

How Does Leaving High Poverty Neighborhoods Affect the Employment Prospects of Low-Income Parents and Youth?

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Serious barriers to work, lack of job readiness in MTO

- **Missing skills and credentials**
- **Chronic health and mental health problems (self or dependent)**
- **Lack of transportation isolates some**

Tina came back to the conversation saying that she had decided she really didn't want to do the training because it was so far. "She has to be to school at 8, I have to catch a ferry, he takes him [Dad takes son to daycare] thank god, I don't know what I would do, then catching the bus and a ferry and the train and then the bus. It's crazy. Or two trains to Spring street on those days."

But how might relocation help the *work-ready*?

- **Spatial mismatch:** relocating toward areas of job growth (in skill-appropriate jobs), e.g. growing suburbs.
- **Networks:** gaining social resources (social capital) useful for finding and keeping jobs.
- **Norms:** motivation from more work-supportive social climate
... but movers might lose social support for work, not have access to openings nearby, etc.





MTO Interim Impacts on Employment: Results and puzzles

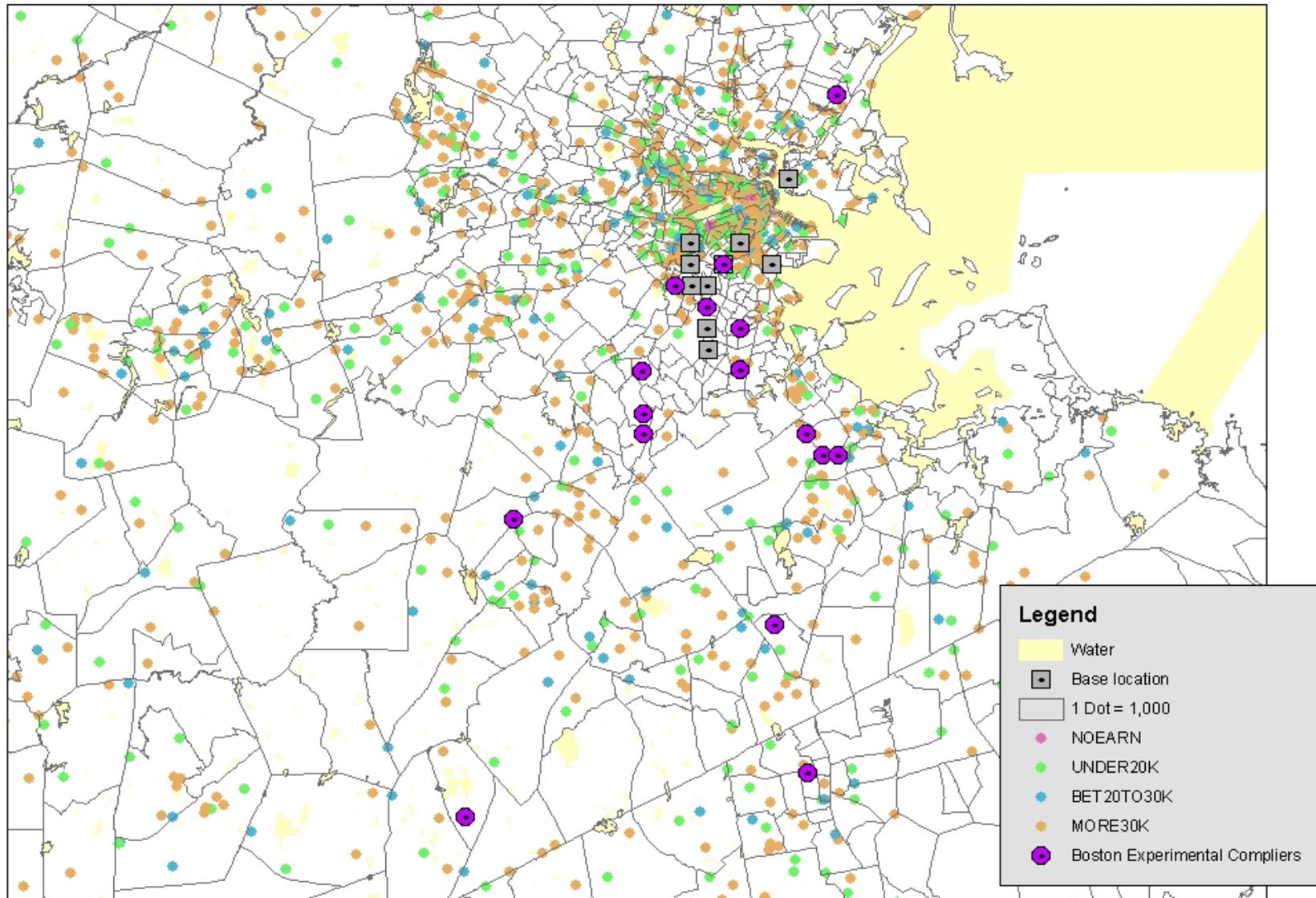
- No significant *generalized* impacts on employment, earnings or receipt of public assistance 4 to 7 years after enrollment.
- *Welfare reform and strong job economy* raised employment across treatment groups.
- Some impacts when disaggregated *by site*:
 - Los Angeles: Increased rate of employment.
 - New York: Significant increases in earnings.
 - Women under 40 appear to do better in the job market.
- Length of exposure to more advantaged neighborhoods is associated with employment outcomes—*though “selection effects” cloud this picture.*

Our Evidence: Spatial Mismatch

- **Boston & New York: Relocating meant leaving denser concentration of low-wage jobs in transit-rich areas for car-reliant areas in low job density communities.**
- **Compliers actually lost spatial access to entry-level job growth zones in Los Angeles (65% at 5 mile radius, 16% at 10 miles).**
- **All three sites: High concentration in healthcare, retail and social services.**
- **Some families moved closer to jobs they already had:**

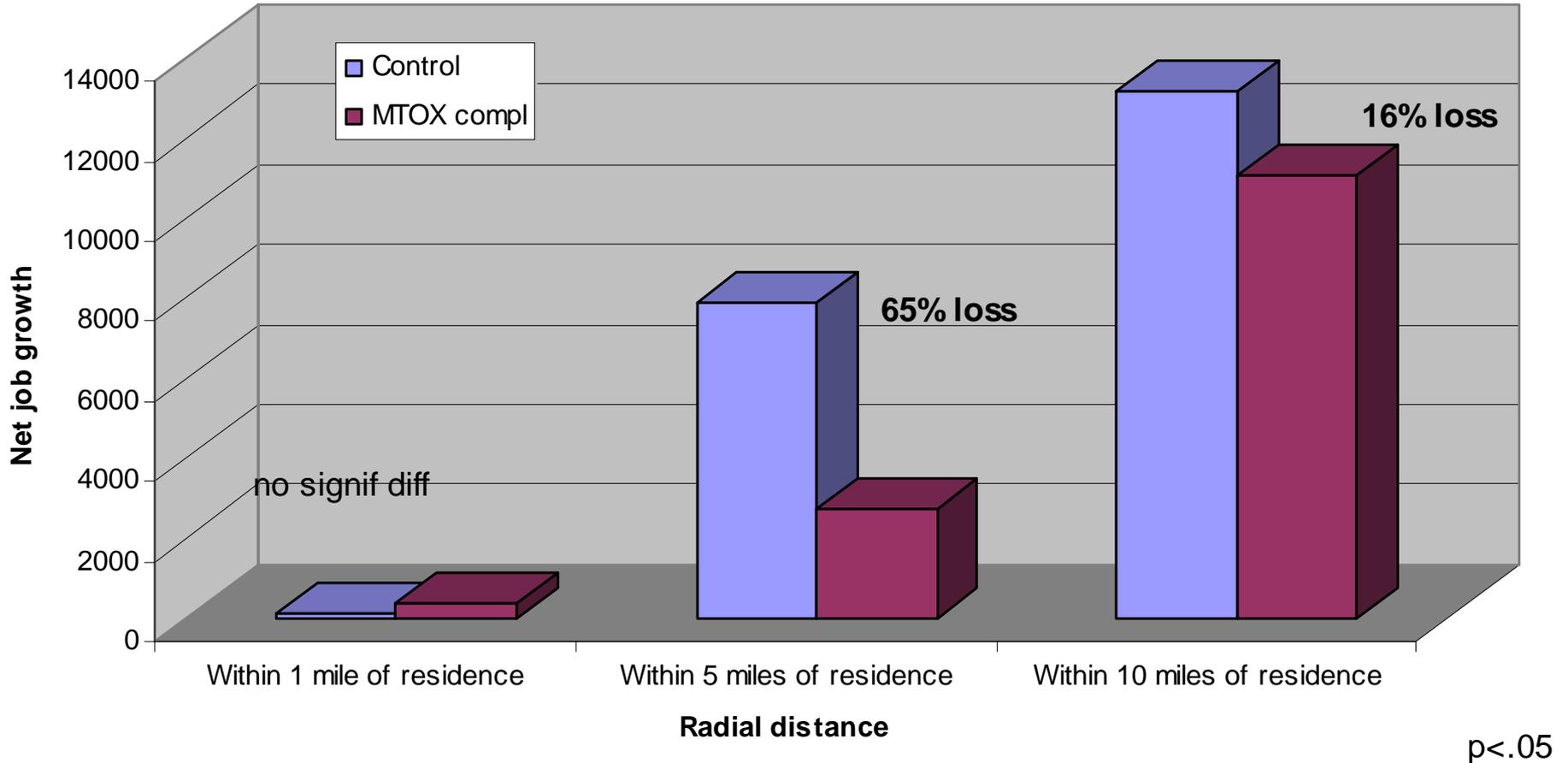
“I started while I was in Manhattan and then moved here where I was closer to work, which was a plus for me. Yeah, it’s like now 10 minutes [away] ... and I also do a lot of overtime.” (Rhadiya)

Boston MSA: Housing vs. job concentrations



The Loss of Spatial Access

Treatment effects on proximity to entry-level job growth:
MTO in Los Angeles



The real spatial challenge

- **Lining up jobs-housing-support “matches”**
 - Accessible childcare at low or no cost was often unstable (relatives move, refuse, become risky)
 - Low-wage job market and low-rent housing markets both bruising and so much in flux for those on the bottom: rent spikes, layoffs, shift changes



Our Evidence: Social Networks

- **Assumptions:** Movers would be willing and able to *form* ties, and their more advantaged neighbors would be willing and able to *provide* information.
- **But movers don't "convert" new locations into significant new social resources:** Had casual, mostly cordial, interaction with neighbors, lives remained *kin-centered*, with some *distancing* from burdensome relatives.
- **They were far more likely to get referrals from current and former co-workers, few of whom were neighbors; some from kin or another trusted source, such as clergy.**



“Culture”: The youth are the story

- In low poverty neighborhoods: Feelings of security and calm; parents’ pride in having neighbors who worked—possible “observation effects” but little interaction.
- The *next generation*: gains in motivation and soft skills? Esperanza’s acculturation strains and gains:

[The fieldworker] asked about “ghetto style” and she explained, “leaning back, always being casual. Always have attitude when out, even in other neighborhoods.” ... She said that she doesn’t want to act like that anymore and her L.A friends make fun of her ... “If I hadn’t moved to the Valley I would have been naïve to other races. The Valley taught me how to fit in.” (Fieldnote)

Assisted relocation is no panacea, but it “promotes” some women:

I asked Anique how she feels that she's been successful in her life. She responds, "Maintaining employment through all the layoffs and downsizing, where I didn't have to end up goin' back on welfare. Getting my daughter out of the Jordan Downs [public housing projects]. And I'm still working on everything else." (Fieldnote)

Conclusions and implications

- 1.** It's the jobs-housing-support matches. *Need supports that make each leg of the stool—jobs or training, childcare, affordable rental housing—more stable and secure.* Childcare and car vouchers could help.
- 2.** Low-income movers don't convert new locations into significant new social resources. *Institutional connections could be fostered in new locations.*
- 3.** Unstable footholds: Rental housing that *stayed* affordable, where landlords accepted vouchers, was not easy to find. *Supply-side strategies “hard” and “soft.”*
- 4.** Relocation alone does little to affect the employment or employability of those who are not work ready. It cannot overcome the barriers, and it isolates some. *Need better targeting, plus intensive supports.*