RESIDENTIAL CHANGE AND SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT

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A stranger was before him—a boy a shade larger than himself. A newcomer of any age or either sex was an impressive curiosity in the poor shabby little village of St. Petersburg.

Neither boy spoke. If one moved, the other moved—but only sidewise, in a circle; they kept face to face and eye to eye all the time. Finally Tom said, "I can lick you!"

"I'd like to see you try it."

"Well, I can do it."

"No, you can't either."... Tom chased the traitor home, and thus found out where he lived. He then held a position at the gate for sometime, daring the enemy to come outside, but the enemy only made faces at him through the window and declined. At last the enemy's mother appeared, and called Tom a bad, vicious, vulgar child, and ordered him away. So he went away, but he said he "'lowed" to "lay" for that boy.

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Residential change, resulting in a change of schools, influences the lives of a majority of school age children. Moves often take place under difficult family conditions, and may be associated with the precipitation, or the exacerbation of emotional disturbances. Some studies have shown a correlation between moving and the prevalence of disturbance in children. Schools do not offer special help to mobile children; and under some conditions, mobility may be associated with poor academic performance. While an attitude of mental mobility may ameliorate problems associated with moving, detailed information about the adaptation to moving does not exist. The rate of moving has implications for neighborhood, or school-based community mental health programs.

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This paper will discuss residential change, a prominent facet of American life having important implications for community mental health practice and for preventative services. Moving represents a stress experience requiring one to give up old relationships and adapt to new conditions. The point is clear when one considers an immigrant from a foreign country, when one thinks of the wife of the junior executive, born and bred in the big city, who is suddenly transported to a relatively small town in the deep South. However, long distance moves constitute a relatively small fraction of all residential changes. About 70 per cent of all moves are made within the same city, or within the same county (U.S. Census, 1960). Such moves have received considerably less attention because it is believed that a local move does not result in very much of a change in the way of life. While such a proposition may be true for adults, every move involving children requires a change of school and a change of friends.

It is the thesis of this paper that any move represents both a problem in adaptation for children, and an opportunity for the development of preventative mental health programs. There is also an important implication for community mental health practice in the sense that residential changes reach such proportions in some areas that the feasibility of neighborhood-based clinical services, or services fixing on a neighborhood-based elementary school must be examined closely. It is the purpose of this paper to bring some of the facts and the problems associated with residential moving to the attention of those concerned with community mental health.

**Extent of Residential and School Changes**

The extent and nature of residential change is well documented in U.S. Census Bureau figures. The 1960 Census showed that approximately 25 per cent of all persons five years old and over had moved at least once in the 15 months preceding the census. Somewhat more than 12,000,000 school age children changed residence, and thereby changed schools at least once in the 15 months preceding the census. Of these, 8.2 million were of elementary school age. Over a five-year period, from 1955 to 1960, approximately 50 per cent of all school age children moved at least once.

The Census does not provide information about the number of school changes experienced by individual children. Rakieten (1961) studied children in 17 of 31 New Haven, Connecticut schools, in 1959-1960. She used grades three to six and reported that 35 per cent of 10-year-olds had been in two or more previous schools, 24 per cent of 11-year-olds, 35 per cent of 12-year-olds, and 48 per cent of 13-year-olds. Levine, Wesolowski, and Corbett (1966) studied children in one elementary school in the inner city of New Haven. They reported that 35 per cent of the children currently enrolled in the sixth grade had been in two or more previous schools, while less than one in four now in the sixth grade had begun in that same school. Twenty-two per cent of kindergarten children, 36 per cent of first graders and 63 per cent of second grade children had already been enrolled in at least one previous school. Greene and Daughtry (1961) studied high school juniors in Savannah, Georgia. They reported that 74 per cent of the junior class experienced at least one change of school due to a family move, while 45 per cent had experienced two or more such changes. Greene and Daughtry (1961) provided data for a white population retained in school. The majority of children then experience multiple changes of schools (beyond changing from elementary to junior high, and from junior high to high school) during the course of their school careers. None of these studies dealt with the families of migrant workers who represent special problems.

**The People Who Move**

Who moves, and what's the nature of the moves that are made? In addition to