

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AMONG OLDER NONMETROPOLITAN IN-MIGRANTS

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Overview

- Older adults began moving into amenity-rich, nonmetropolitan areas in the 1960s and have moved to such destinations in greater numbers during every decade since.
- Typically higher in income and educational-levels than the non-migrants in an area, they are also presumed to be more likely to become integrated into the new community.
- But the idea that elderly migrants move to amenity-based retirement destinations occurs primarily among recent retirees who are moving for amenities does not seem to be accurate.
- Rather, such migrants seem to be moving as much to be near adult children or other family members as for amenities themselves.

About the Data

- The data presented in this Policy Brief are from Nina Glasgow and David L. Brown, “Social Integration among Older In-migrants in Nonmetropolitan Retirement Destination Counties: Establishing New Ties,” in *Population Change and Rural Society*. Edited by William A. Kandel and David L. Brown. 2006. Springer.
- Series sponsored by Western Region Multi-State Project, W1001, *Population Change in Rural Communities*.

Social Integration among Older Nonmetropolitan In-Migrants

Retirement destinations are among the most rapidly and consistently growing types of nonmetropolitan areas. Older people began moving to amenity-rich nonmetro areas in the 1960s and have moved in greater numbers to nonmetro than metro counties in every decade since the 1970s. In the 1990s, nonmetro “retirement destination counties” - defined as those with 15 percent or higher net in-migration of persons age 60 or older - grew by 28 percent compared to 8 percent for all other nonmetro counties. By definition, nonmetro retirement destination counties attract older migrants, but they also attract working-age persons who obtain jobs in economic activities induced by retiree inflows (Johnson and Fuguitt, 2000). Such retirement-age newcomers typically have relatively higher incomes and education levels than long-term older residents, and their presence often boosts the economies of their new nonmetro locales.

Much research has focused on older in-migrants’ contributions to nonmetro population and economic growth, but their social integration in nonmetro retirement destinations has received little attention. However, social integration of older in-migrants has important implications for both retirement destinations themselves and for in-

migrants' civic engagement, health and well-being, and retention in nonmetro destinations. From the destination community's standpoint, better-integrated migrants provide time, experience and know-how that can contribute to accomplishing important communal goals. To address this research gap, we investigated migrants' informal social relationships and their participation in formal community organizations compared with that of longer-term older residents of nonmetro retirement communities.

The Issues

Our analysis examines the process by which older migrants build social ties and establish social relationships and participation in new communities. We describe in-migrants' level of informal and formal social participation compared to that of longer-term older residents, and we examine why some older residents of nonmetro retirement destinations are more likely to participate than others.

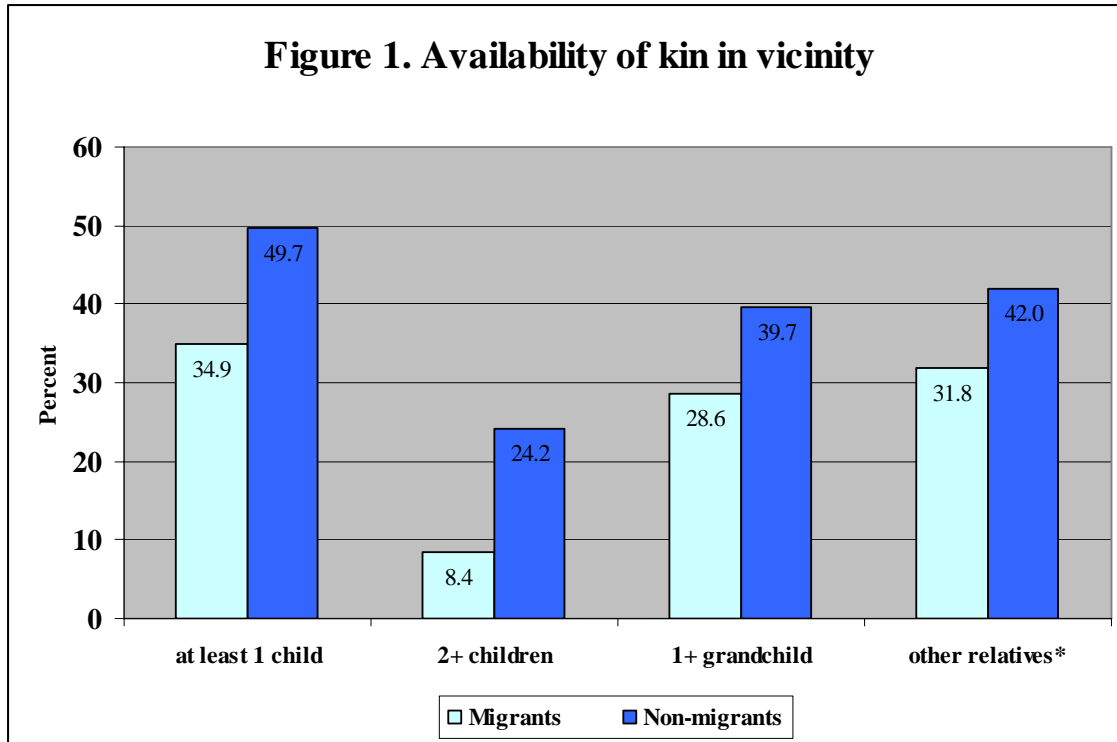
Migration is a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence that disrupts everyday social relationships (Long, 1988). Hence, even when migration is voluntary, as is usually the case with retirement migration, it disrupts long term social involvements. Older in-migrants to nonmetro destinations face the challenge of establishing new social relationships, and some people are more successful in doing this than others.

We define social integration as “the entire set of an individual’s connections to others in his or her environment” (Pillemer, Moen, Wethington and Glasgow, 2000, p. 8). This broad definition encompasses participation in formal community organizations and personal social networks. To say that a person is socially integrated means s/he is embedded in a network of social ties, the most proximate of which are family, friendships and affiliations with community organizations.

Study Findings

Informal Networks

Longer-term older residents are more likely to have family members in retirement destination counties than are in-migrants (Figure 1). However, in-migrants also have a considerable number of family and friend connections in their new communities. As Figure 1 shows, half of longer-term older residents have at least one child living within a half hour drive, and a quarter have two or more children living nearby. Longer-term residents also have considerable access to grandchildren and other relatives. Similarly, over one-third of older in-migrants have an adult child within a half hour drive, 29 percent have grandchildren nearby, and 32 percent have other relatives in the immediate vicinity.



* other than children or grandchildren
 Source: Cornell Retirement Migration Survey, 2002

Our findings contrast with the model of elderly migration that hypothesizes that moves to amenity-based retirement destinations (such as the areas in our study) occur among recent retirees who are moving for amenities, not to be near adult children or other family members (Litwak and Longino, 1987). Moves to be near family were expected to occur later in old age following a decline in health, the onset of disability, or the death of a spouse. Our data, however, indicate that many older persons consolidate their family ties much earlier in life during their first move after retirement.

Our findings also provide insights into the destination selection process among older persons moving to nonmetro retirement destinations and their social

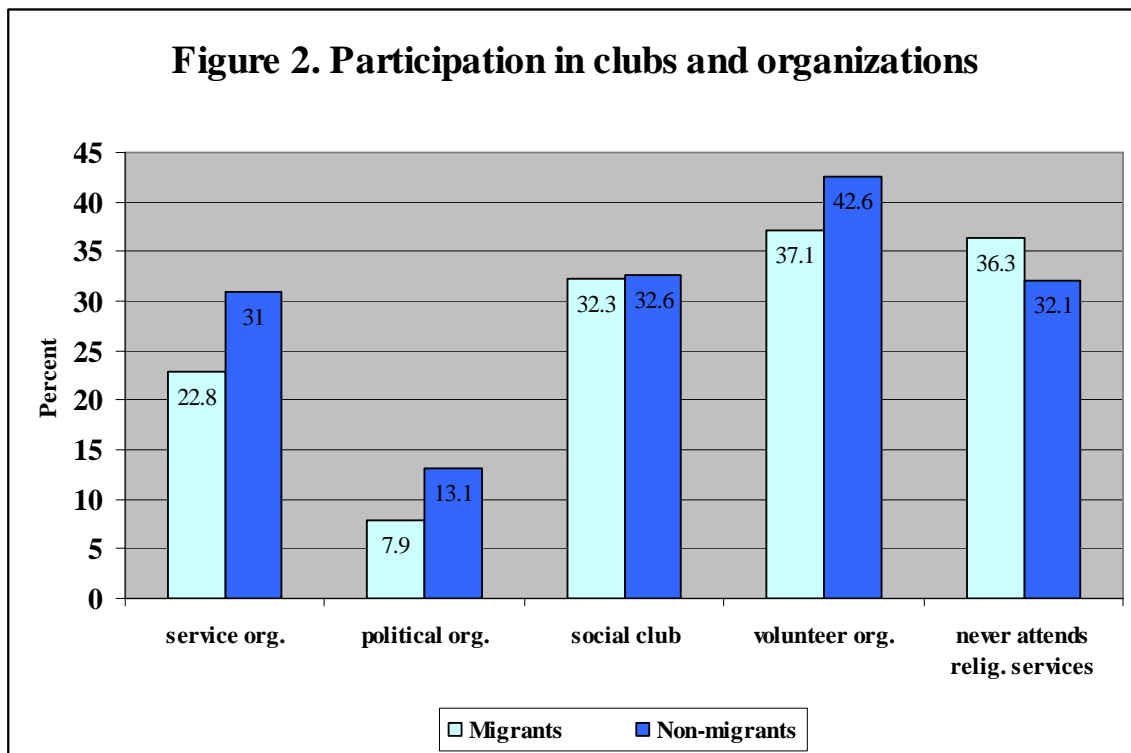
integration in informal networks. In addition to place amenities, the location of family and friends obviously is also an important consideration in their destination choice. Physical access to family and friends is reflected in visitation patterns. Both older migrants and longer-term residents report visiting family and friends once or twice per week. From the standpoint of informal social integration, both older migrants and non-migrants appear to have ample opportunities to interact with and obtain support from family and friends.

Formal Social Participation

Past research shows that participation in formal organizations and community activities has positive effects on the health and well-being of rural older people (Young and Glasgow, 1998). In

the present study, we find that over two-thirds of longer-term older residents participate in at least one type of formal organization compared with 58 percent of in-migrants. Hence, while longer-term residents participate more frequently, the difference is modest. Longer-term residents are somewhat more likely to participate in service, political, and volunteer organizations, but migrants and non-migrants are equally likely to participate in social

clubs (Figure 2). Longer-term older residents are also more likely than in-migrants to attend religious services (Figure 2). These findings are important because the longer-term residents in our study had lived in their communities an average of 22.1 years compared with about 3 years for in-migrants. In-migrants appear to integrate rather quickly into their new communities.



Source: Cornell Retirement Migration Survey, 2002

Why Are Some Older Residents More Likely To Participate?

Even though our data indicate that migrants and longer-term residents have similar levels of participation in formal organizations and activities, they also show substantial variation in such participation within both groups. We therefore conducted a multivariate

analysis of three categories of factors that past studies indicated would affect formal participation to gain insights into why some older people are more likely to participate than others: a) socio-demographic status, b) health and activity limitation, and c) involvement in close primary social relationships. We conducted our analysis separately for

migrants and non-migrants. Our findings are summarized below, but readers wishing to see the statistical findings and for a more detailed discussion may refer to our chapter cited at the beginning of this report..

Among older non-migrants, those who were better educated, healthier, and whose duration of residence was longer were significantly more likely than other non-migrants to participate in formal organizations. We expected these factors to positively effect formal participation. Having one or more adult children nearby reduced formal social participation. This result, too, was expected, given that previous research had shown that people with more frequent primary group involvements participate less in formal organizations. Frequent interactions with family are thought to substitute for social involvements in the wider community.

Factors most strongly affecting formal participation among the in-migrants included education, with the more highly educated being more likely to participate, and with those currently working or having activity limitations (i.e., a disabling condition) being less likely to participate. Our multivariate analysis led us to conclude that the process of social integration is somewhat different for non-migrants vs. in-migrants. For both migrants and non-migrants, however, a relatively higher education predicted greater participation in community organizations. In terms of the three categories of variables, socio-demographic (education and length of residence) and health indicators had some effect on participation among both groups, but it was only among the non-migrants that strong personal network

ties (having children nearby) dampened formal participation.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Older in-migrants have substantial kin and friendship ties prior to moving to a rural retirement destination. In contrast with previous theory, it appears that *family reunification* is an important factor motivating first moves undertaken by older people upon retirement. That many in-migrants move to be near family or friends portends well for retaining them in the nonmetro retirement destinations. Having family and friends upon whom they can rely for social support during times of transition or crisis is likely to increase the likelihood of in-migrant retention. Accordingly, nonmetro retirement destinations need to plan for the future when today's well-off migrants may require a greater degree of assistance.

Non-migrant older residents of retirement destinations are only slightly more likely than in-migrants to participate in community organizations and activities. In-migrants have a relatively high level of social involvement soon after their arrival, suggesting that becoming socially integrated is not difficult. Given that the in-migrants are younger and better educated than the longer-term older residents they join, the in-migrants represent a resource and talent pool in their new communities. The community leadership in nonmetro retirement destinations would do well to recruit in-migrants as volunteers and for participation in a variety of community organizations. Community leaders could take concrete actions to encourage

participation in a broad spectrum of community activities by offering transportation to volunteers and by making it clear that the past work and life experiences of older people are a valued community resource.

With the aging of baby boomers, a large number of persons will reach retirement age, and many of them can be expected to move to nonmetro retirement destinations. Accordingly, those places should be planning for a renewed influx of older residents. A balanced consideration of the pluses and minuses of this demographic change will help to prepare retirement destinations to benefit from this change.

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