

Notes and Brief Reports

When People Are Forced To Move*

A recently completed study¹ supported by a Social Security Administration research grant examined the economic, social, and psychological impact of forced relocation upon families displaced by urban renewal. A secondary purpose was to evaluate the effectiveness of a local urban renewal agency in mitigating some of the negative effects anticipated in the relocation process. The presence of two major reconstruction projects on adjacent sites in downtown Topeka provided the opportunity to compare experiences of persons displaced by urban renewal with those displaced by an interstate highway project. Only the former group received counseling and assistance through the urban renewal agency. Two samples of voluntary movers in the Topeka area were selected as control groups for the study.

The racial composition of the samples were comparable in that each included roughly the same proportion of Negro families (22-30 percent). However, only the urban renewal group contained a large number of Mexican-American families (21 percent). The urban renewal population was also somewhat older and less educated and contained more low-income families and fewer married couples than the other groups. As might be expected the urban renewal group lived in the poorest and least costly housing.

In examining the geographical distribution of the samples after relocation, the study found that the families in the urban renewal group were the most likely to remain within a mile of their former homes. This was especially true for the Mexican-Americans who tended to remain within close proximity to their former church and shopping area. White families tended to move the farthest from their former homes. However, with income differentials taken into account, the white families from the urban renewal sample were less likely to move to more distant outlying areas of

the city than those from the highway sample. Mobility patterns of Negroes were similar for the highway and urban renewal groups. In the vast majority of cases, Negroes from both groups moved to blocks already occupied by other Negroes. Only about 20 percent of the Negroes moved to previously all-white blocks, and these were adjacent to blocks already containing Negroes. The voluntary movers traveled greater distances within the Topeka area and were most likely to emigrate from the city.

Relocation had a mixed impact on the cost and quality of housing for the three types of movers. The urban renewal and voluntary movers made significantly greater improvements in quality of housing, although they were still somewhat less likely than the highway group to be living in good quality housing after the move. Similarly, Negroes and Mexican-Americans made greater gains in housing quality than did white families.

Younger persons in the urban renewal sample were able to improve quality of housing more frequently than older persons. Before moving from the urban renewal area, the aged were the most likely to be living in good housing conditions (42.0 percent of the group aged 65 and over compared with 29.5 percent of those aged 50-64; 27.8 percent of those aged 35-49; and 12.9 percent of those under age 35). After the move the aged were least likely to have good quality housing (38.0 percent compared with 40.9 percent, 50.0 percent, and 45.2 percent of the above age groups, respectively). The aged living in poor housing before the move were able to make some gains; this category decreased from one-half to one-third of the elderly urban renewal group. Nevertheless, as noted, they were the most likely of any age group to be living in poor housing conditions after leaving the urban renewal area. Among those displaced by the highway project, the aged made gains in housing quality that were more nearly comparable to the improvement made by the other age groups in the same sample.

Although the urban renewal families as a group increased the quality of their housing much more frequently than did those in the highway sample, the difference was attributable to the medium-income families. Low- and high-income families in the urban renewal sample were no more likely to improve housing than were those in the highway population.

*Summary prepared by Virginia Reno, Research Grants Staff, Office of Research and Statistics.

¹ William H. Key, *When People are Forced to Move* (The Menninger Foundation, Topeka, Kansas). Requests for further information about the study should be addressed to Dr. William H. Key, Chairman, Department of Sociology, University of Denver.

For the three categories of movers, the average size of dwelling units remained virtually the same. However, crowding decreased for the urban renewal and voluntary movers as a result of more efficient matching of dwelling size with family needs.

Homeowners increased for the two forced-mover groups but not for the voluntary movers. Among the urban renewal population, homeownership increased from 36 percent to 45 percent and the highway group increased from 52 percent to 58 percent. Of the homeowners who had lived in mortgage-free homes in the urban renewal group (85 percent) and the highway group (76 percent), more than 60 percent had to obtain loans to purchase their new homes.

The rent costs of those not owning their own homes increased at quite different rates for the three types of movers. Among families displaced by urban renewal, median contract rent increased from \$31 to \$48; the increase was from \$50 to \$52.50 for the highway sample and \$50 and \$55 for voluntary movers. Even more significant is the change in rent-income ratio after the move. For the urban renewal group, rent increased from 19 percent to 28 percent of income, the highway group showed a decrease from 21 percent to 16.5 percent, and voluntary movers had very little change (from 18.0 percent to 18.5 percent).

The study concludes that many forced movers, especially younger families and minority groups, are able to benefit from the move by improving housing quality. The aged are the most likely to lose, both economically and in loss of established social ties. The author notes that though the study was not directly concerned with the effect of relocation on the small businesses in the area, general observation made in the course of the interviews suggested that this might be the most serious problem and result in the greatest hardships.

Comparisons of the urban renewal sample with the highway sample indicate that the assistance provided by the urban renewal agency favorably influence the quality, crowding, and ownership aspects of postrelocation housing for the population served. However, the agency's efforts did not favorably influence housing costs for their clients. As previously noted, relocation workers were most helpful to the middle-income group in improving housing quality. Among the low-income families,

the constraints and lack of choices were so limiting that the work of the relocation workers had no measurable effect. The primary recommendation of the study emphasizes the need for urban renewal planners to secure an adequate supply of vacant, low-rent, standard housing before initiating future relocation programs.

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SOCIAL AND REHABILITATION SERVICE

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