

Voucher Use, Labor Force Participation, and Life Priorities: Findings From the Gautreaux Two Housing Mobility Study

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Abstract

This article uses qualitative data from the Gautreaux Two Housing Mobility Study to assess how the use of vouchers to move low-income families out of segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods into more affluent ones affects female movers' labor force participation. We compare movers' and nonmovers' labor market experiences before they move, finding similar employment experiences and histories of holding low-wage service jobs interrupted by periods of welfare receipt. Primary obstacles to working are childcare responsibilities, illness and health issues (including pregnancy), transportation difficulties, and layoffs from temporary jobs. Respondents have positive attitudes toward employment. We find that moving had little or no impact on most study participants' employment situations. We explore this outcome by profiling four groups that describe the employment situations of most respondents after moving and discuss why moving seems to have little effect on employment. This article pays special attention to how gender influences voucher holders' labor market participation.

Introduction

The mid-1990s' welfare reform laws put new emphasis on jobs and work as the main way for individuals to lift themselves and their families out of poverty and dependency on the state. At the same time, public housing policy emphasized housing vouchers, rather than the construction of more publicly funded units, as a better way to help low-income families obtain affordable housing. A greater emphasis on voucher use was motivated by several factors; one was a growing consensus among researchers that living in the racially segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods, where most public housing developments are located, contributes to joblessness and other negative outcomes for inner-city residents (Massey and Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1999, 1997, 1986).

Results from the Gautreaux program, a 1980s-era housing mobility program that used vouchers, showed that families who moved from high- to low-poverty areas experienced better employment and other outcomes over time than those remaining in original units (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum, 2000). These results and research about the effects of living in concentrated-poverty neighborhoods spawned interest in housing mobility programs that used vouchers, including the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment. Policymakers hoped that by using housing vouchers to move public housing residents from concentrated-poverty neighborhoods or prevent concentration altogether, they could attend to some of the persistent problems associated with living in such neighborhoods, such as chronic unemployment.

Does the use of housing vouchers to move out of concentrated-poverty neighborhoods improve movers' labor force participation and prospects? Unfortunately, recent results from the MTO experiment (Orr et al., 2003) were less encouraging than the original Gautreaux program results. Although experiment participants who moved to low-poverty neighborhoods saw improvements in some of their well-being measures, participants' income or employment outcomes were not affected.

Neither the original Gautreaux program results nor those from the MTO experiment have completely explored why participants fared the way they did with respect to employment. The mechanisms at work in each study—how moving affects labor force participation—remain hidden. In this article, we use qualitative data from the first two rounds of the Gautreaux Two Housing Mobility Study to assess the relationship between using housing vouchers to move low-income families to more affluent neighborhoods and female movers' labor force participation. We first ask, what are voucher holders' baseline employment experiences? And then, how does the process of moving influence voucher holders' labor force participation? To answer these questions we first compare movers' and nonmovers' employment situations at baseline, before they move, and describe their employment experiences and the role of work in their lives. These comparisons and descriptions provide a background for discussing our finding that moving had little or no association with most respondents' employment situations. Second, we profile four groups that describe our respondents' employment situations, after they have made voucher moves, focusing on how employment influences the moving process and vice versa.

We will attempt to accomplish two goals with this article. Our first goal is to shed light on low-income women's labor market and employment experiences while participating in a housing mobility program. We want to give a sense of what voucher users' lives are like. We believe this will help tell the story behind the recent quantitative findings from MTO that show no association between moving to a more affluent neighborhood and employment outcomes.

Second, we want to focus on gender—an issue that has been largely ignored in previous studies but that has become increasingly important in the post-welfare reform political climate. Welfare reform marks a shift in government policy that emphasizes low-income women as workers rather than as mothers and pushes them into the labor market (Orloff, 2004). It is important to consider the role of gender in work, given the fact that most welfare recipients and public housing leaseholders are women. In addition, most theories about joblessness in central cities pertain to men's employment and do not tell us much about the employment situations of inner-city women. Our Gautreaux Two sample comprises low-income, African-American, mostly single mothers, which enables us to consider these issues.

Literature Review

Past research on voucher use provides a context for considering the employment experiences of Gautreaux Two respondents before and after they move. Nationally, 44 percent

of voucher holders receive wages as their primary form of income (Finkel and Buron, 2001). Movers tend to have greater work incomes than nonmovers do, especially if they move to the suburbs or live in low-poverty neighborhoods (Devine et al., 2003). In the 50 largest U.S. metropolitan statistical areas, nonmovers' employment rates exceed that of movers, but differences are not significant. Moreover, in most areas, movers' employment rates decrease as the neighborhood poverty rate increases (Devine et al., 2003).

Research about Chicago Housing Authority voucher holders, a group similar to our sample, shows that there is not much difference in employment or other characteristics between successful and unsuccessful voucher users (Popkin and Cunningham, 2000). Therefore, we expect little difference between movers' and nonmovers' employment rates at baseline. A recent paper analyzing Gautreaux Two program participants' voucher take-up reports that full-time employment or educational commitments prevent some participants from successfully searching for units and moving (Pashup et al., 2004); we expect to echo that finding.

Research from the original Gautreaux study found that voucher holders who moved to the suburbs were more likely to improve their long-term employment prospects (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum, 2000). Some researchers have suggested that inner-city residents are victims of "spatial-mismatch"; as the economy and the city's geography have changed, inner-city residents have experienced declines in employment as more jobs have moved to the suburbs. A more recent study of the Detroit area from Allard and Danziger (2003) supports the spatial-mismatch hypothesis. Allard and Danziger report that welfare recipients living outside the central city had access to more jobs per person, and that living closer to jobs was associated with an increased probability of finding work and leaving welfare. The findings suggest that we might see increased employment prospects for our Gautreaux Two participants after they move as well. Recent findings from the MTO study, however, show no significant differences between movers and nonmovers in any of the measures of adult employment and earnings (Orr et al., 2003). The evidence, then, is mixed as to whether we should expect notable changes in employment among our participants.

Other issues affect our participants' employment prospects beyond their status as voucher holders and residents of racially segregated neighborhoods. The fact that our study participants are African American, female, and moving from public housing developments is likely to have negative or limiting effects on their job prospects. Waldinger and Lichter (2003) highlight the role of employer stereotypes about the suitability of different racial and ethnic groups for different types of jobs in channeling different groups into different occupations. Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991) more directly investigate the meaning of race for employers and find they often confound race and class and engage in statistical discrimination against African Americans and Hispanics. The researchers find that if an individual is African American, has a low income, and is from the inner city, or is perceived as such, these characteristics severely hinder the person's employment chances. Employers are loath to hire someone with these characteristics, which, for them, symbolize poor education, work ethic, and presentation skills. Since our sample participants are African American, have low incomes, and are primarily from the inner city, we might expect that although there may be more job opportunities in the suburbs, they may not be effectively open to our respondents.

In addition, Reskin (1991) argues that labor markets are composed as labor "queues" that reflect a ranking of workers by qualities that employers desire and by how workers rank jobs. Employers hire workers from as high up in the labor queue as possible, with the most desirable jobs going to the preferred workers. Reskin shows that women and African Americans are at the bottom of most labor queues, so we might expect that our sample participants will be viewed as suitable for, and will receive, some of the least desirable jobs when they do work. We also expect that our respondents will be channeled into stereotypically female jobs.

Moving may affect social networks, which many researchers consider important for finding employment. Contacts with working neighbors, acquaintances, family members, and friends are “social resources” that help individuals find jobs independently of their “personal resources” of skills and education (Lin, 1999). Since pervasive joblessness is a characteristic of inner-city, high-poverty areas, moving to a low-poverty neighborhood with higher rates of employment should result in new contacts that could help individuals in expanding their employment opportunities. Granovetter (1973) suggests that individuals find jobs through “weak” ties such as acquaintances, instead of through the “strong” ties of immediate family members or close friends, which suggests that movers may be able to find jobs through new neighborhood contacts. MTO experiment results suggest, however, that, although those who moved to low-poverty neighborhoods were about 20 percent more likely than individuals who remained in their original neighborhood to have a friend who is a college graduate or earns more than \$30,000, this increase in “social capital” did not transfer into employment gains (Kling et al., 2004).

It is important to consider how welfare receipt and welfare reform affect single mothers’ employment, since the Gautreaux Two sample consists of low-income, mostly single mothers with a history of welfare dependency. Edin and Lein (1996) show that neither welfare nor the low-wage work available to them enables single mothers to meet their expenses. Their resulting survival strategies involve a combination of welfare, work, and support from their private social networks. The decision to work or continue to receive welfare depends in part on the labor market of the city where they live and on individual cost/benefit calculations of the utility of working versus staying on welfare. Edin and Lein find that, while most women would prefer to work than receive welfare, working does not necessarily improve their financial situations.

Harris (1996) finds that many single mothers oscillate between welfare and work and that repeat welfare dependency is determined by social isolation, childcare responsibilities, and a lack of education and skills. Moving to an unfamiliar area may increase social isolation and childcare difficulties. An important caveat is that these studies are based on data collected before welfare reform began in 1996. Since a central focus of welfare reform is encouraging work and discouraging welfare use, we might expect that new disincentives to welfare use would push more women into employment and change the way single mothers assess the costs and benefits of working instead of receiving welfare. Indeed, recent research has suggested that employment rates and income levels of single, low-income women rose during the 1990s due to changes in welfare law, tax law (the earned income tax credit), and the economy (Grogger, 2003).

Data and Methods

The Gautreaux Two Program

As a result of ongoing litigation about alleged housing segregation policies on the part of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, in 2001 the CHA implemented a new round of the Gautreaux residential mobility program. The Gautreaux Two Program enabled residents who were current CHA public housing leaseholders in good standing to sign up for vouchers they could use to move to “opportunity areas.” As defined by the program, these are census tracts where the African-American population does not exceed 30 percent and only 24 percent of residents are living in poverty.

For many, the Gautreaux Two voucher presented an opportunity to quickly move out of public housing instead of spending years on a waiting list for regular housing choice vouchers. An important context for the Gautreaux Two Program is that all of CHA is

currently undergoing a massive 10-year redevelopment plan involving the demolition of many existing units and the construction of new mixed-income developments. Therefore, residents in certain developments slated to undergo demolition or renovation were able to weigh the Gautreaux Two voucher against other mobility options that were offered to them under the CHA's "Plan for Transformation."

CHA residents went through several steps to secure Gautreaux Two vouchers. First, all tenants were sent letters inviting them to participate in a 1-day, phone-in registration. After they were deemed eligible for the program, tenants were invited to attend mandatory orientation sessions. Individuals who made it to an orientation session were required to attend an individual meeting with a housing counselor and return all program paperwork. Out of 1,120 people who called to register for the program, 450 completed all the steps and were granted vouchers to be used within 6 months. After they were granted vouchers, clients were responsible for conducting their own housing searches, determining (with help from their housing counselor) whether units were in "opportunity areas," and then arranging for inspections and lease negotiations.

According to the 2000 Census, 48 percent of all census tracts in the city of Chicago qualified as "opportunity areas." Qualifying tracts were primarily clustered on the city's north and southwest sides, but many city neighborhoods are a checkerboard of qualifying and nonqualifying tracts. Thus, clients who wished to move within the city had to use a trial-and-error approach, often locating multiple units before finding one at a qualifying address. Overall, clients received little specific information about which city neighborhoods were eligible for the program.

Data Collection

Using a two-pronged approach, we recruited a sample of mover and nonmover families. First, an initial pool of 82 families was randomly selected from 20 percent of all Gautreaux Two clients participating in orientation sessions. To compensate for the initial low rate of participants who actually moved with the program, in the late fall of 2002 we drew a second sample of 25 program enrollees who had located units and begun the inspection and moving process. Adding this second sample to the first sample ensured roughly equal numbers of movers and nonmovers. Thus, although only 36 percent of program participants overall have used Gautreaux Two vouchers to move, the rate is over 50 percent for Gautreaux Two study participants. Of these movers, 58 percent relocated to opportunity areas in the city, while the rest moved to the suburbs.

The bulk of the data from the Gautreaux Two study consists of four indepth qualitative interviews with 91 respondents. We completed baseline interviews before families used the program to move and maintained ongoing phone contact between interviews. We completed 86 of 91 interviews in the second round, with a retention rate of 95 percent. Movers' interviews were conducted 3 to 6 months after they moved (usually about 9 to 10 months after the baseline interviews), while nonmovers' second interviews occurred about 12 months after baseline interviews. The retention rate for the third round of interviews is 88 percent, and the fourth-round interviews are nearly complete. The fourth round of interviews began in the fall of 2004.

The baseline and second-wave interviews capture the process of searching for housing and moving and the initial adjustment to the new neighborhood. These interviews enable us to assess the early qualitative effects of respondents' employment on moving and the effects of moving on employment. When they are complete and ready for analysis, the third and fourth waves of the study will provide a longer range assessment of how moving impacts respondents' employment.

The sample we use for analysis in this article consists of 81 respondents.¹ We excluded one male respondent, four movers who did not use Gautreaux Two Program vouchers to move from their baseline units, and five participants whose second interviews are still being processed or are missing. We excluded these respondents so we could focus solely on women's employment and maintain the geographic uniformity of the mover and nonmover comparison groups, since respondents who moved via other means moved to neighborhoods similar to those of their original public housing developments.

The baseline interviews typically lasted between 2 and 4 hours and consisted of several open-ended questions that we used to probe in depth about many aspects of respondents' lives. Topics we focused on include experiences with all aspects of the Gautreaux Two Program implementation, narratives of respondents' motivations for moving, and their views on anticipated costs and benefits from their moves. We gathered a focused life history that gave us a sense of the racial and socioeconomic makeup of the various housing situations and communities in which respondents had lived and a detailed employment history. We also collected detailed narratives about respondents' current social and neighborhood contexts, including their family relationships, romantic involvements, family structures, social networks, schools, child-focused programs, or other social services families might have been using before they moved. We asked about families' daily and weekly routines and their neighborhood management strategies, such as strategies for avoiding street violence while participants were out and about in their neighborhoods.

After baseline, we modified interview questions to reflect movers' and nonmovers' different situations. Interviews with movers were designed to capture the process of searching for housing, moving, and adjusting to new neighborhoods; interviews with nonmovers were designed to gather obstacles to moving. Our approach to collecting qualitative data is highly systematic. All interviewers focus on gathering core content but have the flexibility to change question wording and the order of questions to make interviews as much like "conversations" as possible. Additional data come from field notes and interviewers' observations completed for every case after each interview. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Narrative analysis and comparative case studies are the primary qualitative methods we use in this article. Narrative analysis involves standard procedures for coding qualitative data and consists of analyzing data through close readings and comparisons of text as well as considering each case in context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Case studies are especially effective for longitudinal data, as interviewers can track and assess changes as they occur. These methods enable us to discern common patterns and processes that can be used to formulate theories about causal forces behind a particular outcome. These methods also facilitate the identification of patterns in respondents' stated motivations toward courses of action as well as their beliefs and normative expectations.

Characteristics of Participants

Most participants in Gautreaux Two were from large or mid-sized CHA developments. Only one-third of program participants in our respondent pool came from developments slated for demolition in CHA's redevelopment plan. All respondents are female heads of household. Household size averaged four members; apart from the leaseholder, most household members are children. Respondents averaged 32 years of age at baseline and had lived in their current developments for an average of 8.5 years. More than half did not graduate from high school and household incomes averaged \$924 a month. Half of the families reported work income and slightly less than 40 percent received some sort of cash assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Only about one-tenth received child support through the formal enforcement system. Virtually all respondents are African American, although a few are also of Caribbean or Puerto Rican descent.

Findings

We explore the relationship between moving and employment for Gautreaux Two voucher holders in two ways. First, we compare movers and nonmovers with respect to employment at baseline and describe their employment experiences and the role of work in their lives before they move. We define movers as program participants who used their vouchers to move into units in “opportunity areas” by round two. Nonmovers are program participants who have not used their vouchers to move and are still in their original public housing units. When we compare movers and nonmovers at baseline, before anyone has moved, we find little difference between the two groups and much in common in terms of their work experiences and opportunities. This snapshot of voucher holders’ lives helps explain how employment influences whether a voucher holder actually moves and provides a background for interpreting our finding that moving was not associated with most respondents’ employment situations, at least early on.

Second, we profile four groups that describe the employment situations of most of our respondents at round two, focusing on how employment influences the moving process and vice versa. The four groups are respondents for whom a job may prevent a move; those who keep a job when they move; nonworkers; and those whose employment status changed around the time of the move.

Employment Before the Move

We found no significant differences between movers’ and nonmovers’ employment rates at baseline or round two, as shown in exhibit 1. At baseline, 55 percent of movers worked, compared to 42 percent of nonmovers. A higher proportion of employed movers had full-time jobs (which we defined as working 30 or more hours per week) than did nonmovers. Percentages are almost identical at round two, with 55 percent of movers and 44 percent of nonmovers working. Both groups increased their numbers of full-time workers by round two. The average wage for movers was \$9.33 per hour at baseline and \$9.57 at round two. The average wage for nonmovers was \$9.43 per hour at baseline and \$10.22 at round two.

Exhibit 1

Employment Characteristics of Gautreaux Two Participants at Baseline and Round Two

Employment	n	Baseline		Round Two	
		Nonmovers	Movers	Nonmovers	Movers
Percentage working	81	42% (10)	55% (7)	44% (10)	55% (7)
Percentage working full time	67	24% (10)	30% (7)	26% (10)	32% (7)
Wage (\$/hr.)	81	\$9.43 (\$8.25)	\$9.33 (\$6.45)	\$10.22 (\$8.59)	\$9.57(\$6.38)

Notes: Values are means, with standard deviations in parentheses. N is number of women.

The difference in percent employment between movers and nonmovers between baseline and round two was not significant at the standard level of significance ($p < .05$).

Exhibit 2 summarizes census data on selected neighborhood characteristics for Gautreaux Two participants at baseline and rounds two and three. At baseline, when respondents are in their original neighborhoods, 38 percent of women aged 16 years and older were employed. Since half of our respondents report work income, they appear to work more than what is average for their neighborhoods. Exhibit 3 compares neighborhood characteristics and female employment rates for movers and nonmovers at round two. We find that movers’ new census tracts have significantly higher employment and lower unemployment rates for women than their original ones, where nonmovers still live. Therefore, a move to an

opportunity area significantly changes the neighborhood context for women’s employment for movers.

Exhibit 2

Gautreaux Two Participants’ Census Tract Characteristics at Baseline, Round Two, and Round Three

Tract Characteristics	Baseline	Round Two	Round Three
Percentage in poverty	46% (19)	25% (21)	27% (20)
Median household income	\$21,133 (\$14,627)	\$35,999 (\$16,934)	\$33,685 (\$17,569)
Percentage of population age 16 and older who are working	38% (12)	53% (15)	50% (15)
Percentage African American	73% (36)	35% (39)	45% (41)
Percentage White	11% (21)	34% (28)	28% (29)
Percentage Hispanic	14% (22)	24% (24)	21% (24)
Percentage married	31% (20)	56% (23)	52% (24)

Notes: Data are from Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3). Except where noted, values are means, with standard deviations in parentheses.

Exhibit 3

Characteristics of Census Tracts at Round Two: Movers vs. Nonmovers

Tract Characteristics	Nonmovers ^a	Movers ^b
Percentage in poverty	48% (20)	13% (8)**
Median household income	\$18,973 (\$11,233)	\$44,164 (\$12,927)**
Percentage of adults working	36% (12)	61% (13)**
Percentage African American	73% (37)	14% (5)**
Percentage White	11% (23)	47% (20)**
Percentage Hispanic	13% (23)	30% (16)**
Percentage married	32% (22)	69% (15)**
Percentage of adult females not in labor force	50% (8)	40% (1)**
Percentage of adult females who are unemployed	13% (8)	4% (2)**
Percentage of adult females who are employed	37% (8)	56% (1)**

^a N=27

^b N=60

Notes: Data are from Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3). Except where indicated, values are means, with standard deviations in parentheses. **Movers differ from nonmovers at P<.01, statistically significant by T-test.

Virtually all respondents work in the service sector. There is little difference between the types of jobs movers and nonmovers hold. For working respondents at baseline, the most common jobs are formal and informal childcare, retail sales, and nursing home and senior care, followed by office clerking, temporary office or manual labor, food service, telemarketing, and hairstyling. A similar pattern emerges when considering all jobs respondents have held, regardless of whether or not they currently work.

Most respondents get their jobs through newspaper ads or walking into businesses and asking for work. Few report finding their jobs through social networks. Respondents consider certain jobs to be better than others. The worst job is as a fast food worker; respondents describe this job as low in pay and respect and cite poor working conditions—“too much work for no pay.” Better jobs are what we term “helping” jobs, such as working in nursing homes with residents, in childcare, or at schools. One sample participant, Karla, currently works at a suburban assisted-living facility for seniors. She prefers this job to working in fast food. She says,

“I love the home health care... Basically, it’s a whole new change. It’s not, ‘I want this and you ain’t fixed my sandwich right,’ compared to, ‘Well, let me help you with this,’ and going about how to show [the residents] how to do it the right way.”

Respondents prefer to work at helping jobs over other jobs and consider them a step up even when they are not paid more. Helping jobs sometimes offer more of a vantage point for career development and continuing education than other jobs do. Respondents see opportunities that would be available to them if they had more training and many are encouraged to go back to school or complete degrees they started in the past. For example, some respondents who are certified nurse assistants have enrolled in phlebotomy courses. Still, most respondents are not very attached to their jobs.

Obstacles to Employment

A review of respondents’ work histories shows they typically change jobs frequently. Most respondents bounce from job to job, their work histories punctuated by periods of unemployment and receipt of public assistance. The most highly paid and most stable employees hold their jobs for at least a few years and are consistently employed, mostly full time. Respondents stop working for several reasons: layoffs, the end of a temporary job, childcare and transportation problems, pregnancy, and illness or disability (their own or their child’s). Some respondents are fired from their jobs, but this is the least common reason for not working.

Childcare is a constant concern for many respondents. Jalonda, a 25-year-old mother of one, lost her job because her childcare arrangements fell through. She explains,

“It’s just havin’ to take off my job, callin’ off, doin’ this, doin’ that. I have to go here in the mornin’, I’m gonna be a little late. Then they have to let me go, cause I was bein’ late too much.”

Some respondents stopped working when faced with an illness or disability in the family. Karen, a 42-year-old mother of six, says,

“I worked. I’d used to be a teacher’s aide, I did security, I worked in a hotel, in-house treatment, so I’m not a person to sit around going, ‘I want somebody to take care of me....’ What allowed me not to work when the kids were younger was Tyana had severe asthma. She had asthma so bad, when I did go to work I ended up having to quit because she just kept having asthma attacks.”

Most respondents work downtown, on the north side of Chicago, or in the suburbs and commute at least 30 minutes to work. They rely on family or friends for rides or take public transportation. Some have cars, which are often in a state of disrepair. Transportation is especially difficult for those who work the night shift in the suburbs because suburban transit systems often stop in the early evening. Liza, a 28-year-old mother of two, who currently works as a data entry clerk for the county court system, stopped working as a parking attendant at O’Hare airport, her highest paying job, because of transportation problems. She says,

“I had difficulties getting home, because after a certain time, the buses stopped running, and I get off late, and I miss the last bus. Walkin’ all the way down here.... And it was real late, and I stopped doin’ it. I just let it go.”

Pregnancy and childrearing are important issues in understanding respondents’ work histories and their off again/on again attitudes toward work and public assistance. Many stop working when they become pregnant. Their jobs do not offer maternity leave, or they have not worked long enough to accrue those benefits and lose their jobs when they can

no longer work. Then they are back on some sort of assistance or unemployment until they find another job after their child is born. Some respondents report being fired when bosses find out they are pregnant, due to getting sick on the job or liability issues.

Elise, a 29-year-old mother of three, thinks she was fired after only 4 days from “one of the highest paying jobs I had” doing customer service at a utility company because she told her supervisor she was pregnant. She says,

“I was pregnant with the twins when I first started working there. And I was so sick....I said, ‘Well I need to let [the supervisor] know, if she looks up and I’m not at my desk... I’m in the bathroom.’ [The supervisor] went and told her boss that I was pregnant...so I think that is why I was fired...They must have thought I was getting ready to take off for maternity leave and I just got there.”

Attitudes About Work and Public Assistance

Respondents are mostly positive about work. Their general attitude about working is that they want to be employed—not “sitting around at home.” Crystal, a 26-year-old mother of four, says,

“I do everything I can to do more for my kids. If I gotta work, I’m gonna work. I hate to be out of a job. I want me a good job where I can just stay there.”

For most respondents, working is preferable to public assistance, but since almost all of these women are single mothers, they must juggle work with family responsibilities and their desire to do what is best for their families.

Almost all respondents receive some form of public assistance—mostly food stamps and medical insurance. Most respondents are constantly reassessing the costs and benefits of working, comparing what they can earn from their jobs with various public benefits, private help, and child support. Christina describes how she limits her work hours to maximize her monthly earnings—her work income combined with her son’s SSI check and food stamps:

“I can’t earn over a certain amount of money...If I earn over, they take his check away. They will take his check, believe me.”

Virtually all respondents have bounced between work and public aid in the past and began receiving cash assistance after having children. Respondents who no longer receive cash aid are happy to be off public assistance. Misha, a 35-year-old single mother of two, says she started receiving aid when her first child turned 2. “And I got off public assistance in 1998,” she says, “and I’m glad. I don’t have to be bothered with them calling here.”

Courtney, a 39-year-old mother of two, describes how she went from working to receiving welfare with the birth of her last child, although she prefers to work. At baseline she was about to start a new job working in a factory making oven-cleaning pads for \$7 an hour; she has worked in retail in the past. Courtney says,

“Last time I had [cash assistance] was when I had my last son, because I had just started a new job, so I couldn’t get [maternity leave] so I had to go [to public aid]...I don’t like to really be bothered with public aid. I try my very best. I’d rather work a \$7-an-hour job than bother with them.”

Welfare reform seems to have impacted respondents’ attitudes toward working versus receiving cash benefits. Most feel that the new work requirements for cash assistance are too onerous to make the benefits they receive worthwhile. The assistance payments,

worked out to an hourly wage, are so low compared to the hours respondents are required to work and attend job training that they believe they would be better off with a job. Ada, a 23-year-old single mother of three, says, “If I get back on, they want me to go and work for them every month for \$248 in the aid office, and I’m not going to do that. I can find me a job where I get more than that.”

Moving and Employment

By the second interviews we find that little has changed in respondents’ employment situations regardless of whether they used their Gautreaux Two vouchers to move. More than 80 percent of workers (movers and nonmovers) remain in their baseline jobs and the overall percentage of movers who work at baseline and round two remains identical. In this section, we profile four groups that describe the round two employment situations of most respondents who were employed at baseline. The groups include movers and non-movers, and the descriptions shed light on how the physical and psychological process of moving relates to voucher holders’ employment.

My Job Is Important

The first group consists of respondents whose commitment to their baseline jobs became an obstacle to moving and describes about 34 percent of nonmovers at round two. Commitment to a job becomes an obstacle to moving in three ways. First, respondents with relatively well-paying, full-time jobs fear that moving might jeopardize their jobs by making childcare and transportation more difficult. Second, because they want to keep their baseline jobs, respondents restrict their housing search to areas near their jobs or with good public transportation. Third, full-time workers have limited time to successfully search for housing.

Sherry is an example of a respondent whose job and family commitments prevent her from moving. She is a 36-year-old divorced mother of four boys and currently cares for four of her sister’s children as well. She is involved in her church and her sons’ schools and works full time. About her family’s busy schedule, she says,

“I’m working full time. [The kids] are in different little summer activities and summer programs. I haven’t joined any programs or anything of that nature. We’re Jehovah’s Witnesses, so we’re always involved in spiritual activities. So, you know, we stay busy constantly.”

Sherry wants to move to escape the drug traffic and gangs prevalent in her neighborhood. At baseline she was working at temporary office jobs and going to school full time, working toward an associate’s degree in child development. Sherry would eventually like to become a teacher and wants to find a job in education. She restricted her housing search to neighborhoods with good public transportation but quickly grew frustrated with the search. At round two, she is still in the same public housing apartment. Her sister’s children are no longer in the household, and she has a new, better paying job as an assistant teacher at a Head Start center very close to her apartment. She says that her work schedule and transportation problems have made it difficult to search for housing. She also reports discrimination from landlords who are reluctant to rent to a single mother with four boys. She says,

“By me being a single parent, and having four boys, some people are very turned off by that. It’s their community, so it’s difficult, you know, and especially if you’re not married.”

Audrey is a 29-year-old mother of four who is engaged to the father of her youngest three children. She currently works full time at a popular coffee shop in an affluent neighborhood on Chicago's north side and commutes about 30 minutes to work by public transportation or taxi. She was recently promoted to "shift supervisor" and makes about \$9 an hour with benefits. She has limited her housing search to areas near her job, which is in an "opportunity area," because she doesn't have a car. Her full-time work schedule also leaves her "too busy" to spend much time looking for apartments. At round two, Audrey has received a raise and plans to work her way up to manager. She says,

"I really don't wanna look [for apartments] out [of] the city unless I have a car. Because it would be hard for me to come to work. An' I really don' wanna go to another [coffee shop] right now, cause I'm tryin' to become a manager. An' I really need to stay in it in order to do [that]."

Audrey is still searching for a new apartment but is frustrated by her lack of success and has not been looking at many units. She still wants to live near her job but is now considering moving somewhere on the south side of Chicago near her family who could provide assistance with transportation. Audrey would be far away from her job, but "I wouldn't have to worry about gettin' cabs to work," she says. "I would be gettin' taken to work."

Holding On to What They've Got

Another large group of respondents consists of movers who, despite moving to a new and often distant neighborhood, maintain the jobs, childcare arrangements, and social networks they had at baseline. About 36 percent of movers are in this group. Many keep their children in their old schools. These respondents view their moves to opportunity areas as trial moves—after a year, they will be free to use their vouchers to move elsewhere. Some want to make sure they like their new neighborhoods and housing arrangements before they make any major changes. Others are convinced from the start that they won't stay in their new neighborhoods for more than a year. All spend a lot of time and energy to maintain their own and their children's family and social ties in the old neighborhood, sometimes because they lack other options.

Amy is a 32-year-old mother of three who has held several steady jobs throughout her employment history. For the past three years, she has worked as a server in the restaurant of a well-known downtown department store. She also attends college in the far south side of Chicago. She is studying early childhood education and would like to work in daycare after finishing. Her children are enrolled in a Catholic school on the south side that is very close to her mother's house. She wanted to move to the south suburbs but could not find a unit that met opportunity area requirements. At round two, she has moved to a unit on the northwest side of the city. She expects that in another year she will use her voucher to move back to the south side where she will be close to her family. For her, she says, the program was a chance to "move to a neighborhood that I want to live in and not be forced to stay right there [in the original move unit]."

Amy admits that she doesn't know her new neighborhood because she is hardly there—she spends a lot of time driving her children to and from school on the south side and commuting to work downtown. She spends most weekends and days off with her family on the south side and does most of her shopping there. She says that nothing has really changed since she moved, except that she had to buy a newer car to keep up with the new commute:

"It's still the same, basically...I mean I might drive a little bit more now, you know, because of the distance but...the only thing is here we have to just get up

a little earlier... so there's nothing that's really changed. The only thing—is my car note...I got a new car. Car and insurance, about 500 bucks a month.”

Terri is a recently married mother of one. She is 28 years old and at baseline works part time for the Chicago Park District, often on evenings and weekends. She eventually would like to be a medical assistant but is putting classes on hold until after the move. She wants to move to escape shooting and violence but worries that moving will create transportation and childcare problems—she's afraid her car won't survive the long commute. She had a difficult search but finally located a unit in a south suburb. By round two, she has moved to her new unit and is commuting an hour each way to her job at the Chicago Park District. About her decision to move, she says,

“Because I was thinkin' [about] not moving. Not to move here, cause, like I said, I'd have a hard time, an' you know, it was hard for me to get back an' forth [to] the city. 'Cause I work in the city. I still work in the city. It's hard [to get] back an' forth. ..I wanted to move, but then...I don' know if I'm gonna make it out here...then I was like, 'You can't; you already signed your lease,' so I *had* to go. I wanted to move from the [project] environment.”

Terri's daughter remains in her old school because Terri didn't have childcare in the new neighborhood. Terri's daughter stays with an aunt in the city during the week and visits her mother on weekends. Terri says,

“[When] I first moved, you know, I was like I gotta – everything gonna change now. 'Cause okay, [my daughter] will be goin' to school out here, [but] who gonna watch her when I work? I don' know how I'm gonna do this, I gotta find a way to do somethin'. So my sister's like, 'Let's leave her out here.’”

Terri has begun attending classes at the local community college and hasn't had any luck finding a job at the local park district. She wants to reduce her course load because, as she puts it, “It was wearin' me down! I ain't have no time.” She is having marital problems due to her husband's inability to hold a job, and would like to move closer to the city when her year is up.

Sheila has four teenagers. For the past 2 years, she has worked as a cashier at a downtown hospital, where she earns \$7.55 an hour. By round two she has moved to a western suburb and kept her job at the hospital. She likes her new neighborhood, which she became familiar with through a friend who lives there. Since she moved, her commute is 90 minutes each way. She would like to find a job closer to her new unit and stay in the new neighborhood. She also would like to begin classes, which are offered free at her job in the city, to become a medical assistant. This is what Sheila says as she weighs her options:

“And then [I] realize [I] might as well find a job out there. You're coming too far and there's no way I would drive that far to work. And it's like, well, when I moved here I was undecided if I wanted to stay here. But now that the kids like it and everything, and my daughter, she's like, 'Well, mom, I want to finish school out here,'... and then the boys, they like it, too. So I said, 'Well, we gonna stay.' And then more than likely what I'm going to do is go on the Internet and look for something this way. [But with a new job] I probably wouldn't have the straight hours that I have no more. And, see, that's another reason why I was like that, 'Should I leave or should I stay?' And then right now I never know, with the way jobs laying off and then the way, if I come out here, I can't say if I have night schooling then I have to turn around and get a job out here, and they might want me to work nights. It'd be messed up. So that's another thing I am thinking before I really do something.”

Not Working

The second group consists of respondents who move but are unlikely to work because of personal or health problems. Virtually all of these respondents have worked in the past but were not working at baseline and have no immediate plans for employment. This group represents about 36 percent of movers.

LaTasha is a 26-year-old mother of three children. At baseline, she is pregnant with her fourth child. She thinks that moving would help her “better herself” and that her children would go to better schools. She recently learned that her oldest son has muscular dystrophy. She did not graduate from high school and has not worked recently. Her family has been helpful in identifying, calling, and taking her to visit units. By round two, she has moved to a small house in a rural northwestern suburb with her new baby and other children. She likes the new neighborhood and plans to stay, yet she is isolated there. She says, “I haven’t been outta this house” since she moved. Her car is not working and public transportation is slow and sporadic in her area. She relies on visits from her family and boyfriend to leave the house for shopping, doctors appointments, and other activities. LaTasha says she wants to find a job but has a hard time being able to “follow through” with things. She says,

“I work one time—no, two times an’ quit the same day. On both of ‘em! [But now] I’m gonna work. I’m gonna get me a job. I can’t sit in here, shoot. I want me an Impala SS. So I guess I’m a have to work for it. Or probably go to school ‘cause I was thinkin’ about goin’ up there to the college an’ see what classes they got. ‘Cause I was goin’ to school for architecture design...every time I decide I would go to school I wind up droppin’ the first semester like I can’t do it, because I don’t know if I really wanna do it! ...I have a fear of failin’ every-thing; I think that’s why I start somethin’ an’ I keep quittin’ it because I don’t think I will finish it.”

Tierra is a 31-year-old mother of one. She had to quit her last telemarketing job, which she had for 2 months, when she started dialysis. At baseline, she received disability payments and was unable to work. She was diagnosed with lupus at age 14 and has had serious health problems over the past 3 years. Despite her health problems, she was able to find a unit with help from her sister, who is also enrolled in the program. Although she successfully moved, at round two Tierra describes several problems with her new apartment and landlord and some incidents of racial bias at her daughter’s school. She is unhappy in her new unit and would like to move south to be near her family. She says,

“Actually, like I said, since I been here, I don’t feel I been happy, ‘cause this place depresses me, ‘cause there’s nothin’ to do, nothin’, you know, can’t get out much because the buses stop runnin’ early, I don’t have a car, I don’t know how to drive, so that’s another bad thing, you know, so I don’t get out.”

Tierra’s dream is to get a new kidney, return to school for a cooking program, and eventually open her own restaurant. For the time being, however, she is unable to work.

Alma has four adult children and is 59 years old. One of her sons was recently murdered by a girlfriend and the case will go to trial soon. His son and another grandchild currently live with her. In the past she held several steady jobs for long periods; she worked the longest as a cafeteria worker at a large auto manufacturing plant for 15 years. Two years before baseline, she had a mild stroke that left her with constant back pain and unable to stand for extended periods of time. She says,

“I can’t do no lot of walkin’ ...Because the lower part of my back gets to hurting an’ then all at once it gets in my knees. An’ then I just lose my balance. An’ I don’t do not lot of standin’ at one time. An’ I can’t do no liftin’, *period*.”

Alma currently receives disability payments and has no plans to work. She wants to move so her grandchildren can go to a better school; she has looked for units in the suburbs. At round two, she was living in a suburban unit found by her housing counselor. Her grandson is doing well in school and her health problems have improved. She has no plans to work but loves her new neighborhood and says, “Since I move out here, seem like I’m happy. For the first time in ...cause I was out there [in public housing] for almost 30 years. This is the first time I really felt *happy!*”

Movers With Job Changes

A small group of respondents experienced changes in their employment situations that coincided with their moves. A handful of respondents, about 7 percent of movers, lost their jobs after moving because of transportation problems. A few who were not working at baseline (again, about 7 percent of movers) started jobs in their new neighborhoods. Another small group of respondents (about 8 percent²) changed jobs for reasons unrelated to their moves.

Alisha is a 27-year-old mother of four. Before moving, she worked at the local phone company for \$5.25 an hour. She lost this job shortly after moving because it was too difficult for her to get to work from her new unit. By round two she has found a new part-time job driving a school bus but will not begin work until school starts.

Nancy moved to a far north suburb that is 2-1/2 hours away from her old neighborhood after her sister, who lives in the same town, found her a unit. Nancy has two children, but her oldest stays with her mother in her old neighborhood. She has held retail jobs in the past but, before the move, was not working due to feeling depressed about the deaths of some close family members. She says,

“I used to always try to keep me a job but, after my sister passed from the breast cancer, I had, like, gave up you know, I had went through like a depressed stage and I just stayed in the house.”

After the move, Nancy’s sister found her a third-shift job as a stocker at a large retail store, where she also works. Nancy depends on her sister to take her to work and pick her up. She is unhappy in her new neighborhood; “it’s too quiet,” she says. She wants to move back to south Chicago to be closer to her family and friends, although her son is adjusting well and likes his new school. She spends each weekend at her old public housing development, where her mother still lives.

Lisa is a 29-year-old mother of three. At baseline, she was working as a security guard and was worried about her drug-addicted mother, who was staying with the family. After moving to the north side of the city, her company transferred her job to a site close to her new apartment. From the start, she had many problems with her unit and landlord. After the unit failed an inspection, Lisa moved back to the south side. Just before moving, she got a better paying unionized job as a housekeeper at a large downtown hotel. She says that she wanted a new job whether or not she was moving.

Discussion

Here we return to the questions stated earlier: What are voucher holders’ baseline employment experiences? How does the process of moving affect and influence voucher holders’ labor force participation? We address each question in turn.

We have shown that there is little difference between movers’ and nonmovers’ employment situations at baseline. Overall, movers and nonmovers have very similar employment histories and experiences. Compared with census data for their original neighborhoods,

Gautreaux Two voucher holders as a group tend to work more than the norm for their areas. Most have worked a variety of low-wage service jobs in the past, regardless of whether they are working at baseline, and have shifted back and forth between work and public assistance as they bear children. Childcare, illness and pregnancy, layoffs from temporary jobs, and transportation problems are the main reasons why respondents stop working. It is important to note that of the obstacles to employment voucher holders describe, only one, transportation, is always affected by a move. Childcare may or may not be affected.

Respondents have positive attitudes about work and prefer to work rather than receive aid, yet they recognize that working may not always be the best thing for their families. Although the amount of aid available to respondents has declined since welfare reform, deciding whether to work involves a near-constant assessment of a job's costs and benefits compared to what a respondent could cobble together in various forms of public and private assistance. We want to emphasize that jobs, while increasingly important to respondents, are just one aspect of their lives. Respondents are all mothers who often have significant personal and health problems that affect their ability and desire to work.

In thinking about how moving influences labor force participation, we observe four early outcomes for voucher holders with respect to their employment situations as they attempt to move into more affluent neighborhoods. Again, we emphasize that our data covers the initial adjustment period after moving. The least common outcome is that movers experience a change in their employment situation. Only a handful of respondents begin new jobs in their new neighborhoods after moving, while a few lose their jobs because of transportation problems, and others change jobs for reasons unrelated to moving. The most common outcome is to keep a baseline job, which may or may not represent an obstacle to moving, or to remain out of the labor force.

Most movers who work at baseline hold on to their jobs and many aspects of their "old" lives after moving. They often view their moves as temporary and expend a lot of energy and time maintaining their and their children's school and social networks in the old neighborhood. For some workers, their commitment to their jobs becomes an obstacle to moving. If they view their jobs as good ones, holding on to their current positions may be more important than moving. A job can also be an obstacle to moving by limiting the amount of time available to respondents for housing searches and the areas they are willing to move to.

Moving out of a highly segregated, high-poverty neighborhood into a more affluent and racially mixed neighborhood seems to have little association with increased or reduced employment, at least initially. This tendency is despite the fact that census data show that movers' new tracts have significantly higher employment rates for women. Theoretically, we might expect that living in an area where more women are working means that more jobs are available, social norms about holding a job are more prevalent, and contact with employed neighbors might help voucher holders find jobs. Instead, we find that respondents who were working before they made voucher moves are likely to continue working at their original jobs, while respondents that are not employed continue to stay out of the labor force. Attitudes about work do not seem to be influenced by moving. Gautreaux Two voucher holders are positive about work before and after they move, and working, when possible, is greatly preferred to receiving public assistance.

These findings do not support ideas that simply moving low-income families out of segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods will encourage greater labor force participation. Beyond what we have already described, we have three suggestions about why location does not seem to affect voucher holders' employment. The first is to emphasize the type of moves Gautreaux Two voucher holders are making. The second is to highlight additional

problems and issues our respondents face in their daily lives that make it difficult for them to find and keep jobs. The third is to emphasize respondents' labor market patterns and the obstacles that keep them from working.

For Gautreaux Two participants, the chance to secure a voucher and move out of public housing is a rare opportunity. Participants' main reasons for moving are a desire to improve their housing conditions and escape the violence, drugs, and gangs that plague inner-city housing developments. While these are certainly good reasons for moving, in most cases Gautreaux Two voucher holders often have nothing to anchor them in the new neighborhoods they move to and a lot to bind them to their old neighborhoods. They do not move to take new jobs or start educational programs, which are common reasons why Americans move.

Most respondents have lived most of their lives in or around the south side neighborhoods where Chicago's public housing developments are concentrated and have an important support network of family and friends there. They also have fairly limited experiences in other parts of the city and do not feel comfortable there. If there were no restrictions on their Gautreaux vouchers, most respondents report wanting to move to working- and middle-class African-American neighborhoods that would not qualify as "opportunity areas." Moving is a major change for many of our respondents. While they may appreciate their new neighborhoods' relative safety and quiet, they are apprehensive about being outside of the city they know. Most take a "wait and see" attitude toward their new neighborhoods, putting off making major changes such as looking for new jobs or changing their children's schools until they have made up their minds about whether they will stay.

Many of our respondents have substantial personal and health problems that can make it difficult to find and keep jobs. In addition to the childcare woes that most working parents face, many of our respondents have witnessed brutal acts of violence and experienced the deaths and incarcerations of close family members, friends, and partners and have suffered material hardships. A study of Chicago Housing Authority voucher holders, a group similar to the Gautreaux Two sample, shows these individuals are more troubled than voucher holders nationwide (Popkin and Cunningham, 2000). Half of our respondents score in the clinical range on the CES-D (a depression scale) or report serious struggles with depression. Pre-existing depression or acute anxiety can sometimes make the inevitable disappointments and frustrations of the housing search overwhelming and can make jobs hard to find and keep. The physical health needs of participants and their children are a prohibitive barrier for many as well. We emphasize this only to highlight that, given the traumatic events our respondents face with depressing regularity, finding or holding onto low-wage jobs may seem relatively unimportant to them.

Another factor to emphasize is Gautreaux Two voucher holders' employment histories. Respondents tend to move in and out of jobs regularly, and they will likely continue to do so regardless of whether or not they move. Most of these employment changes will be influenced by whether respondents have more children, whether they or their children have health problems, and whether they are laid off from temporary jobs, rather than by residential moves. While transportation to and from a job can certainly be affected by a move, other common obstacles to working such as pregnancy, childcare problems, and illness are less likely to be.

We also want to emphasize that the employment obstacles faced by Gautreaux Two voucher holders are directly related to their gender and status as single mothers. The obstacles these voucher holders face are different from the employment obstacles reported for men in the literature about inner-city joblessness. Our respondents are often the only caregivers for their children, and sometimes grandchildren, and shoulder all aspects of their care and well-being with few material resources. These responsibilities, in turn, affect our respon-

dents' abilities and desires to work. Ironically, although the pressures of being a single mother may play out as an employment obstacle for respondents, children are a primary motivation for working. Respondents think working will improve their children's lives by alleviating material hardship and by setting a good example for them.

In conclusion, our findings do not offer much hope that using vouchers to move low-income families out of racially segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods will lead to greater labor force participation among these families. Moving alone simply cannot alleviate many of the obstacles that Gautreaux voucher holders, who are mostly low-income, single mothers, face when finding and keeping jobs. Moving to a more affluent neighborhood does not seem to translate into gains in labor force participation, although the new neighborhood offers a much different context for employment.

It is possible that later rounds of interviews with Gautreaux Two voucher holders will paint a different picture of their employment outcomes after moving, but we do not expect much change from what we present here. Voucher holders who held onto jobs when they moved and decide to remain in their new neighborhoods may eventually find jobs near their new homes, but we do not expect moving alone to encourage nonworkers to enter the labor force. We also expect that some current workers and nonworkers will switch places in future rounds of interviews. Voucher holders' propensity to hang on to their jobs when they move may mean that it is hard for voucher holders to find jobs even though most work at low-wage service jobs. It could also mean that moving in itself is such a big change that respondents want to hold on to familiar aspects of their routine.

After Gautreaux Two program participants move, voucher holders are in areas with much greater labor force participation for women, but it is unclear how or why this could translate into employment gains. Since respondents already want to work and have positive attitudes about it, being around more "role model" workers in the new neighborhood seems unlikely to have any effect unless they help voucher holders find jobs, something we have very little evidence of in the Gautreaux Two study. We know from past research on gender and work, however, that a desire to work is only one of many factors involved in finding and keeping a job. Additional issues of race, education, and employer stereotyping need to be considered as well, since they affect the types of jobs and opportunities available to African-American, female voucher holders who are from inner-city areas.

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Notes

1. The total N is higher than 81 in some of our exhibits because we have additional data for some respondents for whom we do not have interviews.
2. These percentages, combined with the others for movers, do not add up to 100 percent due to missing data and the fact that a few movers did not fit into any of these groups.

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