

**An Overview of the  
Moving to Opportunity (MTO)  
Experiment:  
A Random Assignment Housing  
Mobility Study in Five U.S. Cities**

# **MTO: A Housing Mobility Experiment**

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- Operated from 1994 to 1998
- Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York
- Eligible families with children living in:
  - public housing
  - high-poverty neighborhoods (poverty rate  $\geq$  40%)

# Random assignment to 3 groups

4,608 eligible families  
in public housing

Low-Poverty  
Voucher Group (LPV)  
(N = 1,800)

Section 8 Group (S8)  
(N = 1,350)

Control Group (C)  
(N = 1,400)

Offered restricted Section 8  
voucher + mobility counseling

Offered conventional  
Section 8 voucher

No voucher, existing programs

47% Leased up  
(N = 864)

68% Leased up  
(N = 918)

# Selected Characteristics of MTO Households

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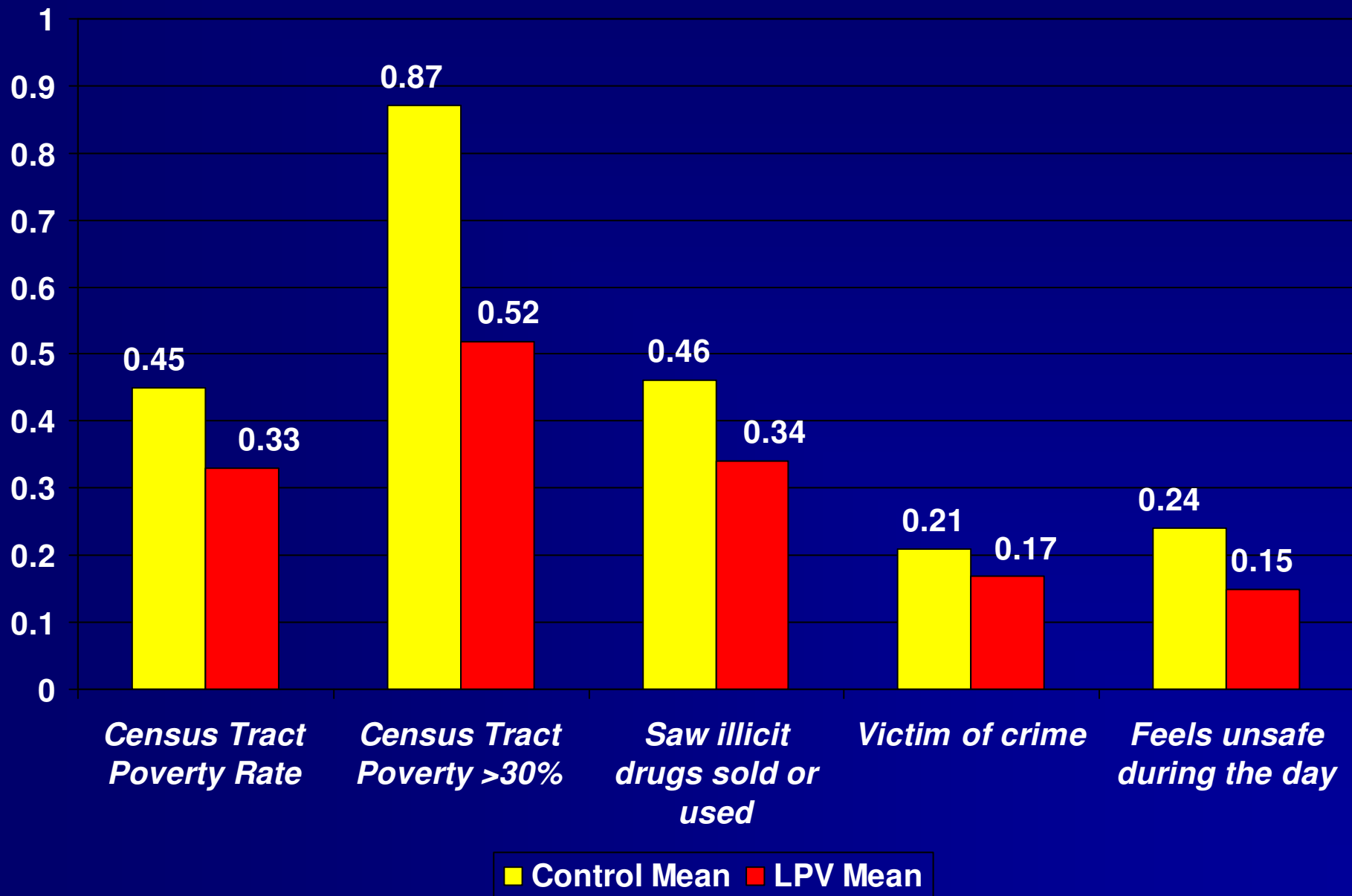
- 22 percent of household heads were employed at baseline.
- 87 percent single-parent female-headed households
- Baltimore and Chicago samples are almost 100 percent black.
- LA, and NY are roughly 50 percent black, 50 percent Hispanic.
- About 20 percent of the sample in Boston is nh-white or Asian.

# HUD's 5-Year Evaluation

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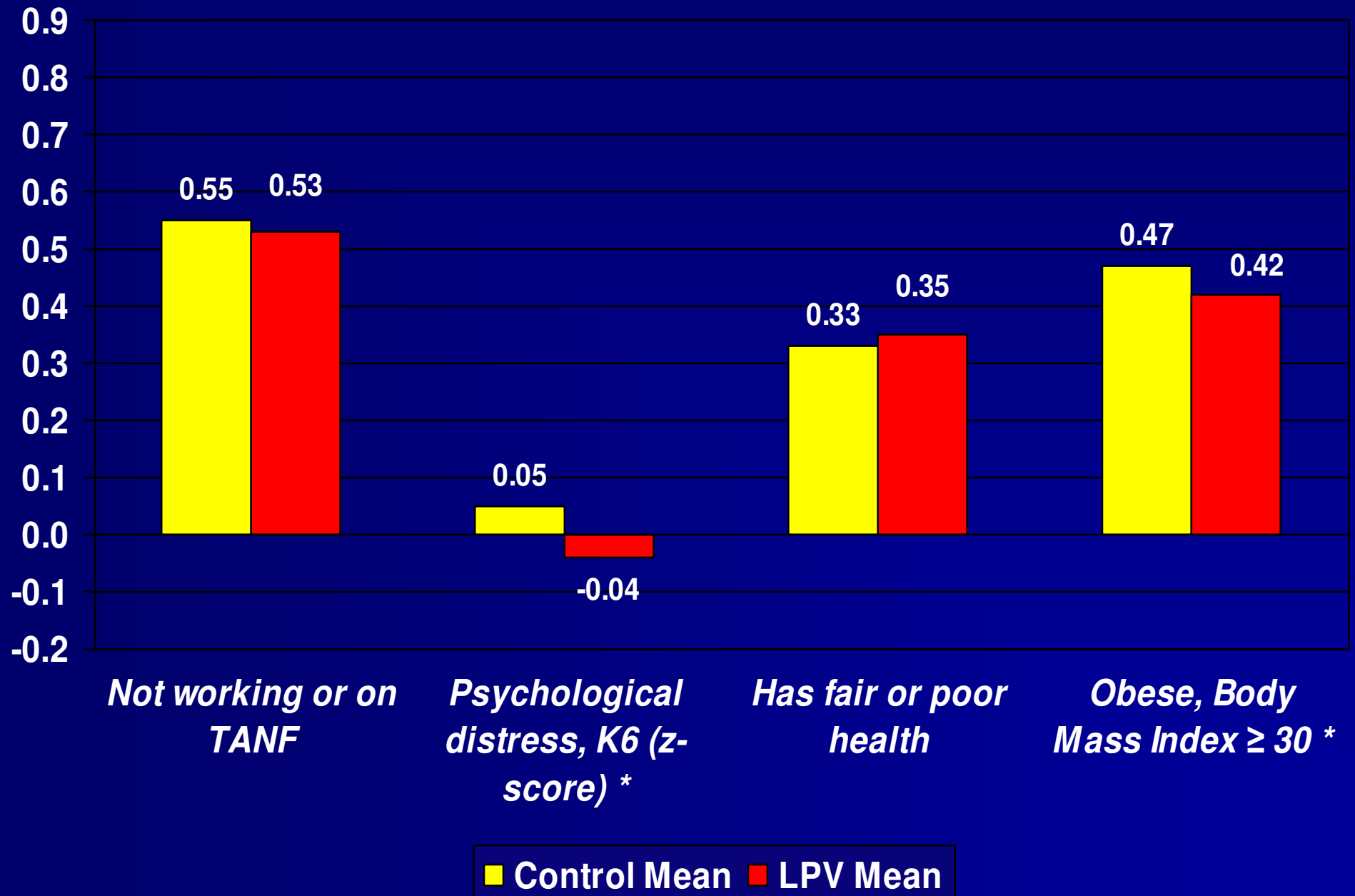
- **Qualitative Studies:** Popkin, Harris, and Cunningham; Also Edin, Clampet-Lundquist
- **Quantitative Study:**
  - Abt (Feins and Orr)
  - NBER (Kling, Liebman, Katz, Sanbonmatsu)
  - Also Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, Ludwig, Whitaker, Psaty
- **Surveys** of household heads, youth ages 12 to 19, and children ages 5 to 11
- **Administrative Data:** earnings, AFDC/TANF and Food Stamps; involvement with criminal justice system (Ludwig)

# MTO Interim: Improved Neighborhood Outcomes (ITT)



All differences in outcome levels between the LPV group and the control group are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

# MTO Interim: No effect on adult labor market outcomes but improved mental and physical health (ITT)



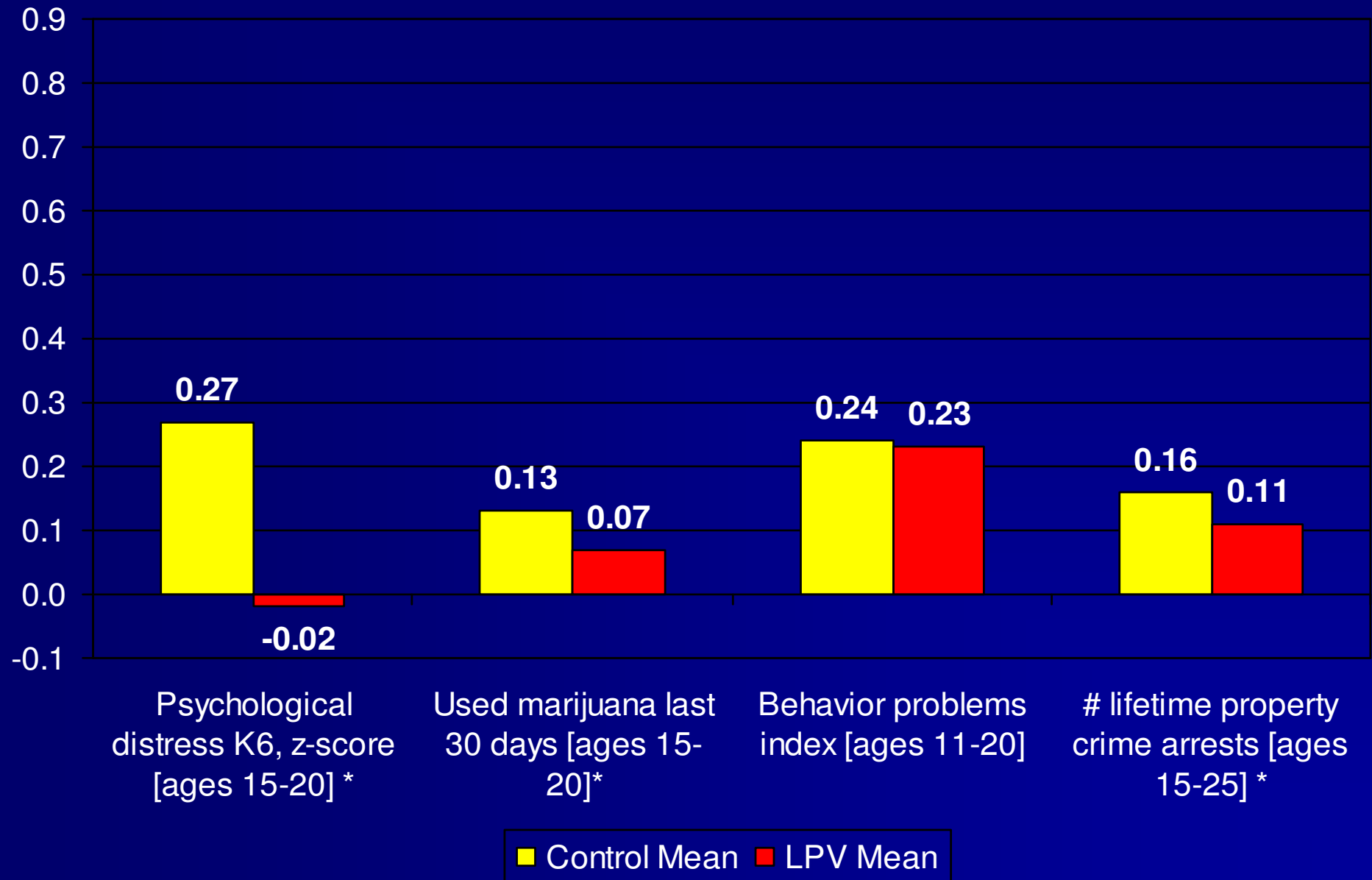
\* Difference in outcome levels between the LPV group and the control group is statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

# MTO Interim: No effect on youth achievement



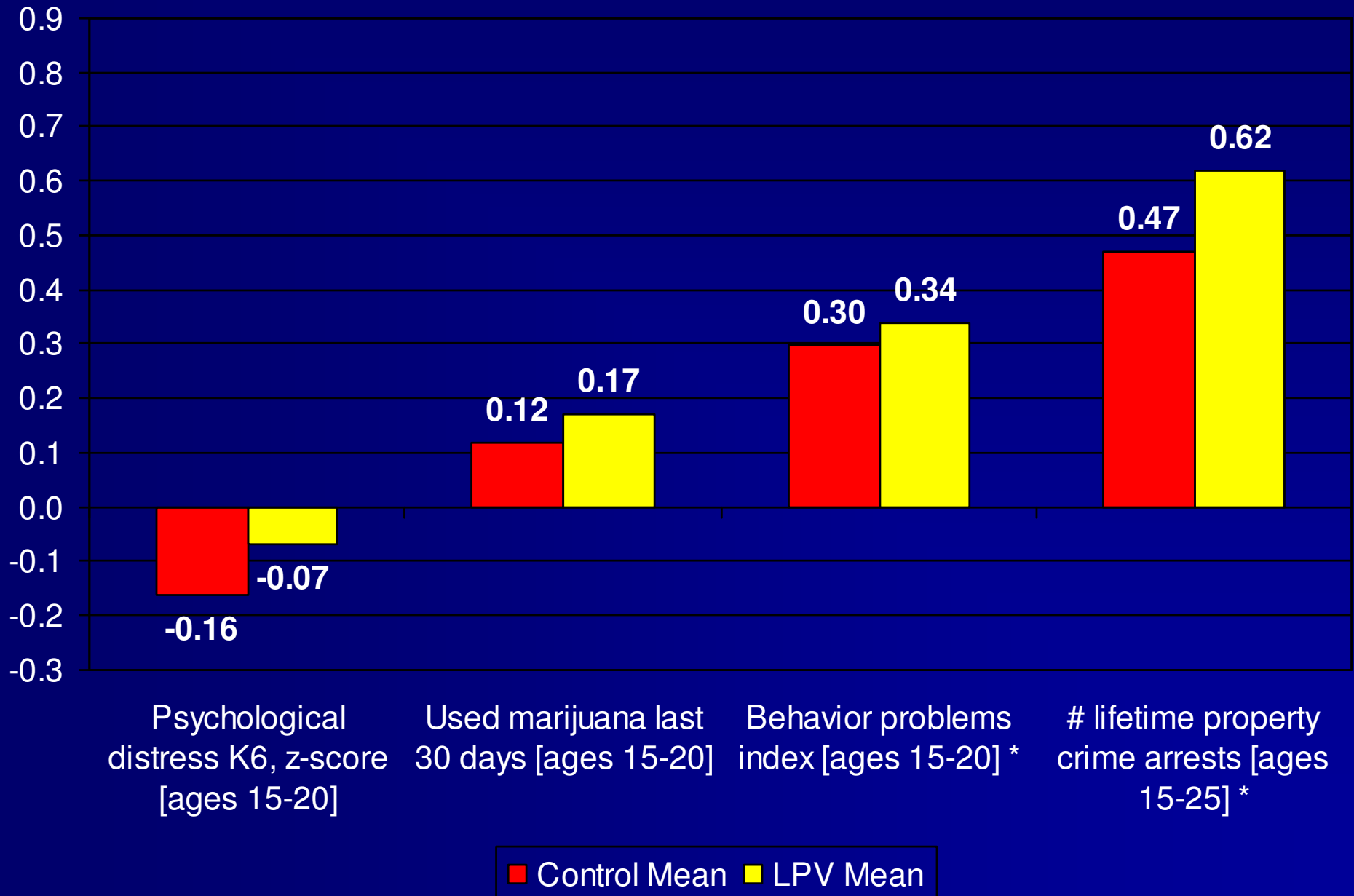
Graph displays Woodcock-Johnson Revised Scale Scores for MTO youth ages 6-20

# MTO Interim: Less psychological distress & fewer behavior problems for female teens (ITT)



\* Difference in outcome levels between the LPV group and the control group is statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

# MTO Interim: Increased risky behavior among male teens (ITT)



\* Difference in outcome levels between the LPV group and the control group is statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

# **Summary of MTO interim findings**

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**(and, by extension, moving to low poverty):**

- **improved housing**
- **increased safety**
- **lowered adult depression**
- **lowered rates of adult obesity**
- **was good for female teens**
- **was not so good for male teens**
- **had little effect on employment or income**
- **had little effect on children's achievement or schooling**

# **The MTO Final Evaluation: Measuring Impacts 10 to 12 years after random assignment**

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**The TEAM: National Bureau of Economic Research team: Lawrence Katz (PI), Jens Ludwig (project director), Greg Duncan, Lisa Gennetian, Ronald Kessler, Jeffrey Kling, Lisa Sanbonmatsu**

**Survey data collection by the Institute for Survey Research at University of Michigan, Nancy Gebler as project director**

**The FUNDERS: HUD, CDC, NSF, NICHD, NIMH, NIA, the Institute for Education Sciences; and, the MacArthur, Gates, Annie Casey, and Smith Richardson Foundations.**

# MTO Final Evaluation: Key Questions

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- What are the long term effects and how do these evolve over time?
- What are the long-term effects of MTO on those who were young children at baseline?
  - Children who grow up in low-poverty areas from infancy and early childhood can be expected to show greater effects than those who move at age 10 or 15.
- What are the mechanisms? Especially for youth by gender?
  - Hypotheses include: retaining social ties, reducing victimization, differences in institutional responses, parental investment, adaptation and decision making, role models

# MTO Final Evaluation Design

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- **Administrative data matching:** Unemployment Insurance, TANF/Food Stamp, Arrest and educational achievement data from state agencies, assisted housing receipt from HUD
- **Surveys** for female adult caregivers and youth aged 10 to 20 (as of December 2007)
- **Biometric data** for adults: height, weight, waist measurement, blood pressure and blood
- **Achievement assessments** for youth
- **Audio-taping** for language assessments
- **Interviewer observations** of residence & neighborhood

# MTO Final Evaluation Outcomes

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- **Education:** Includes reading & math achievement tests using assessments developed for ECLS-K
- **Employment**
- **Social program participation & income**
- **Mental and physical health (expansions)**
- **Risky / delinquent behavior**
- **Housing / neighborhood conditions**
- **Mediating measures (expansions)**
  - Try to better understand youth gender difference in MTO impacts
  - Learn more about neighborhood integration by class vs race

# MTO Final Evaluation: Timing

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- First survey pre-test in November 2007; Second survey pre-test with small sample of MTO families in February 2008
- Survey interviews from June 2008 to September 2009
- Administrative data agreements and matching happening now
- Reports and papers coming out in 2010 and 2011

# Why is MTO Important?

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- It has potentially significant policy implications, informing poverty de-concentration policies.
- It has broad general appeal: People want to know how important neighborhood is.
- It is a platform for contributing to scientific research on the causal influences of neighborhoods on children and families. **See**
  - [www.hudusers.org](http://www.hudusers.org)
  - [www.mtoresearch.org](http://www.mtoresearch.org)