

RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY OF CHILDREN: THE HOUSING POLICY CONTEXT

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Housing Policy For Low-Income Households: A Primer

(1) 3 main types of assistance:

Type	Units
public housing	~1.2 million
private assisted	~1.5 million
housing vouchers	~2.0 million

(2) Not an entitlement: only ~1/3 of income-eligibles receive housing assistance

- U.S. spends 3 times as much on tax benefits to homeowners than on assistance (primarily rental) to low-income households

Housing Policy For Low-Income Households: A Primer (continued)

- (3) Assisted housing units must meet physical quality standards
- (4) Public housing and “private assisted” housing must meet site and neighborhood standards; vouchers do not
- (5) Voucher program considered centerpiece of housing policy:
 - costs less
 - greater choice of where to live
 - less neighborhood distress

Therefore, it is arguably the most important window into housing policy and residential mobility

Housing Policy For Low-Income Households: A Primer (continued)

- (6) Voucher program turns the residential mobility issue on its head: one of its goals is to **foster residential mobility to “higher quality” neighborhoods**; program evaluated, in part, on “barriers to moving”
- based on renewed interest in “neighborhood effects” in last two decades, though research evidence is mixed
 - implicitly based on belief that “all moves are not equal” -- e.g., moving to a safer neighborhood is better for children’s outcomes than remaining in an unsafe one

Housing Vouchers and Children's Residential Mobility

- First, an important fact: median length of residence of voucher families with children = ~ 2 years (*Thompson 2007; also see Lubell et al. 2003*)
- What do we know about the effects of housing vouchers on children's moves?
 - best evidence from housing voucher experiment conducted in 2000-2004 in six sites (Atlanta, Augusta, Houston, Fresno, L.A., Spokane)
 - study done by Abt Associates

Housing Vouchers and Children's Residential Mobility (continued)

Key findings:

(1) Homelessness

- . **reduce homelessness** over 4-5 years compared to controls (*ITT*)
- . **36 percent reduction** for those who actually use the voucher (*TOT*)

Housing Vouchers and Children's Residential Mobility (continued)

Key findings (continued) :

(2) Moves

- comparing families in 3 baseline living arrangements--living in own place, w/others, in public housing--voucher users had **1.3 fewer moves over 4-5 years** among those starting in own units
- **among** treatment and controls who did not start out in assisted housing, **no difference in moves out of baseline census tract**
 - Note: study doesn't report fraction of treatment or control families who move **within** a census tract, only fraction who move to a **different** census tract

Housing Vouchers and Children's Residential Mobility (continued)

Key findings (continued):

(3) Neighborhood Quality

- produce only **slight improvement**
- **all improvement attributed to families starting in public housing**, which is typically located in very high poverty tracts
- some evidence that vouchers are used in “submarkets” defined by location and race

Housing Vouchers and Children's Residential Mobility (continued)

Key findings (continued):

(4) “The Mystery of Relinquishers”

- the majority of those who give up voucher do so for reasons *other than* becoming income ineligible
 - primarily complexity of program rules, paperwork requirements, interactions with landlord, finding suitable housing
 - no significant differences between relinquishers and non-relinquishers at baseline, **BUT** non-relinquishers are doing better than relinquishers (e.g., less poverty, more food per person) after 4-5 years

Housing Vouchers and Children's Residential Mobility (continued)

Illustrative Policy Implications (*Gubits et al. 2009; Briggs 2008*):

- (1) performance incentives for voucher administrators
- (2) “authentic” search assistance
- (3) reform administrative practices of PHAs (e.g., steering families to voucher submarkets)