

# Migration for Housing: Urban Families in Rural Living

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## Executive Summary

This study examined the movement of low-income families from urban areas to rural Pennsylvania to find available, affordable quality housing. The year-long ethnographic study involved interviews with: migrant families to understand why they moved and what their perceptions of their new community were; long-term community members to examine their perceptions of community change; and local government/community organization representatives to ascertain what, if any, changes to social services were being attributed to low-income families migrating to the area.

A key finding from the study showed that, contrary to much of the migration literature, respondents did not relocate for labor opportunities. In this study, families migrated out of urban centers and into rural areas for housing opportunities.

## Introduction

Pennsylvania ranked 48<sup>th</sup> nationwide in population growth in the 1990s; despite its slow growth, data show a 94 percent increase in the number of non-whites moving into rural counties between 1990 and 2000 (<http://www.ruralpa.org/about.html#3>). What these statistics hint at is a slowly growing trend occurring in some rural Pennsylvania counties of low-income urban individuals and families moving to rural communities in search of housing and other affordable services. Fitchen (1991) documented this trend more than a decade ago when she noted that, in rural communities closer to metropolitan areas, local agencies reported a significant increase in low-income people moving in from urban areas. Fitchen argued that the high housing costs in urban areas coupled with the surplus small-town rural housing stock was a good propeller of urban poor to the countryside.

Throughout the United States, rural counties are increasingly becoming home to correctional facilities, halfway houses, and drug treatment centers that shelter individuals from local neighborhoods as well as more distant communities. Upon release from these facilities, individuals may choose to remain in the area; and subsequently, seek services from local organizations.

While the numbers of urban individuals entering Pennsylvania rural counties have not been documented due, in part, to the difficulty in tracking through traditional census data collection methods, the effects of urban

individuals and families moving into rural Pennsylvania communities may have major consequences for the state's economic and social institutions. At issue, too, is the role that race and ethnicity play in the racially homogeneous rural Pennsylvania counties that are experiencing increased levels of minorities seeking improved living conditions.

This research project began after observations of the above patterns were revealed in an on-going study – The Family Life Project (FLP).<sup>1</sup> Preliminary findings from the Pennsylvania FLP ethnographic data showed that low-income individuals and families who were migrating to three research counties were driven by public housing availability and the prison economy.

In 2004, a community ethnographer from the FLP was

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<sup>1</sup> The FLP, funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, was a five-year study conducted by researchers at Penn State and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The goal of the project, which began in 2002, was to understand the development of young children by following them from infancy through their first three years of life. The study was comprised of five projects conducted by 23 investigators who represented more than 10 disciplines. The study funded by the Center falls under the ethnographic portion of the FLP, which was comprised of two components: a family ethnography consisting of 37 families and a community ethnography of community characteristics hypothesized to affect families' and children's lives across the three Pennsylvania counties of Huntingdon, Blair and Cambria.



This project was sponsored by a grant from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

Information contained in this report does not necessarily reflect the views of individual board members or the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. For more information, contact the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 200 North Third St., Suite 600, Harrisburg, PA 17101, phone (717) 787-9555, fax (717) 772-3587, email: [info@ruralpa.org](mailto:info@ruralpa.org).

## Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research is designed to explore and help explain the reasons individuals choose to relocate, where they relocate, how long they stay, what resources they need or what social ties they build. Findings from ethnographic studies are best used when combined with larger quantitative data that determine how the uniqueness of the present economic and social contexts shape individual choices. By understanding how these macro- and micro-level forces are integrated, state and local governments will be better able to adopt policy measures that take into account the needs of newcomers and long-term residents, budgets of social service providers, and the impact of such forces on statewide institutions.

invited to attend the Special Housing Needs Task Force meeting that was formed by a group of social service providers, community developers and local officials in Blair County. The group was organized to address how the county should respond to the increasing numbers of poor families moving into the county. One major area of concern addressed at the task force meeting was a charge that private developers were advertising the availability of low-income “Section 8” housing in Blair County in large metropolitan areas.<sup>3</sup> In one instance, a task force member stated that approximately 80 low-income families moved to a small Blair County community to take advantage of the Section 8 housing opportunities. He said that the impact on the community was immediately felt by the school district, which provided alternative education programs for 13 children from these families. By taking action, the group felt it could best address these concerns in the interests of all those involved.

This research allowed a small team of researchers from the FLP to explore these findings more systematically in the three rural counties of Huntingdon, Blair and Cambria, where the FLP data were collected.

The research, conducted in 2005, was an ethnographic study that explored the lived experiences of 15 families that chose to leave high poverty urban neighborhoods and move into a central Pennsylvania rural county. Over seven months of intensive, semi-structured monthly interviews and observations, the project elicited factors that respondents say contributed to their mobility, and the processes of relocation that included how respondents discovered information, obtained services, built upon opportunities and reacted to challenges.

To understand how agencies and local long-term residents responded to demographic shifts occurring in these communities, the researchers attended meetings and interviewed organization officials and residents who had

spent their lifetimes in the area and lived in the same neighborhood as the migrant families participating in the study.

There is a lack of systematic research that examines the processes by which individuals or families come into rural Pennsylvania counties from large cities via the low-income housing industry, what services they seek, how long they stay or what social ties they develop within communities. Further, studies have not addressed the impact of these demographic shifts on community cohesion and quality/quantity of services rendered to the poor.

## Summary of Related Research

The fact that low-income urban dwellers are moving to poor rural communities for reasons other than employment opportunities have been examined in the literature but to a very limited degree (Jobes, 2000; Maynard, Kelsey, et al., 1997; Fitchen, 1995 and 1994; and Larson, 1994). These researchers cite affordable rental housing, the portability of welfare benefits and the better overall quality of life as primary reasons for relocation. To achieve a better quality of life, more low-income urban dwellers are opting to leave the city in favor of the amenities they believe a small town has to offer. Nadel and Sagawa (2002) describe seven myths and realities about rural America that many respondents in the project study came to realize over time, including their preconceived notions of cleaner and safer environments, decreased drug use, and better health care. Soon after arriving, though, many notified other family members and friends back in the city of origin of their newfound, if only brief, happiness. Migrations such as these have reshaped our nation’s rural communities from a mostly homogeneous society to one that is progressively becoming more diverse (Housing Assistance Council, 2004; Barcus, 2002; and Brown and Deavers, 1989). In response to this trend, local service agencies struggle to support the needs of both new and long-term residents. Fitchen (1995) argues that the migration of poor people to depressed rural communities redistributes poverty to those areas and further concentrates it there. Further, new migrants from urban centers bring with them lived experiences that may be at odds with local residents. Jobes (2000) argues that many long term residents in small rural towns fear that population expansion will result in a faster-paced, impersonal lifestyle common in most cities. As a conse-

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<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Section 8 Program is now called the Housing Choice Vouchers Program. The program is the federal government’s major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. In this report, the program will be referred to as Section 8.

<sup>3</sup> During the meeting, the director of the housing authority stated that the housing authority does not advertise to the public and, to his knowledge, he had not heard about these allegations. Nonetheless, the task force said they were aware of one local developer who did advertise Section 8 outside the county.

quence, competition for resources and conflicts arise between new migrants and those whose families have resided in local communities for generations.

Other aspects to consider are who is moving into communities and where they are moving. It makes a difference to local economies that poor urban minorities are choosing to relocate to poor, mostly white, rural communities. That is, local governments want to attract individuals who bring in resources (in the form of higher taxable and more discretionary incomes, for example) as opposed to those who will require specialized services (such as public housing, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Medicaid). Two of the study's three counties (Blair and Cambria) have experienced net population losses between 1990 and 2000.<sup>4</sup> Researchers have attributed population losses in rural America, in part, to brain drain, where college-educated and highly skilled individuals leave for better opportunities in more metropolitan settings (Nord and Cromartie, 1999; and Hertzog and Pittman, 1995). For example, Nord and Cromartie (2000) argue that during the 1990s migration trends in the rural South were mostly beneficial; however, in disadvantaged areas, out-migration was still the norm. These authors note factors other than brain drain contribute to population loss in rural communities and suggest that communities actively improve job skills among residents, increase wages, and elect strong leaders. Other studies show how small rural towns attract retirees and vacationers. Shumway and Otterstrom (2001) found that rural restructuring in the Mountain West has caused increased concentration of migrations due to the attractive environmental and natural amenities now available for profit. No studies were found that call for rural communities increasing the numbers of impoverished families as a response to population decline.

Increasingly, studies show the complexities and uniqueness of rural poverty (Jensen, 2006; Brown and Lichter, 2004; Snyder and McLaughlin, 2003). Researchers argue, and this study supports the arguments, that policies to decrease concentrations of poverty in urban areas cannot be cut and pasted into rural settings. For example, Swaminathan and Findeis (2004) found the increased workforce participation of former welfare recipients was not uniform across both urban and rural areas. They argued that implementing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (federal welfare reform) in rural counties did not coincide with the rise in employment opportunities that were experienced in urban areas. Thus, the decreased welfare rolls that were attributed to increased employment opportunities in the late 1990s were not found across high poverty rural areas.

## Project Goals and Objectives

This project was an exploratory ethnographic study that examined the characteristics and forces, as well as the experiences, that drove migrations in poor families; the subsequent responses of those with longer ties to the community; and the effects on local public policies and access to social services.

## Selection Process and Data Collection

The researchers used the families and organizations already involved in the FLP to further investigate the proposed research questions. Researchers recruited 17 migrant families and 12 long-term families.<sup>5</sup> Fourteen of the 17 migrant respondents were seen monthly throughout the study period. Each of the other three migrant respondents was interviewed once during the study. The 12 long-term respondents were also interviewed once during the course of the study. These families lived within a mile of the migrant families and were selected by snowball sampling.

Ethnographers also attended 16 community meetings and conducted 14 informational interviews with county agencies and organizations.

While 15 of the migrant respondents were African American, it was not a primary goal of the study to examine race. Future large-scale demographic studies of low-income families migrating into the area would have to be conducted to determine if race is a salient factor.

Since the families studied were not a random sample of all low-income migrant families in the Cambria, Blair and Huntingdon communities, they were not statistically representative. Nonetheless, their experiences were indicative of the challenges families faced and the strategies employed to navigate the migration process.

## Data Analysis

The primary data form used in the analyses was qualitative narratives. Data were analyzed at three levels: within-case level, cross-case level, and cross-site (county) level. Analysis of data at the within-case level permitted a detailed understanding of the experiences and views of a particular group, such as the in-migrant group. Analysis at the cross-case and cross-site level allowed for the comparison of experiences across families, agencies and geographic locations. Cross-case analysis within each of the three counties helped to generalize the findings within cases. Similarities in structures or processes across cases demonstrated stronger support for the findings of the within-case analysis.

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<sup>4</sup> The prison population of Smithfield State Correctional Institution, which opened in 1988, may be a factor attributing to the slow population growth in Huntingdon County during this time period.

<sup>5</sup> Each of the migrant families moved into one of the research counties no more than 18 months from the start of the research project. The long-term community members have at least two generations of family ties to one of the three counties.

## Results

### Profile of New Migrants

The findings in this study result from both within-case and cross-case analyses. Within-case analyses were based on examining all of the data on each family and determining what patterns emerged for each respondent. Cross-case analyses then culled this information to determine what patterns emerged across the sample. This section describes the patterns that emerged in the data at both levels. By focusing on the emergent patterns, this report details the processes and intersections of relocation characteristics, nuanced-behaviors, and meanings that respondents gave to their lived experiences. Thus, the profile is substantively organized as opposed to creating separate profiles for each respondent.

To unravel some of the nuances surrounding rural poverty, researchers examined the experiences of families around several domains. Each respondent was drawn to the study area for a better quality of life. Of note, however, is that none of the respondents reported being drawn into the area for employment opportunities. In searching for a better quality of life, housing was a major pull factor. How did respondents come to find safe and affordable housing in central Pennsylvania? Rumors in the community circulated that public housing authorities and private real estate developers were advertising 'low-income Section 8 and public housing' vacancies in large northeastern cities such as Newark, NJ, Brooklyn, NY, Pittsburgh, PA and Philadelphia, PA. Interviews with each of the public housing directors across the three counties revealed no such practice, as was the case with the private developer who was interviewed. None of the 17 respondents observed any advertisements of low-income housing opportunities in the cities from which they relocated. Exclusive of the four respondents who were referred to the transitional housing for battered women, most respondents found out about available and affordable housing in the study area through their family and social networks. A few were drawn to the area serendipitously.

While many families relocate because of better employment opportunities, this study demonstrates that better housing opportunities are driving migrations. Once housed, families seek out employment opportunities. Respondents were asked to list and explain, in order of importance to the respondent and her/his family, the following factors: housing, work, health, safety, education and other (respondent could fill in item or items not included in the list). Housing, safety and work were the three most prevalent relocation reasons.

### *Housing and Safety*

Housing was the most prevalent reason given for those choosing to relocate. Much of low-income housing research focuses on availability, affordability, and quality (Anderson et al., 2003; Conger, 1993; Currie and Yelowitz, 2000; Einbinder, 1995; Gagne and Ferrer, 2006;

Harkness and Newman, 2005; Howell et al., 2005; Hulchanski, 1995; Newman and Harkness, 2002; and Yeung et al., 2002). For study respondents, all three of these factors drew them into the study area. Because the respondents were housed (i.e., were not homeless) in their previous location, they were moving to an opportunity, such as places where public and assisted housing options were available, affordable, and in good condition. Their decisions to migrate are understandable when comparing the urban conditions from which they moved, where their housing choices were few, the costs of housing were high, and the quality of housing and neighborhoods was poor. This last factor was significant for many respondents. It was not only the quality of housing that was important, but where the housing was located. Included in the quality of housing is safety—both within and outside the home. Safety was the second most prevalent reason respondents gave for why they chose to leave the city.

Many of the respondents experienced high rates of concentrated residential mobility over their lifetimes while living in the city and, for all but five respondents, this was the first time living outside an urban environment. This is important because the amenities and social networks respondents found in the city were absent in central Pennsylvania, creating unforeseen obstacles for families.

Schafft's (2006) study of hyper-mobility within impoverished rural New York communities demonstrates the problems associated with frequent moves, especially in the K-12 school system. Hyper-mobility often falls under the radar screen of policy makers because families' mobility is hard to capture using traditional census measures and most studies focus on movement between metro and nonmetro areas.

This study found that half of the respondents had moved during the study period and several had made plans on leaving the study area within the next year. The effects of frequent mobility have major implications for schools, housing authorities, welfare assistance offices, census trackers and the socio-emotional development of children and families.

Another reason respondents gave for relocating to the study area was to secure a Section 8 voucher. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the purpose of the Section 8 program is to give low income families, the disabled and the elderly increased opportunities to obtain safe and affordable housing anywhere in the U.S. where a public housing authority resides.

Five respondents said they moved to the study area, in part, to obtain a Section 8 voucher; however each stated that she was willing to live in the study area for a of couple years to get a voucher while determining if the area had a better quality of life before deciding to stay in the area, return to the city, or move to a new town altogether. Each knew the waiting period to obtain a voucher

in the city where they lived before relocating could take up to 10 years or more. By relocating to the study area, this process could be expedited. During the last interview for the study, respondents were asked their future housing plans. All five families (who reported Section 8 as a reason for relocating) said they wanted to leave the area because they perceived that the area was not racially tolerant of African Americans. For those families who did not list obtaining a housing voucher as a reason for relocating to the study area, racial insensitivity was also a source of tension that produced conflict.

This study found that families were committed to establishing stable home environments amidst the constraints of poverty. Many were proud to have a place of their own, or wanted one, where they were responsible for paying the bills, controlled who entered the home and when, sought refuge and privacy, and built on family traditions. Burton and Lawson Clark (2006) state “that the ability to construct a homeplace as a site of resistance may greatly improve the lives of families living in poverty.”

### *Work*

For many middle and working class families, work is the reason for migration. These families relocate to begin new jobs or anticipate finding employment quickly, then begin the processes of securing housing, relocating other family members, enrolling children in schools, finding childcare, setting up bank accounts, joining social clubs, etc. For families similar to those in this study, obtaining quality, affordable housing is the primary driving force for mobility. Many are pulled from their residences because of eviction or landlord foreclosure, substandard housing, overcrowding, loss of employment, physical and mental health concerns, high crime neighborhoods, domestic and substance abuse, and housing policy (such as HOPE VI demolition and rehabilitation programs). For these families, housing is primary. Once shelter has been secured, families then seek out other services.

Once families have obtained quality, affordable housing, most actively begin looking for employment. However, most found barriers to finding work, including the lack of low-skilled employment opportunities, the lack of temporary job placements, the lack of access to public and private transportation, perceived racial disparities, and few childcare options for shift work. As described earlier, most of the families worked or were enrolled in an employment training program at some point during the study period. Of the three who were not working, one was in college full-time, one had rental income and a third was a caregiver for an autistic family member. The challenge for these families was finding permanent, living wage employment with benefits, such as health insurance, vacation and sick leave, and retirement savings. One respondent worked for a company that offered health benefits; however, the respondent declined coverage because it was too expensive. Another respon-

dent and her 2-year old son were enrolled in the voluntary Family Express Early Head Start program sponsored by the Huntingdon County Child and Adult Development Corporation. The program, which operated three days a week, housed the children on the lower level while caregivers took GED classes or attended job training and adult development workshops on the upper level. Three other respondents were enrolled in the Single Point Of Contact (SPOC) program, which is funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare but administered locally. The purpose of the program is to provide low-income individuals with the skills, training and services needed to obtain employment. Two more respondents worked for temporary agencies, which screen and hire employees for businesses. The pool of applicants, however, is much greater than the need. Thus, if employees miss work for a family emergency or cannot find reliable transportation to get to work, the employee is quickly replaced by another waiting in line. The consequences for families are sporadic employment and breaks in public assistance, such as TANF, food stamps, healthcare and housing costs.

Another barrier to employment for families was transportation. Some assistance programs, such as SPOC, Family Express and Head Start, provided transportation for families. The major concerns respondents had about transportation ranged from respondents not having a driver's license and difficulty in passing the driving exam to expensive transportation costs, unreliable used cars and dependence on others for transportation. For some respondents, who had to depend on others (and pay for their services) for transportation to and from work, flexibility, good planning and time management were essential. Arriving at work one hour before schedule or staying one hour late to catch a ride home from a co-worker was not out of the ordinary for some respondents. Also, shift work posed more barriers since buses typically operate during peak working hours. Finally, respondents in the Huntingdon sample voiced concerns about the unavailability of public transportation including taxis, buses, or countywide carpools. With the constraints of finding living wage employment, quality childcare, and reliable transportation, it makes sense that families in these contexts secure housing first and then seek out employment.

### *Advantages and Disadvantages of Migration Experiences: In-Migrant Perspectives*

For in-migrant families, there was some ambiguity surrounding their relocation to central Pennsylvania. Initially, respondents were optimistic about their chances of securing better outcomes for themselves and their children. More often than not, the shelter, safety, and peace many discussed morphed into feelings of distrust, angst, and uncertainty. Many talked of leaving the area as soon as possible; however, when faced with the decision

of where to go, many knew where they did not want to go, and that was to the cities from which they came.

For example, while respondents repeatedly spoke of negative experiences they encountered in the study area, more than 70 percent of respondents said the percentage of positive social interactions in the study area were 50 percent or greater. The most prevalent reason given for this contradiction is that respondents did not fall into the trap of intolerance that was demonstrated by some long-standing community members.

Each of the in-migrant experiences were complex and demonstrated the social costs and benefits involved in housing programs designed to give individuals the freedom to choose where to live, which is the major goal of Section 8.

The pros and cons of families moving from an urban area with more employment opportunities but higher costs of living to a more rural area with lower costs of living but less employment opportunities were also evident.

For example, one of the respondents, a single mother with three young children, was a teacher's assistant. During the study, she began taking college classes in business management. She received a Pell Grant to cover 80 percent of the costs of classes, leaving her with a \$2,000 tuition payment. Her monthly income totaled \$1,506, and her monthly expenses were \$1,391.

The respondent's wages from her temporary jobs places her family of four well below the 2005 Federal Poverty Guidelines. The public housing subsidy, which requires the respondent to pay 30 percent of her income, is a major resource that keeps the respondent and her children stably housed. If the respondent's temporary employment remains stable, she has \$115 of disposable income at the end of the month. However, she will need to use her disposable income to pay down her college tuition. This is still a much better financial situation than the one she had in her prior location, where she had to work 16 hours per day to pay her \$500 monthly rent. Here is an example of a respondent who understands the value of higher education and lives within her means.

Respondents in this study showed that low-income families have the same dreams and expectations that higher income families have. The major difference is the means by which one is able to acquire such dreams. While a middle class family can buy the flat screen television on low-interest credit, poor families rely on the generosity of family members and strangers and the high interest rent-to-own outlets and pawn shops to lease a television. Many low-income families are not aware of the excessive interest charged by these companies.

#### *Social Service Experiences and Needs of In-Migrants*

Overall, respondents had good experiences with social service agencies in which they came in contact. Respondents repeatedly were thankful for the number of agencies

that came to their assistance when they first arrived in the study area. Faith-based organizations delivered furniture and clothing, assistance offices helped file the necessary paperwork to receive benefits, and neighbors offered transportation to the grocery store and advice on community assets. Two of the four respondents living at the transitional housing shelter did not have anything positive to say about their experiences. Another respondent who lived at the shelter was featured in an article in the local newspaper that showed the name and a photograph of the facility, which caused anxiety for the woman. Her experiences when she first got to the shelter were wonderful—the on-site case manager helped her get a job and the facility met all of her needs. Soon after, however, the case manager was fired, leaving no one for the woman to rely on for professional assistance.

A concern that was repeated by many of the families living in public housing and awaiting a Section 8 voucher appeared to be that the housing authority was looking for a reason not to grant a voucher to families and gave infractions that seemed arbitrary.

For those respondents who came to the study area to receive a Section 8 voucher, there was no contradiction in their intent—they expected exactly what the Section 8 program promised—the choice to live wherever they wanted to live. Conflicts arose when local housing authorities and residents did not have the same expectations. Housing authorities expected to have enough funds in their budgets to manage their sites and programs. This was the biggest concern voiced in the 2005 Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Agencies' Annual Conference, which the researcher attended. Should a tenant receive a voucher in a county and transport the voucher to another county with a higher rental rate, the monies to pay the difference are taken from the former housing authority's annual budget. For small differences in rates, this is not a problem; however, for those individuals moving to large urban areas with a small rural housing authority voucher, one can see the apprehension rural authorities may have. That is, they will have less vouchers to give out because of the extra monies used to cover the higher housing costs in the city.

One response adopted by at least one housing authority in the study area, which has also caused some community conflict, was to adopt a local preference. Due to local preference guidelines established by HUD, housing authorities have discretion to implement a wide array of eligibility criteria for Section 8 vouchers. The main argument for proponents of local preference is the lack of funding to help everyone in need. Newly arrived families must establish at least one year of residency (usually by moving into a public housing unit) before becoming eligible for a Section 8 voucher. Tenants may contact the authority at any time to verify their position on the list. The average wait time for the study participants was about one year.

## Long-Term Respondent Perspectives

The average age of the long-term respondents was 42 ½, more than nine years older than the average age of the in-migrant group. These respondents were chosen because they lived within a one-mile radius of one of the in-migrant homes, and they had long-term ties (at least two generations) to the local community, thus allowing them to offer their perspectives of social change over time. Most lived in homes on the private market. While four lived in publicly subsidized housing, at least one was eligible for, but refused to accept, government assistance. The stigma of receiving government “hand-outs” has been discussed throughout the rural poverty literature. Four of the long-term respondents described their employment as stable (one was retired and lived comfortably on her retirement income and investments). The others experienced fluctuations in their employment, similar to the challenges described by the in-migrant respondents.

Respondents were asked to describe general changes in the local community they have seen/experienced over the last decade. Respondents were then asked about changing demographics in their community to determine the extent to which they were aware of individuals moving into the community and what explanations they might give to explain why individuals were moving into the area. Respondents completed the interview with a discussion on the future of the community.

A major theme that emerged from the long-term respondent data surrounded race and the increases in the number of minorities moving into the local area. Comments from the long-term respondents about race and social change ranged from a highly vocalized rejection of all minorities to acceptance of diversity as a fact of life.

In some cases, the long-term respondents were opposed to the women’s transitional housing and were outspoken

about their concerns. Researchers have argued that regardless of being victims of domestic abuse or mental illness, which can sometimes feed into an addiction, abused women are not trusted and often criminalized, governed, discriminated against and placed under surveillance by staff and sometimes the public (Anti-Discrimination Center of Metro New York, 2005; Donnelly, 2005; Foucault, 1977; Foucault, 1991[1978]; Gordon, 1991; HUD-USER, 1999; Hunt, 1999; Melbin, 2003; Merry, 1999 and 2001; Pratt, 1999; Procacci, 1991[1978]; and Susser, 1999). For the study participants who lived in the domestic abuse shelter, the criminalization was compounded by racism.

In terms of class, long-term respondents were asked to describe who was poor in their community. All of the in-migrant and most of the long-term families participating in this study and the larger Family Life Project study would be considered poor by the federal government poverty guidelines; however, most of the long-term respondents did not consider themselves poor based on their families’ needs.

## Conclusion

This study allowed the researchers to document the movement of low-income families from urban areas to rural Pennsylvania to find quality, affordable housing. Overall, the research found that, contrary to much of the migration literature, the respondents relocated for housing opportunities rather than labor opportunities.

The research also shed light on how U.S. public housing policy made at the federal level may be playing out at the local level, and how the federal program expectations may be presenting challenges for local policymakers and small communities and their residents.

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