

Researchers study older adults' plans for relocation

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A University of Kansas study helps family members and urban planners predict which seniors will relocate and what the effects will be.

Weighing the comforts of home against the promise of simplified life, thousands of older Americans this year made the turbulent decision to move — or not to move.

These choices affect not only those moving, but also their families and communities. A University of Kansas study helps [family members](#) and [urban planners](#) predict which [seniors](#) will relocate and what the effects will be.

The findings show that a survey of seniors' expectations can predict moves and can be used to estimate the need for accessible housing, said Julie F. Sergeant, lead author and assistant director for research at the School of Social Welfare's Office of Aging and Long-Term Care. The other authors are Rosemary Chapin, professor and director of the Office of Aging and Long-Term Care; and David J. Ekerdt, professor and director of KU's Gerontology Center. The work was published in October in the *Journal of Aging and Health*.

“Communities are looking at the trends in the population and wondering how this is going to have an impact,” Sergeant said. “Are older adults moving in, moving out? If those older adults are going to be moving to Topeka, Wichita or Lawrence — or even another neighborhood in the

same town — those communities want that information.”

In 2000, a national survey asked more than 4,000 adults, ages 68 to 107, to rank on a scale from zero to 100 their expectations of moving within two years. Two years later, the same adults reported whether they had actually moved. Not unexpectedly, the KU team found a strong link between the replies in the first survey and the relative chances of moving. But even among those most confident of relocating, the majority had not yet done so by 2002. And high expectations of moving to a nursing facility appear to have no bearing on whether a person would actually move there.

“I think it’s a story about decision-making in ambiguous situations,” Sergeant said. “One of the things I want to do with a follow-up study is look at people whose expectations went one way but their actual behavior was different.”

Asking about expectations may help friends and family talk to seniors about moving, Sergeant added. They may later uncover the reasons why expectations do not always materialize.

Several life factors made people more or less likely to migrate, the study shows. People lacking a driver in their households were more likely to move, as were those living farther than 10 miles from a child or a close friend. Marriage or divorce sent people packing.

The death of a spouse tended to keep seniors in place for at least two years. Also unlikely to move were those most unhappy with their neighborhood. The seeming paradox may reflect no financial means to move out, Sergeant said. Minorities in all income brackets were also less likely to move than Caucasians, a finding that agrees with previous data.

One potential follow-up would be to repeat the study in the wake of the

housing and financial crises.

“It would be interesting to conduct that study now,” said Ekerdt. “There’s so much uncertainty and worry in selling one’s property.”

The current study shows that all in all, 43 percent of seniors with high expectations of switching homes within two years did so between 2000 and 2002. The same was true for 22 percent of those uncertain and 10 percent of those not expecting to move. On the other hand, roughly 3 to 5 percent moved to a nursing facility regardless their expectations.

“Some [older adults](#) are planners. Others are not. People who don’t plan may not understand there are alternatives to moving to a nursing facility,” Sergeant said.

But the KU team has been finding out that people tend to have preconceptions about moving somewhere as old age approaches.

“I think most people understand that sooner or later they are going to need to live in a more manageable environment,” Ekerdt said. “I’ve sat in so many people’s houses and asked them why they moved and they said they knew they just couldn’t manage anymore.”

Provided by University of Kansas

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