



GERONTOLOGY
RESEARCH CENTRE

SENIORS' HOUSING UPDATE

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2010 OLYMPIC VILLAGE AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN - UPDATE

by Eunju Hwang, Andrew Sixsmith GRC



In the last issue of SHUP we reported on the Olympic Village development in the False Creek area of Vancouver. One of the aims of the development was to provide a legacy to the city in terms of housing built to universal design standards. SAFERhome Society (<http://www.saferhomesociety.com/>) was commissioned to inspect the apartments according to their checklist of universal design criteria. However, the initial inspection earlier this year indicated that the apartments were not built to SAFERhome's guidelines. The specific problem was that the water waste outlet pipes in the apartments were located too high, making it difficult to lower sinks in the event of a person having mobility problems, particularly if they are a wheelchair user. Since the last issue, a lot of activity has occurred to try to rectify the situation. There appears to have been real intent on the part of the Vancouver City planners to make sure their 220 social housing units meet the SAFERhome criteria. Unfortunately, it is doubtful that the 862 market units will be fitted out to these universal design standards.



RESIDENTIAL RELOCATION IN LATER LIFE: “UNPACKING” POST RETIREMENT MOVES

by Lorne Lovegreen, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Gerontology, SFU

John and Sue had always planned on retiring to Florida. They worked hard throughout the years and manage to achieve their dream, despite challenges along the way. They knew where they would retire: to a nice condominium in a retirement community on the coast of Florida. Not too fancy, but fancy enough to offer golf, maintenance-free yards, fun activities and plenty of sunshine. When the time came to retire, they headed to Florida, leaving behind a lifetime of friends, family, and memories. It was fine, because a new world beckoned them, a life of new friends, new activities, and new beginnings. Ten years went by, their new world became comfortable and familiar—friendships were forged into meaningful ties. However, when John’s health began to fail, family up north tried to get John and Sue to move back home, but John said, “No way, I’ll go feet first, if I do.” The following spring, that “something” did happen, John died. Sue could not manage without him; she was depressed and missed him terribly. Her health problems were getting worse and she needed help around the house. Many of her friends had moved away, were too sick to help, or had died. Sue didn’t want to burden her family up north. She knew she needed to move, but where would she live? Her daughter wanted her to move in with her, but there were the four grandkids, the two dogs.... Sue thought to herself, “How could I be in this situation, John and I planned for everything all of our lives. Where should I go, what should I do? I wish we would have moved back home near the kids, when John was still healthy.” Now, she thought, it might be just too late.

The story above, while fictitious, illustrates some of the dilemmas faced by older adults as they experience

normative losses associated with aging (e.g., widowhood, shrinking social networks, and physical impairment). Coping with such losses is often complicated by the need to simultaneously undergo a significant life-style change—such as relocating to a different residence. Such dilemmas may be even more challenging for older adults who migrated to amenity-rich retirement communities. In such cases, retirees may leave behind family and friends that have long served as a source of support. Over time, social ties may weaken and become frayed. Weakening of social support ties are usually not a concern for older adults who move in early retirement, since amenity-seeking movers are usually healthy and independent—and have a limited need for support (Speare, 1988). However, challenges may occur when the older adult is no longer able to manage on their own, is in need of help, and has limited ties to their former social network system.

Prior research indicates that the types of residential moves made in later life are substantively different than those made at earlier ages (Lee, 1980; Meyers & Speare, 1985; Wiseman, 1980). Over the past several decades, various models have been developed in attempt to understand post-retirement relocation (e.g., Haas & Serow, 1993; Lee, 1980; Wiseman, 1980). Most notable is the push-pull model and the life course model. The push-pull model contends that older movers relocate in response to characteristics associated with their current and future residence (Lee, 1980). That is, attractions (pull) of the prospective destination (e.g., climate) act in concert with the negative aspects (push) of the origin (e.g., loss of spouse) and their joint action is mediated by specific barriers and/or

facilitating factors such as ties to family and friends (Lee, 1980).

Later formulations of the push-pull model incorporate the notion of “anchors” and “moorings” as important factors in determining whether one undertakes a residential move. Moorings refer to the attachment to one’s home or community (Stimson & McCrea, 2004) and emphasize the role of social integration (e.g., ties to one’s social network system). Therefore, moorings tie people to places and for a move to occur moorings must be “untied” in some way (Stimson & McCrea, 2004). Anchors on the other hand, refer to conditions or situations that can be “pulled up” and “planted” in another location for the express purpose of establishing stability in the new residence (Manicaros & Stimson, 1999).

While the push-pull model has informed many studies on retirement relocation it has had limited utility (Walters, 1994). Inconsistencies have arisen partly because definitions of push versus pull factors are not consistently defined. For example, one study may define a characteristic as a pull factor, whereas another may define it as a push factor. Push and pull factors can also have different meanings and consequences, depending upon individual preferences and needs. In this sense, a push factor for one person may act as a pull factor for another.

Limitations associated with the push-pull model have led researchers to develop models which consider how life events are linked to specific types of moves (Burholt, 1999; Wiseman, 1980). While several models have been put forth, the life course model developed by Litwak and Longino (1987) remains the dominate model in gerontological literature for classifying the unique types of residential moves undertaken by older

adults. According to Litwak and Longino (1987), three types of moves are made in later life: amenity, assistance, and dependency moves. The first move (i.e., amenity) occurs at or near retirement age. Amenity movers are typically in good health, have higher income levels and tend to move in search of attractive and amenity-rich environments. Destination locations are normally in warmer climates, cater to active living lifestyles, and have aesthetically pleasing environmental qualities. In contrast, assistance moves are characterized by individuals who have experienced moderate losses (e.g., financial constraints, moderate functional difficulty) and who move near family or friends for limited social support. The third type of move (i.e., dependency) occurs when health needs are so great that they overpower the ability of friends and family to provide adequate care to the older person. A primary assumption of this model is that older individuals seek congruence between environmental demands and personal competencies (Lawton & Nahemow, 1973). In this sense, a “continuum of adjustment” occurs, for the older person as they adjust their environment in response to declines in their functional ability (Filion et al., 1992; Kahana, 1982).

Recent research calls for moving beyond a three-phase model of post-retirement moves. Some argue that while these models possess “significant explanatory power, they have only modest predictive power” (Walters, 2000, p. 141). Others contend that residential moves in later life are much more complex than previous models suggest (Bloem, van Tilburg, & Thome’sse, 2008). Yet others, informed by life course theory, emphasize the need to consider how residential transitions and trajectories are shaped by the socio-historical and geographical location in which the person lives as well as how lives are intricately and interdependently linked to others (Elder, 1995).

Such sentiments may be well founded when we note as people live longer and in better health than ever before, coupled with the unprecedented number

of baby boomers who are aging, we are likely to see greater diversity in the motivations for, and types of, moving in later life. Difficulties in devising an adequate typology may relate, in part, to the need for longitudinal data – data which is relatively scarce. Another obstacle may stem from the challenge of trying to categorize transitional events (e.g., reasons and motivations for moving) into discrete events (e.g., type of move).

However, while relatively few datasets are available, data from the Florida Retirement Study (FRS) provides a unique opportunity for understanding residential mobility in later life. The FRS is an ongoing panel study which focuses on late-life adaptation of community dwelling elderly persons (Kahana et al., 2002). Baseline data collection occurred in 1990 (N=1000), and respondents were interviewed annually. After baseline, the study continued to follow respondents who moved out of the retirement community (including those who relocated to other cities or entered nursing homes or assisted living facilities). The FRS, currently collecting its 19th wave of data, is one of the few panel studies to exclusively focus on retiree migrants.

With the aim of exploring and describing the types of residential moves made in later life, the first eleven waves of data from the FRS were utilized. Data were included for those respondents who had moved in the previous year and who had no missing values for the variables used in the analysis (N = 329, the number of observed moves). For the purpose of this analysis, only the first move out of the retirement community was included—multiple moves were not included in the analysis.

A descriptive review of the sample reveals that the majority of study respondents were female (76.6%), not married (59.3%), had a high school degree or higher (90.6%), had at least one child (79.6%), and owned their home prior to moving (79.6%). The mean age (wave prior to moving) was 83 years (SD=4.4). All respondents were Caucasian. Respondents lived an average of 15.5 years (SD=6.2) in their

homes and nearly one-half had at least one family member living in Florida the wave prior to moving.

As expected, the majority of moves were to settings that provided some level of care support (51.1%), the remaining percentage (48.9%) relocated to residential settings designed primarily for healthy individuals (e.g., apartment, condominium). In ranking the moves from most common to least common setting, moving to an assisted living facility was first (25.2%), followed by independent living within a continuing care retirement community (23.4%), conventional housing (18.2%) such as an apartment, condominium, or single family home), and skilled nursing facilities (14.6%). The remaining movers moved in with family (11.2%) or moved to another active-living retirement community (7.4%).

Several interesting findings have emerged from these preliminary analyses. First, a number of movers relocated to another retirement community, suggesting that not all second moves are care-seeking moves as proponents of the life-course model contend (Litwak & Longino, 1987). Second, older parents were more likely to move near sons, but move in with daughters and third, the distance of the move (e.g., moved out of Florida) depends upon parental status and the gender of the parent. For example, childless older adults were more likely (77.9%) than those with children to make a move within Florida (59.3%). Most revealing, is when controlling for demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, marital status, housing tenure), health status and proximity of family, the likelihood of making an inter-state move (moving out of Florida) increases by a factor of 7.9 among women with children compared to men without children.

The findings presented above lend support for reconsidering earlier models of residential moves in later life. While many study respondents moved to care-providing residential settings (e.g., assisted living), nearly half made moves to independent-based living. Thus, we see some evidence that the journey from

independence to dependence is much more multifaceted than earlier models suggest. Residential moves in late life are quite complex. Knowing where one moves (i.e., type of housing), while necessary and informative, is not sufficient for fully understanding the types of moves made by older adults. Considering salient factors such as how trajectories of health, patterning of kin-networks, and the availability of adequate housing stock intersect and shape residential moves may bring us closer to understanding moving in later life and for developing meaningful typologies of moves undertaken by older adults.

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RECENT CENTRE ACTIVITIES

GRANTS & CONTRACTS

Hwang, E. (PI), Gutman, G., Sixsmith, A., Koehn, S., Cress, E., Ziebarth, A., Chui, E., Kim, T., Crawford, C., Tam, T., & Gutzmann, J. *Creating age-friendly communities in low-income neighborhoods: Cross-cultural case studies in North America and East Asia*. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) International Opportunity Grants, Ottawa, OT, Canada. \$60,000.

Dr. Andrew Sixsmith (Director, SFU Gerontology Research Centre) has been awarded a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council – SSHRC grant as co-applicant for the project “The Impact of Broadband Internet on Elder Health and Safety in Rural Communities.” The project PI is Richard Smith (Associate Professor, School of Communication and Director of the Centre for Policy Research on Science and Technology). Total grant awarded is \$80,000.



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