



Elder Migration: Grandparents and Where They Live Lesson Plan

Introduction

We live in a mobile society. Many young people have experienced firsthand the consequences of moving. Many have parents and/or grandparents living some distance away. This activity is designed to help students understand how migration influences population change. This activity can be included as an extension to units on immigration, family life, public policy and contemporary issues.

Objectives

Students will:

- give reasons why adults of different age groups change residences;
- identify migratory patterns among older adults; and
- explain possible effects of elder migration on families and communities.

Key Terms

migration, mobility, proximity, relocation

Materials

Handouts: Student survey, fact sheet and maps

Procedures

1. Introduce the topic by asking students how many have moved (changed residences) across state or national boundaries in their lifetimes. List the different states (and countries) on the chalkboard, or use a map to identify locations.
2. Discuss the following points, emphasizing similarities and differences in the needs and desires of different age groups.
 - a. List common reasons why people who are in their early 20s move (going to college, new job, to be closer to boyfriend/girlfriend, to be closer to/farther away from family). How many students plan to move when they are older? If so, where?
 - b. List common reasons why people who are middle-aged or approximately the age of students' parents move (to be closer to family, change of jobs, move to a bigger house, separation or divorce in family). In what ways do students think moving is good or bad for young persons when the family or parents move? In what ways do students think moving away is good or bad for older family members, such as grandparents and other relatives?
 - c. List common reasons why adults over 60 move (to be closer to/farther away from family, changed jobs, retired, need smaller housing, widowed, warmer

climate, to be with friends). How might the condition of grandparents living long distances from their grown children and grandchildren affect family relations? In what ways would communities benefit from having older adults move into their region? Where would the students like to live when they get older? Why?

3. Ask students to complete the survey (page 63) about their grandparents. Students will need to do this assignment as homework in order to get information from their parents or grandparents. A smaller group of students can be responsible for tabulating findings, but the entire class should be involved in drawing conclusions based on their findings. Based on the survey, what conclusions can students draw about the migration pattern and living arrangements of their grandparents? What geographic setting, climate, activities and proximity to families do students think older adults prefer?
4. Using different-colored markers, plot on a map transparency (page 66) the birthplaces of grandparents. The map will readily show migration patterns among students' grandparents over their lifetimes.
5. Discuss information on the fact sheet which corresponds to the items on the survey.

Extension Activities

- Invite to class older adults who reside in different housing arrangements (own house, senior housing, apartment, nursing home). Arrange an intergenerational discussion group around such topics as: advantages and disadvantages of age-segregated housing; affordable housing for all ages; and what it is like living alone, living with one's grown children and living in a nursing home.
- Investigate local and state programs for senior housing. Students might contact state agencies on aging, local senior centers and local administrators of senior housing. Offer as an alternative or extra assignment that students visit and report their observations of different senior housing facilities.
- Have students plan their own retirement homes. Where and with whom would they like to live when they are older? Why?

Elder Migration: Fact Sheet

Cities, Suburbs or Country

In 1987, 31 percent of the older population lived in America's central cities, 42 percent in suburbs and 27 percent in rural areas. The suburbs have the greatest increase in the number of older adults. Suburbs offer more services than rural communities and do not have the problems of urban settings. The proportion of older people living in cities differs for ethnic minority groups: 55 percent of all older African Americans, 53 percent with Spanish surnames and 24 percent of the white population.¹ Satisfaction with life does not seem to vary for older adults based on whether they live in urban, suburban or rural settings.

Proximity to Family

When families are geographically distant, it is generally due to the mobility of adult children, not the mobility of the grandparent generation. Approximately 80 percent of older adults with children live less than one hour away from at least one child. Approximately 50 percent have at least one child within 10 minutes of their home.² Physical distance, however, is not a good measure of emotional distance within families. Most older adults are in regular contact with family members. Most older adults (96 percent) report that they do not want to live with their children, preferring to live independently.³

Place of Origin

The diversity among older adults is seen by their cultural backgrounds, represented by their many lands of origin. Older people cannot be viewed as a homogeneous group, but are heterogeneous with a variety of backgrounds.

States with Largest Numbers of Older Adults

Over half of the older population lives in eight states: California (3.1 million), Florida (2.4 million), New York (2.4 million), Pennsylvania (1.8 million), Texas (1.7 million), Illinois (1.4 million), Ohio (1.4 million), Michigan (1.1 million).⁴

Mobility of Older Adults

Older adults are less likely to relocate than younger adults. Between 1975 and 1980, 23 percent of the older population moved, compared with 48 percent of those under 65.

Relocating to New Communities

Older adults are less likely to move to a different community than are younger adults. However, when they relocate to a different state, it is more likely to be to the Southern or Western United States. In 1985, the top five states to which older persons moved were: Florida, California, Arizona, Texas and New Jersey. The top five states from which older adults moved were: New York, California, Illinois, Florida and New Jersey.⁶

Types of Housing

Older adults are more likely to move to a different type of housing within the same community. The majority of older people live in independent housing, either owning their own homes (75 percent) or renting (25 percent). Of those owning their own homes, 83

percent own their homes free and clear. The median value of housing owned by older people in 1985 was \$52,281. Most houses owned by older adults were built before 1950.

While most older people (86 percent) prefer never to move,⁸ they may move to housing which better fits their needs. For example, congregate housing facilities may offer meals, housekeeping, recreational and health services. About 5 percent of the 65-plus age group live in long-term care institutions (nursing homes).

Reasons for Moving

Older adults may choose to move for a variety of reasons, including climate, safety, services, maintenance requirements and proximity to family. Among the old-old (over 75), relocation is more likely to accommodate changing needs. Like all ages, adjustment to moving is easier when individuals feel they have a choice, when they are part of the decision-making process and when they feel they are maintaining a level of independence.

References

1. Bureau of the Census. Population Profile of the United States: 1989. Current Population Reports. Special Studies Series P-23, No.159, U.S. Department of Commerce. 1989.
2. Shanas, E. "Older People and Their Families: The New Pioneers," Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1980, 42, 9-14.
3. Transamerica Life Companies. "2 Generations View Their Financial Futures." Los Angeles, CA: IA, July 1988.
4. Bureau of the Census. 1990 Census of Population. General Population Characteristics, 1990.
5. Longino, C. F.; Biggar, J. C.; Flynn, C. B.; and Wiseman, R. F. The Retirement Migration Project. Final Report to the National Institute on Aging. University of Miami, 1984.
6. Senate Special Committee on Aging. Aging America: Trends and Projections. 1987~88 Edition. Washington, DC, 1987.
7. U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. American Housing Survey for the United States in 1985. Washington, DC: IA, December 1988, 332. Current Housing Reports, R-150-85.
8. Survey conducted for the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). Reported in Older Americans Reports, June 5, 1987, 9.

Elder Migration: Student Survey

Directions: The following questions will help us investigate where older family members live. Answer for up to two grandmothers and two grandfathers. If you have more than four, arbitrarily choose the ones you know best. If you have fewer than four living grandparents, leave the others blank.

	Grandmother		Grandfather	
	#1	#2	#1	#2
1. Does your grandparent live in the (a) city, (b) suburb or (c) rural community?				
2. Approximately how long does it take to get to your grandparent? (hours: 1/4, 1/2, 1, 2, 3, etc.)				
3. In what state or country was your grandparent born?				
4. In what state or country does your grandparent currently live?				
5. Has your grandparent moved in the last 10 years? (yes or no)				
6. If yes, did your grandparent(s) move to a different community?				
7. Did your grandparent(s) move to a different type of housing (e.g., house, apartment, senior housing, nursing home)?				
8. What was the primary reason your grandparent moved? (a) to be closer to family; (b) to have a place with less upkeep; (c) to be in a different climate; (d) for a safer place; (e) to be closer to service such as health care, stores, etc.; (f) other: _____				