

The Summer Employment Experiences and the Personal/Social Behaviors of Youth Violence Prevention Employment Program Participants and Those of a Comparison Group

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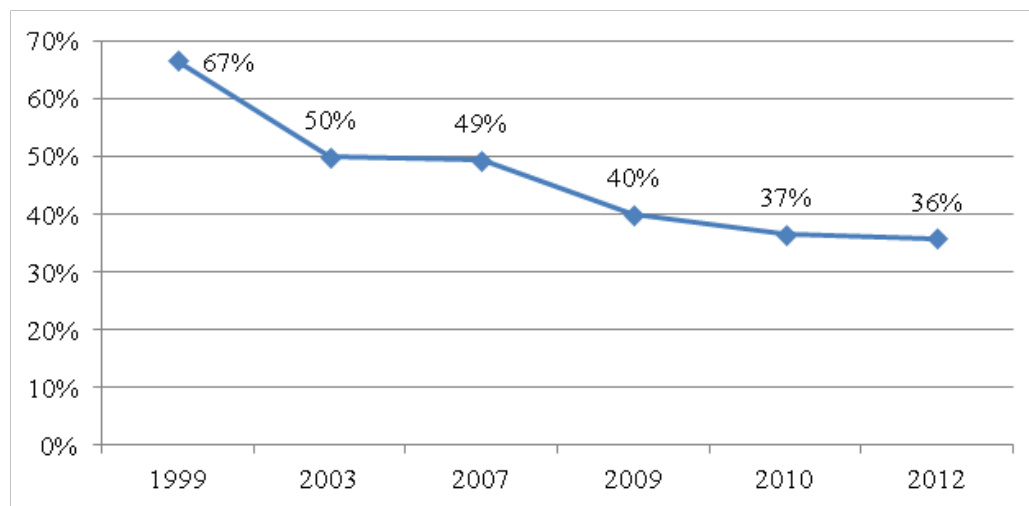
Thanks are due to the research assistance provided by Joseph Downey and Sheila Palma of the Center for Labor Market Studies, Midori Morikawa of Action for Boston Community Development, and Jonathan Rosenthal, Joseph McLaughlin, and Neil Sullivan of the Boston Private Industry Council. Portions of the research questions used in this study were originally developed by Dr. Gia Barboza of Northeastern University.

SECTION 1:

OVERVIEW

The summer job market for teens in both Massachusetts and the U.S. over the past five years has been quite depressed, with record low summer employment rates for the nation's teens being set in the past three years (2010-2012).¹ The teen summer employment rate in Massachusetts fell from 67% in 1999 to only 36% in 2012, a decline of 31 percentage points (Chart 1). Black and Hispanic teens, especially those residing in low income families and from high poverty neighborhoods, have experienced the greatest difficulties in finding employment in the summer. Lack of job opportunities reduces teens' exposure to the world of work and their ability to acquire both basic employability skills (attendance, team work, communicating with other workers and customers) and occupational skills. Being jobless all summer also increases their risk of social isolation (staying at home), hanging out on the street, and exposure to or participation in urban violence and delinquent behavior.

Chart 1: Trends in the Teen (16-19) Summer Employment Rate in Massachusetts, 1999-2012



To address these job deficit problems and provide positive summer activities for youth 14 to 24 years old in low income neighborhoods of Boston, the Youth Violence Prevention Funder Learning Collaborative ("the YVP Collaborative") has funded meaningful employment opportunities for each of the past three summers, 2010-2012. The YVP youth employment initiative has focused on youth residing or attending school within census tracts in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan that have been identified by the Boston Police Department as having a high number of fatal and non-fatal shootings. Based on insights and research from the first two summers (2010-2011), the YVP Collaborative defines a meaningful employment opportunity as a paid work experience with quality supervision, a well-designed learning plan, and connections to supportive services, particularly positive youth development and mentoring activities.²

Over 420 YVP summer employment program participants, who worked in various non-profit and government agencies and a few private sector firms,³ were tracked in this research study. To facilitate an analysis of the impacts of the YVP summer employment programs, a comparison group was identified that included 192 eligible applicants from the Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) waiting list who applied for but were not assigned a subsidized summer job through ABCD.

The purpose of this research was to study employment outcomes for YVP program participants and comparison group members, the quality of their workplace experiences,

and the impacts of the YVP summer employment program on personal and social behaviors that correlate with youth violence and exposure to violence. This study and previous evaluations of the YVP employment programs strived to answer the following question: Does meaningful summer employment reduce Boston economically disadvantaged youths' involvement in risky, violent, and delinquent behaviors while increasing their job skills, career aspirations, and positive social and community behaviors?⁴

In this study, we tracked and analyzed the employment experiences and personal / social behaviors of YVP program participants and those of the comparison group of youth over the course of the 2012 summer. Key findings include the following:

- The net job creation effects of the YVP summer employment program appear to be quite high. While all of the YVP program participants received subsidized employment, only 27 percent of the comparison group members obtained some employment during the summer. Most of the comparison group members who obtained employment worked limited hours (under 20) in private sector jobs.
- YVP program participants rated the overall quality of their subsidized work experiences quite high and the vast majority found their supervisors to be extremely or very supportive. Many YVP program participants engaged in work activities that helped them build occupational skills and various soft skills, which many employers find lacking in teen job applicants. Almost all of the participants rated their overall summer experience as being very good or somewhat good, and 92% of them said they would take the same summer job next year if it were offered to them.
- Our analysis of changes in the personal and social behaviors of both YVP summer employment program participants and comparison group members over the summer revealed that program participants almost always fared better than their comparison group counterparts, most of whom remained jobless during the summer.
- Program participants were significantly more likely than their comparison group peers to experience an improvement in risky, deviant, or violent behaviors or to avoid a deterioration in such behaviors over the summer. Program participants showed improvement in 19 of the 22 areas examined, 13 of which were statistically significant. Comparison group members experienced improvement in only 3 of the 22 areas, only one of which was statistically significant. Comparison group members also experienced a deterioration in behavior in 19 of the 22 areas, 9 of which were statistically significant.
- The biggest differences in statistically significant behavior change between the program participants and comparison group involved using alcohol, selling or using illegal drugs, not listening to one's parents, teachers or supervisors, spreading false rumors or lies about others, and picking on others by chasing them.
- Statistically significant behavior change among the program participants was also found in the following areas: involved in a physical fight during the past 30 days, attacked or threatened someone with a weapon other than a gun, and damaged or destroyed someone else's property.

These research findings indicate that meaningful employment opportunities can help reduce violent, risky, and adverse social behaviors among economically disadvantaged youth from Boston's high crime neighborhoods during the summer months and prepare them for future employment and academic experiences.

SECTION 2:

ABOUT THE STUDY

In 2012, the YVP Collaborative partnered with the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University to evaluate the 2012 YVP summer employment program. A set of entry and follow-up surveys were administered to YVP summer employment program participants to improve our understanding of their summer job experiences and their personal / social behaviors over the summer.

Specifically, the survey questionnaires collected information on the demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds of program participants, the characteristics of the jobs they held, the type of work activities in which they engaged, their ratings of the quality of their job experience and supervision, their willingness to accept these jobs next summer, and their behaviors in a variety of areas, including risky, deviant, delinquent, and violent behaviors, and their exposure to various types of urban violence (getting punched, kicked, choked or being attacked with a weapon other than a gun). The information from the entry and exit surveys was combined to estimate changes in these behaviors and exposure to violent behaviors over the course of the summer.

To improve our understanding of the impacts of the YVP summer program on the employment and personal / social behaviors of program participants, a comparison group of youth summer job applicants was identified. These applicants were eligible for Action for Boston Community Development's (ABCD) summer jobs program, but did not receive a job through the program. They were free to seek other employment including jobs in other summer programs for teens. They were selected for interviewing shortly after the jobs program began and at the end of the summer jobs program.

Information was collected on the comparison group's employment experiences during the summer and at the time of the follow-up interview at the end of the summer. The survey questionnaire included the same questions on personal and social behavior that were asked of participants in the summer jobs program. A comparative side by side assessment of the numbers of net positive and negative outcomes for both groups was prepared, together with findings of a comprehensive set of multivariate statistical analyses of the estimated independent impacts of being a YVP summer employment program participant on selected deviant, delinquent, and violent behaviors.

SECTION 3:

KEY FINDINGS

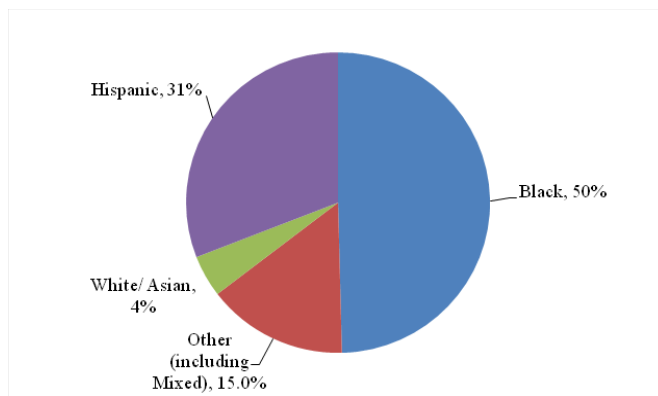
The Center for Labor Market Studies prepared a series of research papers on the summer job experiences and personal / social behaviors of both program participants and comparison group members with the assistance of both ABCD and Boston Private Industry Council staff. This research report is designed to provide an overview of the major findings from the three research papers with a focus on the employment and behavioral experiences of the program participants, the comparison group, and comparisons of key differences between the outcomes for the two groups, including tests of their statistical significance. The main findings by topic area include:

YVP Program Participants and Their Summer Employment Characteristics

- A total of 421 summer employment program participants were chosen for the study. The group was fairly evenly divided between men (52%) and women (48%), 30% were 14-15 years old, another 27% were between 16 and 17, and the remaining 43% were 18 or older.

- A substantial majority of the program participants were either Black or Hispanic, reflecting the race-ethnic composition of the eligible population in the neighborhoods served by the program (Chart 2). Only 1 in 4 of these participants had graduated from high school by the time of the initial interview with the balance still enrolled in high school. Only 18% were living with both parents. The vast majority (95%) were residents of Dorchester, Mattapan, or Roxbury.

Chart 2: The Race-Ethnic Distribution of YVP Summer Employment Program Participants at the Time of the Initial Interview (in %)

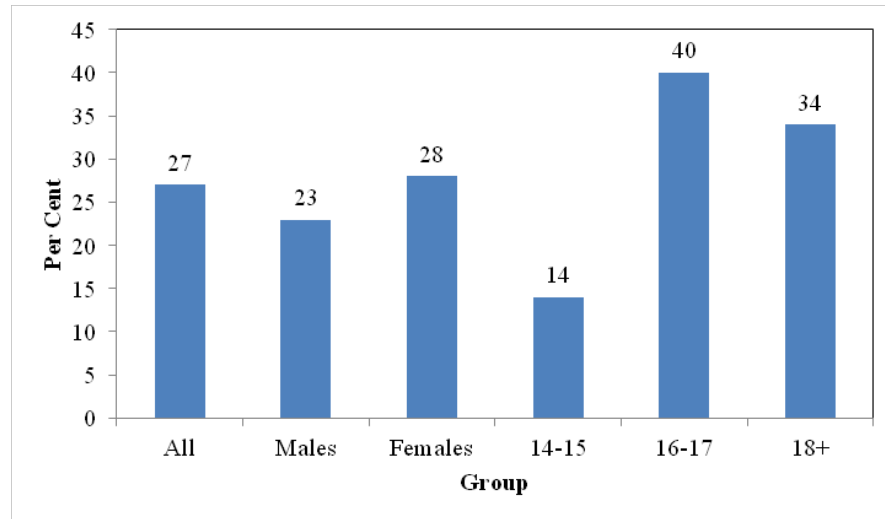


- The overwhelming majority (70%) of the jobs held by YVP summer employment participants were in non-profit agencies in the professional, technical and social services industries, primarily in child care, day care, family care, health care and social services for children and adults. Another 15% were in entertainment and recreation industries, including summer camps, hotels, and other services. Approximately 9 of 10 participants occupied jobs as service workers or administrative support / clerical workers. Fewer than 10% held blue collar jobs as construction helpers, landscapers, or handlers / laborers. A high fraction of the male respondents (25%) expressed an interest in working in mid-skills jobs in construction / manufacturing in the the future.

The Comparison Group and Their Summer Employment Outcomes

- The program staff members at ABCD were able to obtain completed initial surveys with 192 of the youth that were originally assigned to the comparison group in the early part of the summer and follow-up surveys with 166 of them. The ages of these individuals ranged from 14 to 22 years old; however, a relatively high fraction (47%) was in the 14-15 age range while 30% were 18 or older. The respondents were members of diverse race-ethnic groups.
- Although the comparison group members were free to find jobs on their own or through other subsidized employment programs, only 27 percent reported some summer employment at the time of the follow-up interviews. Thus, more than 70 percent remained jobless during the entire summer. Employment ratios were higher for females than for males, and for older teens (16-17) than for younger teens (14-15).

Chart 3: Percent of Comparison Group Members Who Were Employed at Some Point During the Summer, All and by Gender and Age Group



- Many of the summer jobs obtained by the comparison group offered limited hours and weeks of employment. Nearly 30% worked for 10 or fewer hours per week, and 50% worked under 20 hours per week. The average employed member of the comparison group worked less than 6 weeks.

Net Job Creation Effects and Fall Employment Rates

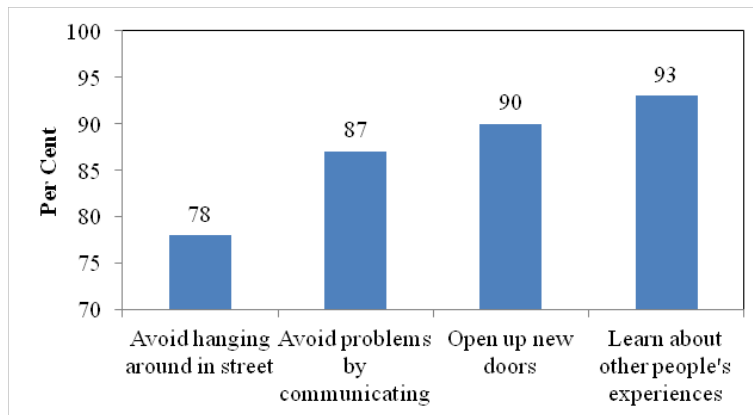
- While 27% of the comparison group found some employment, nearly 1 in 4 of the employed reported working in an agency that received public or private funding to create summer jobs. Thus, only 1 of 5 members of the comparison group was successful in obtaining an unsubsidized job during the summer. The net job creation effects of the summer program appeared to be quite high.
- At the time of the exit interviews, 35% of the participants in the summer jobs program reported that they had a job lined up after the program ended. In contrast, only 17% of the comparison group reported any employment at the time of the follow-up interview in the late summer / early fall. The best predictors of their employment status were their work status during the summer months. Path dependency in teen employment is quite high for all groups of youth. Work today leads to a higher probability of work tomorrow.
- One-half of the comparison group reported that they were jobless but actively looking for work at the time of the follow-up survey, yielding an unemployment rate of 75%. Many members of the participant group (69%) also reported being unemployed at the time of the exit interviews. Both groups could benefit from active job placement assistance in securing employment upon the end of the summer.

YVP Summer Employment Program Participants' Activities and Their Assessments of Work and Program Experiences

- A majority or near majority of program participants indicated that on their job they met new people that would help them move forward in life (62%), learned how to help solve problems (52%), got trained in a new skill area (49%), and helped to come up with ideas to assist their agency in performing better (49%).

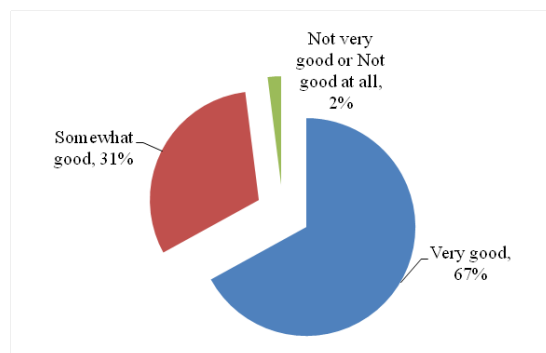
- Most program participants reported that the summer program helped open up new doors for the future (90%), helped them learn about other people's experiences (93%), and helped them avoid simply hanging out in the street all summer (78%).

Chart 4: Percent of YVP Summer Employment Program Participants Reporting Various Types of Help Received From the Program



- Nearly all participants (97%) responded that they had a regular worksite supervisor, and a very high percentage (75%) rated their supervisors as either extremely supportive or very supportive in helping them do their jobs. Only 4% of the participants rated their supervisor as not being very supportive or not supportive at all in performing their job. The higher the rating of the job site supervisor, the more likely a participant was to rate his/her summer work experience as favorable. Almost all (98%) of the participants rated their overall summer experience as very good or somewhat good (Chart 5). Each gender and race-ethnic group gave very high ratings to their summer work experience (94% to 100%)

Chart 5: YVP Summer Employment Program Participants' Views on the Quality of Their Work Experiences, 2012



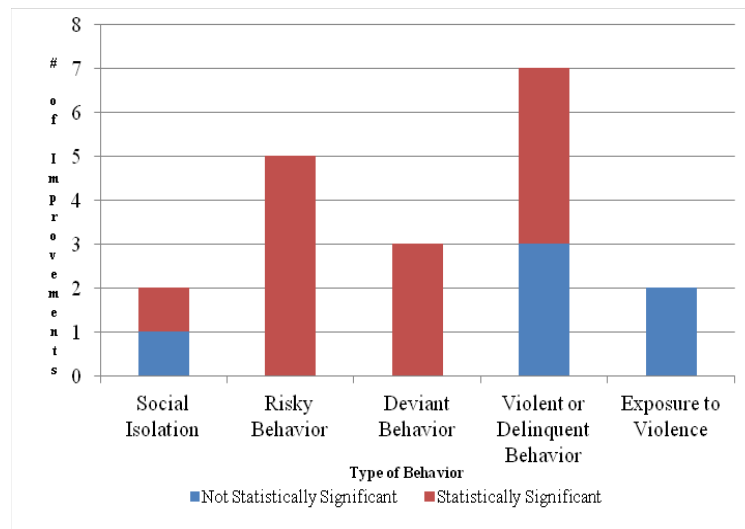
- A very high share of summer program participants (92%) said they would take the same summer job next year if it were offered to them. Over 90% of the members of each gender and race-ethnic group said that they would do so. The willingness of participants to accept the same summer job was significantly and positively linked to their overall rating of the quality of their summer work experience.

- When asked how they spent their summer pay checks, the most frequent response by participants was buying clothes, shoes, or other personal items (68%). However, more than 60 of every 100 participants reported giving money to their mother or father, and 17% gave money to other relatives. Almost half of the participants responded that they put part of their money in savings accounts, and 40% used their income to buy school supplies. Only 3% admitted that they used part of their incomes to buy illegal substances.

Changes in the Personal and Social Behaviors of YVP Program Participants and the Comparison Group Over the Course of the 2012 Summer

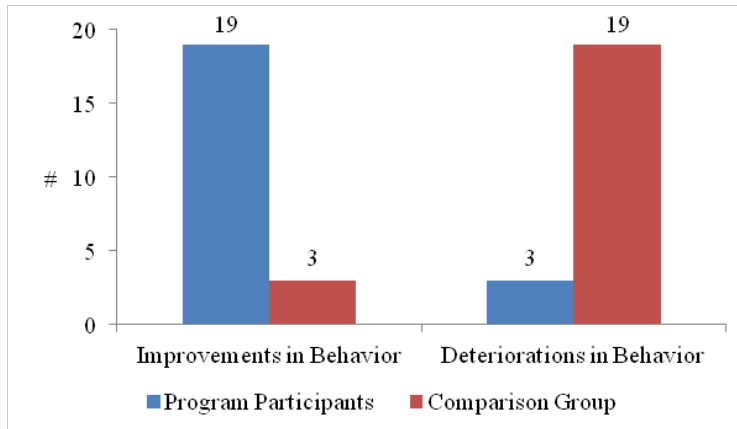
- Among YVP program participants, net improvements in behavior over the course of the summer took place in 19 of the 22 areas examined (social isolation, risky, deviant, delinquent, and violent behaviors). Thirteen of these 19 changes (primarily in violent or delinquent behavior) were large enough to be classified as statistically significant. The biggest changes in these two areas were typically largest for men. Among the comparison group, net improvements in behavior took place in only 3 areas over the course of the summers, and only 1 of these changes was large enough to be categorized as statistically significant (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Number of Measures in Which YVP Summer Employment Program Participants' Experienced Improvements in Behavior by Type of Behavior and Statistical Significance of the Changes Between the Initial and Follow-up Interviews



- Of the 22 behaviors measured, summer program participants experienced a net deterioration in behavior in only 3 areas, none of which was large enough to be classified as statistically significant. Comparison group members experienced a deterioration in behavior in 19 areas, 9 of which were statistically significant (Chart 7).
- On not one measure of net positive behavior change did the comparison group significantly outperform the program participants. On 12 of the 22 measures of net behavior change, the program participants exceeded the comparison group by five percentage points or more and on four measures by ten or more percentage points.

Chart 7: Comparisons of the Number of Measures in Which YVP Program Participants and Comparison Group Members Obtained a Net Improvement or Deterioration in Behavior Over the Summer (22 Total Measures)



- The participants did not experience any significant change in their exposure to four forms of urban violence during the summer. The comparison group only experienced a statistically negative change in one area (being shown a gun by others in their neighborhood).
- The biggest differences in statistically significant behavior change between the program participants and comparison group involved:
 - using alcohol;
 - selling or using illegal drugs;
 - not listening to one’s parents, teachers or supervisors;
 - spreading false rumors or lies about others; and
 - picking on others by chasing them.
- Statistically significant behavior change among the program participants was also found in the following areas:
 - been involved in a physical fight during the past 30 days;
 - attacked or threatened someone with a weapon other than a gun; and
 - damaged or destroyed someone else’s property.

- 1) For recent evidence on this issue, See: Andrew Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, and Walter McHugh, *The Dismal State of the Nation's Teen Summer Job Market, 2008-2011 and the Outlook for the Summer of 2012*, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, May 2012.
- 2) See: <http://www.bostonyvpfunders.org/>.
- 3) The YVP program participants were placed in meaningful employment opportunities by six local programs and intermediaries, including Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), Boston Youth Fund (BYF), GOTCHA Youth Jobs, StreetSafe Boston, and Youth Options Unlimited (YOU).
- 4) During 2010 and 2011, the YVP Collaborative conducted community based research studies to understand the effects of youth employment on violent behaviors and other personal/ social behaviors that are predictors of violent behavior. This earlier research informed the YVP Collaborative's definition and concept of meaningful employment. Portions of the original research questionnaire developed by Dr. Gia Barboza at Northeastern University were used in this new evaluation.
- 5) The group of eligible applicants was supposed to have been randomly assigned to a control group by ABCD. Since several of the demographic characteristics of the control group differed from those of the participants in a number of significant ways, we refer to this group as a comparison group rather than a true control group.
- 6) The Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University prepared the following three reports for The Boston Private Industry Council and the Youth Violence Prevention Funder Learning Collaborative, See:
 - (i) *The Summer 2012 Jobs Program for At-Risk Youth in High Poverty Neighborhoods of Boston: An Overview and Assessment of Program Operations, the Work Experiences of Participants, their Perceptions of Program Benefits, and Changes in the Social Behaviors of Youth*, February 2013;
 - (ii) *The Employment Experiences and the Personal and Social Behaviors of the Comparison Group of Boston Teens and Young Adults During and After the Summer of 2012*, February 2013; and
 - (iii) *A Comparison and Assessment of the Summer Employment Experiences and the Deviant/Delinquent/Risky/Violent Behaviors of Summer Jobs Program Participants and Members of the Comparison Group*, March 2013.
- 7) A net improvement implies that the per cent of respondents reporting an improvement in behavior exceeded the percent with a deterioration in behavior.

The full research paper is available on The Boston Private Industry Council's website (<http://www.bostonpic.org/research>) and the Center for Labor Market Studies' website (<http://www.northeastern.edu/clms/publications/>).

The Center for Labor Market Studies also prepared three background research reports on 2012 YVP program participants and program operations, the employment experiences and behaviors of comparison group members, and a comparative assessment of the employment experiences and behaviors of both groups. These three research papers are available on the Center for Labor Market Studies' website. The titles of the three papers are the following:

- (i) The Summer 2012 Jobs Program for At-Risk Youth in High Poverty Neighborhoods of Boston: An Overview and Assessment of Program Operations, the Work Experiences of Participants, their Perceptions of Program Benefits, and Changes in the Social Behaviors of Youth, February 2013;
- (ii) The Employment Experiences and the Personal and Social Behaviors of the Comparison Group of Boston Teens and Young Adults During and After the Summer of 2012, February 2013; and
- (iii) A Comparison and Assessment of the Summer Employment Experiences and the Deviant/Delinquent/Risky/Violent Behaviors of Summer Jobs Program Participants and Members of the Comparison Group, March 2013.

