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# Residential Mobility and Youth Well-Being: Research, Policy, and Practice Issues

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*Despite an extensive body of sociological work suggesting that residential mobility reduces child well-being, the subject of relocation has been largely overlooked in social work and social welfare literature. Recent social policies threaten to increase the incidence of moving among low-income families in the United States. This paper reviews theoretical and empirical literature in this area and finds evidence that residential mobility reduces children's academic functioning, and may negatively affect other aspects of child well-being. These effects are especially strong for poor children from single parent families, making this issue of particular relevance for social work. The authors suggest implications for future research, propose policies to increase residential stability, and provide directions for social work practice with mobile children.*

## Introduction

The United States has been described as a nation of movers, with 15–20% of its population relocating each year (United States Department of Commerce, 1998). The vast majority of these citizens—renters in households earning less than \$25,000 per year—are economically disadvantaged both by tenure status and by income (US Department of Commerce, 1998). Social scientific inquiry demonstrates that moving can be a difficult transition for household members due to the loss of familiar spatial environments, social relationships, and social institutions (Pribesh &

Downey, 1999). For children, these moves can be especially problematic. The issue of residential mobility is overlooked in a growing body of social work literature that examines the factors that increase and reduce risk among children (Smith & Carlson, 1997). This paper critically evaluates the literature regarding residential mobility and children, and considers the complexity of issues confronting researchers and policy makers concerned about this issue.

While the US has long been a highly mobile society, recent social policies are exacerbating this trend for low-income families. The passage of the Personal Responsibility Act is predicted to have deleterious effects on the housing budgets of former welfare recipients, and initial research indicates that relocations and evictions are occurring with disturbing frequency among this population (Nichols & Gault, 1999). Housing advocates predict that the HOPE VI Act, which is intended to rebuild distressed public housing, will fail to replace all of the units it demolishes. This will likely result in an overall loss of low-income units, and will certainly require the relocation of at least some low-income tenants (Leavitt, 1998). Further, the current trend of owners opting out of Section 8 contract renewals is reducing the stock of low-income residences, and threatens to result in displacement for many low-income residents (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1999). These policies should gravely concern housing advocates and social workers that serve low-income populations.

Household moves are not, of course, inherently problematic. The degree of difficulty in adjustment to a move is dependent on the presence or absence of many factors. For example, the desirability of a move, the reasons for relocating, and the cohesion and support among household members are all part of the context which influence the effects of a move (Coleman, 1988; Hagan, MacMillan & Wheaton, 1996). Moreover, it is arguable that blocked mobility, or the inability to move to take advantage of a better job, house, or school, can be even more stressful than relocation. Indeed, the assumption that it is desirable to move away from poverty conditions is the basis for programs which move low-income families from distressed urban neighborhoods to the suburbs (Rosenbaum, Fishman, Brett & Meaden, 1993). In

short, the complexity of factors that motivate relocation complicates the study of residential mobility effects.

Despite the fact that residential mobility may be necessary for upward mobility, it is also true that many relocation decisions are made as an adaptation to inadequate housing conditions, economic displacement, divorce, or other negative circumstances. This is especially the case for low-income and minority populations, who are overrepresented among the population of frequent movers (Newman & Owen, 1982). For example, research conducted in Chicago indicates that 75% of highly mobile students (defined as 4 or more moves over a two year period) were African-American, 78% were eligible for subsidized school lunch, and only 22% lived in two-parent households (Kerbow, 1996). Moreover, moving is a different experience for each member of a household. Although one household member may perceive a move as beneficial, other household residents may find the move distressing. Children and adolescents, the subject of this paper, face unique problems during relocation, such as the loss of a familiar school and friendships. Children are unlikely to initiate moves, and have little input into the conditions of relocation.

Awareness of this issue is growing. A conference devoted to the topic was convened in June 2000 by the Poverty and Race Research Action Council. National policy scholars in the fields of education, housing, and child welfare expressed similar concerns that frequent household moves negatively affect the school performance of children, and discussion of this issue has begun to appear in the news media (Rothstein, 2000). The purpose of this paper is to understand and conceptualize relocation and its effects on youth, and to clarify its implications for theory, research, and social policy formulation.

While numerous sociological and educational studies examine the relationship between residential mobility and youth well-being, a comprehensive, critical review of the theoretical and empirical literature has not appeared in the social welfare literature. This paper begins with a review of theoretical and empirical literature concerning the effects of residential mobility on the well-being of children and adolescents. After drawing conclusions from the empirical literature, an evaluation of the theoretical and methodological issues facing mobility research

is undertaken, and the difficult decisions that confront policy makers are outlined. Finally, we present directions for social work practice.

### The Effects of Residential Mobility: Theoretical Literature

Several theoretical models attempt to provide a framework for understanding the psychological and social impacts of household moves. We review five sets of theories: 1) stress and coping theory, 2) mobility experience theory, 3) social capital theory, 4) classroom turnover theory and 5) the moving to opportunity perspective. We describe each theory briefly. After our discussion of the empirical literature we comment on the extent to which empirical studies support these theoretical models, and consider the methodological issues facing researchers.

**Stress and coping theory.** The earliest residential mobility studies began with theoretical assumptions drawn from the stress and coping literature (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982). In this theory, moves are assumed to be inherently stressful events that tax the coping capacities of individuals. These events, if intense or prolonged, in turn permanently disrupt the psycho-social functioning of individuals. When early empirical work began to demonstrate that many moves are not harmful to coping, and that harm either may not occur or may diminish with time, residential mobility scholars began to think about the contexts of relocation and its effects. While the assumptions of stress and coping theory still underlie much mobility research, it has been modified in response to contrary empirical findings.

**Mobility experience theory.** Mobility experience theory proposes that the effects of residential mobility on social and psychological well-being can be understood only within a contextual framework of motivations, conditions, and temporality (Hagan, MacMillan & Wheaton 1996). Mobility is not simply an event with specific outcomes, but a set of social and psychological experiences that together result in successful or unsuccessful adjustment to a new environment. These theorists argue that residential mobility effects are moderated by four factors: a) the history of previous migrations, b) the amount of time devoted to the move, c) motivations for the move, and d) distance of the move.

The *history of previous migration* is hypothesized to have a positive impact on post-move adjustment. Post-move adjustment is thought to be easier for those with previous moving experiences. The previous moves are seen as providing a type of "inoculation" against the stressors of moving. The *amount of time devoted to the move* is also hypothesized to be positively related to successful post-move adjustment. Those who have a greater amount of time to plan the move, find adequate housing, and adjust to the idea of relocation are hypothesized to adjust more easily to a new residence. *Motivations for the move* are thought to impact the sense of control and expectancy of the mover, thus moderating the impact of moving on well-being. A move precipitated by factors perceived as negative (eviction, financial reasons, an unwanted job transfer) will make adjustment more difficult, while a move precipitated by factors perceived as positive (moving for a better job or to reside in better housing) will make post move adjustment easier. Finally, *distance of the move* is thought to be inversely related to adjustment. Longer moves are hypothesized to create a greater sense of displacement and to require a longer period of adjustment.

**Social capital theory.** Mobility experience theory improves upon stress and coping theory by elaborating the factors that buffer or moderate the experience of moving, but it does not offer insights into the theoretical factors that reduce children's learning and emotional functioning. One approach that does attempt to understand such causal mechanisms is social capital theory (Coleman, 1988). Social capital refers to the "... social relationships, ties, and networks established among people within the context of wider social systems" (Midgley & Livermore, 1998). Links between parents, key individuals, and social institutions within communities are all sources of support for individuals, particularly children. Coleman (1988) suggests that social capital enhances human development, cognitive capacities, and social functioning. He hypothesizes that residential mobility will disrupt an individual's social capital networks, with resulting impairment in social functioning. Social capital is thought to exist within and between families. He suggests that when families move, they tax their internal relationships, disrupting "intra-family" social capital. What is more, moving disrupts

relationships with other families, teachers, administrators, and neighbors, lessening "inter-family" social capital. Thus, it is social relationships and their disruption that are responsible for post-move reductions in child well-being.

**Classroom turnover theory.** Other scholars theorize that classroom based processes explain the impacts of residential mobility on children's learning and emotional functioning (Entwisle, Alexander & Olson, 1997). Kerbow (1996) argues that mobility disrupts the continuity of students' learning processes. Students enter new schools "out of sync" with subject matter, and are not as academically prepared as the rest of their cohort. While a single move may not be problematic, difficulties may accumulate over time for the most highly mobile students. Schools may not have adequate information about new students, which can lead to inappropriate academic placements and a failure to connect them to adequate support services. Moreover, Kerbow posits that residential mobility can affect entire classrooms, creating an unstable milieu. The lack of knowledge about student preparation leads teachers to assume that they need to review previously covered material. This repetition is thought to slow down the process of knowledge acquisition, reducing the overall quality of educational instruction.

**"Moving to opportunity" perspective.** Finally, an alternative perspective is offered by what we might call the "residential mobility as upward mobility" hypothesis. This view suggests that for poor children trapped in distressed, high poverty urban environments, moving might enhance academic performance. This idea underlies the growing number of "moving to opportunity" programs which relocate inner city public housing residents to suburban homes. Proponents of those programs argue that the negative effects of residential instability are outweighed by the positive benefits of escaping poor schools and concentrated poverty (Goring, Kraft, Feins, McInnis, Holin, & Elhassan, 1999). While they acknowledge that students may at first have adjustment problems, they propose that the benefits of more academically gifted peers, better schools, and fewer neighborhood problems eventually result in improved outcomes for relocated youth (Pettit, McLanahan & Hanratty, 1999; Rosenbaum & Popkin, 1991).

### The Effects of Residential Mobility on Youth: Empirical Literature

Empirical studies that examine the effects of residential mobility on children focus on post-move educational, psychosocial, and behavioral outcomes. We review findings for empirical outcomes in five related areas: academic performance, grade retention, high school completion, social adjustment, and behavioral or psychological problems. The literature regarding each outcome is examined, and we attempt to assess whether the studies provide support for any of the theories outlined above.

**Academic performance.** A rather extensive body of research finds a significant relationship between residential mobility and decreased academic performance (Frazier, 1970; Sandlin, 1989; Temple & Reynolds, 1995; Tucker, Marx & Long, 1998). Negative effects of mobility are demonstrated for student test scores (Audette, Algozzine & Warden, 1993; Eckenrode, Rowe, Laird & Braitwaite, 1995; Ingersoll, Scamman & Eckerling, 1989; Reynolds & Wolfe, 1999; Shuler, 1990), student grade point average (Eckenrode, Rowe, Laird, & Braitwaite, 1995; Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford & Blyth, 1987), and use of special education services (Gottlieb & Weinberg, 1999). Multiple school changes also appear to reduce academic performance (Benson, Haycroft, Steyaert & Weigel, 1979; Benson & Weigel, 1980; Tucker, Marx & Long, 1998), and highly mobile students are especially likely to experience reduced academic performance (Felner, Primavera & Cauce, 1980). It is not clear how much of the variance in the academic performance of movers can be attributed to residential as opposed to school change, although Pribesh & Downey (1999) suggest that their effects are equivalent.

Some studies contradict these findings, or suggest that the effects are significant but fairly weak (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 1996; Blane, Pilling & Fogelman, 1985; Goebel, 1978; Heywood, Thomas & White, 1997; Marchant & Medway, 1987; Walls 1995). These scholars suggest that residential mobility studies fail to consider pre-existing differences between movers and non-movers, to differentiate short and long term effects of moving, and to control for significant moderating variables. Blane et al. (1985)



find that the overall effect of mobility on math and reading scores is marginal and likely reflects pre-existing differences between mobile and stable children. Goebel (1978) finds that high rates of mobility in the preschool years of the adolescents in her study do not adversely influence their later academic performance. She reasons that "... it is also possible that moving represents an enrichment of the environment which may, over a period of time, facilitate educational development even though, on a short term basis, there may be both facilitating and debilitating aspects of adjustment to moving, which cancel each other out." (Goebel 1978, p. 14).

Other factors moderate the effects of moves on academic performance. Children at earlier grade levels reportedly experience the most negative and lasting effects of residential mobility (Ingersoll, Scamman & Eckerling, 1989), and such effects are greater for Black and Hispanic students (Felner, Primavera & Cauce, 1981). Residential mobility also is found to have greater negative impacts on the academic performance of boys than girls (Goebels, 1978).

**Grade retention.** Studies examining residential mobility and educational outcomes consistently find higher levels of grade retention among highly mobile youngsters. This outcome is of importance because of its inverse correlation with high school completion. This finding appears to be especially true for "hyper-mobile" children who move three or more times. Two different analyses of the 1988 National Health Interview Survey of Child Health (NHIS) conclude that children who move three or more times are more likely to repeat a grade than are more residentially stable children (Simpson & Fowler, 1994; Wood, Halfon, Scarlata, Newacheck & Nessim, 1993).

In addition to hypermobility, researchers find that other variables moderate these effects. Tucker, Marx, and Long (1998) identify a statistical interaction between mobility and family structure, finding moderate levels of mobility (less than 8 moves) to have no measurable effects on school performance if children live with both of their biological parents. Further, they surmise that "residential stability may actually buffer the harmful effects of family transitions on school performance . . ." (Tucker et al., 1998, p. 123).

Straits (1987) finds that residential mobility does impede progress in school, but only for children of low SES families.

Other notes of caution are raised in the literature. Wood et al (1993) find that the risk of grade retention increases as risk factors such as poverty, racial minority status, and low parental education accumulate, noting that these factors are often correlated with high levels of residential mobility. Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1996) find that mobile children are more likely to be retained, but when background characteristics and first grade measures of school performance are introduced, effect sizes diminish.

**High school completion.** High school completion rates of mobile students are also of interest to researchers. Coleman's (1988) study of the dropout rates in 893 public, Catholic, and other private high schools finds that mobile children have nearly double the dropout rates of their stable counterparts. Other studies confirm the finding of an increased risk for dropout among highly mobile children (Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Hagan, MacMillan & Wheaton, 1996; Haveman, Wolfe & Spaulding, 1991). However, these studies note the role of familial factors (e.g. family structure and size, parental availability and support, etc.) in moderating the effects of high rates of mobility. Children from dual parent families and families where parents have greater interpersonal resources are less likely to experience residential mobility as a precursor to dropout. Astone and McLanahan (1994) note that residential mobility explains a large portion of the variance in the educational disadvantage associated with living in a single parent family. However, Rosenbaum, Fishman, Brett, and Meaden (1993) report that participants in the famous Gatreux housing relocation program who move to suburban homes are more likely to complete high school and attend college.

**Social and interpersonal functioning.** A small number of residential mobility studies examine difficulties in social functioning associated with moving. Vernberg's (1990) study of middle to upper-middle class students finds recency of move in early adolescence to be predictive of negative outcomes on several dimensions of social adjustment and functioning. These include increased social distress, difficulty making friends, and less overall social contact. Simpson and Fowler (1994) note difficulties in the

social adjustment of highly mobile youth, including increased incidence of peer conflict, greater likelihood of school suspension or expulsion, and anti-social behavior. Pettit, McLanahan, and Hanratty (1999) find that African-American children who relocate to middle class neighborhoods as part of the Moving to Opportunity Program are less likely than control group participants to be involved in after school activities.

Males in these studies appear to encounter more social rejection and other post move difficulties than females. This pattern of gender difference in post move adjustment is consistent with previous literature focused on post-move coping behaviors (Donohue and Gullotta, 1983; Lehr & Hendrickson, 1968). Brett (1982), however, finds female adolescents and younger children to fare worse than adolescent males in her study of families that relocate due to job transfers.

**Psychological functioning and behavior problems.** Inquiry into the relationship between psychological and behavior problems and moving has also been undertaken (Mundy, Robertson, Greenblatt & Robertson, 1989; Simpson & Fowler, 1994; Stacks, 1994; Tooley, 1970; Wood et al, 1993). Extensively mobile children are more likely to be psychiatrically hospitalized (Mundy et al, 1989), more likely to initiate drug and alcohol use (Catalano, Hawkins, White and Pandina, 1985), and more likely engage in premarital sexual behavior (Stacks, 1994).

Increased rates of depression (Hendershott, 1989; Brown & Orthner, 1990; Simpson & Fowler, 1994) and higher rates of suicidal behavior (Beautrais, Joyce & Mulder, 1996) are correlated with high mobility among youth. Hendershott (1989) identifies both recentness and frequency of moves as salient factors in predicting impairments in self-concept and esteem. Kroger's (1980) frequently cited work provides evidence that mobility and distance of move are predictive of self-concept.

However, other scholars disagree that residential mobility is significantly related to psychological or behavioral difficulty. For example, Buerkle (1997) finds few statistically significant differences in the social functioning of mobile youth. Other studies have also disputed the relationship between mobility and behavioral problems (Barrett & Noble, 1973; Brett, 1982; Marchant & Medway, 1987). These authors argue that residential mobility

scholars fail to control for differences in samples of movers and non-movers, such as pre-morbid functioning, SES, and family structure.

**Discussion.** What conclusions can be drawn from this review of empirical literature? On balance, the reviewed studies provide strong evidence that residential mobility negatively affects academic well-being. Residential mobility reduces academic performance, increases the likelihood of grade retention, and reduces high school completion rates. These effects worsen with cumulative moves, with "hyper-mobile" students having the greatest academic impairment. A subset of our reviewed studies suggest that SES, family structure, and pre-move academic functioning moderate, but do not eliminate the effects of residential mobility on academic functioning. While it is true that these studies demonstrate that relocation is not *always* problematic, the correlation between high rates of mobility and other risk factors such as poverty, life cycle changes, and single-parent family structure suggest a troubling profile of cumulative academic risk. We conclude that the effects of residential mobility are enhanced for at risk families, making this topic even more salient for social work, which is concerned about the well-being of exactly these populations. Since academic performance is a predictor of later life chances, these studies raise the possibility that residential mobility may be an overlooked factor in the replication of social inequality in the US (Astone & McLanahan, 1994).

The effects of residential mobility on other outcomes are far less clear. Relocation may have at least short-term effects on the social adjustment of children, with boys more likely than girls to experience social adjustment difficulties in response to residential mobility. It also appears that these effects are worsened by number of moves. The literature on residential mobility and behavior problems is both too sparse and too dated to draw clear conclusions. Similarly, the literature on psychological functioning is both too limited and too reliant on correlational statistics to draw clear conclusions. The few studies that do exist suggest that psychological problems resulting from relocation lessen with time and are related both to recency and distance of moves. At present, the current literature on non-academic outcomes is sufficient merely to warrant calls for further research in this area.

It is difficult to draw conclusions about theoretical mechanisms that account for these effects. Empirical studies in this area are mostly designed to determine whether the effects of residential mobility hold when controlling for a variety of family and demographic characteristics. While these factors indeed may moderate the relationship between moves and well-being outcomes, they do not explain causal processes. Still unanswered are claims made by social capital and educational process theorists. Does moving disrupt social capital, making it difficult for mobile students to achieve academically? Or, does relocation alter the classroom teaching milieu? Kerbow's (1996) work has suggested that the effects of classroom turnover reduce aggregate school functioning, while other studies provide some evidence that the disruption of social capital and peer relationships reduces academic functioning (Coleman, 1988; Pribesh & Downey, 1999). Still, more work will have to be completed before we can draw clear conclusions about causal mechanisms.

The findings from research on moving to opportunity programs require a final note. This literature is very new, and the effects of moving on child academic well-being and behavior are mixed (Pettit, McLanahan & Hanratty, 1999; Rosenbaum & Popkin, 1991). Despite advocates' claims, it is unclear that such programs have the capacity to improve the well-being of significant numbers of youth, and families often express serious reservations about being relocated away from their communities of choice (Turner, Popkin & Cunningham, 1999). It seems unlikely that moving families to non-poor neighborhoods can be a centerpiece of housing policy given the sheer number of families currently residing in distressed areas, and the likelihood that suburban neighborhoods will respond with some political backlash. What is more, it is difficult to generalize from the experiences of these program participants given that most school moves are not moves of upward mobility, but rather to schools of similar quality and with student populations of comparable SES (Kerbow, 2000).

### Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

**Research Needs.** The extensive body of work in this area suggests that residential mobility is a significant and overlooked

factor in the transmission of well-being in the United States. However, our review of this literature also reveals several major gaps in this work. Further work on relocation should focus on the following: 1) clarification of mobility's effects on behavior, adjustment and psychological functioning, 2) exploration of the theoretical frameworks explaining residential mobility outcomes, and 3) beginning investigation of programs and policies that can reduce the negative effects of residential mobility.

First, research should focus on increasing our clarity about post-move functioning. Scholars should attempt to clarify which categories of students are at risk, under what sorts of circumstances, and for what set of outcomes. Recent studies indicate that as many as 25% of school moves are actually requested by adolescents. This suggests that we should attempt to distinguish which moves are harmful and which are non-harmful or beneficial (Kerbow, 1996). Policy scholars may wish to study clients of social programs with high levels of mobility, including participants in "moving to opportunity programs", children in the child welfare system, and children disrupted by federal housing policy. In order to disentangle the effects of confounding factors such as pre-move academic and psycho-social functioning, it will be important to develop research designs that provide a baseline of student functioning and that control for unobserved family characteristics. It will also be essential to utilize longitudinal research designs, because the effects of moving appear to be cumulative. Scholars interested in child risk and protective factors should incorporate residential mobility variables in their survey instruments, and remember to include this literature in theory building. Residential mobility seems to be a promising concept for social work's "person in environment" perspective which attempts to link macro and micro level processes.

Second, we should elaborate our theories of how residential mobility effects operate. Including measures of classroom stability, student adjustment, peer relationships, social capital, and family cohesion would allow researchers to test those variables as mediators of residential mobility effects. At present, residential mobility operates in a "black box", and we do not fully understand the pathways to different psycho-social outcomes. It may be, for example, that curricular instability is responsible for

poor academic outcomes, while disrupted peer relationships may account for child behavior problems. Also, because it is unclear whether the effects of mobility are due to changes in residence or school changes, future research should include both variables.

Third, research should focus on understanding the factors that might lessen the negative impacts of relocation. This suggests both identifying "protective" factors, and examining the functioning of school adjustment programs. Many schools do in fact have programs and policies in place designed to ameliorate post-move maladjustment (DiCecco, Rosenblum, Taylor & Adelman, 1995). Peer programs, orientation workshops, and welcoming programs have all been implemented, but rigorous examination of those programs has not been undertaken. Research should be conducted on the efficacy of these programs so that they might be replicated on a larger scale.

**Policy directions.** At present, federal social policy appears to be intentionally and unintentionally displacing low-income citizens. Welfare reform is destabilizing the housing conditions of former welfare recipients, causing many to relocate in search of more affordable housing (Nichols & Gault, 1999). The HOPE VI program will likely displace some low-income residents as new projects that create mixed-income housing communities are developed (Leavitt, 1998). While this is intended to reduce the problem of concentrated poverty in housing projects, it is likely to result in the displacement of some low-income residents. Section 8 housing vouchers and "moving to opportunity" programs emphasize moving the poor closer to labor markets and better schools rather than developing opportunities within communities already inhabited by poor residents (Turner, Popkin & Cunningham, 1999).

This literature review provides a strong rationale for supporting the implementation of place based development policies in order to reduce the mobility of low-income families. First, at the federal level, funding for HUD's public housing and Section 8 project based programs should return to pre-1984 levels. HUD has taken disproportionate hits in budget cuts since that time, and its programs have suffered a great deal (Stanfield, 1985; Morgan, 1995). Funding housing preservation legislation would help to revitalize public housing units and maintain the current project

based Section 8 housing stock. Second, federal policy should be considered that would require that the HOPE VI program rebuild as many units as it demolishes, sanctioning local housing authorities who fail to reach an 100% replacement rate. Third, new programs that allow greater stabilization of families should be funded. For example, homeownership programs targeted to low-income families could help to reduce mobility among such families, provide them with financial equity, and help to stabilize transitional neighborhoods (Johnson & Sherraden, 1992; Scanlon, 1998). Alternately, rent control legislation could stabilize poor families by protecting them from abrupt rent increases (Downs, 1988). Finally, local housing policies could focus on the development of aggressive programs to prevent evictions. Such programs have been developed in a variety of US cities, and typically provide outreach, counseling, and emergency financial assistance to residents on the verge of eviction (Schwartz, Derance-Manzini & Fagan, 1991).

**Practice implications.** Social workers in direct practice with families and youth should consider relocation and high mobility to be risk factors for evaluation and possible intervention. School social workers should make efforts to establish relationships with new students, and help them in the tasks of adjustment and integration into new school and community relationships. This is of particular importance for those students with a history of multiple moves and school changes. Such an intervention has been established at the Los Angeles Unified School District's Early Assistance for Students and Families Program. This program seeks to welcome new students and their families through a series of social work interventions and tasks. Workers attempt to welcome new students in several ways: by using an initial greeting table at the start of the school year, by extending welcomes through members of student clubs, by establishing formal "welcomers" in each class, and through making formalized connections to parents of new children (DiCecco et al, 1995).

School social workers can also assist at-risk, recently relocated children by identifying whether special services are needed or were utilized in the recent past. Many students have relocated so frequently that school districts have never completed Individual Education Plans for children with serious learning



or behavioral problems. Frequent relocation means that many children fall through the cracks and do not receive the appropriate screening and diagnosis needed to start special services. School social workers should attempt to learn about such history as quickly as possible, and should facilitate the request of previous school records. They should also advocate for rapid completion of testing and evaluation for these students.

### Conclusions

This paper has examined theories and empirical data regarding the impact of residential mobility on the well-being of children and adolescents. The evidence suggests that relocation is a structural factor that reduces academic functioning and may negatively influence psycho-social functioning. Recent social policy initiatives are destabilizing housing for low-income populations and social workers should turn their attention to assisting these populations through public policy advocacy and direct practice. In particular, the profession should advocate for programs that have the capacity to develop distressed neighborhoods, and to reduce the mobility of poor families with school age children. Housing stability is within our grasp, and can be realized if we have the will to make the proper policy choices. Social work, a profession with a rich history of housing advocacy, must renew that tradition in the coming years if we are to build a housing policy that fosters stability for low-income residents.

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