Relocation counselling as a tool to prevent negative spillover effects?

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Abstract

Public housing revitalization relocatees often recluster in already fragile neighbourhoods where they continue to struggle with poverty and may cause nuisances and conflict in their new living environment. This paper reviews the literature on relocation counselling efforts and the appearance of negative neighbourhood spillovers connected to four American voluntary housing mobility programs: Gautreaux 1 and Gautreaux 2 (Chicago), the Moving to Opportunity Demonstration (five cities), and the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program. Although these programs involve voluntary moves—in contrast with involuntary relocation in HOPE VI—a great deal may be learned from them because of (1) efforts in the voluntary programs to forestall resistance in destination neighbourhoods of program movers and (2) special counselling provided to ease adjustment into low-poverty. Our review suggests that screening out multi-problem families, limiting the number of housing voucher families moving into particular neighbourhoods, and providing both intensive counselling can minimize negative neighbourhood spillovers.

Introduction

In recent years, the United States and several European countries have witnessed substantial public/social housing revitalization programs, which attempt to improve the prospects of distressed communities and their residents. Whereas there is ample research into the effects of such programs on both target neighbourhoods and individual residents, far less attention has been devoted to unintended program effects outside target neighbourhoods. Existing residents in destination communities may be adversely affected by housing restructuring and mobility programs through reductions in neighbourhood quality (Johnson et al., 2002). For example, does crime increase and school test scores go down? We use the term negative neighbourhood spillover effects to conceptualize this phenomenon.

This issue is especially relevant for restructuring programs which require substantial relocation of residents from public or social housing slated for demolition. The most notable American example is the HOPE VI program. Many American politicians, policymakers and citizen activists fear that the
relocation of public housing residents, with housing vouchers, simply moves social problems and nuisance to other areas. HOPE VI relocatees often recluster in already fragile neighbourhoods where they continue to struggle with poverty and deprivation and to cause nuisances and conflict in their new living environment (for an overview, see Varady, 2010). Even if ‘multi-problem tenants’ comprise a small minority among relocatees they can make life unbearable for neighbours and destabilize entire buildings or parts of neighbourhoods (e.g. Smith, 2002; Kromer, 2009, p. 267).

This paper aims to review the literature concerning relocation counselling efforts and the appearance of negative neighbourhood spillovers connected to four voluntary housing mobility programs in the US: Gautreaux 1 and Gautreaux 2 (Chicago), the Moving to Opportunity Demonstration (five cities), and the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program (Thompson litigation). We seek to answer two questions about these programs. First, what types of programs have been put in place to forestall resistance or were initiated when community resistance in (potential) destination areas became apparent? Second, to what extent have these programs prevented voucher recipients from clustering in particular neighbourhoods thereby possibly contributing to increased crime, vandalism, drops in local property values, worsening building conditions and lower test scores (i.e. negative spillover effects)?

Although these four programs involve voluntary moves—in contrast with involuntary relocation in HOPE VI—a great deal may be learned from them concerning (1) efforts in the voluntary programs to forestall resistance in destination neighbourhoods of program movers, (2) special counselling and supportive programs provided to ease adjustment into low-poverty and low-minority areas, and (3) constraints affecting low-income families searching for housing in low-poverty and/or low-minority neighbourhoods as well as obstacles affecting their ability to remain there. The present paper builds upon our International Journal of Housing Policy article which reviews the literature on neighbourhood spillovers associated with forced moves resulting from HOPE VI and the Urban Restructuring Policy in the Netherlands (Kleinhans & Varady, forthcoming). When we started work on this paper we looked for available evidence of spillovers from voluntary housing mobility programs. But it quickly became clear that, because little work has been done on this subject, we needed to extend the focus to include the potential (preventative) impact of counselling and related programs. Preventing community resistance is at best a distant secondary goal for Gautreaux, MTO and other voluntary housing mobility programs. Furthermore these programs are small and consequently would not by themselves be likely to produce identifiable neighbourhood spillovers. However, all four programs involve counselling and related support services such as outreach to landlords, and thus, anticipate resistance issues and ways to prevent or diminish the risk of negative spillover effects. As mentioned above, the overarching question then is: To what extent is there evidence that counselling and related services forestall spillovers or are likely to achieve that goal?

Our systematic literature search of voluntary mobility programs examined several primary sources: books, published journal articles, conference reports and other (unpublished) materials, and various news sources (magazines, newspapers) about cities dealing with negative spillover effects. We reviewed the bibliographies of relevant publications to find other sources and solicited information from the authors and other scholars and practitioners working on the subject.

As indicated earlier, negative neighbourhood spillovers may include a wide range of phenomena. Therefore, we first develop a conceptual framework for examining negative neighbourhood spillovers in “receiving” neighbourhoods of mobility programs. Then, we consecutively deal with the review and analysis of the four housing mobility programs. This is followed by a discussion of the findings. Finally, we provide conclusions and suggestions for further research.

**Conceptual framework for negative neighbourhood spillovers**

Inspired by George Galster’s work on poverty concentration “thresholds” (Galster, 2002; 2005; Galster et al. 2008), we define negative neighbourhood spillover effects as problems that are linked to
increases in neighbourhood poverty, lower property values, higher incidence of crime, vandalism and incivilities, lower test scores in local schools, due to an influx of relocatees with specific characteristics (poverty, problematic behaviour). We presume that negative neighbourhood spillovers are most likely to occur when relocatees from public housing restructuring sites or voluntary housing mobility programs concentrate in neighbourhoods already beginning to change and where the in-movement pushes the proportion of poor households beyond some threshold which will vary for each single neighbourhood and different neighbourhood outcomes (property values, crime rates). For example, as the proportion of poor rise in a neighbourhood—possibly as a result of the in-migration of relocatees—property values might decline in a linear way. However, at a certain threshold, say fifteen to twenty per cent, the rate of decline may accelerate (see Galster, 2005, p. 123; Galster et al., 2008, p. 127). We acknowledge that in some circumstances housing restructuring could lead to positive neighbourhood spillovers e.g. higher property values, less crime and vandalism in streets adjoining a restructuring site if the building activities inspire greater neighbourhood confidence and if only a limited number of poor or ‘problematic’ families move into these nearby areas. (Castells, 2010; Zielenbach & Voith, 2010; Zielenbach et al., 2010).

Our conceptual framework (see Table 1) describes the mechanisms at the household level that could create negative spillover effects. That is, objective changes in neighbourhood conditions (stage 1) influence perceptions and evaluations of these changes by (indigenous) residents and others (stage 2) although there is usually no one-to-one correspondence between perceptions and objective changes. In the third stage householders act (if they can) on perceptions by moving, postponing property repairs, changing their children’s schools and so forth.

Table 1. Conceptual framework negative spillover effects from relocation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>STAGE 1</th>
<th>STAGE 2</th>
<th>STAGE 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors</td>
<td>Objective changes in destination areas</td>
<td>Perceptions and evaluations of changes (of indigenous residents, policymakers, practitioners and community leaders)</td>
<td>Potential behavioural adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Increases in the proportion of relocatees / poor households / ethnic minorities / multi-problem households</td>
<td>Perceptions of changes in the population composition and associated social problems (e.g. tensions, worse reputation)</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction: speed up moving plans, withdraw psychologically from the area, or become actively involved in stabilisation efforts.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increases in the proportion of households receiving housing vouchers</td>
<td>Perceptions of changes in the proportions of subsidized households</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Increases in the incidence of crime, vandalism, etc.</td>
<td>Perceptions of changes in the incidence of crime, vandalism, etc; fears of neighbourhood decline.</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction: speed up moving plans, withdraw psychologically from the area, or become actively involved in stabilisation efforts.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Drops in test scores at local schools</td>
<td>Perceptions of changes in test scores and quality of local schools</td>
<td>Parents changing their children’s schools or becoming actively involved in improvement efforts.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drops in property values</td>
<td>Perceptions of changes in property values</td>
<td>Delay investment in one’s property, speed up moving plans or delay such intentions (owner-occupiers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worsening building conditions</td>
<td>Perceptions of changes in physical conditions.</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction: speed up moving plans, withdraw psychologically from the area, or become actively involved in stabilisation efforts.</td>
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</table>
We do not seek to establish to what extent all mentioned stages and changes appear in the reviewed literature. Rather, the framework is the background against which various findings with regard to negative spillover effects and potential impacts of relocation counselling and supportive services can be interpreted.

We are not the first to connect the threshold concept with the mobility of program participants. Using Galster’s work as a theoretical base and a national database of vouchers at the block group level Kirk McClure (2010a, 2010b) asks two key questions: 1) How many vouchers can be absorbed in an area before they negatively impact the neighbourhood; and 2) How many of these negatively impacted block groups can exist before we call it a “national problem? Interestingly, census block groups are much smaller than census tracts and correspond more closely to the sociological concept of neighbourhoods. McClure came up with various outcomes which strongly depend on the standard for defining a voucher threshold (e.g. 4 or 10 per cent), which in turn strongly affected his estimate of the number of vulnerable areas.

Galster and McClure’s writings taken together emphasize the need to focus voucher relocatees into low-poverty (and perhaps also, low-minority) areas. Continued movement of voucher recipients into already fragile neighbourhoods significantly increases the likelihood that additional decline is set in motion. However, Kingsley and colleagues (2003) observe that it is unrealistic to expect HOPE VI to relocate all residents to low-poverty neighbourhoods because residents are exercising their own locational choices and because housing officials generally do not encourage daring moves. By implication, it would be undesirable to create a national voucher program requiring moves to low-poverty, low-minority neighbourhoods because this approach would restrict locational choice. This issue – managing housing voucher migration flows—remains unresolved.

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<td>issues</td>
<td>Do thresholds exist? If so, do they vary between different indicators?</td>
<td>Residents may overestimate or underestimate the nature, size and impact of the objective changes</td>
<td>Residents may not be able to distinguish between: 1) voucher recipients from restructuring sites, 'regular' v-recipients or voluntary mobility program participants, and regular in-movers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Different influx from various types of residents, with or without vouchers or a priority status</td>
<td></td>
<td>Residents may assume incorrectly that multi-problem households have vouchers or that they moved involuntarily from restructuring sites; Perceptions and evaluations may be based on residents’ stereotypes about racial / ethnic groups which may be influenced by their own experiences or others’ experiences in different parts of the city.</td>
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Gautreaux 1 Housing Program (1976-1998)

The Gautreaux Assisted Housing Program was created as a result of a series of class-action law suits filed against the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), beginning in 1966. The suits alleged that the housing authority deliberately segregated black families through its tenant selection and site selection policies while HUD continued to fund such civil rights violations. Administered by the non-profit Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities in Chicago, the program provided access to private-sector apartments either in mostly white suburbs or within the city of Chicago. Suburbs that were more than 30 per cent black were excluded by the consent decree. Participants were assigned to city or suburban locations in a quasi-random manner. Although in theory the voucher recipients had the choice of whether to accept or to reject a unit, in actuality, they were placed wherever the program happened to have housing openings at the time (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000).

Gautreaux planners included a number of features that would not only ease the adjustment of movers into predominantly white areas but also reduce community resistance. Our discussion of these features relies almost exclusively on Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum’s 2000 book. Despite the now voluminous literature on the Gautreaux Housing Program, scholars have conducted almost no empirical research on how the following features helped reduce or prevent community resistance. Thus, most evidence presented below is of a tentative nature. First, the Leadership Council attempted to spread Chicago movers over as wide an area as possible.

[The Council] initially deemphasized and later excluded the large portions of the city and parts of the southern and western suburbs where significant numbers of blacks lived. [Furthermore] in order to maintain racial integration in communities where it existed, and to minimize visibility that could lead to community resistance, the Leadership Council also imposed moratoria on Gautreaux placements in integrated places. Thus, within predominantly white areas, some neighborhoods, developments, and buildings were off-limits to the program, or the number of families permitted to move to those locations was limited” (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum 2000, p. 58).

In other words, Gautreaux discouraged housing voucher clustering but whether they succeeded is unclear from existing scholarship.

Secondly, the Leadership Council screened applicants to select participants who would be good tenants. The Gautreaux Program tended to select families with four or fewer children and families who regularly paid their rent and who had some source of income (usually Aid to Families with Dependent Children, AFDC). In addition, counsellors visited applicants’ homes to identify which ones were such bad housekeepers that they would be undesirable tenants. Together, the three criteria reduced the eligible pool of applicants by about 30 per cent. Staff believed that such screening would insure not only that landlords would be satisfied with their tenants and that they (landlords) continue to participate in the program (despite landlords’ concerns about the extra costs of housing voucher families [Quinn, 1986]) but also that landlords could avoid “alienating existing or prospective middle-class white tenants, whose racial bases or lifestyle preferences--such as taste in music or cars--might have caused them to object to Gautreaux families.” (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000, p. 61).

Thirdly, the Leadership Council developed a wide-ranging counselling role because families might not successfully make integrationist moves, especially to the suburbs, without extensive information, preparation, and persuasion. Counselling included group briefings, individual counselling, home visits, site visits to suburban housing, and after the first few years, an increasing amount of training that enabled families to conduct their own housing searches. (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000, p. 51) The pre-selection feature undoubtedly helped families select apartments where they would be most likely to fit in with neighbours. (Pashup et al., 2005; Duncan & Zuberi, 2006, p. 30). The Council’s post-move counselling and support services—which helped families gain access to community
services, resolve disputes with landlords, and develop support networks—further reduced moving risks and may have also avoided adverse impacts on neighbours. (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000, p. 56)

Finally, the Leadership Council devoted considerable effort to recruiting landlords. “It had secured voluntary cooperation of the real estate industry in accepting black families in nearly all-white areas; but it had also sued industry members and suburban public bodies for discrimination.” (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000, p. 42).

Between 1976 and 1998, the Gautreaux program helped over 7,000 poor black public housing families (and families on the waiting list for public housing) move to private sector apartments. Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum’s widely cited research (including their 2000 book) indicates that those who moved to the suburbs did better than those who remained in the city in terms of finding jobs and that among youths over 18, those in the suburbs were far more likely to attend college than their counterparts in the city (see also DeLuca & Rosenbaum, 2010; Duncan & Zuberi, 2006; Rosenbaum & Zuberi, 2010). However, a longer follow-up on the adult earnings of the Gautreaux children failed to show any significant city-suburban differences (Boyd et al., 2010). We will not deal with the benefits for program participants themselves in more detail, as this is beyond the scope of our paper.

Overall, the Gautreaux program produced very limited community resistance. “The Gautreaux program’s use of the existing private housing market, its modest pace and scale, its screening of families and dispersal of them across the region, and its commitment to families’ confidentiality all contributed to its low visibility, which in turn led to only sporadic and limited opposition to the program itself.” (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000, p. 9)

Initially, there was no evidence for negative spillovers such as culture clashes between suburban movers and their neighbours. “[T]here is little difference in overall social integration between city and suburban movers. ...City and suburban movers reported similar frequencies of interaction with their neighbors on six different activities, and both groups rated their neighbors as being ‘friendly.’” (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000, p. 125). However, more recent qualitative research conducted with Gautreaux mothers shows that many did experience initial culture clashes with their new neighbours but that they were able to handle them. “Many of the mothers interviewed … noted that they had to change their way of behaving to comply with the social norms of the new neighborhoods” (DeLuca & Rosenbaum 2010, p. 189). However, acceptance of middle-class norms may also result in exclusion from lower-class peer groups with whom strong ties may have been maintained (e.g. Portes, 1998), thus eliminating social support which may be crucial for undertaking efforts towards (upward) social mobility.

Our literature search yielded no empirical research dealing with a link between in-migration of Gautreaux families and the incidence of crime or other problems. However, we believe that research comparing arrest records of city and suburban movers is salient. In reality, males placed in suburban neighbourhoods experienced lower odds of being arrested for drug offenses as compared to those originally placed in city neighbourhoods. This might have reflected the positive impact of new friends in the suburbs who served as role models (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000) or alternatively it could reflect fewer opportunities for participating in gang violence in the suburbs (DeLuca et al., 2010). Neither of these hypotheses has been tested. Arrest records for girls were not affected, however (DeLuca et al., 2010).

**Gautreaux 2 Housing Program (2002 – 2005)**

The Chicago Housing Authority contracted with the Leadership Council for a new round of Gautreaux vouchers (i.e. Gautreaux 2) as part of the Plan for Transformation in Chicago (the city’s HOPE VI program), which was initiated in 2000. Gautreaux 2 added poverty dispersion to Gautreaux
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1’s focus on racial dispersion. This change reflected HUD’s shift during the 1990s from racial mixing (which proved highly controversial and politically impractical) to income mixing. As defined by the program, opportunity areas are census tracts where the black population does not exceed 30 per cent and only 24 per cent of residents (at maximum) are living in poverty.

As in Gautreaux 1, officials did screen out (potentially) problematic families. Only leaseholders in good standing with CHA were eligible to sign up for a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) through Gautreaux 2 (i.e. they were not behind in their rent, had not damaged their unit and had no misdemeanour convictions in the past two years (Pushup et al., 2005; Varady, 2010). Orientation sessions organised by the Leadership Council covered a range of topics, including program and neighbourhood requirements, search strategies, rent limits, tips on presenting one’s family to a landlord, a question-and-answer period, and a pep talk on how to stay focused during the housing search. In briefings, clients received little specific information about city neighbourhoods which were eligible for the program. The orientation sessions were followed by required one-on-one sessions with a housing counsellor from the Leadership Council (Pushup et al., 2005).

For the most part, participants were left on their own to find landlords who would accept a voucher, and to negotiate with those landlords. Apparently landlord outreach by the Leadership Council was much less concerted in Gautreaux 2 than in Gautreaux 1 (Boyd, 2011; Edin, 2011).

Not enough time has elapsed to assess the long-term impacts of Gautreaux 2. However, impacts that have been assessed are disappointing compared to Gautreaux 1. Many of the Gautreaux 2 families who originally moved to low-poverty, low-minority neighbourhoods subsequently moved on to neighbourhoods with higher proportions of poor families and black ones as well (Duncan & Zuberi, 2006). About one-half of the participants made secondary moves, and within this group the vast majority (81%) moved to non-opportunity areas (Boyd, 2008; Varady, 2010). Unfortunately, as with Gautreaux 1, there has been little empirical research on the clustering of voucher families. Substandard units and landlord hassles were the most frequently mentioned reasons for the secondary moves. Furthermore, it appears “that moving had little or no impact on most study participants’ employment situations.” (Reed et al., 2005, p. 219)

Whereas Gautreaux 1 produced generally positive results regarding social integration this was not true for Gautreaux 2. Some families who moved back to higher-poverty inner city areas did so out of a desire to be near friends. Apparently, the distance created by the program move had made it difficult to maintain familiar social patterns. “For many secondary movers, feeling distant from their networks in their previous neighborhoods was exacerbated by difficulty connecting with neighbors in their new neighborhoods.” (Boyd et al., 2010, p. 136) However, there is no evidence that this lack of social integration rose to the level of a cultural class between old and new residents, or, in other words, a negative spillover from the first move.

Gautreaux 2 research did not deal directly with the crime issue but Boyd (2008) points out that some Gautreaux 2 children found their Gautreaux neighbourhoods “boring and missed their baseline friends and visited them frequently…” (p. 53). If Gautreaux boys did look to gang members and relatives involved in crime in their old neighbourhood as role models (a real possibility according to Briggs et al.’s 2010 MTO study, see below) then this could have pushed Gautreaux 2 boys toward anti-social behavior and crime.

Gautreaux 2’s relatively disappointing results may reflect the fact that whereas Gautreaux 1 families tended to be first or second generation residents of Chicago public housing and most of them came from two-parent families, in contrast, a far higher proportion of Gautreaux 2 households were female headed ones whose families had lived in public housing over several generations. Alternatively the less impressive findings may reflect the fact that far more apartments were rented to Section 8 housing voucher tenants during the Gautreaux 2 than the Gautreaux 1 era. “Indeed, there is evidence that some apartment buildings in otherwise middle-class neighbourhoods filled almost completely with [regular]
Section 8 tenants [and the far smaller number in Gautreaux 2 program].” (Duncan and Zuberi, 2006, p. 8). Thus, it appears that Gautreaux 2 did lead to some degree of reclustering. Finally, the regression during Gautreaux 2 from low- to higher-poverty neighbourhoods may have been because Gautreaux 1 program officials selected units for participants and negotiated with landlords; this did not happen in Gautreaux 2 (Boyd et al., 2010). This does not necessarily mean that Gautreaux 2 families made “bad choices.” Rather these families did the best they could under difficult circumstances and without agency help. This often resulted in moves to high voucher density buildings and neighbourhoods.


The Moving to Opportunity Demonstration (MTO) began in 1994 in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City. The MTO program is especially useful in examining the beneficial outcomes of policy efforts, since it was intentionally established as an experiment to assess the effects of relocating households from public housing projects to low-poverty neighbourhoods (Feins & Shroder, 2005, p. 1276). This is in contrast to Gautreaux 1 which can only be considered a “pseudo-experiment” since participants were not randomly assigned to low-poverty neighbourhoods. In MTO, public housing families were randomly assigned to one of three groups: (1) an experimental group where members received a voucher and search assistance but were required to find a housing unit in a low-poverty neighbourhood; (2) a comparison group where members received a regular housing voucher with no restrictions on where it could be used; and (3) a control group where members remained in public housing (Varady, 2010; see also Feins & Shroder, 2005).

HUD’s MTO Program Operations Manual (Feins et al., 1994) provides detailed guidance in a number of issues that would affect participants’ ability to adjust to their new location – and in turn the likelihood that negative neighbourhood spillovers would occur. These programmatic issues included: landlord outreach (here HUD drew upon the Leadership Council of Chicago’s experience with Gautreaux 1), screening (credit and housekeeping checks) and pre-move counselling, search assistance and tenant advocacy (e.g. landlord negotiations). For example, HUD provides the following guidance to reduce resistance to voucher families based on children’s gang membership.

In the home visit, NPO [non-profit organization] counsellors must find out whether any members of the family are (or were) members of a gang, and whether that affiliation is likely to create any problems for the family in a new dwelling. If gang membership remains a problem, counsellors should help families deal with this issue before the family moves to a new unit” (Feins et al., 1994, pp. 12-4).

This requirement seems reasonable but is it feasible? Poor implementation would mean that MTO children affiliated with gangs would be moving into suburban neighbourhoods thereby reinforcing neighbourhood objections to the program. Unfortunately, little has been written about the effectiveness of these NPO counsellors in implementing these guidelines, especially with regard to gang membership, gang violence being a high priority concern of many destination neighbourhoods.

While there is some proof that those in the experimental group moved to safer neighbourhoods, there is no evidence that the program led to better employment or educational outcomes as was the case in Gautreaux 1 (Duncan & Zuberi, 2006; Kling et al., 2004; Orr et al., 2003; Shroder, 2001). Furthermore, by the time of the interim MTO evaluation two-thirds of those in the experimental group (i.e. those who had originally leased-up), had already moved at least once and among those in this group a majority (56 per cent) had moved back to high-poverty areas (Briggs & Turner, 2006). “Many of them did so because of an involuntary move, e.g. the landlord had sold the house, rents had been raised, or the tenant had to leave because of a tenant-landlord dispute […]. Post-move counselling might have helped such families from making poorly judged decisions” Varady, 2010).

Finally, MTO experimental movers had little meaningful interaction with their neighbours—in part because they retained strong ties to relatives and friends in their old neighbourhood (Rosenbaum & Zuberi, 2010).
A firestorm of opposition emerged in Eastern Baltimore County when the MTO experiment was first announced and MTO became a lightning rod for opposition to housing mobility programs. As a compromise HUD agreed not to fund the second stage of MTO. Once implementation of MTO got underway, however, the controversy and attention dissipated (Briggs et al., 2010, p. 63)

Briggs et al. (2010) in their qualitative study of MTO in Boston, Baltimore and Los Angeles offer contradictory views concerning negative neighbourhood spillovers associated with housing vouchers (see also Briggs & Turner, 2006). On page 224 Briggs and colleagues state that “the risk to receiving neighborhoods from voucher in-migration is trivial...” yet they provide contrary evidence at several points in the book. They note (1) that MTO voucher recipients tended to locate in voucher corridors or voucher hotspots, fringe areas of the central city or fragile inner suburbs already beginning to decline (but provide no empirical spatial analysis), (2) that some MTO families noticed in-migration of poorer families in their low-poverty areas—the ‘ghetto followed me’ dynamic...” (p.160) and (3) that “adolescent boys in the (MTO) experimental group reported more behavior problems: were more likely to smoke, more likely to be arrested for property crimes and –perhaps most surprisingly—were no less likely to be arrested for violent crimes than their counterparts in the control group. These findings have been controversial, leading some to pronounce MTO a failure—or even a threat to receiving neighborhoods.” (p. 93) On the other hand, “for MTO girls, moving out of public housing meant less harassment, less pressure for sexual activity, and a reduced risk of victimization.” (Briggs et al., 2010, p. 95; see also Duncan & Zuberi, 2006).

The surprising results for MTO boys may reflect the fact that they continued to turn to relatives and friends in their old neighbourhood for role models. “Many MTO youth who relocated to low-poverty areas remained exposed to such fast behavior –“street” behavior—because they were so embedded in kin networks that their parents chose to keep front and center.” (Briggs et al., 2010, p. 134).

MTO’s poor performance relative to Gautreaux 1 (in terms of better employment or educational outcomes) may be due to the fact that the latter families were placed in predominantly white neighbourhoods in job-rich suburban areas distant from inner-city ghettos. However, DeLuca et al. (2010) reject this explanation. They note that MTO moves took place in the late 1990s in the midst of welfare reform and a booming economy which provided a very different context for work and welfare receipt. In other words, the impact of the booming economy and welfare reform likely overshadowed the impacts of MTO.

**Baltimore Housing Mobility Program (Thompson litigation, 2003-present)**

Originated as a partial settlement of Thompson versus HUD, a public housing desegregation case filed in 1995, Metropolitan Baltimore Quadel (MBQ) administers the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program (BHMP) under contract with the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (Engdahl, 2009). Thompson vouchers are specifically targeted to housing units in neighbourhoods where less than 10 per cent of the residents are in poverty, less than 30 per cent are minority, and less than five per cent of all housing units are public housing or in HUD-assisted housing complexes (Engdahl, 2009).

BHMP constitutes the “next generation of mobility counselling” because it includes most, if not all of the key components participants need to find housing in opportunity areas and to make adjustments to their new locations (Briggs & Turner, 2006, p. 59; Tegeler et al., 2007). Theoretically these features would also reduce neighbourhood opposition.

First, MBQ conducts criminal background checks and excludes any household with a live-in family member who has a committed a violent or drug-related crime in the last five years.
Second, the Thompson vouchers are administered regionally so units can be leased in any jurisdiction without having to use “portability” (a feature of the regular Housing Choice Voucher program which in some metropolitan areas involves a great deal of paperwork). After the first year, the vouchers can be used anywhere (i.e. not just in low-poverty, low-minority neighbourhoods) and the vouchers continue being regionally administered.

Third, BHMP offers a variety of assistance to ensure that families make a good locational choice (i.e. one that presumably would minimize the likelihood of negative neighbourhood spillovers): tours and visioning workshops to expand participants’ views of the possible, pre-move credit counselling and other preparations for successful tenancy; staff conducted workshops emphasizing good neighbour responsibilities; escorted unit visits, landlord recruitment, security deposit assistance, and post-move and second-move counselling to ensure that families make (and retain) a successful move (Engdahl, 2009; Tegeler, 2010). Staff make clients aware that there are often different social norms in their new neighbourhoods and that they will be expected to adjust to them.

Fourth, through landlord education and outreach MBQ seeks to counter the poor image of the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP), the “regular” voucher program in the US. For example, MBQ staff stress the counselling provided to voucher recipients (Engdahl, 2009).

Finally, as in Gautreaux 1, staff monitor placements to avoid clustering. “If certain areas start to receive a lot of participants or already have a large number of voucher families from the regular local HCV programs, they step up recruitment in other areas… This [MBQ’s approach] is in contrast with the laissez faire approach in the regular voucher program which frequently results in clusters of voucher holders in identifiable ‘voucher submarkets’.” (Engdahl, 2009, p. 19)

As with MTO, there was a huge furor when the Thompson Partial Consent Decree was first announced in October 1995. At the time of the fairness hearing, there was an organized letter writing campaign led by the same people in Baltimore County who led the opposition to MTO. But as with MTO, once implementation of the program got underway, the controversy and attention evaporated (Tegeler, 2011). The absence of controversy in the case of Thompson is easy to explain. While most Baltimore MTO families relocated during the HOPE VI demolition period, i.e. a time when relocation issues appeared almost daily in the media, BHMP families have been moving since 2002, after the majority of these public housing buildings were torn down.

Twelve hundred BHMP families have relocated from public housing to low-poverty and low-minority neighbourhoods. According to Engdahl (2009), BHMP participants believe that they have benefited from the program, over and beyond achieving better housing in a safer environment. Specifically, participants believe 1) that they have a better quality of life, 2) that they are more motivated (due to a greater feeling of safety), 3) that they are healthier (with respect to both physical and mental health), 4) that they have been able to access better schools and consequently are more satisfied with their children’s schools, 5) that they have started to tap their new neighbourhoods’ social resources (e.g. church, PTA), and finally 6) that families show “preliminary signs of attaching to suburban job markets.” (Engdahl, 2009, p. 31). Furthermore, in contrast to Gautreaux 2 and MTO, most families are either staying in their original (first-move) units or moving to other opportunity areas.

It is important to note, however, that in contrast to Gautreaux 1 and MTO, the Thompson project was not designed so as to scientifically test “hypotheses”. Engdahl’s technical report on BHMP is largely descriptive in nature. Optimistic assessments of the benefits of the programs are not backed up with statistics from two participant surveys carried out by the Maryland ACLU. Engdahl’s report should therefore be used with caution.

The most popular destination for BHMP movers was Baltimore County (Baltimore County and the City of Baltimore are two separate entities), site of 43 per cent of the Thompson voucher moves. Howard County was the next most popular destination. The average distance of initial program moves
was 10 miles, but 20 per cent moved more than 15 miles away. Only one out of every ten movers remained in Baltimore city, and these tended to move to the north-east part of the city (DeLuca & Rosenblatt, 2009). BHMP movers are distributed among 348 census tracts and the largest number in any one tract is 48 (in Columbia MD, see below). Fifteen tracts have 20 families or more. Given that census tracts average around 1,500 even 48 may not be large enough number to indicate clustering and to cause spillover effects (Tegeler, 2011). On the other hand, 20 to 48 households in a census block group (which is much smaller than a census tract and corresponds more closely to the sociological concept of neighbourhood) would be a clear indication of clustering. However, data are only available on the census tract level.

Columbia, a planned community that consists of ten self-contained villages, in Howard County, Maryland, (see Levinson, 2003) has attracted a disproportionately large number of BHMP families because of the perceived excellence of its schools, its reputation for extreme diversity and excellent racial climate, its relatively good bus transportation (both within the community and to the rest of Howard County), its Source of Income Law, which prevents discrimination based on housing voucher status, a higher Fair Market Rate (FMR) which ensures Thompson participants access to middle market rental housing and the relatively good job market in Howard County, especially for entry-level workers. The movement of voucher families (including some with special Thompson vouchers) into older parts of Columbia may be contributing to the familiar processes of neighbourhood decline formerly most evident in the inner city. Clustering of voucher families (including BHMP families) is most apparent at the level of neighbourhoods of older apartments, but there have been no spatial analyses using hot spot analysis or similar sophisticated techniques (Tegeler, 2011).

Columbia appears no longer the idyllic mixed-income, mixed-tenure and mixed-race city envisioned by its founder James Rouse. In November 2000 the Baltimore Sun published a series of three articles documenting rising crime and incivilities, stagnating properties as well as faltering test scores along with disruptive classrooms (Epstein, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c). Children from voucher families (including ones receiving the special Thompson vouchers) have special needs that the public schools in Columbia find difficult to meet. Perceptions of declines in school safety and quality are causing middle-class whites and blacks to move out of older neighbourhoods served by these lower-quality schools.

Thus, with the possible exception of Columbia, the BHMP seems to have succeeded in dispersing to low-poverty and low-minority areas with few adverse community impacts. DeLuca and Rosenblatt (2009) argue that the BHMP has been more successful than Gautreaux 2, particularly with respect to poverty dispersion, and attribute this to more thorough pre-move counselling and post-move follow-ups.

Discussion

This paper has attempted to draw lessons about voucher recipient reclustering and possible negative neighbourhood spillover effects from four voluntary housing mobility programs: Gautreaux 1 and Gautreaux 2 (Chicago), the Moving to Opportunity Demonstration (five cities) and the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program (Thompson litigation). Table 2 provides a summative comparison of the four programs.
Table 2. Voluntary Housing Mobility Programs and Negative Neighborhood Spillovers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gautreaux 1</th>
<th>Gautreaux 2</th>
<th>Moving to Opportunity</th>
<th>Thompson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Type of mixing</td>
<td>Race-based</td>
<td>Race-based and income-based</td>
<td>Income-based</td>
<td>Race-based and income-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Program features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Officials self-selected units</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Discourage voucher clustering?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Screening?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Pre-move counseling?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Post-move (second move) counseling?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Landlord outreach</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Regional administration</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (Re)clustering</td>
<td>Unlikely due to dispersal efforts</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Community resistance?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Negative neighborhood spillovers</td>
<td>Yes, but participants handled them</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No; but little social interaction</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No, arrests for suburban movers went down</td>
<td>Yes (boys attached to the 'hood)</td>
<td>Yes, increased anti-social behavior among boys</td>
<td>No, but Columbia MD has experienced crime in older complexes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gautreaux 1 stands out with respect to efforts to prevent reclustering and to avoid adverse community effects. Staff officials avoided placing families in heavily black or integrated areas, selected tenants who would be ‘good tenants’, developed a wide ranging counselling role to facilitate successful integrative moves and devoted considerable effort to recruiting landlords so as to open opportunities in all-white areas. The program has been successful in shifting poor families to predominantly white communities without much community resistance and in preventing forced return moves to the inner
city. Gautreaux families generally fit in well in their new neighbours and there is no evidence of the new families bringing crime to their new locations.

The results for Gautreaux 2 are more problematic than for Gautreaux 1. More Gautreaux 2 families lived in Chicago neighbourhoods with a high density of voucher residents; more Gautreaux 2 children retained ties to their old neighbourhoods along with negative role models, and Gautreaux 2 mothers sometimes experienced cultural clashes with their neighbours. These problematic trends may reflect the lower level of assistance in the housing search offered to Gautreaux 2 families. However, they may also be due to broader changes between Gautreaux 1 and Gautreaux 2, i.e. more single mothers as well as a tighter housing market linked to the more recent program.

Of the four programs, only MTO provoked intense community opposition. This is because the program was announced at a time when Baltimore’s public housing projects were being torn down and residents of East Baltimore County feared large-scale voucher immigration to their already fragile communities. In retrospect, these fears seem to have been based (at least partly) on reality (i.e. the actual relocation patterns from the projects to vulnerable neighbourhoods closer to the suburbs); they should have been acknowledged and addressed by HUD and local officials. The fact that MTO experimental moves resulted in increased crime and anti-social behaviour among boys highlights the need to be realistic about what housing mobility programs can and cannot accomplish.

Overall, the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program has overcome some of the issues that bedeviled MTO, i.e. the failure to move families to racially integrated neighbourhoods. Whereas most MTO families never left their original urban school district and thus were never provided access to higher performing suburban school districts, in contrast the BHMP used both poverty and race-based criteria to shift children into newer and generally higher performing school districts. BHMP’s success thus far is due to its intensive pre-move counselling and post-move follow-ups as well as the focus on dispersal. The Columbia, Maryland case study shows the need to closely monitor the mobility patterns of voucher families. While moves to Columbia New Town seem to represent an improvement at the community level (Columbia as a whole) they are more problematic when the focus is on older apartment clusters and schools serving them.

Conclusions

Our recently published IJHP article on negative neighbourhood spillover effects associated with the vouchering out of HOPE VI public housing developments deals with forced moves (Kleinhans & Varady, forthcoming). The present paper, in contrast, has combed through the now voluminous literature on voluntary housing mobility programs to determine (1) the types of programs have been put in place to forestall community resistance, and (2) the extent to which these programs have been successful in preventing housing voucher clustering and in turn, community problems like crime, vandalism, drops in local property values, worsening building conditions and lower test scores.

Recent scholarship on poverty and voucher thresholds suggests that negative neighbourhood spillovers are most likely to occur when participants in a housing mobility program concentrate in neighbourhoods already beginning to change and where the in-movement pushes the proportion of poor households beyond some tipping point which will vary for different neighbourhood outcomes (property values, crime rates). This body of work (Galster, 2002, 2002; Galster et al., 2008; McClure, 2010a) emphasizes the value of dispersing voucher families over the metropolitan area. Our four program comparison suggests that dispersal combined with screening and counselling, as well as outreach to landlords, could not only insure greater household choices (see Tegeler, 2010) but in addition, could reduce community resistance.

Adding the latter features to the current Housing Choice Voucher Program as part of HUD’s proposed “Transforming Rental Assistance” (TRA) program will not be easy. The cost for the voucher program will go up because of enhanced services; suburban localities will continue to zone out affordable rental
housing, and voucher families and their advocates will resist any effort to limit their locational choices. Resolving these issues will not be easy but better research could help.

Up to now, virtually all of the empirical research on voluntary housing mobility programs has focused on the benefits for low-income families, i.e. program participants (the equity issue). Whether these programs hurt middle-income neighbourhoods (the efficiency question) has been largely ignored. Qualitative and quantitative research is needed on (1) the extent to which counselling helps voucher families fit into their surrounding neighbourhood, (2) the extent to which different types of mobility programs produce different levels of clustering (hot spot analysis would be an appropriate technique to use, see (Varady et al., 2010), (3) the actual housing voucher threshold for different communities, and (4) the cause-effect relations, if any, between voucher in-migration and changes in crime and other community problems.

On-going monitoring would be an important first step in improving the quality of information available on neighbourhood spillovers.

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