

Advancing Scholarship

Celebrating
10
Years

USC Price
*Sol Price Center for
Social Innovation*

The USC Price Center for Social Innovation brings an interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to social innovation research. In 2020, Gary Painter, Christine Beckman, and Jovanna Rosen advanced a new definition of social innovation: “*Social innovation is an iterative, inclusive process that intends to generate more effective and just solutions to solve complex social problems.*” Using this framework, Price Center researchers conduct research in the following topical areas: housing instability, criminal justice, education, inequality, and social innovation as its own distinct field of academic inquiry.

Strategic Research Areas

HOUSING INSTABILITY

Housing stability is one of the most critical policy issues of our time, and traditional policy levers have failed to catalyze the change needed to provide safe, affordable housing for all populations. The Price Center conducts a wide range of research to improve housing stability through a community-driven process of piloting and testing new practices, bringing them to scale, and ultimately diffusing those practices into systems change.

Recent Work

How do Renters Cope with Unaffordability?

Household-Level Impacts of Rental Cost

Burdens in Los Angeles

Authors: Jovanna Rosen, Sean Angst, Soledad De Gregorio, and Gary Painter

The Los Angeles region faces a deep and worsening housing affordability crisis. Price Center Researchers conducted an in-person, door-to-door survey of 800 Los Angeles renter households to better understand the impacts of the housing affordability crisis in our region. The project aimed to understand how rental affordability operates, uncovering how it impacts residents in Los Angeles specifically, and how its effects differ across populations. Surveys were conducted during 2019, in Spanish and English, across the Los Angeles Promise Zone (LAPZ), in Central Los Angeles, and the South Los Angeles Promise Zone (SLATE-Z).

Key Findings

Survey results suggest that high rents may force Los Angeles households to cut back on critical basic needs in impactful and lasting ways, the effects of which differ across groups and places.

- 73% of households were rent-burdened, spending over 30% of household income on rent and utilities. 48% were severely rent-burdened, spending over 50% of household income on rent and utilities.
- A majority of households have cut back their consumption of basic needs over the past two years in order to afford rent, including food, clothing, and entertainment and family activities. Many have acquired more debt as well. Rent-burdened households were more likely to have made cutbacks on food, clothing, and transportation than non-rent-burdened households.
- One in five respondents reported being unable to pay for an unexpected \$400 expense, with rent-burdened households less likely to be able to pay.



CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Nationally, one in three Americans have a criminal record, and by extension, face lifelong barriers to employment and economic mobility for themselves as well as for their families¹. The Price Center conducts a range of research to develop, scale, and diffuse new models to build a more inclusive workforce for justice-involved individuals, which focus on young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who have been involved in the justice system and as a result are not in school and not working.

Recent Work

Accelerating Fair Chance Hiring with LeadersUp

Authors: Victoria Ciudad-Real, Kalen Cornelius, Juliana Vidal, Carolina Bhalla, Gary Painter, and John Roberson III

With support from the California Workforce Accelerator Fund program, the USC Price Center partnered with LeadersUp, a national nonprofit focused on ending the youth unemployment crisis, to launch the Accelerating Fair Chance Project during the spring of 2019. The goal of this project was to address unemployment among young people who have been involved in the justice system by identifying employer-led solutions. Through leveraging the expertise of employers and adapting a Design Thinking Model, this project engaged employers in an iterative, collaborative process to reimagine new hiring structures that expand employment opportunities for justice-involved individuals.

The project resulted in a January 2021 report detailing findings from the Fair Chance project's survey, innovation lab sessions, and employer engagement conducted in 2019 and 2020, highlighting both current opportunities and challenges that employers face to expand employment opportunities for justice-involved individuals. The researchers also established an Employer Framework for corporations to identify and develop Fair Chance hiring strategies that align with their unique structures and needs.

Key Findings

- Despite various Fair Chance hiring laws and employer support for the concept of hiring justice-involved youth, inclusive hiring practices are not yet widely adopted.
- Hiring practices, including outreach and interviewing, vary widely depending on the company. Any intervention should consider these differences and be tailored to meet the specific company's unique structure.
- Hiring opportunities for justice-involved youth are further limited by compounding issues such as widespread stigma, skill-matching, and employer education on the nature of justice involvement.
- Adopting a Design Thinking approach can help leverage employer expertise and identify new hiring strategies to include justice-involved youth in talent acquisition processes.



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¹ Brame, R., Turner, M. G., Paternoster, R., & Bushway, S. D. (2012). Cumulative Prevalence of Arrest From Ages 8 to 23 in a National Sample. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), 21–27. doi: 10.1542/peds.2010-3710



EDUCATION

Despite decades of traditional policy approaches to closing the achievement gap, disparities in educational attainment still exist by race and socioeconomic circumstances. The Price Center conducts research to develop, scale, and diffuse new models and processes to improve educational attainment across all grade levels, including postsecondary education.

Recent Work

Evaluating the Emergency Aid Programs at USC and Los Angeles Community College District

Hilary Olson, Kalen Cornelious, Riley Carbonneau, Victoria Ciudad-Real, Jovanna Rosen, Cynthia Barboza-Wilkes, Hannah Lee, and Gary Painter

Emergency aid programs intend to reduce the vulnerability of low-income students for whom the inability to afford necessary expenses can threaten the successful completion of their degrees. The Leonetti/O'Connell Family Foundation established emergency aid programs at USC and the Los Angeles Community College District in 2019. Both programs provide cash assistance to students experiencing financial hardships with the goal of alleviating external stressors in order to improve educational outcomes.

The Price Center evaluated the success of these programs by utilizing administrative data and interviews with programs recipients to understand the impact of the aid on students' lives.

Key Findings

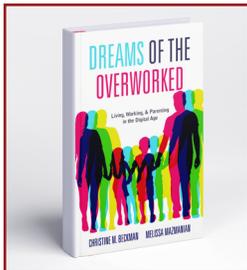
- The main impacts of receiving emergency aid for students were reduced stress and a greater ability to focus on school.
- Across both campuses, COVID exacerbated existing financial insecurities, most commonly due to negative job impacts.
- If interviewee demographics are representative, the programs are being particularly used by Hispanic, Black, and Asian students; female students; and students with fairly high GPAs. The programs also appear to be an important resource to undocumented students, graduating seniors, and graduate students, who typically struggle to obtain financial support from other sources.



INEQUALITY

Despite a number of traditional policy and legislative attempts to reduce inequality in the United States, far too many individuals are adversely affected by racial inequality, segregation, economic and wealth inequality, gender disparities, and other systemic barriers that prevent individuals from reaching their full potential. The Price Center conducts a wide range of research to address inequality across multiple spaces and policy areas in the United States and abroad.

Recent Work



Dreams of the Overworked: Living, Working, and Parenting in the Digital Age

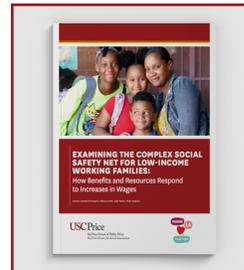
*Authors: Christine M. Beckman
and Melissa Mazmanian*

Price Family Chair in Social
Innovation and Associate Director

Dr. Christine Beckman co-authored *Dreams of the Overworked*, an ethnographic account of working parents' efforts to be ideal workers, perfect parents, and ultimate bodies. The book highlights how technology intensifies these myths of perfection, celebrates the people who actually do the work of scaffolding the dreams of those around them, and reveals the hidden sources of gender inequality in everyday life.

As a result, Dr. Beckman has been featured in [WBUR](#), the [New York Times](#), and more discussing the ideals many parents pursue and the impacts of technology, positive and negative, on this struggle.

She tells WBUR, “Doing any one of these things to our aspirations is nearly impossible. Work, debt demands are always escalating. Parenting demands are a bit unreasonable, we might say, and so these working parents are always trying to juggle and trying to achieve on these three dimensions.”



Examining the Complex Social Safety Net For Low-Income Working Families: How Benefits and Resources Respond to Increases in Wages

*Authors: Soledad de Gregorio,
Rebecca Smith, Gary Painter,
and Molly Creighton*

The United States social safety net aims to improve the lives of the lowest-income families and individuals. As the term “social safety net” implies, the goal is to provide a support system that “catches” families as they fall into poverty but still encourages work. The assortment of non-contributory assistance programs — in-kind and cash transfer programs — has grown and become more complex over the years, and families and case managers often face challenges in navigating through them. The Price Center partnered with Imagine LA to understand the total resources families have available and identify the threshold points where the safety net may actually become a barrier towards economic independence.

Key Findings

- Overall, the research finds that for most families, as earned income increases, there are long resource plateaus.
- Only families whose incomes fall extremely low and receive both childcare and housing assistance are caught by the safety net and can cover necessary living expenses.
- Navigating the safety net is complicated.
- The safety net is particularly supportive for families with young children.



SOCIAL INNOVATION

Recent Work

Social Impact Bonds 2.0

The complexity of social problems, paired with constrained public resources, requires social innovators to identify new approaches for financing the delivery of social services. Social impact bonds (SIBs), which launched approximately ten years ago, offer one such financing mechanism and are also referred to as Pay for Success (PFS). PFS is an innovative approach to contracting social services that ties payments for service delivery to the achievement of a predetermined, measurable outcome.

In the fall of 2019, the Price Center for Social Innovation launched its partnership with the [Policy Evaluation and Research Unit \(PERU\)](#) at Manchester Metropolitan University. In 2018, Price Center Director Gary Painter co-authored a book titled *Payment by Results and Social Impact Bonds: Outcome-based payment systems in the UK and US*, published by Policy Press. More recently, the partnership produced a series of briefs focusing on an important breadth of topics:

- [Social Impact Bonds 2.0: The First Ten Years, The Next Ten Years](#)
- [Fresh Strategy is Needed for Economic and Social “Recovery”](#)
- [Can Impact Bonds Help to Cure “Social Long COVID”?](#)
- [Outcomes Partnerships Offer Rare Combination of Three Blessings](#)
- [Social Impact Bonds 2.0?: Findings from a Study of Four UK SIBs](#)
- [People Deserve Better—That’s the Key Point about SIBs](#)
- [China Watches Neighbours Develop Home-Grown SIBs for Well-Being and Innovation](#)
- [SIBs Growth in Europe May Reflect Politics and Lack of Accountability](#)
- [SIBs Could Propel Recovery and Tackle Pandemic Inequities](#)
- [Pandemic Shows Risks of Extreme Events to SIB Beneficiaries](#)

