

# ANNOTATIONS

## WHY FAMILIES MOVE<sup>1</sup>

**T**HIS is a very superior study of some of the social and psychological factors affecting residential moves in the city. The research has been conducted under the joint sponsorship of the Bureau of Applied Social Research and the Institute for Urban Land Use and Housing Studies, both of Columbia University.

The research design is an unusually broad one. Most studies of residential mobility have followed an ecological approach, using census tract or block data in order to discover differences between mobile and stable areas. Relatively few studies have used the survey method to contrast mobile and stable households or to study the reasons for leaving one particular dwelling and moving to another. Rossi's is virtually the first study to combine all three approaches.

To achieve this combination, Rossi's group conducted 924 interviews in four Philadelphia census tracts. These four census tracts represent the four combinations of high and low social status and high and low residential mobility. Every *n*th household is interviewed, with this *n* varied to give approximately equal subsamples in each tract.

Information is collected about the ages of household heads, the size of the household, and their status and preference with regard to owning or renting. In the analysis, these data are built into an Index of Mobility Potential. The interviews also furnish information about attitudes toward present housing and neighborhood, with these data built into a Complaints Index. Together these two indexes provide a surprisingly potent means

<sup>1</sup> Rossi, Peter H.: WHY FAMILIES MOVE. Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1955, x + 220 pp., \$4.00.

for discriminating between households desiring to stay and desiring to move. (A prediction based on these two indexes is correct 75 per cent of the time, as opposed to 52 per cent if one simply predicts that every household wishes to stay.) To learn something about the motives behind actual moves, the households are asked about reasons for leaving their former dwelling and picking the one they now occupy. Finally, the interviews furnish data to show that stated anxiousness to move is closely correlated with intending to move within the next ten months. But what the interviews cannot show is whether these stated intentions are closely related to actual mobility behavior. To provide this check, each household is revisited 8 months later. It turns out that 80 per cent expecting to move actually do so; while of those expecting to stay only 4 per cent move.

The impressive set of findings produced by this design are too numerous to be reviewed in their entirety. Residents of stable neighborhoods have more social ties with their neighbors than do residents of mobile neighborhoods. This relationship is qualified by socio-economic status in an interesting way. High status individuals tend to have more contacts in general and therefore more contacts with their neighbors. But once the level of interaction is held constant, it is found that the residents of stable areas are more likely to have their friends or relatives within the local area. Thus while level of interaction is predominantly a function of status, its location is closely affected by neighborhood mobility. It also seems to be the case that residents of mobile areas, having fewer ties with their neighbors, are more apt to perceive them as unfriendly and as having lower class status than themselves.

The households that are most likely to move are young couples with several children who are renting but desire to own. Since their family size is rapidly changing, so are their housing needs. For this reason they are more mobile than single renters whose housing requirements are relatively fixed. When such couples are a little older, say over 35 years of age, they are less mobile because many of them have passed the stage of family building and their housing needs are changing less rapidly. Also a larger proportion of them own their homes instead of renting. At ages above 45 family size is again changing rapidly as chil-

dren leave the household. But this time changes in family size result in surplus room, which is less frustrating than insufficient room. Among married couples of the same age and housing tenure, those with children are more mobile than those without because they are more apt to be in need of space and, through their children, are more sensitive to neighborhood characteristics. As for couples with children, those renting are more mobile than those owning for several reasons. Rented dwellings tend to be smaller—a modal size of three rooms as compared with six rooms for owner-occupied dwellings. For this reason rented dwellings are less likely to meet the space requirements of a large household. This difference in capacity is further increased by the greater control which an owner exercises over his room arrangements as compared with a renter. Then too, more renters prefer to own than owners prefer to rent.

These findings help to clarify why specific households have the complaints they do about housing and neighborhood. The most common complaints concern the dwelling unit itself, with space complaints more frequent than those pertaining to heating or costs. Less frequent but no less effective are complaints about the neighborhood, particularly its social composition. Interestingly enough, nearness to job or church or relatives and friends emerge as secondary considerations. The same is true for calibre of local schools or shopping facilities. Relatively speaking, renters complain more about costs and shortages of space. Owners have better control over these aspects and complain relatively more about aspects over which they do not have control, namely, neighborhood characteristics. Complaints about space bear only a loose relationship to objective space pressures, as measured by number of rooms and household size. On the other hand, such complaints are much more likely when there has been a change of household size during occupancy of a dwelling. Apparently the absolute amount of space available to a family is not as important as becoming accustomed to a certain way of using it and then having to modify this usage because of an increase in household size.

Households have definite specifications in mind when they look for a new dwelling. Because they want to avoid the dissatisfactions of their previous dwelling, their specifications for

the new dwelling are closely related to their complaints about the old one. On the basis of these specifications they narrow the choice to a few dwellings. Only at this point do cost considerations enter in as a decisive element.

With regard to methodology, the author furnishes many examples of ways in which the survey method supplements the ecological approach, thereby strengthening the study of residential mobility. He offers one particularly cogent example of the fallacies that sometimes arise when a correlation between census tracts is generalized down to the level of individual households. Mobile census tracts have the highest proportion of single persons and childless couples. From this one might suppose that such households are more mobile than couples with children. However it turns out that all types of households in mobile areas have a higher turnover than their counterparts in stable areas. Moreover in the two mobile areas studied, couples with children prove more mobile than childless couples; and both prove considerably more mobile than single persons.

Besides the overall research design, Rossi's principal innovation is a scheme for analyzing the reasons affecting a decision. Reasons are classified in various ways on the basis of a set of questions which ask the respondent first to identify from a list those reasons that operate in his decision at all and then to assess their relative importance. The procedure is convincing but requires considerable familiarity with the area under study. Also, being rather elaborate, it consumes valuable interview time.

In summary, this book deserves a wide audience. Its many findings make it an important monograph in the field of residential mobility. This value is not lessened by an annotated bibliography. Its technique of reason analysis is applicable to a wide range of decision behavior. The author tells his story in 200 readable pages. Finally, it furnishes any course in sociological methods with an attractive case study in view of its readability, its solid results, and its warranted championing of the survey method.

ROBERT G. POTTER, JR.