



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Serita C. Holte for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in Psychology presented on May 27, 2010. Title: Residential Mobility Push & Pull Factors.

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Katherine MacTavish

This thesis examined factors that contribute to residential mobility, specifically looking at which aspects of a family's current situation *pushes* them out of their current home and what factors *pull* them into new locations. Residential mobility is of particular interest to developmental scientists because of the possible detrimental consequences for children (NRC, 2010). We examined a survey sample of 33 low-income rural households and an intensive sample of eight low-income rural families with school-aged children. Using qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews, we discovered that *push* and *pull* factors were almost equally apparent in the survey sample, in which respondents were asked to state the factors that influenced their most recent move. For the intensive sample, the families gave an account of every move that had taken place in each child's lifetime. We found that *push* factors appeared more frequently than *pull* factors. The *push* factors numbered 44 and the *pull* only 24, out of 68 total moves. We discovered that *Housing Imperative* (the need for immediate housing, lack of housing or discontent) was the most commonly stated *push* factor in both samples. The most common *pull* factor in the survey sample was the *Affordability* of the new location, but in the intensive sample, it was a *Kin Network* (proximity, dependence or providing/receiving support from relatives or friends). Our findings illustrate the obstacles low-income families face in stabilizing household life and demonstrate the need for decent, safe, and affordable housing options as a means to help families stay in place.

Key words: Residential mobility, *push-pull* factors, child development, rural, low-income

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Residential Mobility Push/Pull Factors & the Implications of High Levels of Mobility on  
Child Development

by

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Serita C. Holte, Author

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For my mother, Paula Holte,  
in thanks for her constant love and encouragement



## **Residential Mobility *Push-Pull* Factors & the Implications of High Levels of Mobility in Child Development**

In the United States, residential mobility is seen as an exercise of freedom and the enacting of one's right to seek better opportunities. Perhaps as a consequence, the United States has one of the highest mobility rates out of all developed countries (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). Even though the mobility rate in recent years has decreased, nearly 40 million people in the nation changed residence between 2002 and 2003. That is 14 percent of the total population. Out of the subpopulation of people living below the poverty line, 24 percent changed residence within that year (NRC, 2010).

Residential mobility is of particular interest to developmental scientists because of the possible detrimental consequences for children. According to the National Research Council (2010), high levels of residential mobility in a child's life have been shown to affect academic performance, behavior and social skill development. While certainly, children may benefit from a family move instigated by positive factors, such as to be nearer to a kin network, better job opportunities or better schools, frequent moves caused by negative factors, such as a family crisis, housing imperative or financial difficulty are likely to negatively affect young children. This is especially true if the moves include changes in schools (NRC, 2010)

This thesis examines residential mobility among a small sample of low-income rural households with children. Using qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews, we identify factors contributing to residential mobility among these families. We chose a rural setting because the majority of past research has consisted of urban populations, those who migrate from rural to urban settings, or vice versa. There is