

***HOUSING ADJUSTMENTS OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS:
DECISIONS AND CONSEQUENCES***

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Abstract

To obtain satisfactory housing throughout the human life cycle, it is often necessary for individuals and families to engage in some form of housing adjustment behavior. It is the purpose of this study to: 1) identify types of housing adjustments of rural households, 2) investigate factors related to housing adjustment decisions and 3) discover differences in satisfaction as a result of the type of adjustment decision made. Results show that the majority of households in the rural Midwest have made a housing adjustment in the past five years. The largest proportion have remodeled, while smaller numbers have moved, or have moved and remodeled. There are significant associations among age, occupation, income, education, number of bedrooms and the type of adjustment decision made. Those who have remodeled, moved and remodeled, or made no change in their housing have significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their neighborhood than those who have moved. Those who have moved and remodeled have significantly higher levels of change in satisfaction in their overall housing situation than those making other types of housing adjustment decisions.

Introduction

Satisfactory housing is an important contributor to the general well-being of individuals and families. Aside from providing shelter from the elements, the home can reflect one's status in society and be a means of self-expression. To obtain satisfactory housing over the human life cycle, it is often necessary for individuals and families to engage in some sort of housing adjustment behavior to address deficits that develop. In order to help families make the best possible decisions regarding appropriate housing adjustment behavior, it is important to develop a better understanding of this behavior, the consequences that result, and variations in decisions and consequences. Hence, the purpose of this study is to: 1) identify the types of adjustment decisions that are taking place, 2) determine if demographic and housing characteristics are associated with the adjustment decision, and 3) determine if differences exist in selected measures of satisfaction level by the adjustment decision.

Theory of Housing Adjustment

Housing adjustments are behaviors that are undertaken to meet demands for more and/or better housing, or to overcome normative housing deficits. Morris and Winter (1978, 1975) view individuals and families as evaluating their housing in terms of both cultural and family norms. When the housing situation does not meet the norms, a normative deficit exists. This normative deficit creates dissatisfaction.

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Families dissatisfied with their housing situation exhibit a propensity to engage in adjustment behavior that is usually a good indicator of actual behavior. This behavior is the outcome of a two part decision-making process. The first is the decision to adjust one's housing status, and the next is the choice among alternatives (Seek, 1983).

Morris and Winter (1978) identify four types of adjustment behavior: residential mobility, residential alteration, change in family composition, and change in family housing norms. Seek (1983) notes that adjustment behavior can also involve the option of both moving and remodeling.

While numerous studies have examined why people move (Rossi, 1980; Morris & Winter, 1978; Michaelson, 1977; Meeks & Firebaugh, 1974), there are fewer studies directed toward home improvement (Parrott, 1985; Seek, 1983), and a limited amount of research addressing the adjustment decision of both moving and improving (Seek, 1983).

Four housing norms have been identified as generally consistent across American society. They are that the home should: 1) be owned rather than rented, (2) be a single family detached unit, (3) have private outside space, and (4) be conventionally constructed (Dillman, Dillman & Schwalbe, 1980; Morris & Winter, 1978). Families or households who have not achieved these norms are more likely to move for the purpose of alleviating their perceived housing deficits (Rossi, 1980; Morris & Winter, 1978).

Morris & Winter (1978) report that mobility is generally the adjustment choice of young households in the early stages of the life cycle. The U.S. Bureau of Census (1974) shows that the highest rate of mobility is found among skilled and unskilled blue collar workers.

Gladhart (1971) maintains that as the price of housing rises, the importance of quality housing as an incentive to mobility diminishes and increased market value becomes a deterrent to mobility. This finding is further supported by Rossi (1980). He has found that the mobility rate is higher for families living in poorer quality housing, which is often of lower market value. Past research studies have shown that families with no male head are more likely to move (Goodman, 1974; Long, 1972). These findings are consistent with Seek (1983) and Keller (1981) who uphold that a major change in resource level, e.g., divorce, often necessitates the need to relocate.

Past studies indicate that home remodeling tends to be chosen as an adjustment behavior by two different groups of people. The first group consists of households that have already achieved the four cultural housing norms described and often have more available resources at their disposal (Morris & Winter, 1978). A family that has no deficits, but has experienced a rise in income, may engage in home remodeling because its family norms have become more demanding. These findings are supported by Seek (1983), Tremblay and Dillman (1983), Roistacher (1975), and Meeks and Firebaugh (1974). They report that achieving better housing through home remodeling is generally the prerogative of home owners who have higher socioeconomic status and more resources.

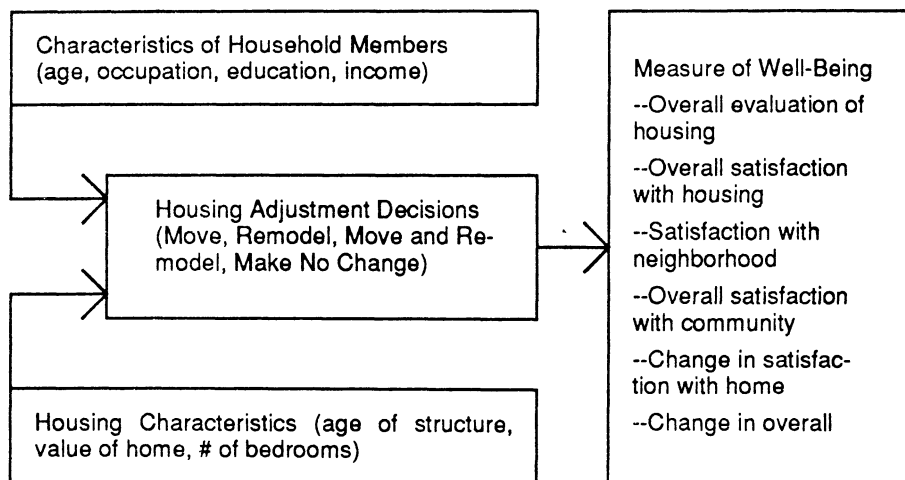
The second group of remodelers is described by Parrott (1985). She maintains that younger households gain more satisfaction by remodeling because their homes tend to be below the satisfaction threshold before remodeling. She also reports that households with lower levels of education and household heads who are in skilled labor occupations are more likely to take part in "do it yourself" activities, compared to those households in the early stages of the family cycle. Previous research also shows that respondents living in older homes are more likely to remodel, and that the average expenditures for improvements is higher for newer homes (Parrott, 1985; Angell, 1984).

Seek (1983) reports that the move and improve adjustment-decision appears to be particularly suited to younger and less affluent homeowners. Moving and then improving can be an effective way of reducing the relatively high costs associated with relocation and spreading these costs over time by making the improvements as and when the household can afford them or when the need arises.

Very little research has focused on those households that are making no adjustments in their housing. Previous research instead focuses on the adjustment process and the perceived level of satisfaction obtained. Those households that are not making any adjustments are assumed to be living in homes that meet all cultural and familial norms or are remaining status quo because of psychological, social, or economic constraints (Morris & Winter, 1978).

Housing satisfaction has been of interest to many housing researchers. Weidemann and Anderson (1985), Hanna and Lindamood (1981) and Brink and Johnson (1979) report that with something as complex as a house, it is possible to be dissatisfied with some of the specific features, and yet be generally satisfied with the whole.

With regard to housing satisfaction and housing adjustment, Bross (1975) shows that adaptations to the home during the previous year do not increase satisfaction. He later suggests that people who are satisfied with their homes make



adaptations, while people who are dissatisfied engage in residential mobility. Morris, Winter, Crull, and Dagitz (1977) report a stronger relationship between mobility and satisfaction than between remodeling and satisfaction. Parrott (1985) states that the greatest increase in satisfaction after remodeling is reported by those households who are already satisfied and who feel that their houses already meet their expectations. Thus, although many researchers have looked at the adjustment process (Parrott, 1985; Rossi, 1980; Spear, 1979; Morris & Winter, 1978; Michaelson, 1977; Goodman, 1974), relatively few have investigated the relationship between the different types of housing adjustment decisions and their consequences. Many previous studies assume, either explicitly or implicitly, that residential mobility is the basic form of housing adjustment.

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Based on the literature reviewed, the following theoretical framework was developed to guide this study.

Variables hypothesized to be related to the housing adjustment decision are: 1) characteristics of the household members (age, occupation, education, income) 2) housing characteristics (age of structure, value of home, number of bedrooms).

The housing adjustment decisions are classified as: 1) remodel [any alteration, addition or retrofit that cost at least \$300 or required at least 40 hours to complete]; 2) move [change in location]; 3) move and remodel [a change in location combined with a remodeling project as defined above]; or 4) make no change [remain status quo].

It is hypothesized that each of the following measures of well-being: 1) overall evaluation of housing situation 2) overall satisfaction with housing situation 3) overall satisfaction with neighborhood 4) overall satisfaction with community 5) change in satisfaction obtained from home 6) change in overall housing situation, will differ in extent dependent upon the particular housing adjustment made.

Method

Data collected for the North Central Regional Research Project NC-178--Economic, Social, Psychological and Health Consequences of the Housing Decisions of Rural Families were used for the analyses. The sample in this study was designed to represent the conditions, beliefs and attitudes of residents in the North Central region. Since the focus of this research was on the consequences of housing decisions of rural areas and smaller towns, only counties in non-metropolitan areas (open country and in places with populations of less than 20,000 inhabitants) were included. From these counties, twelve were randomly selected from each state to be included in the sample. Within each of the 12 counties, sample segments were randomly selected.

An interview schedule was developed by researchers from each of the six states participating in the study. The interview schedule was first pretested in order to check for clarity, ease of administration, validity, and reliability.

In the fall and early winter of 1985, personal interviews were conducted with 506 randomly selected rural households in six Midwestern states: Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. Data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using frequency distributions, chi-square analyses, and analyses of variance (SPSSX).

Measurement of Variables

Demographic variables measured for this study were: 1) age of the respondent (categorized as under 35; 35 through 44; 45 through 54; 55 through 64; and 65 and over), 2) occupation of the male household head (categorized as farmer; professional, administrator or manager; foreman, supervisor, skilled craftsman; laborer, service or clerical worker; or no male head), 3) income of the household (categorized as under \$15,000; \$15,000 through \$29,999; or \$30,000 and over), and 4) education of the respondent (categorized as less than 9 years; 9 through 12 years; some college; or college graduate or advanced degree).

Housing characteristics used for this study were: 1) age of the structure (categorized as being built before 1900; 1900 through 1919; 1920 through 1939; 1940 through 1959; 1960 through 1979; or 1980 and after), 2) value of the structure, (categorized as less than \$20,000; \$20,000 through \$39,999; \$40,000 through \$59,999; \$60,000 through \$74,999; \$75,000 through \$99,999; or over \$100,000), and 3) number of bedrooms (categorized as two or less; three; or four or more).

Six measures of well-being were used in the analyses. Evaluation of overall housing situation was measured on a scale from one to seven with 1=very worst and 7=very best. Satisfaction with the overall housing situation, satisfaction with neighborhood overall, and satisfaction with community overall were measured on a scale from one to seven with 1=extremely dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=somewhat dissatisfied, 4=mixed, 5=somewhat satisfied, 6=satisfied, 7=extremely satisfied. Change in satisfaction obtained from the home and change in overall housing situation were measured on a scale of one to five with 1=got much worse, 2=got worse, 3=no change, 4=got better, 5=got much better.

Findings

Frequency distributions show that approximately one-fourth of the respondents are under age 35, and one fourth are age 65 or over. A sizable proportion of respondents are classified in each of the occupational groups with the fewest (15.6%) being farmers, and almost one third (28.7%) being foreman, supervisors, or skilled craftsmen. The majority (57.3%) have from nine to twelve years of schooling. Household income is fairly evenly spread among three groups with just over one-third earning either under \$15,000 (36.4%) or from \$15,000 to \$30,000 (37.5%), and slightly less than one-third (26.1%) earning \$30,000 or more annually. Over one-half (56.7%) of the respondents live in homes built before 1960. The largest proportion of homes (25.9%) are valued from \$20,000 to \$39,999. The largest proportion of respondents (42.9%) live in homes with three bedrooms.

Table 1 presents the housing adjustment decisions of rural families during the last five years. The largest group of respondents (37.9%) have remained in their current home and have remodeled it. A smaller proportion (18.4%) have moved, while slightly fewer (14.4%) have both moved and remodeled. Slightly over twenty-nine percent (29.2%) have made no change in their housing during the past five years.

Table 1. Adjustment decisions of rural families during the last five years.

Adjustment decision	Number of respondents	Percent ¹
Remodeled	192	37.9
Moved	93	18.4
Moved and Remodeled	73	14.4
Made No Change	148	29.2
Total	506	99.9

¹Total may not equal 100.0 percent due to rounding.

Chi-square distributions show that the demographic characteristics of age, occupation, education, and income are significantly ($p < .05$) associated with the type of adjustment decision made. Though the age of the structure and the value of the home are not significantly associated with the adjustment decision, the number of bedrooms is ($p < .05$). (See Table 2.)

A larger proportion of young people, under age 35, have chosen to move than have those who are older. A larger proportion of those 45 through 54, compared to other age groups, have chosen to remodel. A larger proportion of those 65 and over, have chosen to make no change.

Table 2. Associations between demographic and housing characteristics and housing adjustment decisions

Demographic/Housing Characteristics	Adjustment Decision		
	Chi-Square	D.F.	Probability
<u>Demographic Characteristics</u>			
Age of respondent	124.34	12	.000*
Occupation of male	21.41	12	.045*
Education of respondent	18.90	9	.026*
Income of respondent	14.88	6	.021*
<u>Housing Characteristics</u>			
Age of structure	23.10	15	.082
Value of home	17.37	15	.297
Number of bedrooms	15.31	6	.018*

N = 506

*Significant at the $p < .05$ level

Compared with those in other occupations, a larger proportion of farmers have elected to remodel or make no change; a larger proportion of professionals, administrators, managers, foremen, supervisors or skilled craftsmen, have decided to move and remodel; and a larger proportion of those with no male head have decided to move.

For households in which the respondent has less than nine years of education, the decision is more likely to be no change than for respondents with higher educational levels. Larger proportions of respondents with an educational level between nine years and some college have remodeled than have those with either more or less education. Larger proportions of those with advanced degrees are more likely to have moved and remodeled than are those with less education.

Households with an income level of less than \$30,000 are more likely to have made no change or to have moved than are households with higher income levels. Those households with incomes of \$30,000 and over are more likely to have remodeled or to have moved and remodeled than households with lower income levels.

Just as characteristics of the household members have various effects on the adjustment decision, research has shown that characteristics of the house itself are related to the adjustment decision. Households with two or less bedrooms are more likely to have moved or have made no change than are households with more bedrooms. Larger proportions of those households with three bedrooms are more likely to have moved and remodeled than those households with other numbers of bedrooms. Those households with four or more bedrooms are more likely to have remodeled and less likely to have moved than those households with fewer bedrooms.

One purpose of this research was to discover if significant differences exist among respondents between selected measures of well-being and the different housing adjustment decisions made. Significant differences identified are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Differences in selected measures of well-being by adjustment decisions

Measures of well-being	Adjustment Decisions			
	Remodel	Move	Move/Remodel	No Change
	Means ¹			
Evaluation of overall housing situation ²	5.1	4.8	5.1	4.9
Satisfaction with overall housing situation ³	5.6	5.4	5.9	5.6
Satisfaction with neighborhood overall ³	6.0 ^a	5.7 ^b	6.1 ^a	6.0 ^a
Satisfaction with community overall ³	5.8	5.7	5.8	5.9
Change in satisfaction obtained from home ⁴	3.5 ^a	3.5 ^a	3.9 ^b	3.2 ^c
Change in overall housing situation ⁴	3.5 ^a	3.6 ^a	4.0 ^b	3.1 ^c

¹Means with different superscripts (a, b, c) were significantly different at the five percent level in the least significant difference test.

²Scores were assigned to responses as follows:
1 = very worst, 7 = very best.

³Scores were assigned to responses as follows
1 = extremely dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = somewhat dissatisfied,
4 = mixed, 5 = somewhat satisfied, 6 = satisfied, 7 = extremely satisfied.

⁴Scores were assigned to responses as follows:
1 = got much worse, 2 = got worse, 3 = no change, 4 = got better,
5 = got much better.

Analyses of variance with the least significant difference test shows that those who have remodeled, have moved and remodeled, or have made no change in their housing have significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the neighborhood overall than do those who have moved. Those who have both moved and remodeled have significantly higher levels of change in satisfaction obtained from the home and from change in the overall housing situation than do those who have completed any of the other housing adjustment decisions. Those who have made no change have significantly lower levels of change in satisfaction obtained from the home and from change in the overall housing situation than do those who have remodeled or have moved. There is no significant difference between movers and remodelers in regards to their change in satisfaction obtained from the home or change in overall housing situation. No significant differences are found among respondents who have made various adjustment decisions as to their evaluation of their overall housing situation, their satisfaction with their overall housing situation, or their satisfaction with the community overall.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study provide a clearer understanding of the housing adjustment decisions occurring in rural communities and the consequences of these decisions. Younger families and families with no male head tend to select mobility as their housing adjustment behavior. This corresponds with previous research (Rossi, 1980; Morris & Winter, 1978; Michaelson, 1977) that states that in early stages of the life cycle, housing adjustments are more likely to overcome cultural normative deficits, and these deficits are usually overcome by mobility. Also, change in resource level upon divorce often necessitates moving to a lower cost home.

Larger proportions of middle-age households, households where the respondent has between nine years of education and some college, households that have four or more bedrooms in their home, and farmers, select remodeling as their housing adjustment behavior. These findings are consistent with past research (Parrott, 1986; Seek, 1983; Tremblay & Dillman, 1983; Roistacher, 1975; Meeks & Firebaugh, 1974) that indicates established households with an increase in discretionary income, whose children have left the home, who have formed attachments to the neighborhood, often see remodeling as an appropriate adjustment behavior. Farmers, whose residence is generally a part of their farming operation, have few viable alternatives for housing adjustment other than remodeling or building a new house.

Larger proportions of households have chosen to both move and remodel if respondent has an advanced degree, the household has a higher income, the male head is a professional, administrator, manager, foreman, supervisor or skilled craftsman. These findings are inconsistent with the idea that the option to move and remodel is particularly suited to younger, less affluent households who are willing to make their own adjustments as they have need and financial ability to do so. This inconsistency can be explained by the urban nature of past research in relation to housing adjustment. Less availability of housing stock within a rural community may necessitate both a move and remodeling in order to achieve desired housing characteristics. Also, it may be difficult for young families to obtain the financing necessary to engage in remodeling activities.

Households most likely to have made no change are those whose members are elderly, whose head has less than nine years of education, who are farmers, who have incomes of less than \$15,000, or who have two or less bedrooms in the home. Each of the characteristics related to no change are characteristics of an elderly population. This study, as well as previous studies (Seek, 1983; Keller, 1981; Rossi, 1980; Goodman, 1974; Long, 1972), indicates that this segment of the population is least likely to engage in housing adjustment behavior unless forced to do so by factors beyond their control.

Past research has indicated that remodeling is an adjustment decision more often chosen if the home is older. The findings of this study do not support that association.

The consistent and fairly high satisfaction levels indicate that families appear to be fairly apt in selecting the appropriate housing adjustment behavior. There are no significant differences in the satisfaction from the overall housing situation between respondents who made various housing adjustment decisions. However, the housing adjustment decision that has resulted in the greatest change in satisfaction is the decision to both move and remodel. By the nature of the decision to both move and remodel, there is greater opportunity for change in housing. Those who have moved express lower average satisfaction with the neighborhood than do those who have made other housing adjustment decisions. While this study does not investigate reasons, it is possible that those who have moved within the last five years may not have become fully acquainted with their neighbors and new neighborhood. This, along with the notion that there might still be some attachments to former neighbors and friends, may account for the lower satisfaction.

While the rural community is sometimes characterized as static, the findings of this study indicate considerable housing adjustment activity, particularly remodeling. There are numerous questions that arise. Who is performing the remodeling services--the occupants, skilled labor, trained professionals? Is there a need for additional resources (human and material) to help households undertake remodeling activities in rural communities? If so, what kinds of help (remodeling plans, presence of skilled labor, availability of loans, etc.) are needed by households? If needed, how can the delivery of these services be more effectively and efficiently structured? Likewise, a greater understanding is needed regarding the options available to those desiring to move.

Families make housing adjustment decisions to reduce perceived deficits in their housing. It is important to better understand factors related to these housing decisions and the resulting consequences. By gaining this understanding, one can be better equipped to assist individuals and families in the acquisition of satisfactory housing.

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