family demographic-school achievement links or, in more macroanalytic terms, as a potential aspect of selection bias). Moderating effects of parental involvement might also be examined. For example, it is possible that school character-

istics are only associated with child achievement when parental involvement is high. This premise seems plausible if it is assumed that school quality is unlikely to have much of an influence on children in the absence of some input from the family (if only in monitoring homework and television viewing time).

WELFARE REFORM

Current evaluations are examining potential effects of welfare-to-work, antipoverty, and residential mobility programs upon parenting and child outcomes via a series of experiments: the Milwaukee New Hope Project (make-work-pay and employment services with about 800 families, measuring parent and child impacts at 24 and 60 months); the Florida Transition Program (participation mandates, make-work-pay strategies, and a 2-year term limit, with about 1600 families and child impacts measured at 48 months); the Minnesota Family Assistance Program (make-work-pay components with over 4000 families); the MTO Program (see Table 1); and the Canadian Self-Sufficiency Project (with a very generous make-work-pay strategy with about 1900 families enrolled in the first cohort, and parent and child impacts measured at 36 months). These demonstrations are assessing packages of policies via treatment-control designs rather than testing the differential effects of different bundles of policies or specific components of programs (i.e., systematically varying three or more treatment conditions). These evaluations allow for comparisons across demonstrations (given that similar, or in some cases the same, measures are being used), subgroup analyses of efficacy (given the large sample sizes), and modeling of the familial (and possibly school) pathways through which these demonstrations might influence child outcome. Moves into the work force, cuts in welfare via sanctions or termination, provision of services and cash supplements for low-income workers, and relocation to neighborhoods with more employment opportunities all may influence parents' relationships with other family members, parenting practices, parental emotional health, and parental harshness and inconsistency toward their offspring (Wilson, Ellwood, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Zaslow, Moore, Morrison, & Coiro, 1995; Zaslow, Oldham, Moore, & Magenheimer, 1998). The randomized experiments are ideal for examining these issues.

These studies also allow for the examination of pathways through which outcomes are influenced. For example, we suspect that moving from welfare to work in the context of these demonstrations will only have positive effects on parenting and children when family income is raised above the poverty threshold (which is

likely in the more generous cash supplement experiments; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998). Likewise, some programs might find a negative effect of termination of welfare benefits, especially if mothers have few job-related skills (Danziger et al., 1999).

A set of multisite longitudinal studies of low-income families also will provide some purchase on these issues (although effect estimates will be less precise due to selection bias). These studies include *Fragile Families*, *Welfare Reform in Three Cities*, *EHS*, *PSID-CS*, *ECLS-K* (see Table 1). Entrance into the work force may have both positive and negative influences, depending on family, work, and community context (Brooks-Gunn, Smith, Berlin, & Lee, in press). The general question to be asked is: under what conditions, for what families, and for what indicators of well-being will moves from welfare be positive or at the very least benign, and when will they be damaging? The conditions include state policies (benefit levels, work requirements, sanction rules, child subsidy levels, training opportunities, local economic conditions, and spatial distribution of job opportunities). All of the above-mentioned studies include several cities/states, allowing for analyses of variation in conditions (or bundles of conditions), as well as individual-level work conditions (job flexibility, pay rate, hours worked, benefits), child-care conditions (type, cost, quality), family conditions (demographic characteristics), and child characteristics (age, health, gender, and, for some studies, temperament).

Policy issues related to child support also may be addressed by these multisite studies (paternity establishment and child support also being part of the *Public Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*). *Fragile Families* was specifically designed to assess couples in cities with extreme labor market, child support, and welfare regimes (eight cities) and cities with less extreme conditions (eight cities). Questions to be asked with this design include: Do values with regard to marriage and fatherhood have different effects on cohabitation in cities with very different labor market or welfare regimes? Does the effect of growing up in a single-parent family on the propensity to cohabit or marry vary across the cities? Estimating separate city regressions is part of this study's strategy, one that could be used in the other studies mentioned above.

CHILD CARE

A number of current initiatives have child care as a focus, specifically the quality, type, and extensiveness of child care used by families with young children. These include the *PHDCN*, *EHS*, *Welfare Reform* in

Three Cities, PSID-CS, as well as the NICHD Study of Early Child Care (1997a, 1997b), the National Study of Child Care for Low-Income Families (a random sample of about 5000 low-income families with working parents and at least one child under age 13 will be seen in 17 states, with a subsample of families receiving or having applied for child-care subsidies), the JOBS Study (an early welfare to work study with over 3000 families with young children), and the ECLS-B Study (a national sample of over 12,000 births, with children and families expected to be seen four times during the first 5 years of life).

What is unique about this family of studies is that many are collecting the same measures of quality of child care (in many cases modeled after the NICHD Study of Early Child Care), all include very large samples of low-income families, and all include multiple ethnic groups. Also, they include states that vary in the generosity of child-care subsidies and child-care requirements (child:staff ratios, group sizes, and training requirements).

Some of the studies also include a large number of family-level characteristics that may be entered into regressions to lessen the possibility of child-care effects being due to selection bias. A major criticism of the literature on associations between quality of child care and child outcomes is that parents who choose high-quality care are more sensitive and stimulating in their own caregiving. This general premise may be assessed across data sets and may test, as well, both mediator and moderator models. For example, links between a family characteristic, such as income, and an indicator of quality child care may be mediated by provision of learning experiences in the home. Alternatively, income may be linked to child-care quality only when provision of learning experiences is high.

The new studies also should include a wide range of child-care quality ratings, given the sampling frameworks (i.e., many studies sampling from disadvantaged neighborhoods and from low-income groups). It is critical to obtain enough cases of poor quality in order to test for curvilinear effects. Also, from a policy perspective, concerns have been raised about child-care settings that do not meet minimum standards for health and safety: current data sets are unable to address the issue of what happens to children with sustained exposure to such settings.

CONCLUSION

The initiatives profiled above both reflect and propagate a number of current trends in developmental science, including the following:

1. *Emphasis on children's earliest years.* Humans' first

3 years comprise a longer period of immaturity and dependence than is experienced by any other species and are characterized by rapid physical and mental developments. Both the "basic" developmental initiatives (e.g., NICHD Study of Early Child Care and ECLS-B Study) and intervention initiatives (e.g., EHS and Nurse Home Visitation Program) reflect a concern with children's earliest years, often beginning at or before the birth of the child.

2. *Integration of macro- and micro-perspectives.* There is a trend, seen in all of these initiatives, toward conducting multisite investigations with large, nationally representative samples in conjunction with videotaping observations of child-parent interactions and observing in child care and school settings.
3. *Accountability of publicly funded services for children and families.* The initiatives profiled reflect increasing demands to subject publicly funded services for children and families—child protective services, public housing, early childhood interventions, and early elementary school to rigorous empirical scrutiny.
4. *Focus on long-term rate of return.* It is believed that focusing on children's early years will yield a high "return" for identifying precursors to school failure.
5. *Acknowledgment of differential effectiveness.* The large, multisite studies have the sample sizes necessary to ask the question "for whom are services most effective, and under what circumstances?" rather than "do they work?" (Berlin, O'Neal, & Brooks-Gunn, 1998; Karoly, Greenwood, & Everingham, 1998; Reynolds, Mann, Miedel, & Smokowski, 1997).
6. *Articulation of "theories of change."* Practitioners and researchers are collaborating to define and articulate program goals, expectations for change, and methods for meeting these expectations (Weiss, 1995). These explicit ideas are providing the basis for program evaluations.

The trends in the data beginning to emerge from these initiatives suggest that in the next century educators will be faced with the task of balancing comprehensive, family-oriented services with the provision of intensive direct child development services (child care). Some children will likely need more direct services than others. Mounting effective interventions will require a balance among the characteristics of the participants, the characteristics of the services, and the interaction between the participants and the program, especially in terms of participants' active in-

volvement in program services. The theory of change approach may be helpful to practitioners seeking to refine program goals and to articulate a service agenda.

These initiatives will provide a wealth of policy-relevant data. Perhaps the most important findings will center on the difficulty of changing human behavior. Some poor young mothers on public assistance will face insurmountable challenges to starting work. Some children, having been neglected, may flounder in preschool or school. Some parents who have experienced domestic violence and loss may be resistant to family support services. Moreover, early interventions cannot be expected to inoculate vulnerable infants against future difficulties.

It might come as a shock to learn that an entire new family of large-scale longitudinal studies was launched in the mid to late 1990s. These have been designed with a more discerning eye toward measuring processes between parents and children, within families, in child-care settings, in early childhood intervention programs, in housing projects, and in schools than was evident in previous national studies. Developmentalists have been key members of the design teams—in a sense, we will not have to rely on the kindness of strangers in the analyses of these new studies, but will be thanking our friends and colleagues for becoming partners in these endeavors.

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