

Moving to be better off

by Frances Kremarik

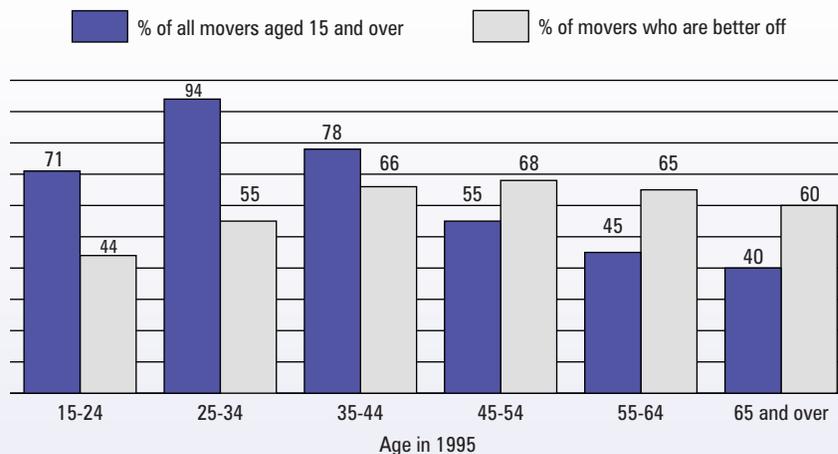
Moving is not fun. Whether you move to the other side of town, the other side of the country, or just two floors up in the same apartment building, moving involves countless chores and disruptions that most people find time consuming and annoying. Moving may involve leaving behind old friends and establishing a new social network; it certainly implies interrupting well-established routines and living out of boxes. No wonder psychologists consider moving one of the greatest stressors in people's lives. Nonetheless, most people decide to move because, despite the inconvenience, they end up better off in some way. This article uses data from the 1995 General Social Survey to draw a brief profile of Canadians who move to improve the quality of their life.¹

Between 1985 and 1995, more than 15 million Canadian adults (68% of all people aged 15 years and over in 1995) moved at least once. Some did so because they needed a larger house, others because of a job offer, while yet others moved because they married or divorced. People cited many other reasons too; for example, downsizing, finances, jobs or school, and seeking independence. The majority (60%), however, reported

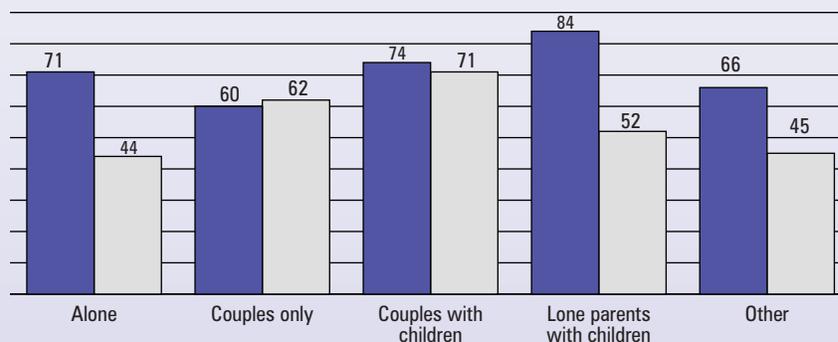
1. The 1995 General Social Survey interviewed nearly 11,000 respondents aged 15 years and over living in private households in the 10 provinces. The data collected included information about demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, most recent moves and reason for move.

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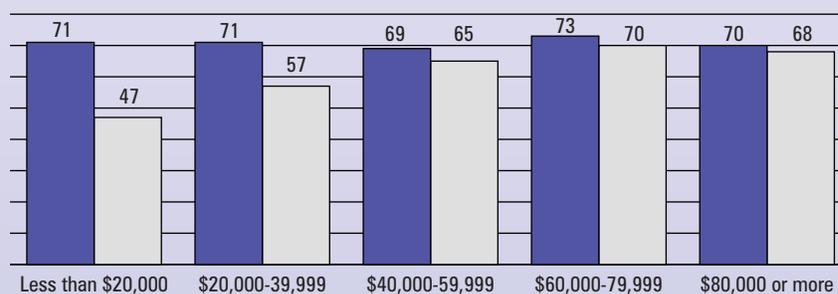
In the previous 10 years, Canadians aged 45 to 54 were most likely to have moved to be better off ...



... as were couples with children ...



... and people with household income over \$60,000



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1995.

	Movers who are better off	Reason why better off			
		Bought/ built house	Larger house %	Better neighbourhood	Smaller house
TOTAL MOVERS	60	34	15	10	4
Living arrangement					
Alone	44	17	7	12	10
Couples only	62	37	11	10	6
Couples with children	71	46	21	8	--
Lone parents with children	52	25	16	10	--
Other arrangements	45	16	17	11	2
Household income					
Less than \$20,000	47	18	11	13	7
\$20,000 – \$39,999	57	32	14	10	4
\$40,000 – \$59,999	65	43	15	9	2
\$60,000 – \$79,999	70	44	16	10	2
\$80,000 or more	68	39	23	10	--

Note: The question allowed multiple responses which will not sum to total.

-- Sample too small to produce reliable estimate.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1995.

that they had moved to improve the quality of their lives with new housing choices — either they had bought a new house, moved into a house that better suited their needs (larger or smaller), or moved into a better neighbourhood; in other words, a change that made them “better off.”

But what does better off mean? In essence, better is defined by what people perceive to be important at any given stage in their life. A new graduate, for example, who had just moved out of his parents’ large single house, may consider a modest apartment a “step up” in life, if it means gaining independence. For a young couple with small children, moving from a crowded apartment to a more spacious townhouse is definitely a move up. Others may feel that a single

family home is their dream come true. Older couples, now that their children have gone, often feel that a smaller home would improve their quality of life by requiring less work and money, and leaving more time and resources for other pursuits.

Of course, a home exists within a neighbourhood, and people’s choice of neighbourhood is also closely linked to their stage in life. Although a “better neighbourhood” is usually defined in terms of its social or physical conditions, it is nonetheless a highly subjective term.² A young single man’s ideal neighbourhood may be completely unacceptable to an elderly woman; couples with young children may want a home close to parks and schools — features that a couple without children might find

detracts from the attractiveness of the area. Better can mean safer, further from downtown, closer to downtown, closer to schools, closer to work, or even closer to the golf course.

Canadians between the ages of 25 and 34 in 1995 were most likely to have moved in the previous decade — 94% between 1985 and 1995. During those 10 years, many in this age group were attending or finishing school, starting their careers, getting married or entering conjugal relationships — all reasons that help explain the high occurrence of moves. Nevertheless, over half of these younger movers felt

2. Hartshorn, T. A. 1992. *Interpreting the City: An Urban Geography*. Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, pp.247-248.

