

Housing dissatisfaction, the wish to move, and actual attempts to find a new home were studied in relation to actual moves by elderly slum dwellers over the following two years. While it was the better-off older person who seemed to want to move, who actually did move could not be predicted by any personal characteristics other than actually having tried to find a new home. This unpredictability is interpreted as evidence for a lack of control over one's own behavior which is typical of the disenfranchised older city dweller.

The Inner-City Resident: To Move or Not to Move¹

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Relocation of older people has a very bad name. The enforced transfer of institutional populations, dislocation consequent to urban renewal and highway construction, and the process of institutionalization itself have furnished hard data attesting to negative consequences of many kinds. However, there have occasionally been suggestions of a "positive relocation effect" if we can give this interpretation to the less-than-expected death rates found among the physically healthier relocatees reported on by Goldfarb, Shahinian, and Burr (1973) and particular age-sex groups of Markus, Blenkner, Bloom, and Downs (1971). Most research has been devoted to the study of relatively vulnerable people being relocated under some degree of compulsion. On the other hand, every year around two million older people change residence under conditions that are frequently quite different from these stressful special cases. The consensus from several studies of the impact of planned age-segregated housing is that this sort of environmental change has favorable social and psychological consequences for many people. By far the greatest number of changes of residence come from older individuals and families moving from one community residence to another. Some of these moves undoubtedly have favorable consequences. There are, good-

ness knows, enough bad places to get out of. There are also older people with both the personal resources and economic means to be successful in the attempt to better their conditions with a voluntary move. Surprisingly, we have almost no information about why unprogrammed moves occur and literally none about the differential consequences associated with different reasons for moving, individual differences among movers, or the characteristics of the new residence. We would, in fact, like to suggest to people now involved in longitudinal research that exploratory research in this area would be both rewarding and relatively easy to build into an existing project.

Lenzer (1965), using 1960 census data, characterized the older population as being moving considerably less than the general United States population. A full 50% of the population at large had moved during the period 1955-1960, compared to only 30% of those 65 and over. Only by age 80 and above (probably due to the heightened probability by that age of changes in health and household composition) was there a slight increase in residential change with age. About 10% of the elderly population moves in the course of a year, on the average.

Generally, most moves are relatively local. Less than half as many elderly (4%) moved from one state to another between 1955 and 1960, compared with the general population. While net gains in the number of elderly (i.e., subtract-

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ing the out-movers) were registered by Florida, California, Arizona, and Texas, these states also experienced gains in their populations of other age groups as well. Therefore, there is no major flood of older people moving so as to grossly change the age composition of any state.

Higher mobility has been noted among the unemployed, the low-income, the less well educated, the renter, the not-presently married, the household member who is not a head (or spouse of a head), and those with earlier histories of mobility (Goldscheider, Van Arsdol, & Sabagh, n.d.).

Other than these correlations between demographic characteristics and mobility, little is known about other details of moving, such as reasons for moves, planning for move, and responses to the anticipation or the fact of moving.

Since the really major disruptions may have lethal consequences, it seems appropriate to ask whether other less dislocating types of moves also have psychological or behavioral consequences. The only prospective study to examine the outcome of people's moves in light of information gathered prior to the move was done by

Goldscheider et al. (n.d.). At the time of the first interview, older people were less likely either to have plans to move or to wish to move. Twelve months later, their reinterviews of the same population determined that 61% of the younger people who wished and planned to move actually did so, compared to only 37% of the elderly. In another report from this study, Goldscheider (1966) found that while non-whites wished to move more often than whites, they were successful in doing so only one-third as frequently as whites. These studies showed a high degree of achieved stability among those who wished to stay where they were and had no plans to move—90%.

Reasons for Goldscheider's subjects wishing to move were primarily because of their dissatisfaction with their neighborhood or domicile. This contrasts with reasons given by younger people emphasizing economic or occupational bases for the move (Rossi, 1955).

A substantial number of elderly people live in unfavorable conditions. They are over-represented in Model City areas and among the rural poor living in substandard housing. On the other hand, older people tend to express satisfaction with their current housing. Two major studies (Goldscheider, 1966; Langford, 1962) estimated that 83% and 75%, respectively, of older people surveyed in urban and small communities had no wish to move from their neighborhoods. About two-thirds of the California groups studied by Hamovitch, Peterson, and Larson (1969) and Sherman, Mangum, Dodds, Walkley, and Wilner (1968) expressed a high level of satisfaction with their housing. Among his Cleveland apartment dwellers, Rosow (1967) found only 4% with what he defined as really serious housing problems. The degree of satisfaction varied greatly according to actual circumstances; however, the highest reported proportions generally being in specially-designed age-segregated housing communities, such as the 99% reported by Carp (1966) in Victoria Plaza. Quite an opposite story is told by the findings of Lawton, Kleban, and Singer (1971) that fully 81% of aged Jewish residents of a high-crime area of Philadelphia would like to move if other conditions were favorable.

While most people are relatively satisfied with their housing, the options open for older people who wish to change are very few. Since such a relatively few do realize their wishes and plans, it is reasonable to assume that many will accept living and housing arrangements that are



Familiarity with a neighborhood may be enough to make older people wish to remain in spite of its physical decline.

less than satisfactory. Thus, there are two groups who have particular problems:

(1) Those who wish and need badly to move but have only undesirable alternatives to their current locations. These people include some relocated by urban renewal, those who experience role loss or changes in household composition, and those who live in deteriorating neighborhoods. Deprived groups such as blacks, the rural poor, and the physically ill are the most vulnerable to unfavorable outcomes of mobility. Niebanck (1965) demonstrated that urban renewal relocatees end up with higher rents and higher living expenses.

(2) Those who do not wish to move and who adapt to undesirable and ultimately self-defeating living situations. Their lack of desire to move may express their limited competence or their dependence, or the avoidance of wishing for something that is not likely to happen.

This report is a follow-up of the residential status of 115 residents of the old Philadelphia ethnic neighborhood named Strawberry Mansion (SM). They were originally interviewed regarding their living situation and life style 2 years previous to the gathering of these data to be reported (Lawton et al., 1971; Lawton & Kleban, 1971). Very briefly, this residual group of elderly Jewish residents was living in a high-crime area of Philadelphia whose social and economic state had precipitously declined in the past 20 years. These people were more deprived by most indices of well-being than the elderly population of the country as a whole or than comparable comparison groups of older people. Interest was focused particularly on characteristics of the environment, which were significantly and independently related to amount of neighborhood mobility and a summed interviewer rating of the residents' vigor, interactive capacity, and response to the interviewer (The VIRO Scale, Kastenbaum & Sherwood, 1972).

These remaining residents of SM were preoccupied with negative feelings about their living situation and with fear of crime, while expressing major frustration with the obstacles to satisfactory relocation. A service project by a local family agency followed our research. They gave some residents assistance in finding new homes, although many more were offered such help than accepted it.

The follow-up was devoted almost exclusively to ascertaining the 1971 residential status of the group. All 1969 addresses were available, and contact was attempted through phone, mail,

personal visit, and the local social agencies and institutions most likely to have knowledge of these people. Finally, state death records for that interval were checked. Some former SM dwellers were identified through these records. Other similar names were found but without enough information to conclusively identify the person. There were a total of 30 people known not to be living at their 1969 addresses whose 1971 status and location could not be conclusively determined. There were 7 who were known to have died, 64 living where they had lived in 1969, and 21 who were located at new addresses, including in nursing homes. This report deals with the 85 living persons whose 1971 addresses were conclusively determined. The purpose of the presentation is to look further at the relationships between housing dissatisfaction, the wish to change residence, behavior directed toward changing residence, and actual change of residence.

Goldscheider (1966) investigated three aspects of moving: (1) the wish to move, (2) plans to move, and (3) actual moving. The present study also considered the wish to move and actual moving, and it operationalized "plans to move" in terms of intervening behavior called "looking for a new place to live." This study examined each of these three residential variables in terms of a more diverse group of personal characteristics than the economic and demographic factors that were explored by Goldscheider et al. (n.d.). Finally, in contrast to Goldscheider's probability sample of Los Angeles residents, this study focused on a low-income deprived group, most of whom wished to move and had only undesirable alternative living situations to choose among; a smaller number were over-adapted to their very negative environments. Twenty-seven environmental, demographic, and personal well-being indices were selected as possible predictors of the following four residential variables: (1) score on a 6-item housing dissatisfaction index (Lawton et al., 1971); (2) the stated wish to move (Yes - No) of 1969; (3) actual looking for a place to live during the past year (1969) (Yes - No); (4) known change of residence during the 2-year period 1969-1971.

A total of 25, or 31%, of the 81 possible correlations between the three 1969 residential variables and the 27 predictor variables were significantly different from zero. Except for expectedly high correlations among the residential variables measured in 1969, all the observed



Dilapidation, crime, and other urban blights result in neighborhoods that foster maladaptive behavior in elderly residents.

relationships were relatively low. However, there were many more than would be expected by chance alone, and there is thus good reason to attempt to interpret the direction of the findings, while still recognizing that a substantial amount of well-being is explained by factors other than the residential variables.

Housing dissatisfaction and the wish to move were highly related to one another ($r = .65$) and were associated with several other residentially related measures. Those who have lived longer in SM, those giving priority to "a nice neighborhood" in their choice of residence, and those giving low priority to shopping and other neighborhood amenities were more likely to wish to move. Those who wished to move and were more dissatisfied were likely to be the more privileged in status: the younger people, males, married people, and those of higher income. On the indices of well-being, the picture is interesting, but not easily characterizable. Those dissatisfied with housing also appear to be dissatisfied in general outlook (low morale) and specifically with respect to their current level of social interaction. They also would like to raise their level of social interaction with peers and tend to be somewhat healthier than the satisfied.

As is frequently the case in relating preferences to behavior, pinning down the wish to move to actual behavior directed toward that end resulted in a less clear picture. The wish to move is only mildly related to efforts in that direction ($r = .38$), and looking for a new residence is associated with somewhat fewer personal characteristics than is the wish to move. Those who actually searched were still those who were most dissatisfied with housing and with their current levels of peer interaction and those with highest income. They were also

those who related most empathically to the interviewers (VIRO score) and those living far from neighborhood facilities. Many of the other correlates of the wish to move disappeared when the behavioral criterion (i.e., actually looking for a place to live) was added.

The actual residential change behavior of SM dwellers was predicted *only* by having actually made a preliminary move in that direction (looking for a place) in 1969, and by one environmental factor, living far from the center of SM.

In summary, it does seem that dissatisfaction with one's present clearly unsatisfactory housing and the wish to move characterized those who have the most personal resources. The only inconsistent note is possibly the lower morale of those who wish to move, but it is very likely that this measure may reflect the sustained reactivity and willingness to consider alternatives of those who wish to move. The opposite side of the coin would indicate that the least competent people were most passively accepting of an environmental situation that would defeat them ultimately. In short, those with most resources at least thought in a way to suggest that they had more options. However, thinking this way did not necessarily lead to behavior that would further the goal. The virtually complete lack of predictability of actual moving behavior suggests that factors beyond those investigated led to residential change. While those who had made tentative, investigative efforts at finding a new place in 1969 tended to be those who actually ended up by moving, this behavior was not in any way forecast by such factors as amount of dissatisfaction, amount of wish for an augmented social life, or possession of any of the fortunate demographic characteristics. Few of the factors related to original attitude toward housing showed any tendency in the same direction where actual moving was concerned. It is almost as if circumstances out of the individual's control and unrelated to those we might reasonably expect to be involved determined whether he moved or not.

A final question that might be asked of the data is to what extent the outcome was in accord with the wishes of the individual. Of all the persons who wished to move in 1969, 27% actually moved within 2 years, a lower fulfillment rate than the 1-year rate of 25% reported by Goldscheider (1966) for those who had wished to move. Of all those who did not wish

to move, 81% did not move during the 2 years; whether this fulfillment rate is different from the 90% 1-year rate reported by Goldscheider is undeterminable. However, our over-all fulfillment rate—the percentage of all who got their wish, whether it was for moving or staying—was 37%, grossly different from the 70% of Goldscheider et al. (n.d.).

The number known to have moved was too small to allow for any analysis of the reasons leading to the move. However, from our initial interviews and from data gained in other studies, we know that some of the more frequent environmental stresses impelling an individual to move may include a substandard dwelling-unit; a dwelling unit with too much space, too many steps, or other obstacles; too-great distance from necessary services or amenities; physical insecurity due to crime, traffic, climatic conditions, and so on; necessity for shared living accommodations; absence of socially integrating personal relationships; cost of new housing that exceeds available means, particularly after the death of a spouse.

These disamenities are most usually associated with changes in the older person's environment: The decline of a neighborhood, the change in neighborhood composition from age peers of similar status to younger residents of different social, economic, or racial status, and the larger social changes represented by externally imposed retirement and the resultant economic decline. Even in the face of such negative environmental change, there may be many positive factors associated with remaining in the environment. "A preference for the familiar" has often been ascribed to older people. Knowledge of how to get about, of which routes to take when going to visit, or which shops to patronize, are distinct aids to coping. A change would mean both new learning of these orientational aids, and interim anxiety associated with the unfamiliarity of the new location. Another aspect of familiarity is likely to be the mental images and memories of life as it used to be in the changed environment. This nostalgia was particularly evident among the SM dwellers who were still capable of experiencing the sensations and feelings of the earlier, happier years in the ethnic community of upward-bound people. Home ownership may constitute a strong tie to an otherwise unfavorable living situation; 69% of all older household heads own their own homes, usually affording them a living situation impossible anywhere else at so low a cost. In

addition to the economic pull of home ownership, there is undoubtedly an emotional attachment to the dwelling purchased with one's life's labor and associated with earlier life stages. In some situations, even though one's social and physical environment has changed grossly, there remains a small reference peer group that is particularly salient to one's needs. A large portion of our SM population is concentrated near a single intersection; our research showed them to be both high in mutual interaction and better off by several indices than were others living more peripherally. Finally, some older areas tend to be closer than newer areas to some of the most basic resources, such as grocery store, physician, and public transportation.

Most people who are young, healthy, and economically independent can cope adequately with such environmental negatives. If they do not immediately move to a more felicitous location, they can at least remodel their homes, take personal and environmental precautions against crime, and seek friends at greater distances. Within the older population, the degree of physical, mental, and economic competence of the individual may determine whether he moves or remains, and whether the outcome is favorable or unfavorable.

Our data suggest that while it was the least competent who did not wish to leave and the most competent who were motivated to leave, who actually does leave is likely to be determined by circumstances relatively unrelated to the individual's characteristics, at least for this residual, deprived population. The situation might well have been different had the early departers been studied. At an earlier stage of the neighborhood's life cycle the options available would probably have been more diverse, and the individuals' resources at an earlier age great enough to be able to exercise an appropriate option. These same people would perhaps have been most likely to experience the positive relocation effect.

Some major questions yet to be addressed in studying in-community change of residence are:

(1) What are the stated reasons for *wishing* to move, and how do they compare with the reasons people give for actually moving?

(2) Are there significant events, such as losses, stress experiences, or intra-individual changes that precede the decision to move?

(3) What are the medical, social, and psychological consequences of moves, and how do they vary with the characteristics of the mover, the

reasons for the move, and the characteristics of the situation into which the individual moves?

(4) What are the various alternatives considered by the mover? How successful is he in choosing an environment that seems to be congruent with his needs?

(5) What are the determinants and consequences of overstaying in an unfavorable environment?

(6) As a neighborhood or community ages, how do early out-movers differ from late movers and non-movers?

(7) What coping mechanisms do older people utilize in orienting themselves in a new residential setting?

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Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his wood fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake . . .
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Robert Frost