# Smart Supervision of Women Offenders – A Research Team Partnership with the Michigan Department of Corrections
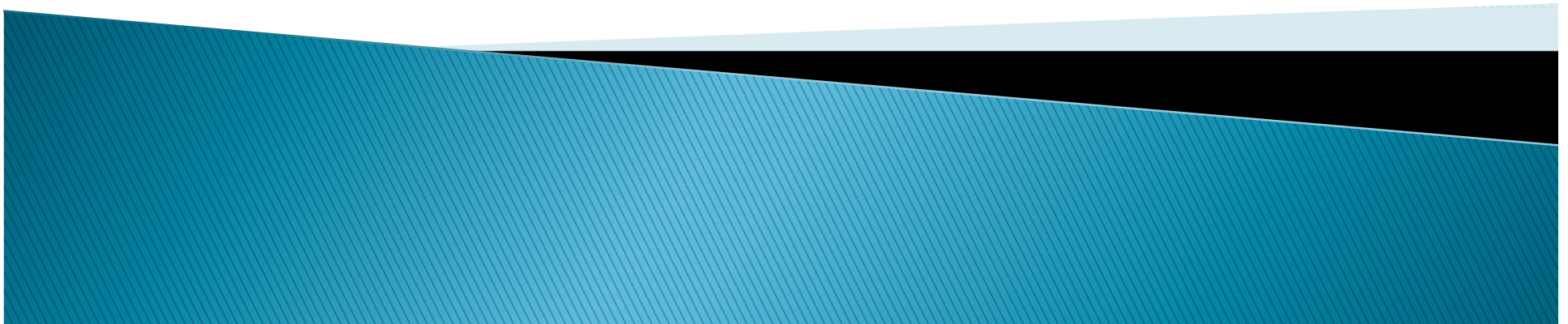
# Race, Neighborhood Danger, and Coping Strategies among Female Probationers and Parolees

Jennifer Cobbina – Michigan State University
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Deborah Kashy – Michigan State University

# Neighborhood Crime & Recidivism

- Individuals on probation and parole typically reside in impoverished neighborhoods
- These neighborhoods are often extremely segregated and have high levels of crime
- Evidence demonstrates that neighborhood context influences recidivism

# Residential Segregation & Concentrated Disadvantage in Black Neighborhoods

- Blacks are most likely to be concentrated in areas of extreme disadvantage
- U.S. neighborhoods continue to be racially segregated, and African Americans live in areas with the most concentrated disadvantage
    - The 2010 U.S. Census reveals that the average African American who lived in a metropolitan area resided in neighborhoods that were only 35% White and as much as 45% Black, while Whites lived in neighborhoods that were 75% White and only 8% Black

# Current Study

1. Is being African American related to women offenders' perceptions of neighborhood safety, perceptions of illegal neighborhood activity, and objective indicators of social disorganization?

2. What strategies do women probationers and parolees use to avoid offending in neighborhoods viewed as unsafe or as having criminal activity?

3. Are neighborhood safety and crime indicators related to women's choice of strategies for avoiding offending in negative neighborhood contexts?
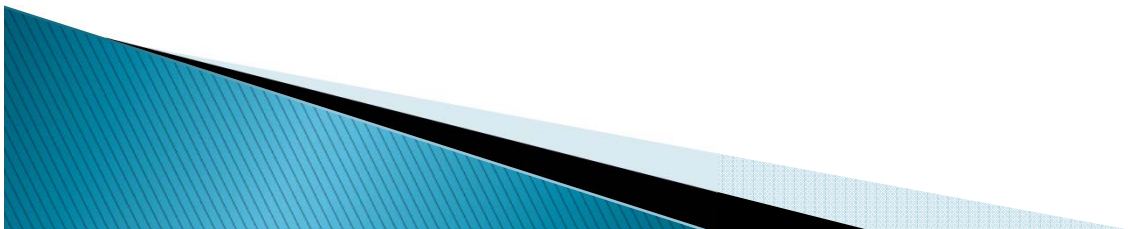
# Sample

- 402 drug-involved female offenders

- Interviews took place in Michigan between November, 2011 and November, 2012

- Respondents were paid $30 for their participation

# Study Design

- The current study utilizes a three part mixed methods design, including quantitative, qualitative, and a mixed-method approach

# Quantitative Measures

- Census Tract Characteristics
  - 4 indicators of social disorganization (economic disadvantage, affluence, residential stability, immigrant concentration) were used to reflect census tract contextual variables related to crime rates.
  - Respondents were asked:
    - Is your neighborhood safe?
    - Are there drugs in the neighborhood?
    - Are there gangs in the neighborhood?
    - Have you heard gun shots in the neighborhood?
    - Are there break-ins in the neighborhood?
    - Is there violence in the neighborhood?
    - Have you been a victim of a crime in the neighborhood?
    - Do police come into the neighborhood a lot?

# Qualitative Measures

▸ If women reported that their neighborhoods were unsafe, that there were "a lot of police," that they had been victimized in their neighborhoods, or that any crime occurred in their neighborhoods (e.g., drug activity), they were asked open ended follow-up questions.

  ◦ Women were asked to describe their strategies to avoid trouble with the law and any drug activity in the neighborhood
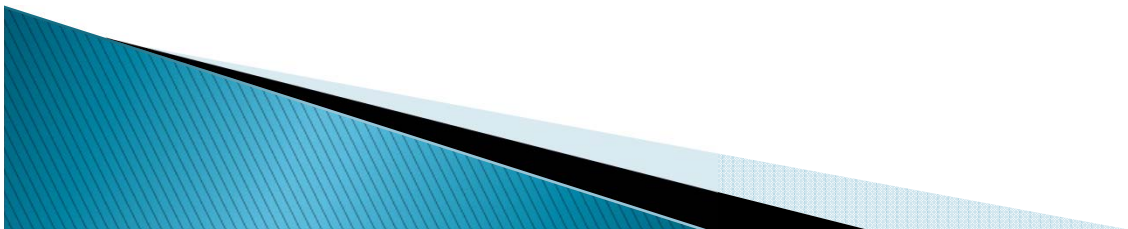  ◦ Women were asked whether they felt the strategies were effective

# Mixed Method Approach

- Used to link women's strategies to avoid offending from the qualitative data to quantitative measures of perceived crime and objective indicators of neighborhood social disorganization
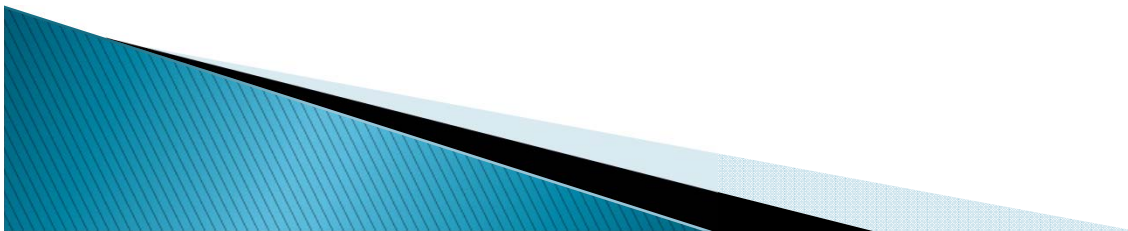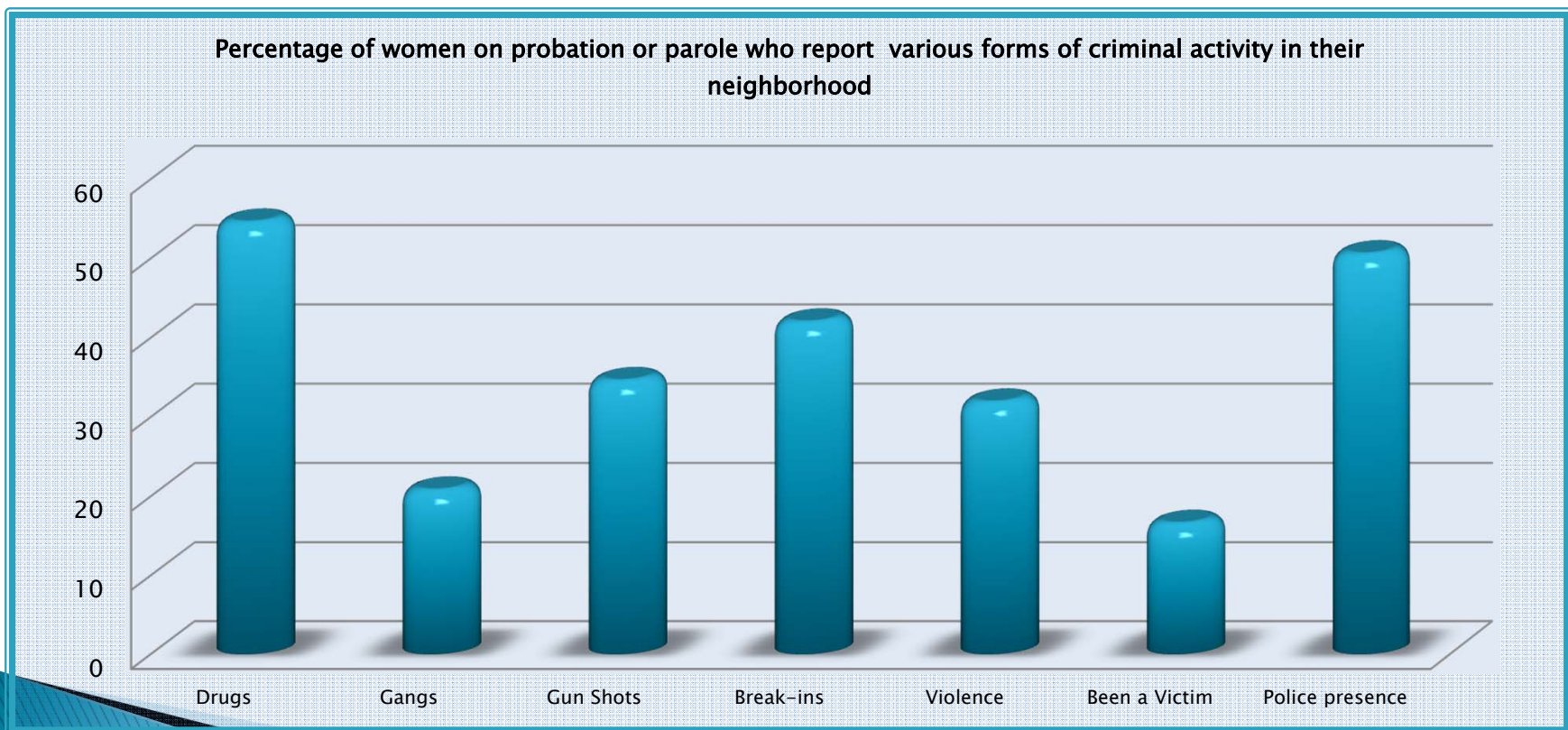
# Study Setting

- Michigan
  - According to the American Community Survey and the 2010 US Census, Michigan is the 3$^{rd}$ most segregated state for Black-White segregation
  - 80% of metropolitan Blacks would have to move to a different neighborhood to alleviate residential segregation in Michigan

# Quantitative Analysis of Data on Perceptions of Neighborhood Crime (N=402)



Percentage of women on probation or parole who report various forms of criminal activity in their neighborhood

# Quantitative Analysis of Perceived Crime and Objective Measures of Social Disorganization by Race

- Black women report an average of 2.9 crime indicators vs. 1.8 for white women.
- Concentrated disadvantage is substantially higher in the Black women's census tracts
- For White women, concentrated affluence, residential stability, and concentrated immigration are higher.

NOTE:  All of these differences are significant.

# Qualitative Analysis of Strategies to Avoid Offending (N=256)

| Strategy | Example | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Avoid Criminal People | "I don't go around people that's … doing wrong." | 18% |
| Stay home | "[I] used to be a street-person … [but] I'm a house-body person now." | 14% |
| Avoid everyone | "[I] stay away from people period, because you never can trust anybody." | 11% |
| Be with pro-social people | "[I] just keep with positive influences, go to my AA meetings, and things like that" | 10% |
| Stay busy with legal routines | "I just go to work. I work all day so I don't have time to think about anything else." | 9% |
| Avoid drugs | "I've noticed what works for my life is if I just … if I stay off the dope, I stay out of trouble." | 7% |
| Think about one's actions | "I have a made up mind to stay out of trouble." | 7% |
| Avoid criminal activity | "I just don't do nothing wrong … I don't do no crimes." | 7% |

# Mixed-Method Analysis of Subjective & Objective Measures of Neighborhood Context in Relation to Strategies to Avoid Offending

- Women who use the "avoid everyone" strategy report a higher number of crime types, and have more concentrated disadvantage, & less concentrated affluence than other women.
- Women who use the "be with prosocials" strategy report fewer crime types, and have less concentrated disadvantage, & more concentrated affluence than other women.
- NOTE: All of these differences are significant.

# Discussion

▸ Overall, women who reside in more disadvantaged neighborhoods have unique challenges to avoiding recidivism as they attempt to navigate their communities. This is especially true for Black women because, compared to White women:

◦ Black women were more likely to live in areas with high disadvantage, and with low affluence, residential stability, and immigration concentration.

◦ Black women were more likely to perceive that they lived in unsafe neighborhoods and reported more types of neighborhood crime than did White women.

# Policy Implications

‣ Identify women most prone to using strategies that may not support a pro-social lifestyle

‣ Housing in safe areas

‣ Reinvest in low income communities

‣ Confront discriminatory housing policies
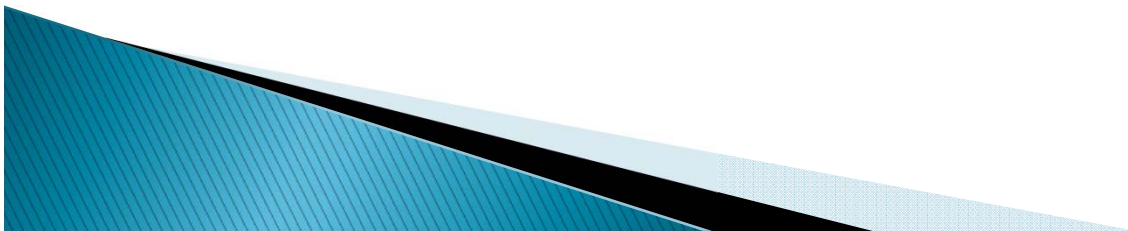
# Race, Neighborhood Context, and Strategies to Avoid Victimization among Female Probationers and Parolees

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# Current Study

1. What are the strategies women offenders use to avoid victimization in neighborhoods they perceive as unsafe or crime ridden?

2. Are the strategies women use connected to perceived community crime and objective measures of community social disorganization?

3. Do the victimization avoidance strategies differ for women of color and other women?

4. Are experiences of victimization in the neighborhood related to the choice of strategy?
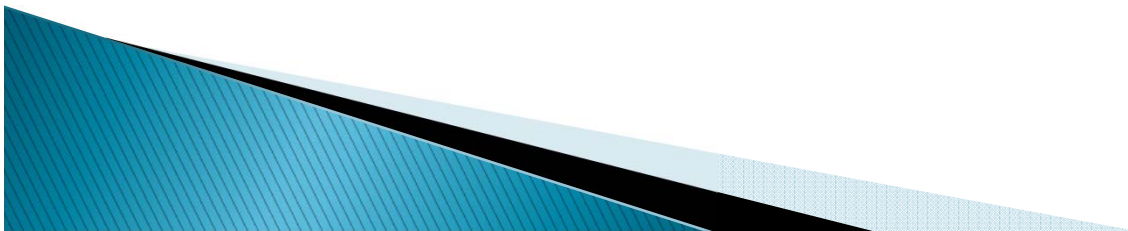
# Sample

▸ Of the 402 women offenders, 286 explained how they avoided victimization
  ◦ 61% reported using 1 strategy
  ◦ 22% reported using 2 strategies
  ◦ 13% reported using 3 or more strategies

# Qualitative Analysis of Strategies to Avoid Offending (N=256)

| Strategy | Example | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Home physical security | "I lock the door." | 25.9% |
| Stay home | "I always stay indoors." | 25.2% |
| Avoid criminal places or certain places at certain times | "I limit how much time I'm out and … I try to be in the house before it gets dark" | 20.3% |
| Avoid everyone | "I don't really associate with too many people … I'm like a loner" | 17.5% |
| Watch surroundings | "when I walk I look behind myself | 9.8% |
| Avoid criminal people | "I just stay away from negative people [and] violent people." | 8.4% |

# Mixed-Method Analysis of Subjective & Objective Measures of Neighborhood Context in Relation to Strategies to Avoid Victimization

- A higher proportion of women (31.3% vs. 12.3%) who perceived their neighborhoods as safe used home physical security.
- Women who used the strategy of staying home have less concentrated affluence, and have more economic disadvantage.
- NOTE: All of these differences are significant.
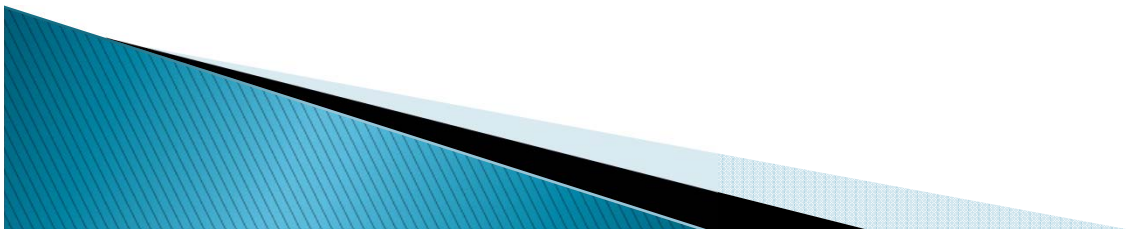
# Mixed-Method Analysis of Race/Ethnicity in Relation to Strategies to Avoid Victimization

- Whites were more likely to use home physical security than Black and Multiracial women
- Black and Multiracial women are more likely to stay home to avoid victimization

- NOTE: All of these differences are significant.
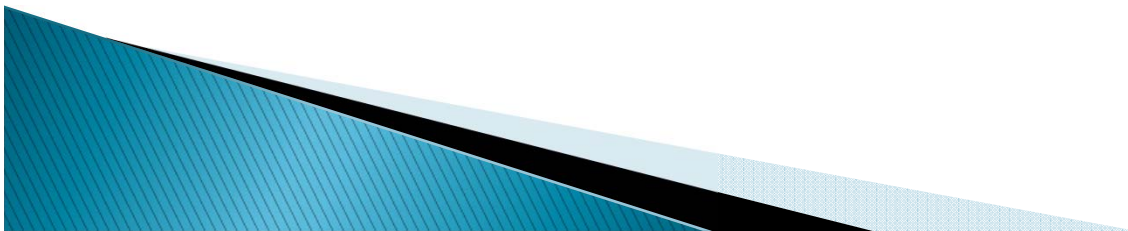
# Discussion

- While women used defensive behaviors, most used avoidance strategies to stay safe

- Women who perceived that their neighborhoods were unsafe were less likely to rely on home physical security

- Women who lived in poor neighborhoods were more likely to stay home

- Black and Multiracial women commonly reported staying home to avoid victimization

# Policy Implications

- Help women to move to less distressed neighborhoods

- Address barriers to living in socially organized communities
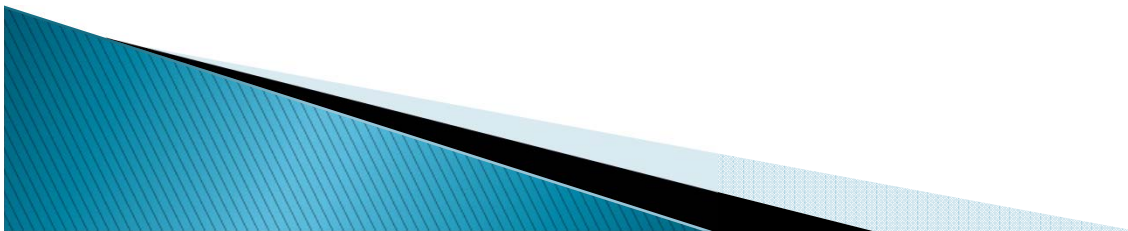
- Help women to build relationships
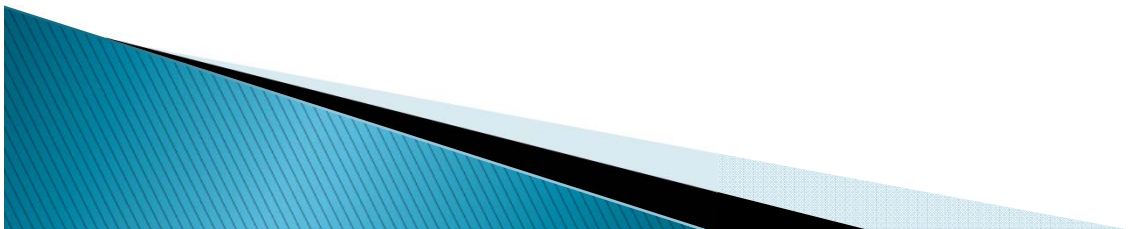
# The Role of Transportation Disadvantage for Women on Community Supervision

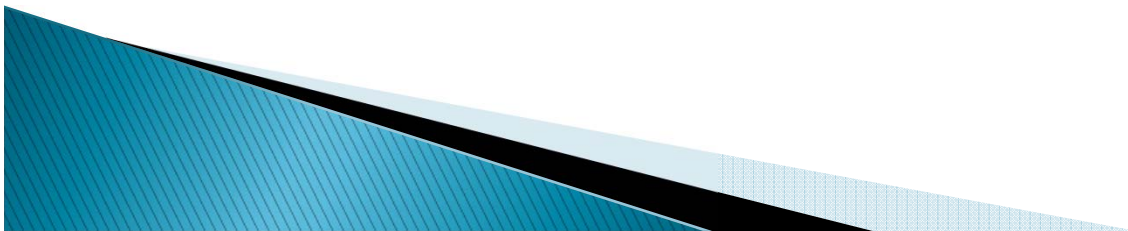Miriam Northcut Bohmert – Indiana University

# Current Study

▸ The goal of the current study is to examine the role of transportation disadvantage in the lives of justice-involved women

# Methodology

- Survey data on 366 women on probation and parole
- 75 in-depth interviews

# Quantitative Measures

- <u>Individual</u>
  - Transportation
    - Do you own/lease a car?
    - Do you have access to a registered/insured car?
    - Do you have a valid driver's license
  - Physical health
    - Do you have difficulty walking a block?
    - Is your vision poor?
- <u>Family</u>
  - # of people who could provide transportation help
  - Degree one can rely on family/friends to help them/children get places or give them money
- <u>Community</u>
  - Overall accessibility (Walk score; livability score)
  - Proximity of amenities (Livability score)
  - Safety (Livability score)

# Qualitative Measures

- Over the past 5 years, when/what transportation problems did you have?
- Currently would you say the way you get to and from places is stressful or easy?
- Currently, do any of your arrangements for getting around place you in danger?
- Overall, what is hard or easy about the ways you arrange transportation?
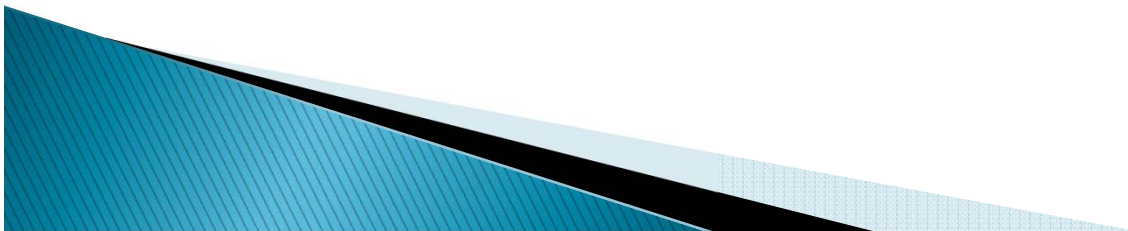
# Results

- 68% did not have their own vehicle
- 58% did not have a valid drivers license
- 37% were unable to borrow a car from family/friends
- 27% had difficulty walking
- 29% had poor vision
- 13% had poor health
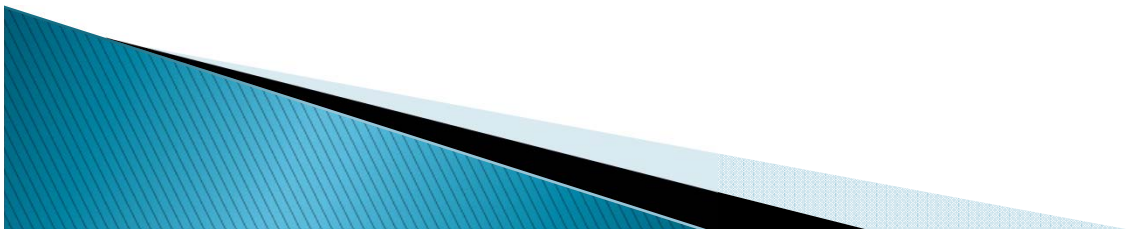
# Individual-Level Problems Helped By Social Support

Brook: "[I have] access to dependable transportation because I'm married . . . but if I wasn't married, I'd be screwed."

Penny: "I have this one guy who's an older guy and he had the biggest crush or something. 'Girl, you look beautiful. I can't believe your age.' He just went on and on about it …. It just sort of intimidates you because you're going to get in the car and you don't know."

# Individual-Level Problems Without Social Support

Mabel: "[I]f it was not for bus service, I have no idea what I would do. I started using the bus the minute I—well, not the minute—within a few days—after I was paroled over to the homeless shelter …. Most of the bus drivers are really good. But also, like most things in life, it depends on how you treat them . . . There was a couple bus drivers who were kinda sleazy, but—I eventually got them to stop. [They were] trying to cop a feel."
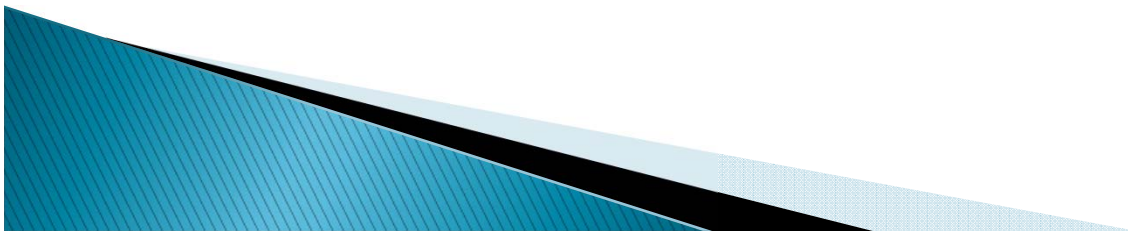
# Poor Neighborhoods, Lack Of Family Support, And Substance Abuse

Mallory: "I mean, everything I do, especially me being a female, I try to do it during the day. I don't like to be out at night. Even when I'm going to east side to see my boyfriend, he will get mad sometimes because I will leave so early . . . He'll be like, what are you doing, are you messing with somebody? I'll be like, no, I just don't want to be out when it's dark . . . I said anything can happen. He said just like anything can happen to you during the day. I said, well at least during the day I have a better chance of running, getting to a neighbor, knocking on the door or something. At night, especially over here, there's nothing over here. I can't knock on nobody's door. When I told him that he understood to whereas that now he sees, like, that I be leaving as I do and when it's still daylight.
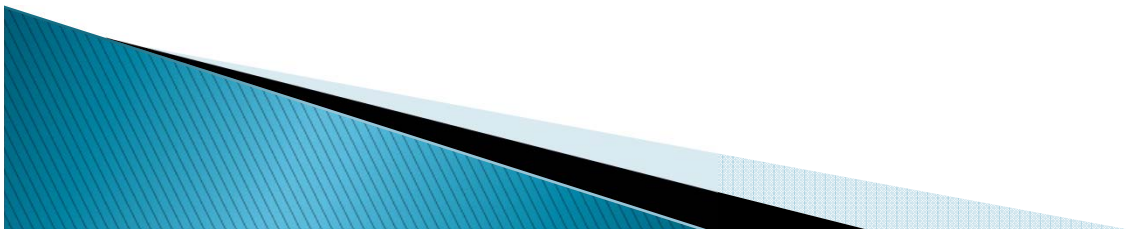
# Intensity of Transportation Problems

- 49% of women reported at least one minor transportation problem
- 39% of women reported at least one moderate transportation problem
-  29% of women reported at least one severe transportation problem

- Out of 75 women, 32 (42.6%) reported transportation as one of their top three concerns

# Discussion

- Women have very poor physical health, lack the legal ability to drive and have limited access to personal vehicles
- Women have relatively high levels of family and friend support.
- Women live in unsafe, inaccessible, and car-dependent areas.
- Women overwhelmingly agreed they had access to dependable transportation.

# Policy

- Supervision agents and agencies should be trained and aware of the significant problems their clients
- Programs should increase women's access to affordable vehicles
- Improve the quality of transportation services
- Less programming for women