Factors differentiating elderly residential movers and nonmovers

A longitudinal analysis

DAVID G. SOMMERS & KATHERINE R. ROWELL
Department of Sociology, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA

Abstract. This paper identifies factors which differentiate elderly residential movers and nonmovers. Longitudinal data were used in the analysis. Logistic regression results showed that length of residency, home ownership, use of community support services, and number of adult children each had an effect on relocation. Respondents who reported longer lengths of residency and those who owned a home were less likely to relocate. Those elders who utilized more community support services were also less likely to move. Conversely, elders with greater numbers of adult children were more likely to relocate. There was not a significant effect of health status on relocation.

Introduction

The elderly are less geographically mobile than younger persons (Bryant & El-Attar 1984). Indeed, relocation rates among adults generally tend to decline steadily with age. One of the unique features of elderly geographic mobility, however, is that many of the key mechanisms which facilitate movement at younger ages are not applicable to the aged. Movement among the aged, for example, is typically not connected to career opportunities, new marriages, or growth in family size (Leslie & Richardson 1961; Siegel 1980). In contrast to younger adults, the elderly are most likely to move for amenities, to receive assistance from others, or to prepare for aging by seeking out more suitable environments such as smaller housing units (Meyer & Speare 1985; Wiseman 1980).

Most researchers concerned with geographic mobility among the aged have focused on relocation from a home to an institution or movement between institutions. Considerably less attention has been given to those elders who move between or within residential communities. Further, the classification of a move from 'home to home' needs to be refined and made more precise (Ferraro 1982) because many researchers have failed to make a distinction between the types of home settings under investigation.

The extent to which mobility decisions among the elderly are related to health is also largely unknown (Speare et al. 1991). Patrick (1980) suggests that the relationship between health and mobility has been overlooked because information on health status is typically not collected in data sets which are used for geographic mobility research. Similarly, Speare & Meyer (1988)
point out that more attention should be given to elderly mobility using data sets which include health and disability information.

This paper focuses on elderly residential relocation. The purpose is to identify factors which differentiate elderly residential movers and nonmovers. A conceptual model originally presented by Wiseman (1980) will be used to classify factors which influence the decision to move, and differences between elderly movers and nonmovers will be examined using logistic regression analysis.

To deal with the problem that types of home environments have been inadequately differentiated, this analysis is restricted to noninstitutionalized elders who moved to a residential area in which none of the housing units were formally set aside for older people. Accordingly, these results are applicable to elders who relocated into residential community settings.

This analysis will also utilize longitudinal data. Some researchers have relied on cross-sectional measurement in their examination of elderly relocation. If mobility is conceptualized as a response to push and pull factors, however, its study is weakened by the use of cross-sectional data (Mutchler & Burr 1991). The present analysis is able to more accurately assess the effects of such factors since these effects are measured prior to actual relocation.

In sum, this paper makes a contribution to the existing literature on elderly mobility by: (1) restricting the analysis to elders who relocated into residential community settings, (2) using longitudinal data, and (3) examining the relationship between health status and mobility. From a policy standpoint, this paper will help to identify the extent to which elderly use of social support services affects the decision to relocate.

**Wiseman's theoretical framework**

Wiseman (1980) has developed a behavioral model which focuses on the relocation process. The process is defined by a set of interrelated decisions: the decision to move, the decision of where to move, and decisions concerning living arrangements. An assumption underlying Wiseman's model is that individuals constantly monitor their residential status based on their needs, desires, resources, and projected outcomes.

A strength of Wiseman's model is that it examines the entire relocation process. Due to the complexity of this framework, however, we will only study factors which influence an elder's decision to move. Although it would be informative to focus on the entire relocation process, data limitations do not permit such an analysis. The revised model used in this paper is presented in Figure 1.

The first component of the model consists of a set of triggering mechanisms, including both push and pull factors, which individually or in combination may stimulate persons to relocate. Specific push factors may include