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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Units</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>public housing</td>
<td>~1.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private assisted</td>
<td>~1.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housing vouchers</td>
<td>~2.0 million</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(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
(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
(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)
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.
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)