

## When People Move . . .

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*Residential mobility is a common phenomenon today. What's its impact on adult participation in continuing educational activities and voluntary organizations in a community? Can any social characteristics (age, educational level, occupation, or employment status) serve as predictors of participation patterns of adults who are on the move? Matthews and Thompson report their findings of a study involving adults living in Alaska in 1968-69. Would the same apply to such adults in your community?*

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How do residential characteristics of adults affect their continuing education patterns? Will an adult who moves from community to community participate in more educational activities than one who doesn't move? Or will he participate less, figuring he'll move.

Does a similar pattern exist for participation in voluntary organizations in the community? That is, will the less mobile adult be more active in these kinds of community institutions than will the adult who moves frequently from one community to another and has a short term of residence in a particular community?

To try to answer these questions, the phenomenon of mobility was studied in Anchorage, Alaska, from 1968 to 1969.

Participation in some form of systematic continuing education is becoming increasingly recognized as a common phenomenon in contemporary adult societies. In a national study, Johnstone<sup>1</sup> found that in a year's time more than 17 million adults in the United States were enrolled in courses on a part-time basis. Two and a half million more were full-time students. In addition, more than nine million other adults were involved in some form of independent study during the year.

Many authorities also believe that participation in voluntary organizations forms one of the most important linkages between the individual and the community of which he's a part. If he's to act and interact positively on decisions that

affect not only the welfare of the total community but that of families and individuals in their various life roles, he needs a structure from which to function effectively. Voluntary organizations can provide such a framework.

The effect of income, education, age, and occupation on participation is documented in previous national and geographically more restricted studies.<sup>2</sup> The Johnstone study did examine a more general type of mobility.<sup>3</sup> However, little systematic evidence has been gathered before this study on the effects of residential mobility on adults' continuing educational pursuits and their activities in voluntary organizations.

### **Study Methodology**

The two measures of participation were calculated differently. Data for the first measure — educational participation — were gathered from three components: scope (number of educational activities participated in), extent (number of hours of participation), and intensity (total participation of the respondent compared to the potential for each activity). A standard score was derived for each component. A composite score was calculated by adding the three standard scores.<sup>4</sup>

The second measure was participation in such volunteer organizations as civic groups, PTA's, homemaker clubs, and fraternal organizations. This measure was developed by tabulating the number of organizations to which each re-

spondent belonged, offices and committee chairmanships held, and percentage of potential meetings attended for each organization to which the respondent belonged. Each of these components was assigned a weight and summed to get a total score for each respondent.

An interview schedule was developed and used as a basis for personal interviews to assess both kinds of participation and to gather data on residential mobility and social characteristics of respondents. Interviews were held with 1 adult from each of 342 households selected by a systematic random process. These respondents represented about one and a half percent of the households in Anchorage.

Using the procedure advocated by Kish, one adult was identified systematically from each of the selected households.<sup>5</sup> In this study, an adult was defined as a person 21 years of age or older or, if younger than 21, either married or living alone as a head of an independent household. Data on educational participation were collected in two, six-month periods to lessen recall error and optimize validity of data.

### **Participation in Voluntary and Educational Activities**

Of the 342 adults interviewed, 109 had participated in a systematic educational experience in the year of the study. The highest degree of educational participation with 55 of 109 participants was in educational activities sponsored by universities or public schools. Additional partici-

pation in educational activities was obtained through on-the-job training (38 adults), community agencies (28 adults), and correspondence courses (19 adults). Four other respondents were full-time students. The average was 1.4 educational activities for each adult.

Participation in voluntary organizations was quite limited. Forty-two percent of the adults didn't belong to any voluntary organization. An additional 25 percent belonged to only 1 organization. In other words, two of three adults interviewed either didn't belong to voluntary organizations; if they did belong, they limited their involvement to only one organization. This study tends to confirm participation patterns reflected in previous studies.<sup>6</sup>

When participation patterns of respondents were analyzed, 18 percent were classified as high, 17 percent as medium, and 65 percent as low. The participation pattern was based on membership in organizations, leadership positions held, and attendance at meetings. These data suggest that if group action is an important process in decision making in community affairs, it tends to be influenced by a small percentage of the communities' adult residents. It must be recognized, however, that organizations don't possess equal influence on decision making about community affairs. Also, we don't know the "ripple effect" of a member of a voluntary organization as he interacts with other community residents who are nonmembers of his organization.

## **Residential Mobility**

The typical respondent of this study reflected an active pattern of residential mobility. Nearly all (94%) of the respondents had moved to at least 1 new community since they were 18 years of age. Slightly over 50 percent of the respondents had moved 3 or more times with 20 percent reporting 6 or more moves.

Forty-seven percent of the respondents had lived in the community six or more years. However, 19 percent had been residents for less than a year. Nine percent had lived in the community one year, and eight percent, two years. An additional 17 percent had lived in the community 3 to 5 years. This trend suggests that a substantial number of new residents leave the community the first year. Once they get beyond that point, however, they seem to stay.

Fifty-seven percent of the respondents plan to remain permanently, while 26 percent planned definitely to move within one year. The other 17 percent felt that they were as likely to move in the near future as to remain in the community. An overwhelming majority of the respondents, 84 percent, felt that their community was at least a "good" community in which to live.

## **Social Characteristics**

Social characteristics such as age, educational level, occupation, and employment status were also

identified for each respondent. More than three-fourths of the respondents had completed high school. In addition, over half of the respondents had continued their education beyond that level in either vocational schools or colleges. Eighty-five percent of the people interviewed were under 50 years of age and 67 percent were 39 or younger. Four out of five were employed at the time of the study. Similarly, for the 82 percent who were married, 4 out of 5 of their spouses were employed, indicating a high level of occupational involvement for women as well as men.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of variance and multiple correlation analysis were used to assess the association between mobility variables, social variables, and the two forms of participation observed in this study. The .01 level was accepted as statistically significant for both measures. Higher levels of significance are reported where observed. When multiple correlation analysis was used, standardized regression coefficients (beta weights) as discussed in Blalock<sup>7</sup> are reported. The latter measure reflects the amount of variance in one variable that can be accounted for by variation in one of a series of variables while holding the others constant.

The frequency with which a person changes his residence isn't significantly related to his level of participation in educational activi-

ties. Similarly, there appears to be little relationship between how long an adult lives in a community and his level of educational activity.

Respondents' characteristics present a different pattern when correlated with participation in voluntary community organizations. Data analysis indicates that as length of residence increases, participation in community organizations also increases. The study also indicates that residents who participate in community organizations are more satisfied with their community than those who don't participate. Although the data don't facilitate exploring this phenomenon in greater depth, you could speculate that active participants were more knowledgeable about their community and so could more fully appreciate its strengths as well as its weaknesses.

Those respondents who viewed the Anchorage community as a permanent place of residence tended to participate in voluntary community organizations at significantly higher rates than those who either were unsure about their tenure or definitely planned to move within the next year. As reflected in Table 1, a .001 level of significance was achieved in this analysis. However, in a similar analysis of effect on educational participation, no significant differences were observed.

Occupational level (white-collar occupations and other forms of employment) was significantly related to participation in educational activities and voluntary orga-

**Table 1. Effect of permanency of residence intentions on level of participation in voluntary organizations.**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	d.f.	Mean Squares	F	Significance Level
Within groups	8,075.87	340	23.75		
Between groups	249.14	1	249.14	10.489	<.001
Total	8,325.01				

  

Group	N	Group Mean	Grand Mean
I — Plan to stay	194	3.28	2.54
II — Plan to move	148	1.56	

nizations. Adults in white-collar occupations participated in more educational activities than did adults in other forms of employment. Those employed in white-collar occupations also exhibited a broader range of community interests expressed in their involvement in community organizations.

The influence of residential mobility and age, education, and income on the two types of adult participation was found to be non-significant. A summary of these analyses is presented in Table 2.<sup>8</sup> When age was controlled, a non-significant effect was observed for the influence of residential mobility on the two types of adult participation. An effect for age was also observed.

The interaction effect between residential mobility, age, and organizational participation is of great importance. It suggests that as age increases, organizational activities increase and at a faster rate for the more mobile person than for the less mobile. However, for the adult

less than 40 years old, the more mobile person tends to participate in community organizations less than the more sedentary individual.

Note further that the level of education had a significant effect on both types of adult participation and the mobile adult with the higher level income participated in community organizations to a significantly greater extent than did the mobile adult with a lower income.

### Implications

As adult educators, our ideal adult is one who takes advantage of every educational opportunity that's of benefit to him and at the same time participates to a high degree in community organizations. Mobility doesn't seem to be as great a factor in distorting our image of the ideal adult as we, at first hand, would speculate. The adults in this study continued to seek out educational opportunities at all phases of the residential cycle. This wasn't

**Table 2. A summary of the influence of residential mobility and age, education, and income on adult participation.**

Residential Mobility	Adult Participation	
	Educational Participation	Organizational Participation
Residential mobility — controlling for age		
Mobility effect	N.S.	N.S.
Age effect (under 40, over 40)	N.S.	F = 11.81
Interaction	N.S.	F = 6.70
Residential mobility — controlling for education		
Mobility effect	N.S.	N.S.
Education effect (high school or less, more than high school)	F = 18.20	F = 18.53
Interaction	N.S.	N.S.
Residential mobility — controlling for income		
Mobility effect	N.S.	N.S.
Income effect (less than \$12,000, \$12,000 or more)	N.S.	F = 25.78
Interaction	N.S.	N.S.

true for the adults' participation in community organizations. Here mobility depressed participation in a voluntary organization at both the entering and departing phase of the residential cycle.

This study suggests that highly mobile people participate in continuing education pursuits that enhance their personal development. Highly mobile people don't participate significantly in developing the community as expressed by their participation in voluntary organizations.

One social characteristic — level of education — displayed the highest correlation with both con-

tinuing educational activities and activity levels in community organizations. Evidence from many previous studies confirms this finding. Previous studies have also suggested that if an adult earns a below-average income or is unemployed or pursuing an occupation demanding low levels of qualifications, he's likely to be a low participant in both educational activities and community organizations. If these influences are compounded by high residential mobility and poor community integration, such a person is likely to be largely unreached by educational content presented through traditional edu-

cational facilities such as the public school, college, or vocational school. An adult with these characteristics is also unlikely to be active in voluntary community organizations.

We have no data that suggest the relative importance or effectiveness of community voluntary organizations to adults who are seeking information about their community. Data in this study suggest that where residential mobility is high, voluntary community organizations should be viewed as inefficient vehicles for directly reaching large percentages of the population.

The adult educator wishing to transmit information on a communitywide basis or to develop dialogues on community issues would be advised to use avenues in addition to community organizations. The information and dialogues might involve such communitywide issues as school bond referenda, support for public facilities, community development, and zoning. Although not reported here, the adults in this study did have a high level of exposure to mass media.

#### Footnotes

1. John W. C. Johnstone and Ramon J. Rivera, *Volunteers for Learning* (Chicago, Illinois: Aldine Publishing Co., 1965), p. 1.

2. Jack London, Robert Wenkert, and Warren O. Hagestrom, *Adult Education and Social Class*, Cooperative Research Project No. 1017 (Berkeley, California: The University of California, Survey Research Center, 1963) and Johnstone and Rivera, *Volunteers*, p. 1.
3. Johnstone and Rivera, *Volunteers*, pp. 10-14.
4. A mean and standard deviation for each of the three components were calculated and these statistics were used to develop the three standard scores. Each composite score was multiplied by a factor of 10 and added to a constant value of 100 to avoid negative numbers. The composite scores ranged from 83.36 to 226.7 with a standard deviation of 27.49.
5. Leslie Kish, "A Procedure for Objective Respondent Selection Within the Household," *American Statistical Association Journal*, XLIV (September, 1949), 380-87.
6. John C. Scott, Jr., "Membership and Participation in Voluntary Organizations," *American Sociological Review*, XXII (1957), 318.
7. Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., *Social Statistics* (New York, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), pp. 343-46.
8. For specific analysis, see James W. Matthews, "Residential Factors and Their Relation to Participation in Adult Education and Community Organizations in an Alaskan Urban Community" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1970), pp. 83-118.