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Moving house

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Moving house

People move house for a number of reasons. For many, moving is associated with moving to a bigger or better house, purchasing a new home, taking up new educational or work opportunities, moving in with a partner, or having a lifestyle change such as gaining greater independence. For others, moving may be associated with relationship breakdown, family conflict or being given notice by their landlord. For some people, affordability issues may mean that moving house may not always be a viable option when desired.

This article explores the rates and reasons behind housing mobility across the life course, as well as barriers to housing mobility. It focuses primarily on recent movers, that is people who have changed address in the last five years.

How often do people move?

According to the 2007–08 Survey of Income and Housing, of people aged 15 years and over, over one-quarter (27%) had been living in their current home for 15 years or more, 30% had been there for 5–14 years, and 43% had moved in the last five years (recent movers).

Some groups of people are more mobile than others. In 2007–08, among recent movers aged 15 years and over, almost half (46%) had moved once, 19% had moved twice, 17% three times, 8% four times, and 11% had moved five times or more in the last five years.

Mobility through the life course

Mobility varies across the life course as people's circumstances and opportunities may change. People aged in their 20s and early 30s are more likely than people of other ages to be going

Data source and definitions

Information in this article comes from the ABS 2007–08 Survey of Income and Housing and relates to people aged 15 years and over.

The Survey of Income and Housing does not include people in non-private dwellings, and this analysis therefore excludes young people moving into non-private university accommodation or aged people moving into aged care institutions.

Recent movers are people who report changing address in the five years prior to the survey.

A *private renter* is a person paying rent to a landlord who is a real estate agent, or another person not in the same household (including a parent or other relative).

through life transitions that may be related to mobility such as transitions from education to employment, out of (and potentially back into) the parental home, and into or out of live in relationships.

People reaching their 30s and moving into older age groups, may find they have housing or family reasons that make it more difficult to move, such as a family, a long-term career or children in education.

Moving at older ages may be due to illness or disability, the death of a spouse, or reflect a desire to downsize after children have moved out.

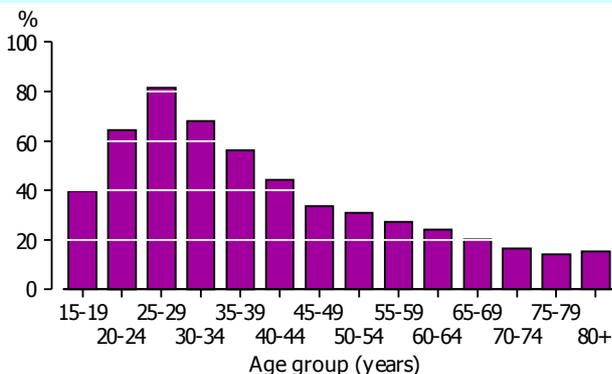
This article will look at four typical household groups that represent different living arrangements across the life course and the mobility experiences in these life course stages.

...young households without children

In 2007–08, people living in young households without children were very mobile with the vast majority having moved at least once (90%), and two-fifths (40%) reported having moved three or more times in the last five years. Of recent movers, 14% were in young households.

Around half (48%) of recent movers living in young households cited housing reasons for their latest move, most commonly that they had purchased their own dwelling (25%) or that they wanted a bigger/better home (12%). One-third (33%) cited family reasons, the most common being getting married or moving in with their partner (20%).

Proportion of people who were recent movers, by age – 2007–08



Source: ABS 2007–08 Survey of Income and Housing

Life course group definitions

There are a wide range of possible living arrangements which reflect the diverse range of households in which people live. In this article four household groups have been used to represent different living arrangements across the life course:

Young households without children refers to people who were either living alone or in a couple only household, where the reference person was aged under 35 years and where there were no dependent or non-dependent children present. This group excludes people living in group or other households.

Parents in couple families with dependent children are parents living in a one family household containing a couple and at least one dependent child. The household may also contain non-dependent children but cannot contain any other related or unrelated individuals.

Lone parents with dependent children are parents living in a one family household containing a lone parent and at least one dependent child. The household may also contain non-dependent children and other related or unrelated individuals.

Older households without children refers to people living either alone or in a couple only household, where the reference person was aged 65 years and over and where there were no dependent or non-dependent children present. This group excludes people living in group or other households.

Dependent children refers to all people aged under 15 years and people aged 15–24 years who are full-time students, have a parent in the household and do not have a partner or child of their own in the household.

Non-dependent children refers to all people aged 15 years and over who do not have a spouse or offspring of their own in the household; have a parent in the household; and are not full-time students aged 15–24 years.

Recent movers aged 15–24 years living in young households were just as likely to have cited family reasons (42%), such as partnering or being independent, as they were to cite housing reasons (37%) for their latest move. In comparison, people aged 25–34 years were more likely to cite housing reasons (53%) than family reasons (30%) for their latest move.

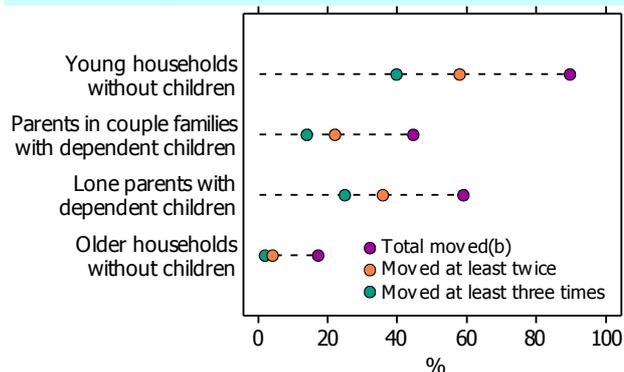
In 2007–08, people in young households were most likely private renters (53%) or owners with a mortgage (39%). The flexible tenures of private renters, relative to other tenure types, would allow for, but not necessarily be the cause of, the high mobility of people in this life course group.

...parents in couple families with dependent children

In 2007–08, 45% of parents in couple families with dependent children were recent movers, accounting for around one-quarter (26%) of all recent movers.

The mobility of parents in couple families with dependent children decreased as the age of the children increased. Of those with dependent

Mobility in the last five years(a), by selected life course groups – 2007-08



(a) People aged 15 years and over.

(b) Includes people who moved in the last five years but didn't know how many times they had moved.

Source: ABS 2007-08 Survey of Income and Housing

children only, those whose eldest child was under five years were more likely to have moved (72%) than those whose eldest child was aged 5–14 years (46%) or 15–24 years (29% moved). The higher mobility rates of those with younger children may be associated with moving into accommodation suitable for a family. The lower mobility rates of those with older dependent children could be related to the more stable/established careers and housing circumstances of these parents, and their desire not to disrupt their children's education.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of parents in couple families with dependent children who were recent movers reported housing reasons for the latest move, with 30% citing a desire for a bigger/better home and 22% saying they moved because they had purchased their own dwelling.

Around three-quarters (76%) of parents in couple families with dependent children were owners with or without a mortgage and 19% were private renters.

...lone parents with dependent children

While representing only 4% of all recent movers, lone parents with dependent children were more likely than parents in couple families with dependent children to have moved in the last five years (59% compared with 45%).

Around one-fifth (21%) of lone parents who had recently moved cited the breakdown of their marriage or relationship as a reason for their move.

The relatively high mobility rates of lone parents with dependent children compared with parents in couple families with dependent children is also associated with the higher likelihood of such lone parents being private renters (42%) compared with parents in couple families with dependent children (19%) in 2007–08.

How far do people move?

Most people who move house move relatively close to their former address. Of people who had moved house in the year prior to the 2006 Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, 60% moved a distance of only 0–9 kilometres from their former residence.

People who moved for work or study related reasons tended to move much further than those who moved for other reasons. Around half of people (48% of men and 50% of women) who moved house for work-related reasons in the year prior to the 2006 HILDA survey had moved more than 100km.¹

...older households without children

In 2007–08, people in older households without children had lower rates of housing mobility than people in younger life course stages. Only 17% of people in older households were recent movers, and only 5% of all recent movers were from older households.

People living in older households without children were mostly owners without a mortgage (80%), while 12% were renting.

For people in older age groups, moving house is often associated with 'empty nesters' downsizing, making a 'sea/tree change' or moving into more suitable accommodation for health or age reasons. Of people in older households who had moved in the last five

Mobility by tenure

Housing mobility varies greatly across different housing tenures. As people move through their life course, different circumstances or decisions may lead them into or out of certain housing tenures.

In 2007–08, people renting privately were very mobile, with the vast majority having moved at least once in the last five years (87%). Of the four life course groups examined in this article, people living in young households without dependent children (53%) were the most likely to be private renters, followed by lone parents with dependent children (42%).

Public renters (i.e. people renting their home from a state or territory housing authority) were less likely than the general population to report being a recent mover (37% compared with 43%). Most (64%) of those renting public housing who were recent movers were people who had made the transition to renting public housing. Renting public housing was more common among lone parents with dependent children (15%) and among those in older households (5%) than in the general population aged 15 years or older (3%).

Less than one-third (29%) of people who owned their home were recent movers. There was a large difference in mobility between those who owned their home outright (15%) and those with a mortgage (42%).

Of the four life course groups examined in this article, parents in couple families with dependent children were most likely to be owners with a mortgage (59%), while people in older households without children were likely to be owners without a mortgage (80%).

Reasons for latest move(a), by selected life course group – 2007-08

	<i>People in young households without children</i>	<i>Parents in couple families with dependent children</i>	<i>Lone parents with dependent children</i>	<i>People in older households without children</i>	<i>All recent movers</i>
	%	%	%	%	%
All reasons for last move					
Housing					
<i>Wanted bigger/ better home</i>	11.8	29.5	13.6	7.0	16.2
<i>Wanted smaller home/ downsize</i>	**0.2	*1.4	*0.9	22.5	2.7
<i>Purchased own dwelling</i>	25.4	22.2	7.8	*3.5	14.4
Total housing(b)	48.2	62.7	48.2	48.9	47.3
Employment	14.9	12.4	*6.2	*1.6	10.5
Family					
<i>Get married/ live with partner</i>	20.2	7	**0.6	*2.7	7.5
<i>Breakdown of marriage/ relationship</i>	1.8	*1.1	21.0	**0.9	4.0
Total family(b)	33.1	17.6	36.4	22.3	32.5
Lifestyle change	6.7	7.1	5.1	19.7	8.9
Other(c)	6.3	8.4	9.9	23.0	9.4
Total(d)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

* estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution

** estimate has a relative standard error of greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use

(a) All reasons for latest move for people aged 15 years and over who had moved in the last five years.

(b) Not all housing or family reasons are displayed in the table, but are included in totals.

(c) 'Other' comprises neighbourhood reasons, health reasons, accessibility reasons and other reasons.

(d) Proportions may add up to more than 100% as respondents could provide more than one reason for their last move.

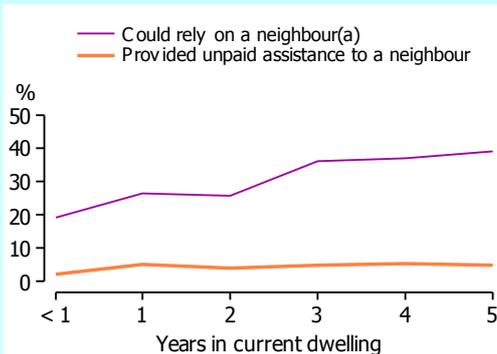
Source: ABS 2007-08 Survey of Income and Housing

Social networks and support

A person's integration into their local community may be related to the length of time they have spent in their current dwelling, especially if their previous dwelling was in a different area. People who have only lived in their current dwelling for a short period may be less inclined to support their neighbours or rely on their neighbours in a time of crisis.

In 2006, people aged 18 years and over who had been in their current dwelling for less than one year were around half as likely as people who had been in their current dwelling for five or more years to report that they could rely on a neighbour for support in a time of crisis (19% compared with 39%). They were also half as likely to have provided unpaid assistance to a neighbour (2% compared with 5%).

People aged 18 years and over, by years in current dwelling – 2006



(a) Could rely on a neighbour for support in a time of crisis.

Source: ABS 2006 General Social Survey

years, almost a quarter (23%) cited wanting a smaller home or to downsize as a reason for their latest move. Similar proportions reported family reasons (22%), lifestyle change (20%) and/or other reasons (23% - mostly health or neighbourhood reasons).

Unlikely to move, but want to

There are a number of people who report that they would like to move but who also reported that they were unlikely to do so.

In 2007–08, 1.2 million people aged 15 years and over (7%) wanted to move in the next 12 months but indicated that they were unlikely to do so.

People who were most likely to report wanting to move but being unlikely to do so included lone parents with dependent children (16%), people renting public housing (13%), non-dependent children (11%) and parents in couple families with dependent children only where their eldest child was under 15 years (11%).

Having a desire to move in the next 12 months, but being unlikely to do so, was more common among the most disadvantaged Socio-Economic Index For Areas (SEIFA) quintile (10%), than the least disadvantaged quintile (6%).²

Moving out (and back)

The first move most people make as an adult is to move out of the parental home, although such a move may not always be permanent.

In 2006–07, almost half (46%) of those who reported leaving home before their mid-30s returned home at least once, usually within three years.

Young people are now more likely to live with their parents than in previous decades. In 2006, almost one in four (23%) people aged 20–34 were living with their parents compared with 19% in 1986.

Money issues were a common reason young people stayed or returned home, but many also said they enjoyed living at home and it was convenient.

For more information, see *Australian Social Trends June 2009*, 'Home and Away: the living arrangements of young people'.

...barriers to moving

In 2007–08, among people who wanted to move in the next 12 months, but were unlikely to do so, 72% indicated that they could not afford to buy a new dwelling, or afford the costs associated with moving, while 14% said that moving was too much effort.

Conclusion

Nationally, around two in five (43%) people aged 15 years and over were recent movers in 2007–08. However, some groups were more mobile, including people in young households without children (90%), parents in couple families with dependent children only where their eldest child was under five years (72%) and lone parents with dependent children (59%).

People in young households without children are more likely than people in other selected life course groups to cite forming relationships as the reason for making a move. Lone parents with dependent children are more likely than others to cite relationship breakdown. People in older households are more likely than others to cite lifestyle change. However, across each of the life course groups, housing reasons, such as a desire for a bigger or better home, or a recent dwelling purchase, were generally the most common reasons for moving.

The financial costs of moving, or the costs of purchasing a new home can influence the mobility of some. For the small proportion of people who had a desire to move in the next 12 months, but considered it unlikely to happen, financial reasons were the most commonly reported barrier.

Endnotes

- 1 Wilkins, R., Warren, D. and Hahn, M., 2009, 'How often do people move house?' In *Families, Incomes and Jobs, Volume 4: A Statistical Report on Waves 1 to 6 of the HILDA Survey*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, pp. 140–144. <www.melbourneinstitute.com>
- 2 Based on the 2006 SEIFA Index of relative socio-economic disadvantage at the Collection District level.