

# Chicago joblessness and crime are connected, U of I report concludes

By Greg Hinz

There's a close connection between Chicago's high murder rate and its loss of industrial jobs, with African-American and to a lesser extent Latino men having trouble adapting to a now-dominant downtown service economy.

That's the bottom line of a fascinating new report being released on Monday that provides some answers to Chicago's troubles, even if, in my view, it gets a little too pat in drawing racial conclusions.

The report was written by the University of Illinois at Chicago's Great Cities Institute for the Alternative Schools Network. Officials including U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and other officials are to discuss it at a hearing called by the Chicago Urban League and other groups.

Overall, the report, using U.S. Census Bureau data, finds that there's been some recovery here from the great subprime recession. For instance, the percentage of blacks aged 16-19 that is working has risen from 9.6 percent in 2010 to 15 percent last year.

But the good news is limited, with nearly 4 in 10 young black adults aged 20 to 24 out



Photo by Brian Cassella/Chicago Tribune/TNS/Alamy Live News

of school and jobless, compared to a quarter nationwide, 39 percent versus 25 percent.

One chart in particular underlines what's happened.

In 1960, when Chicago's neighborhoods were filled with factory jobs, 22.3 percent of

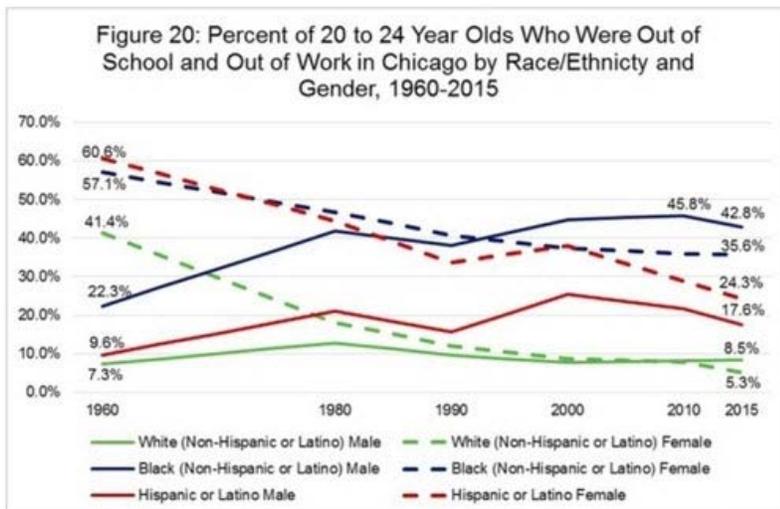
African-American men aged 20 to 24 neither held a job nor were in or finishing school. Figures among Latino and white men were somewhat higher, while most women of any race or ethnic background were out of the workforce, most likely being housewives.

By 2015, the nonworking/not-in-school figure for that age range had dropped among all groups except white men, where it held about constant, and Latino men, where it rose about eight percentage points. But among black men, the idleness figure doubled, going from 22.3 percent to 45.8 percent before dipping a little in 2015 to 42.8 percent.

In other words, joblessness and poverty have become more concentrated.

That at least partially explains, the report suggests, why just five neighborhoods — Austin, Englewood, New City, West Englewood and Grand Crossing — accounted for a third of the homicides citywide in 2016. Jobless rates among teens in those neighborhoods ranged from 79 percent to 91 percent.

“Joblessness among young people is tied



Data Source: 1960, 1980, 1990 and 2000 Decennial Censuses and 2010 and 2015 American Community Survey, public use files. Tabulations by Great Cities Institute, University of Illinois at Chicago.

to the emptying out of jobs from neighborhoods,” the report concludes. “In contrast, jobs (are) being centralized in Chicago’s downtown areas where whites are employed in professional and related services.”

In a statement, schools network Executive Director Jack Wuest goes even farther: “The best jobs are moving north and east, while black and Latino youth are locked into” other neighborhoods “It’s little wonder that so many of our youth succumb to the gangs.”

I’m not sure I buy that. Black men should be able to get jobs downtown just like whites and many Latino and black women.

Still, it’s fair to conclude that black men in particular have had trouble adopting to the loss of factory jobs, report co-author Matt Wilson told me. But it’s also fair to say that many African-Americans attend inferior schools, and some South Side areas do not have as good a connection to the Loop as the North Side.

Read the report and decide for yourself. But overall, I think it’s fair to conclude that it provides some solid evidence that gang violence and murder need an economic remedy, not just a policing one.

*Find the report at [www.asnchicago.org/youth-employment-hearing-2017](http://www.asnchicago.org/youth-employment-hearing-2017)*