

Does Mobility Matter? The Neighborhood Conditions of Housing Voucher Holders by Race and Ethnicity

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Abstract

Mobility is one mechanism used to address the federal goals of deconcentrating poverty and minorities. The Housing Choice Voucher Program relies on participants to make residential location decisions consistent with these goals. Our research investigates the level and impact of mobility on the neighborhood quality of voucher holders, their neighborhood conditions by race and ethnicity, and perceived obstacles to mobility within the jurisdiction of a Southern California housing authority.

About one-third of the sample moved during the study, and moving resulted in improved neighborhoods for only one subset of movers. Minorities live in more impoverished, overcrowded neighborhoods than nonminorities, even when controlling for mobility status, contract rent, and other factors. Further, most voucher holders see the lack of rental units as a major obstacle to mobility. These findings suggest that current policy is not uniformly achieving deconcentration and that real and perceived barriers to mobility exist, especially for minorities.

Keywords: Housing assistance programs; Mobility; Neighborhood

Introduction

Encouraging the deconcentration of poverty through mobility has emerged as a major federal approach to housing policy. It reflects an effort not only to deconcentrate the poor, but also to use housing assistance to provide better living environments for lower-income minority households. For example, under a judicial mandate, the Chicago Housing Authority allowed black households receiving housing assistance to move from the primarily poor, black inner city to the more affluent, predominantly white suburbs (DeLuca

and Rosenbaum 2003; Rosenbaum 1993). While more recent efforts, such as the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program, focused explicitly on poverty, as opposed to racial deconcentration, the link between improving opportunities for minorities and deconcentrating poverty is clearly evident in housing policy and research (Goering and Feins 2003; Massey and Denton 1993; Pendall 2000; Wilson 1987).

Recent research and public policy have focused on the concentration of poor economic conditions in neighborhoods and have given less attention to other neighborhood conditions. However, overcrowding in some areas exposes residents to numerous physical and mental health risks (Acevedo-Garcia 2001; Acevedo-Garcia et al. 2004; Bashir 2002; Cohen et al. 2003; Krieger and Higgins 2002). Neighborhood economic and physical conditions tend to be associated. That is, poor physical conditions such as overcrowding exist in areas with poor economic conditions, such as lower incomes and higher levels of poverty and unemployment (Ross and Mirowsky 1999). For this reason, deconcentrating poverty most likely results in better living conditions for households moving from higher- to lower-poverty neighborhoods.

The largest federal housing program with a deconcentration dimension is the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP), also known as Section 8 tenant-based rental assistance. The HCVP is a passive form of deconcentration because it relies on the recipient to choose neighborhoods with better conditions.¹ Under the HCVP, voucher holders locate a suitable rental unit in the private market and the local housing authority (HA) administering the program provides a subsidy that is the difference between 30 percent of the tenant's income² and the fair market rent (FMR) for the area.³ HAs typically operate at the city or county level, and the households receiving rental assistance tend to live within the jurisdiction of the administering HA. However, voucher holders may exercise locational choice and move among jurisdictions. Although the HCVP does not require the recipient to live in a particular type of neighborhood or city, it implicitly assumes that voucher holders

¹ The goal of deconcentration is reflected in the Section 8 Management Assessment Program (SEMAP). One indicator of SEMAP for housing authorities administering voucher programs is effectiveness in “[e]xpanding housing opportunities” by encouraging “participation by owners of units located outside areas of poverty or minority concentration” (CFR §985.3(g)).

² As part of the choice philosophy, voucher holders may contribute more than 30 percent of their income (e.g., in cases where a voucher holder's preferred unit exceeds fair market rent). In these cases, voucher holders pay the difference between the HA's contribution and the market rent; however, at the time of the initial lease, voucher holders' contributions may not exceed 40 percent of their adjusted household income.

³ The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development sets FMRs based on a survey of an area's housing market. The HA processes the payment to the voucher holder's landlord and has the authority to adjust the rental subsidy between 90 percent and 110 percent of FMR.

will exercise their mobility option to find housing in higher-quality neighborhoods. However, whether this assumption holds in practice remains an unanswered question.

Over the past 10 years, much of the research on deconcentration policy among recipients of housing assistance focused on the outcomes for households moving from inner-city public housing developments to the private rental market using vouchers (Goering, Feins, and Richardson 2002; Kingsley, Johnson, and Petit 2003; Varady and Walker 2000). In addition, the samples of voucher holders in a substantial portion of this research tend to be heavily black, either directly by design, as in the Gautreaux program, or indirectly as a result of the composition of the population being studied, as was the case for some sites in the MTO program. While existing research provides valuable knowledge about mobility and the outcomes of movers with housing assistance, it typically follows programs involving operational conditions very different from the regular voucher program.⁴ Moreover, it focuses on different racial and ethnic populations than are found in many metropolitan areas in the western United States.⁵ One recent study on the mobility and neighborhood conditions of voucher holders in Alameda County, CA, did examine the regular voucher program, but the population again was overwhelmingly black (Varady and Walker 2003).

Existing research on the HCVP in the dynamic, racially and ethnically diverse communities in the western United States is rare. Moreover, there is little research that takes mobility into account when examining the relative neighborhood conditions of HCVP voucher holders by race and ethnicity.⁶ This type of research is extremely important for two reasons. First, because the HCVP is the primary rental housing program assisting low-income households, knowledge about its operation in different regions is critical to assessing its ability to meet poverty deconcentration goals. Second, the history of deconcentration efforts suggests that eradicating disparate outcomes for minorities is a goal, if only an indirect one, of these efforts.

⁴ Special programs such as Gautreaux and MTO included elements not found in the regular voucher program such as a requirement to locate in a particular type of neighborhood (low poverty) or additional services such as housing counseling (Varady and Walker 2003).

⁵ Much of the existing mobility research on recipients of housing assistance is based on experimental (MTO) and quasi-experimental (Gautreaux) research that provides better evidence of causality between the relocation of voucher holders and their outcomes. However, MTO operated in only five cities, while Gautreaux was specific to the Chicago area. Therefore, despite the strength of the research designs to determine causality, the generalization of results from these programs outside the geographic areas of study is limited.

⁶ Exceptions typically are studies using aggregated data. For example, a recent report examines poverty concentration and mobility and poverty concentration by race for the 50 largest metropolitan statistical areas (Devine et al. 2003).

Our research addresses questions on the neighborhood conditions of voucher holders in the racially and ethnically diverse environments of the West. Specifically, we consider the relationship between mobility and neighborhood quality, especially for minorities, and also examine some obstacles that might reduce the effectiveness of mobility policy in practice. To do so we use data from three sources: responses to a sample survey of voucher holders under the jurisdiction of the Santa Ana Housing Authority (SAHA), SAHA's client files, and the 2000 U.S. census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002).

The remainder of the article is divided into five sections. In the first, we briefly review poverty concentration arguments and deconcentration policy and programs, as well as empirical findings on the outcomes of these types of policies and programs. In the second and third, we present the methods we used and discuss the study sample and study area. In the fourth, we present the results of statistical analyses. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of HCVP policy, our results, and their policy implications.

Poverty, race, and spatial concentration

Poverty and race/ethnicity have been considered together in scholarship and policy for many decades. Early research suggested that the concentration of poverty was associated with shared norms and behaviors that fostered intergenerational poverty. Beginning with Lewis's (1966) study of poor Mexican families, this line of thinking resulted in a favorable view of the middle-class family and a negative view of the lower-class family and was referred to as the culture of poverty thesis (O'Connor 2001). This thesis, often couched in terms of class differences, also had racial and ethnic undertones. The release of the Moynihan report in 1965 drew attention to the notion of the cultural pathologies of the poor, particularly poor blacks. As reflected in the comments of historian Alice O'Connor (2001), it is difficult to separate race and poverty in this report. She writes that the issue of the report "was not racial discrimination but poverty," although its "main purpose was to influence the administration's policy agenda on race" (203). The report drew a hostile reaction from civil rights advocates, who argued that it focused on the pathologies of black families "as a cause rather than a consequence of poverty and community distress" (O'Connor 2001, 207). With a highly visible civil rights movement, the culture of poverty thesis receded into the background of public debate.

The idea that concentrated poverty results in unfavorable outcomes most certainly entered the public consciousness. The degree to which the Moynihan report (1965) affected public policy, however, is unclear, although some housing programs beginning in the 1970s appear to be consistent with deconcentration.

tration of poverty goals. Mobility, a passive deconcentration strategy, appeared as a feature of the Experimental Housing Allowance Program in 1973 and was retained in the Section 8 certificate and voucher programs.⁷

The 1980s witnessed a resurgence of the culture of poverty thesis in the scholarly literature. Work from conservative and liberal scholars alike gave enhanced visibility to racial and poverty concentration. On the conservative front, Charles Murray (1984) echoed earlier arguments promoting the middle class as the model for society:

It is now intellectually respectable, as until recently it was not, to argue that welfare children should be indoctrinated with middle class values.
(220)

He attributed a rise in negative outcomes for the poor to public policies, taking aim at all federal social policy from education to housing, and explicitly criticized policies providing preferential treatment to minorities. He also argued for the elimination of preferential treatment and all welfare-type programs including housing subsidies for the poor. Murray's (1984) work provoked an immediate response from scholars and advocates. According to O'Connor (2001), critics characterized his argument as "partial, deceptive, and for the most part just plain wrong" (248).

William Julius Wilson's (1987) work on urban poverty offered a more liberal perspective. Although he acknowledged the pathologies of the poor, his argument echoed the advocates of the 1960s by identifying behavioral pathologies as a consequence, not a cause, of poverty. Instead of individual behaviors, he identified structural constraints as barriers to the poor and favored reducing barriers and increasing opportunities. His work was interpreted by some as a culture of poverty perspective, although his intent was to focus attention on the social structural constraints faced by the inner-city poor and not on specific behaviors. In addition, his work emphasized class, not race, as the key structural element of interest for poverty studies (O'Connor 2001).

Historically, the scholarly debate about poverty explicitly and implicitly concerned race and discrimination. In addition, a spatial dimension was involved, not only in Wilson's (1987) work on the inner-city poor, but also more generally in that the assumption of spatial concentration was apparent in discussions of (sub)cultural transmission of socially undesirable behaviors.

The reasoning of scholars and the associations found in their research find a complement in the public policy response to poverty issues. Although it is

⁷ The Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, which authorized the Section 8 certificate program, explicitly supported income deconcentration (Katz and Turner 2001).

difficult to assess the degree to which scholarly contributions prompted public policies, it is reasonable to assume that research on poverty, as well as the work of housing advocates and others, influenced the move toward racial and poverty deconcentration in federal housing programs. At the same time, actions by beneficiaries of federal housing programs also had an impact on policy making. For example, the 1966 class action suit *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority* charged that the Chicago Housing Authority and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had discriminated against blacks by siting public housing projects in black neighborhoods and discouraging blacks from living in the handful of projects located in white neighborhoods and serving predominantly white tenants. The plaintiffs won their case, and after numerous legal challenges, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the public agencies to resolve the problem with a remediation plan to deconcentrate the blacks served by the Chicago Housing Authority. The plan resulted in the movement of poor, inner-city black families to the mostly white Chicago suburbs⁸ (National Housing Law Project 1999; Rosenbaum 1995).

This deconcentration strategy is credited with numerous positive outcomes for households moving to the suburbs, including better high school graduation rates for the children of movers, increased employment, and better residential conditions (Popkin and Cunningham 2002; Rosenbaum 1995; Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000). Recent research on Gautreaux participants also suggests that moving to better neighborhoods fosters higher levels of efficacy for participants, and as a result, presents new opportunities for improved social outcomes. This research rejects the culture of poverty thesis, while lending support to the argument that “places matter” (Rosenbaum, Reynolds, and DeLuca 2002, 81).

The Gautreaux experience contributed to the development of the federal MTO experiment in 1992. MTO focused on five cities and emphasized the deconcentration of poverty, not race.⁹ The experiment was designed to study the outcomes of households that used vouchers to move from high-poverty to low-poverty neighborhoods. MTO results have been mixed, but show that the experimental group moved to neighborhoods with higher high school graduation, higher homeownership, and lower unemployment rates (Orr et al. 2003).

⁸ See Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum (2000) for a detailed history of the Gautreaux program and participants’ outcomes.

⁹ MTO was designed as a poverty deconcentration, not a racial or minority desegregation, program. As a result, more racial and ethnic diversity in the voucher holder population occurred under this policy. However, as noted by Goering and Feins (2003), “The cities and areas targeted for MTO would be almost exclusively black and Hispanic” (43).

In addition, participants moving to lower-poverty from higher-poverty areas reported an increased feeling of safety, improved mental health, and better educational and behavioral outcomes for their children (Goering et al. 1999; Popkin and Cunningham 2002; Popkin et al. 2000).¹⁰

The Gautreaux program and the MTO experiment are two of the country's most visible mobility programs. However, others such as HOPE VI and many local programs have sought to deconcentrate poverty (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000). Although the focus in many of them appears to be poverty, some researchers have considered the pattern of racial/ethnic concentration of poverty associated with mobility programs. Their research indicates that mobility may result in better neighborhoods or less concentration of poverty for movers, but may not spur the deconcentration of minorities to the same degree (Kingsley, Johnson, and Petit 2003).

The larger mobility programs use housing vouchers to support participants' moves from high-poverty or racially concentrated public housing developments to private market rentals in lower-poverty or less racially concentrated neighborhoods. Mobility is also a feature of the HCVP, the largest demand-side housing program in the country. The HCVP subsidy can be used anywhere in the country as long as there is a local HA; thus, in theory, it presents no barrier to recipients' mobility¹¹ (Basolo 2003; Pendall 2000). However, unlike the best-known mobility programs, Gautreaux and MTO, recipients are not required to locate in low-poverty or racially diverse areas. Therefore, the HCVP is a passive mobility program that relies on voucher holders to make personal residential choices resulting in deconcentration.

Researchers have conducted very little research on the deconcentration aspect of the HCVP, especially the implicit goals of fostering the deconcentration of minorities. In most existing studies, the neighborhood conditions of voucher holders are compared at one point in time with the conditions of public housing residents, the poor not receiving assistance, and/or the regular rental population. Findings from existing studies indicate that minority deconcentration may not be accomplished through the voucher program and that minorities continue to live in neighborhoods with social and economic distress (Devine et al. 2003; Hartung and Hening 1997; Newman and Schnare 1997; Pendall 2000). However, a study of the Welfare to Work Voucher Program (WTWVP) found that participants using these vouchers experienced better neighborhoods, as measured by poverty and unemployment rates, than the

¹⁰ See Goering and Feins (2003) for a comprehensive discussion of MTO and its outcomes.

¹¹ In practice, mobility may be made more difficult by HA program administration (Basolo 2003; Katz and Turner 2001).

control group that did not receive vouchers.¹² Moreover, the study reveals that positive impacts were stronger for one racial/ethnic subgroup, non-Hispanic blacks (Patterson et al. 2004).

Existing studies tend to use aggregate data such as metropolitan areas and examine the conditions of voucher holders in place without considering their residential moves while using assistance. Moreover, this research rarely focuses on the western part of the country, an area with a different development history, a different racial and ethnic mix, and a less marked history of residential segregation (Ong 1998).

The research presented here uses individual-level data from a sample of voucher holders receiving assistance from a local HA in Southern California to answer questions on their neighborhood conditions. The next section presents the formal research questions and the methodology used in the study.

Research questions and methodology

The research was designed to investigate the residential location, satisfaction, and mobility choices of voucher holders under the jurisdiction of the SAHA in Orange County, CA. It is a cross-sectional study of individuals receiving voucher assistance in spring 2002.

The central research question is this: What explains the variation in general neighborhood conditions among voucher holders? In addressing this general question, we consider the following related questions:

1. What is the likelihood that racial/ethnic minorities in the program live in worse neighborhoods than nonminority households receiving vouchers?
2. Do movers with vouchers live in better neighborhoods than nonmovers with vouchers?
3. How influential is the price of housing (rent) in determining the neighborhood conditions of voucher holders?
4. What types of obstacles discourage voucher holders from moving to better neighborhoods?

¹² The evaluation involved an experimental design with the treatment group receiving a voucher through WTWVP and the control group on the waiting list for a voucher under the regular HCVP (Patterson et al. 2004). The authors assert that it is essentially a study of receiving a voucher or not; however, variation in implementation across the six study sites and the inability to deny a control group member a voucher when one was made available under the HCVP, as well as other minor differences in the WTWVP, suggest that caution should be used in applying results too broadly.

These questions expand on existing research on voucher holders in several ways. First, previous research has shown that minorities receiving voucher assistance tend to live in distressed neighborhoods (Pendall 2000), but research on the HCVP has not examined the question at the individual level, particularly in the racially and ethnically mixed communities common in much of the western United States. Second, we examine the potential for mobility to improve neighborhood conditions for voucher holders, while specifically considering their race and ethnicity and the price of housing. Third, we examine the obstacles to mobility in our population to better understand the limits of a passive mobility program such as the HCVP.

We conducted a mail survey of voucher holders within the population receiving SAHA assistance in 2002. A random sample of voucher holders ($n = 830$) was selected from the population ($N = 2,558$), and movers were oversampled to ensure their representation in the response sample. The mail survey was designed in collaboration with the HA and guided by recommendations from Dillman (2000). The design included five major elements aimed at optimizing the response rate:

1. A draft questionnaire was reviewed by HA staff and pretested on voucher holders from two jurisdictions. This step provided feedback on the effectiveness of questions and the reasonableness of response time. On the basis of this process, we modified a few questions and response categories to increase clarity. The questionnaire included queries about actual and planned moves, individual sociodemographics, and perceptions and attitudes about living environments.
2. The survey introduction letter was cosigned by a researcher and an HA manager.
3. Because of the ethnic mix in the population, the letter included a description of the study and instructions in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The questionnaire was translated into Spanish and Vietnamese for respondents requesting it.¹³
4. The sampling frame, the HA client database, was complete for the population, and the sample mailing list was drawn directly from this source.¹⁴
5. Nonrespondents received multiple follow ups encouraging them to participate.

¹³ Less than 3 percent of the respondents completed the survey in a foreign language.

¹⁴ The database contained the names and addresses of Section 8 voucher holders. To gain access, we agreed to procedures to maintain the anonymity of the respondents and to ensure the security of the data.

The survey was implemented in spring 2002 and was completed by August of the same year. A total of 467 voucher holders (56.3 percent) returned a completed questionnaire. While the response rate was good for a mail survey, it could be unrepresentative of the population since respondents could differ from nonrespondents in a systematic manner. To assess this possibility, we compared respondents with nonrespondents. Movers were oversampled and therefore overrepresented in the final sample. A response bias analysis revealed that response was more likely as age and contract rent increased and less likely with increases in income.¹⁵ For this reason, the results may not be representative of the Santa Ana voucher holder population.

Cases that had incomplete addresses¹⁶ or that could not be geocoded¹⁷ were dropped because we could not determine the neighborhood locations of these respondents.¹⁸ Also, 35 of the movers were not using voucher assistance at the time of their last move. We removed them and analyzed a total of 403 voucher holders. All households in the final sample lived in Orange County.

The sample data were combined with variables from the SAHA client database, which included race and ethnicity, gender, age, contract rent, and income. Using the addresses provided by the respondents, corresponding neighborhood data were extracted at the census-tract level from Summary Files 1 and 3 of the 2000 census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002) and joined to the survey and client data.

Study context

The voucher holders fall under the SAHA's jurisdiction. Santa Ana is located in the northern part of Orange County, a historically suburban county located directly south of Los Angeles County. Orange County has no public housing developments, but inclusionary housing policies have provided some affordable rental units (Calavita, Grimes, and Mallach 1997) and publicly subsidized developments have resulted in other below-market units. The HCVP is the single largest rental assistance program for low-income households living in the county and is administered by three city HAs, including Santa Ana's, and the county HA (Basolo 2003).

¹⁵ The response bias test, a logistic regression with response (yes = 1, no = 0) produced coefficients that were not statistically significant for ethnicity, race, children under 18 present in the home, and gender.

¹⁶ We asked respondents to report their address on the survey form to verify its correctness. In some cases, respondents had recently moved or did not provide complete addresses.

¹⁷ We successfully geocoded about 90 percent of the addresses.

¹⁸ We did replace missing values with the mode or mean on other variables that were missing only a few cases.

Santa Ana, the most populous city in the county, has experienced significant demographic change over the past 20 years and in many ways is very different from Orange County as a whole. Santa Ana is more racially and ethnically diverse than the county, with whites comprising approximately 43 percent of the population, compared with 65 percent of the population of the county. At the same time, Hispanics comprise over three-quarters of the city's population, compared with less than one-third in the county (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002).

The racial/ethnic composition of the sample appears considerably different from that of comparison groups—renter households with incomes at or below 50 percent of median family income (MFI) in Santa Ana and the county. Although their total number is small, blacks constitute a larger proportion of the sample than is found in city or county reference groups; Asians comprise a much larger percentage of the sample than their proportions in the city or county; whites constitute a larger share of the sample than they do in the city comparison group, but a smaller proportion than in the county; and Hispanics represent only one-third of the sample, but over 75 percent of the city comparison group and 40 percent for the county (see table 1).¹⁹

The city of Santa Ana is one of the poorest areas of Orange County, with a 1999 per capita income of \$12,152, the lowest of all 34 cities in the county.²⁰ Also, Santa Ana had the highest percentage of persons in poverty in 1999 (19.8 percent). Overcrowding is a serious issue: 50.3 percent of the units have more than one person per room, and 22.6 percent have more than two persons per room (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002). These conditions are by far the worst of any city in the county. A 2003 article in the *Los Angeles Times* emphasizes the problems, identifying Santa Ana as “the nation’s most crowded big city” (Mena 2003, B1). Finally, a recent study from the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government found that Santa Ana had the highest level of urban hardship in the country (Montiel, Nathan, and Wright 2004).

Housing costs are very high in Orange County. In fact, it is one of the most expensive regions in the country for ownership and rental housing²¹ (National

¹⁹ The data in table 1 should not be overinterpreted as under- or overrepresentation of particular groups in the voucher program since there are several possible interpretations for these results. For example, vouchers issued by other HAs, but being used in Santa Ana, are not represented in the sample numbers.

²⁰ Santa Ana ranks 31st among the county’s 34 cities on 1999 median household income and 33rd on 1999 MFI (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002).

²¹ The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) (2003) ranked Orange County among the 10 least affordable metropolitan statistical areas for renters. The NLIHC (2003) estimates that a household in Orange County would have to make \$23.46 an hour to afford a two-bedroom unit at FMR. In other words, at the California minimum wage of \$6.75 an hour, a household would need about 3.5 full-time workers to afford a two-bedroom unit.

Table 1. Response Sample by Race and Ethnicity with Comparison to Renter Households at or below 50 percent of Median Family Income in the City of Santa Ana and Orange County

Race/Ethnicity	Sample		Santa Ana ^b	Orange County ^b
	Number	Percent	Percent	Percent
Blacks ^a	24	6.0	1.7	2.2
Asian ^a	198	49.1	10.1	16.1
White ^a	49	12.2	9.6	38.0
Other ^c	132	32.8	78.6 ^d	43.6 ^d
Ethnicity				
Hispanic	132	32.8	76.8	40.0
Non-Hispanic	271	67.2	23.2	60.0

Note: Percentages may not total 100 percent because of rounding.

^a Categories represent all non-Hispanic households within that race.

^b Data for renter households only. These are special tabulations of census 2000 data (HUD 2002).

^c In the sample, the other category is equivalent to Hispanic households, since only three racial categories appeared in the database. In the comparison groups in Santa Ana and Orange County, the other category includes Hispanic households and other racial groups.

^d The total number of renter households at or below 50 percent MFI minus the sum of the other three race categories in this table.

Association of Home Builders 2002; U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002). While Santa Ana has a lower median contract rent (\$758) than the county (\$861), it has only about a 2 percent vacancy rate versus approximately 3.5 percent countywide (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002).

From a regional perspective, Santa Ana is near the bottom of the hierarchy of cities. Vast differences in wealth and prosperity between many of the county's cities and Santa Ana are evident in the aggregate numbers. In general, these differences are reflected in neighborhood quality as well. At the same time, median household income among census tracts within Santa Ana varies from a low of \$26,893 to a high of \$76,774, and tract overcrowding rates (more than one person per room) range from 9.2 percent to 87.3 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002).

The next section offers some descriptive analyses and presents the variables and multivariate analyses of the neighborhood conditions of SAHA voucher holders.

Analysis

The opportunity for mobility is a key element of the HCVP. In the study sample, slightly more than one-third of the voucher holders had moved within the past three years. Mobility varied by race and ethnicity, with 38.2 percent of Asians, 37.4 percent of Hispanics, 33.3 percent of blacks, and 16.3 percent of non-Hispanic whites having moved (see table 2). Clearly, minorities moved more than non-Hispanic whites.

Table 2. Mobility by Race and Ethnicity

	Blacks	Asians	Hispanics	Non-Hispanic Whites	Total
Move	8 (33.3%)	76 (38.2%)	49 (37.4%)	8 (16.3%)	141 (35.0%)
No move	16 (66.7%)	123 (61.8%)	82 (62.6%)	41 (83.7%)	262 (65.0%)
Total	24 (100.0%)	199 (100.0%)	131 (100.0%)	49 (100.0%)	403 (100.0%)

Note: $\chi^2 = 8.77$ with 3 df ($p = 0.03$).

Mobility presents an opportunity to improve neighborhood conditions. As an initial step in our analysis, therefore, we performed a series of elementary statistical tests to examine the potential associations between mobility, neighborhood conditions, and other variables. Using an index of neighborhood conditions,²² we first performed a difference of means test on movers versus nonmovers. The t statistic was statistically significant ($t = 3.158$; $p = 0.002$; $n = 403$) and indicates that there is a difference in neighborhood conditions between mover and nonmover voucher households. Specifically, the analysis suggests that movers live in better neighborhoods, on average, than nonmovers. Next, we considered only mover households. In a paired t -test analysis, we considered whether neighborhood conditions, before and after mobility, revealed an improvement.²³ The t statistic was not significant ($t =$

²² The neighborhood conditions index was constructed by summing the Z-scores of six neighborhood (census-tract-level) indicator variables: one minus the poverty rate; one minus the unemployment rate; one minus the percentage of households on public assistance; median household income; one minus the overcrowding rate; and the reflection of population density. Thus, the index captures a combination of negative economic and crowded conditions. The index has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.878 and is a continuous variable with the intuitively appealing quality of scores ranging from low (worst conditions) to higher (best conditions).

²³ We computed the neighborhood conditions index for the current and previous neighborhoods for this analysis.

-0.315 ; $p = 0.754$; $n = 141$). In other words, the analysis does not indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean conditions of movers' previous versus current neighborhoods. We also performed an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and a t -test to analyze the change in neighborhoods—the gain or loss in the value of the neighborhood conditions index—between movers' past and present neighborhoods by race and ethnicity. Neither test revealed a statistically significant difference among these groups.²⁴

Mobility may vary by characteristics other than race and ethnicity. For example, moving decisions may be associated with age. It may be that older people find moving more arduous than younger ones and therefore opt to move less.²⁵ As shown in table 3, elderly voucher holders, defined as aged 62 and over²⁶ in this analysis, do tend to move less than younger ones.

Table 3. Mobility by Age

	62 and Older	Under 62	Total
Move	36 (27.7%)	105 (38.5%)	141 (35.0%)
No move	94 (72.3%)	168 (61.5%)	262 (65.0%)
Total	130 (100.0%)	273 (100.0%)	403 (100.0%)

Note: $\chi^2 = 4.49$ with 1 df ($p = 0.03$).

Voucher holders in this study receive assistance through the SAHA and therefore may be more likely to live in Santa Ana. Table 4 shows that 66.5 percent of them do indeed live in Santa Ana. In addition, the table reveals that a strong majority of non-Hispanic whites (85.7 percent) live in Santa Ana, as do a majority of Asian (65.3 percent) and Hispanic (66.4 percent) voucher

²⁴ The ANOVA analyzed the change in movers' previous versus present neighborhood conditions using three racial groups, blacks, Asians, and whites ($F = 0.860$; $p = 0.426$; $n = 141$). Because of the small number of black households in the sample, these results should be interpreted with caution. The t -test examined this change in neighborhood conditions for Hispanics versus non-Hispanics ($t = -0.318$; $p = 0.751$; $n = 141$).

²⁵ Moving may also be more difficult if the head of household has a disability (Shea et al. 2004), and, in some cases, the difficulty may be compounded if that person is elderly as well. We did not collect information on the disability status of voucher holders from SAHA files and therefore cannot examine the mobility behavior of these households or fully disentangle the expected associations among mobility, age, and disability.

²⁶ This definition coincides with the definition of elderly used in HUD's special tabulations of decennial census data.

Table 4. City Location by Race and Ethnicity

	Blacks	Asians	Hispanics	Non-Hispanic Whites	Total
Lives in Santa Ana	9 (37.5%)	130 (65.3%)	87 (66.4%)	42 (85.7%)	268 (66.5%)
Lives outside Santa Ana	15 (62.5%)	69 (34.7%)	44 (33.6%)	7 (14.3%)	135 (33.5%)
Total	24 (100.0%)	199 (100.0%)	131 (100.0%)	49 (100.0%)	403 (100.0%)

Note: $\chi^2 = 17.30$ with 3 df ($p = 0.00$).

holders; however, only 37.5 percent of black voucher holders lived in the jurisdiction.

Mobility in and out of Santa Ana indicates that while many voucher holders choose to move within the jurisdiction, a substantial number choose to move out. As shown in table 5, almost 42 percent of the voucher holders who moved stayed within the city. However, about 36 percent moved to another community. Only 5.7 percent moved to Santa Ana from another jurisdiction, and approximately 16 percent lived outside Santa Ana before they moved and chose to stay outside.

Table 5. Moves in and out of Santa Ana

	Now lives in Santa Ana	Does not now live in Santa Ana	Total
Previously lived in Santa Ana	59 (41.8%)	51 (36.2%)	110 (78.0%)
Did not previously live in Santa Ana	8 (5.7%)	23 (16.3%)	31 (22.0%)
Total	67 (47.5%)	74 (52.5%)	141 (100.0%)

Note: Cell percentages are for the total of movers.

$\chi^2 = 7.51$ with 1 df ($p = 0.01$).

The mobility of SAHA voucher holders indicates that movers are leaving Santa Ana more than they are moving into it. Given the city’s relative position at the bottom of the regional economic hierarchy, it might be assumed that voucher holders are leaving for an area with less concentrated poverty or overall better neighborhoods. In table 6, we compare the mean values on the

Table 6. Change in Neighborhood Conditions by Type of Move

Direction of Move	Neighborhood Conditions Index		Change
	Previous	Current	
Santa Ana → Santa Ana	-1.16	-2.02	Worse
Santa Ana → outside	-0.93	1.47	Better
Outside → Santa Ana	3.77	-1.11	Worse
Outside → outside	1.98	1.48	Worse

Note: N = 141.

neighborhood conditions index, before and after moves, for four groups within the mover portion of the sample:

1. Households that lived within Santa Ana before and after the move
2. Households that lived in Santa Ana but moved out of the city
3. Households that moved to Santa Ana from outside the city
4. Households that lived outside Santa Ana before and after their moves

The only group that shows an overall improvement in neighborhood conditions is the households that moved out of Santa Ana.²⁷ This result suggests that leaving the city improves neighborhood conditions for voucher holders and that such a move is consistent with HCVP goals.

The bivariate analyses thus far provide some preliminary results for associations between mobility and race, as well as other factors, and race and location of residence. These initial analyses, however, do not fully address the question of whether movers are better off than nonmovers and, equally important, whether neighborhood conditions are associated with race and ethnicity when controlling for mobility and other factors. Therefore, in the next section, we perform multivariate analyses to better understand the impact of choice, the HCVP's mechanism for deconcentration, on SAHA voucher holders.

²⁷ We performed an ANOVA and post hoc comparisons between groups using the Bonferroni adjustment on the change in neighborhood conditions for the four groups. The ANOVA indicates a statistically significant difference between at least two of the group means ($F = 6.29$; $p = 0.00$), and the post hoc comparisons indicate statistically significant differences in the means of groups 1 and 2 and groups 2 and 3. In other words, the analyses reveal that the neighborhood conditions of households that lived in Santa Ana before and after the move did not improve as much, on average, as they did for households that lived in Santa Ana but moved out of the city. This latter group also had a higher mean on change in neighborhood conditions than households that lived outside and moved to the city. However, given the small size of the group moving into Santa Ana, these results should be interpreted with caution.

Multivariate analyses

To examine differences in neighborhood conditions by race and ethnicity, we specified three ordinary least squares regression models with neighborhood conditions (the index described earlier) as the dependent variable.²⁸ The independent variables used in all models include dummies for race and ethnicity as the primary variables of interest with sociodemographic characteristics (gender, marital status, presence of children under 18 in the household, age, education, and annual household income) of the voucher holders as control variables. Given that the city as a whole has concentrated poverty and overcrowding compared with the rest of the county, we also include in all models an additional control variable for residence in the city. Model 1 includes the race and ethnicity and control variables only. Model 2 introduces mover status to the base model. Contract rent is added in Model 3 (see table 7 for descriptive statistics of variables used in the analyses).²⁹

Table 7. Variable Measurement and Descriptive Statistics

	Measurement	Mean ^a	Standard Deviation
Independent variables			
Race	1 = Black, 0 = other	0.060	
	1 = Asian, 0 = other	0.494	
	1 = Non-Hispanic white, 0 = other (reference)	0.122	
Ethnicity	1 = Hispanic, 0 = not	0.325	
Santa Ana residence	1 = yes, 0 = no	0.665	
Gender	1 = male, 0 = female	0.409	
Marital status	1 = married, 0 = not	0.511	
Children present	1 = child present, 0 = not	0.506	
Age	In years	55	15
Education	1 = high school diploma or GED, 0 = not	0.509	
Income	Annual household in dollars	\$16,412	\$9,104
Mover	1 = yes, 0 = no	0.350	
Contract rent	Monthly contract rent in dollars	\$974	\$253
Dependent variable			
Neighborhood conditions	6-item additive index ^b , $\alpha = 0.878$	-0.177	4.711

^a The mean of the dichotomous variables is equal to the percentage coded 1.

^b The index ranges from worst (-13.79) to best (11.55) conditions.

²⁸ Diagnostics for the models revealed no problems with multicollinearity, influential outliers, or heteroskedasticity.

²⁹ The distributions for annual household income and contract rent were positively skewed. Therefore, we took the natural log of the values for these variables to improve the shape of their distributions.

The results for Models 1 through 3 are shown in table 8. In Model 1, all three of the race and ethnicity coefficients have negative signs, but only the estimates for the Asian and Hispanic groups are statistically significant. Therefore, the analysis indicates that Asian and Hispanic voucher holders, on average, live in worse neighborhood conditions than their non-Hispanic white counterparts. As expected, the coefficient for residence in Santa Ana is negative and highly statistically significant. In other words, voucher holders living in Santa Ana tend to live in neighborhoods with worse conditions than their counterparts outside the city. The only other statistically significant result is for marital status; married voucher holders are more likely to live in better neighborhoods.

Table 8. Ordinary Least Squares Regressions: Neighborhood Conditions

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Black	-1.422	-1.433	-2.740*
Asian	-2.108**	-2.269**	-3.766***
Hispanic	-2.369**	-2.509**	-3.268***
Santa Ana residence	-3.069***	-2.782***	-2.781***
Gender	-0.860	-0.855	-0.509
Marital status	1.335*	1.321*	0.513
Children present	0.458	0.477	-0.616
Age	0.018	0.020	0.050*
High school graduate	0.614	0.626	0.977*
Annual household income (ln)	-0.206	-0.149	-1.034*
Mover		1.005*	0.470
Contract rent (ln)			7.498***
R^2	0.123	0.132	0.219

Note: N = 403.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Model 2 includes whether the voucher holder moved in the past three years as an independent variable. The coefficient for mover status is positive and statistically significant, indicating that movers live in better neighborhoods than nonmovers. All other results are similar to those found in Model 1. The last regression, Model 3, includes the amount of rent paid by voucher holders. This model explained 21.9 percent of the variation in neighborhood conditions in the sample and had the best fit of the three models. The estimate for contract rent is positive and statistically significant. In fact, the standardized coefficient for

rent (not shown) was the largest of any of the variables. Mover status is no longer statistically significant in this model. In other words, when contract rent is controlled for, mobility does not appear to explain the neighborhood conditions of voucher holders. Simply put, better neighborhood conditions are associated with higher rents. The coefficients for the race/ethnicity variables remain negative, and all the coefficients for these variables are statistically significant. In addition, the age and education of the householder are positive and significantly associated with neighborhood conditions. The only other statistically significant coefficient is for the income variable. However, the result is not intuitive since the estimate has a negative sign; that is, neighborhood conditions tend to get worse as household income increases.³⁰ (We consider this result further in the “Discussion and policy implications” section.)

The results of these models answer several of our research questions. The analyses clearly show that after mobility, rent, and other factors are controlled for, minorities are more likely than nonminorities to live in poorer neighborhoods. As reported, contract rent was the most influential factor determining neighborhood conditions. This finding is not surprising since the HCVP works within the market model and better neighborhood conditions have market value (you get what you pay for).

The HCVP subsidy is based on an area’s FMR, as determined by HUD. FMR is set at the median in Orange County, although HCVP rules permit the SAHA to set payment standards above 100 percent of FMR³¹ and allow voucher holders to contribute more than 30 percent of their income for a unit above FMR. These elements of the program presumably allow voucher holders to move into better neighborhoods. In theory, this seems reasonable, but it underestimates or ignores the obstacles that voucher holders may encounter in their search for a suitable unit. In the next section, we address the fourth research question by examining the obstacles to mobility perceived by voucher holders.

³⁰ Initially, we were concerned that this result could be due to multicollinearity among variables in the models, so we examined this possibility. The bivariate analyses of model variables show a negative association between the neighborhood conditions index and income, although the correlation coefficient is not statistically significant. None of the variables in the model were strongly correlated (no bivariate relationship achieved a correlation coefficient of 0.60). We ran several versions of Model 3, dropping variables that were correlated with income to assess their influence on that variable. The direction of the income coefficient did not change at all. Finally, variance inflation factors calculated for the variables in the model were between 1 and 3.5 and do not indicate any serious multicollinearity problem.

³¹ In 2002, the SAHA had exception rents in areas with very high cost housing, primarily in affluent coastal cities. According to staff, without these exceptions, these communities would be outside the reach of voucher holders.

Obstacles to mobility

Most of the sample perceived at least one obstacle to mobility, and approximately 35 percent identified multiple obstacles. The responses to the queries about obstacles are displayed in table 9. The results are presented by race and ethnicity to determine whether minorities and nonminorities perceive the same obstacles and at similar levels or whether there is variation among the groups.

Table 9. Obstacles to Mobility

	Blacks	Asians	Hispanics	Non-Hispanic Whites	Total	Percentage of the Total
Too few homes to rent ^a	20	138	77	24	259	64.3%
Percentage within the group	(83.3%)	(69.3%)	(58.8%)	(49.3%)		
Too much paper work ^b	5	35	22	2	64	15.9%
Percentage within the group	(20.8%)	(17.6%)	(16.8%)	(4.1%)		
Landlord will not rent Section 8 ^c	17	66	70	24	177	43.95
Percentage within the group	(70.8%)	(33.2%)	(53.4%)	(49.0%)		

^a $\chi^2 = 12.74$ with 3 df ($p = 0.01$).

^b $\chi^2 = 6.06$ with 3 df (not significant).

^c $\chi^2 = 21.73$ with 3 df ($p = 0.00$).

The first obstacle was the number of available units for rent. A majority of respondents (64.3 percent) felt that the lack of rental units was an impediment to mobility. An overwhelming majority of blacks (83.3 percent) identified this obstacle, compared with 49.3 percent of their non-Hispanic white counterparts. A majority of Asian and Hispanic voucher holders also identified the lack of units as an obstacle. A chi-square analysis of this obstacle by race/ethnicity was statistically significant.

The second obstacle concerns the administrative requirements of a move under the program as reflected by a question on the paperwork involved. Only 15.9 percent thought that the amount of paperwork was an obstacle. Although the groups varied in their response to this question, a chi-square analysis indicated no statistically significant association between race/ethnicity and this obstacle.

Finally, voucher holders were asked about landlords' willingness to rent to voucher households. While this obstacle could overlap with the availability of rental units in general, it is more specific. Approximately 44 percent of voucher holders perceived reluctance on the part of landlords to rent to program partic-

ipants. Again, blacks identified resistance more than the other groups did: Almost 71 percent of blacks thought landlords were obstacles to mobility, although a relatively high percentage of Hispanics (53.4 percent) and non-Hispanic whites (49 percent) agreed. Only about one-third of Asians perceived this lack of willingness. A chi-square analysis between this obstacle and race/ethnicity revealed a statistically significant association.

In sum, many of the voucher holders in the sample anticipate difficulty in changing their location and, as a result, many of them may be discouraged from seeking housing in better neighborhoods. In the next section, we discuss the significance of our findings and their implications for policy makers and housing researchers.

Discussion and policy implications

To place our results in context, it is important to understand federal policy and the HCVP's program elements. Changes to the program over the years explicitly acknowledged the operation of market principles by allowing the portability of the voucher benefit (thus facilitating mobility) and raising the ceiling on the proportion of rent paid by the recipient. The reasons for these modifications may never be completely known, but at least three interrelated explanations are evident in the literature and political rhetoric on housing policy.

First, scholars for decades have associated the concentration of poverty with antisocial behaviors and lack of opportunity among the poor. Poor neighborhoods also tended to be racially or ethnically concentrated. Public policies and practices associated with some public housing developments drew criticism for concentrating the poor, particularly poor blacks, and contributing to the social problems they experienced. In response, the federal government and some local governments adopted dispersal or mobility policies to deconcentrate public housing. Deconcentration goals were adopted for the HCVP, as reflected in the Section 8 Management Assessment Program indicator mentioned earlier.

A second explanation for program modifications over the years is simply that they reflect ideological changes in federal policy. The effort to shrink big government resulted in the federal government's withdrawal from providing housing and its reliance on providing vouchers to help with private market housing costs. Because the HCVP requires voucher holders to find a unit priced at the middle of the private rental market or lower, choice can be interpreted as working with the private sector with less government intervention.

Finally, a third explanation for the revisions to the tenant-based HCVP is that policy makers assume that given a choice and adequate information,³² voucher holders will move to neighborhoods with less poverty and overall better conditions. In this way, the federal (macrolevel) goals and concerns rely on individual (microlevel) decisions to meet policy expectations. However, voucher holders face constraints in making their choices. Like all households, voucher households are constrained by their budget or ability to pay. More household income presents greater opportunities in the rental market, but voucher households are, by definition, at the lower end of the income distribution in their region. Therefore, their budget constraint is more severe than it is for the average household. Allowing voucher households to pay more than 30 percent of their income toward rent may benefit those with higher incomes, but it does little for households making less. Many elderly and disabled households on fixed incomes have virtually no reasonable way to pay more than 30 percent of their income toward rent. To do so, they might have to forgo medication, food, or utilities. For many lower-income families, paying more than 30 percent has similar consequences and potentially affects the well-being of parents and children. Therefore, income levels mean that choices are highly constrained for voucher households.

Choices are also limited by other factors. As revealed in the survey data, most voucher holders perceive a lack of available units. The low vacancy rates reported earlier (2 percent in Santa Ana and 3.5 percent in Orange County) are consistent with voucher holders' perceptions. Voucher holders also perceived unwillingness on the part of landlords to rent to HCVP participants.³³ The survey data therefore suggest that perceived barriers to mobility may limit relocation options for minorities, especially blacks. Overall, the realities of the market in Orange County suggest that opportunities for voucher holders to move to better neighborhoods are limited.

The results from the bivariate and multivariate analyses offer a complex picture of the associations between mobility and neighborhood conditions. Initial analysis of the movers alone failed to show a statistically significant difference between their previous and current neighborhoods. At the same time, the mover-only subsample revealed a pattern of more out-migration than in-migration to Santa Ana and suggested that households leaving the city

³² CFR §985.3(g) calls for HAs to provide voucher holders with a list of landlords, including those in areas with less poverty and minority concentration, who are willing to rent to program participants. Other initiatives aimed at communicating information or counseling have been implemented, but the level of these efforts varies among HAs.

³³ This perception was supported in our discussions with HA personnel, who emphasized their substantial effort to encourage landlords to participate.

tended to move to better neighborhoods; this result could be interpreted as a success for deconcentration by passive mobility. In considering the full sample, bivariate and initial multivariate analyses indicated that movers lived in better neighborhoods than nonmovers; again, these results suggest that passive mobility may be working as a deconcentration strategy. However, in the final multivariate model, which includes contract rent, mobility status is no longer associated with neighborhood conditions. These results indicate that rent, as well as other factors, and not the household's mobility, explain neighborhood quality. In other words, the market reality that higher rents garner better neighborhoods (less impoverished with less overcrowding) was strongly supported by the data.

Results from the multivariate models indicate that minorities lived in worse neighborhoods than their non-Hispanic white counterparts. These effects are strongest in the final model, which includes contract rent. These results provide compelling evidence that minority voucher holders in our sample are disproportionately located in worse neighborhoods.

The assumption that choice will result in deconcentrating poverty and minorities is not strongly supported by our data. Voucher holders in our sample face significant budget and supply constraints and, most likely, discrimination. The data suggest that some obstacles to mobility may affect minorities more than nonminorities. At the same time, it may also be true that some minority voucher holders, especially immigrants, exercise choice in a manner that results in racial/ethnic—and possibly poverty—concentration. If this is the case, it could explain the negative association between neighborhood conditions and income noted earlier. Some voucher holders, regardless of income, may choose to live in neighborhoods that have cultural familiarity and offer services such as ethnic markets, shops, and restaurants. In other words, these neighborhoods may have relatively worse conditions, but still attract voucher holders who have relatively higher incomes and choose cultural concentration.

For this reason, the degree to which voucher holders' residential choice is based on cultural preferences and, as a result, contributes to poverty and racial/ethnic concentration in Orange County is part of our current efforts. However, our work is unlikely to explain the finding for blacks in our sample. While they represent only a small percentage of SAHA voucher holders, our last model clearly indicates that blacks live in worse neighborhoods than their non-Hispanic white counterparts. This finding is consistent with much of the literature.

Conclusions

Our research focused on voucher holders under the jurisdiction of one Southern California HA. Caution is therefore needed when generalizing beyond our sample. With this in mind, we turn to the policy implications of our study. First, the research indicates that the HCVP may achieve only limited deconcentration. Especially in housing markets such as Orange County, voucher holders gravitate toward units that have relatively lower rents and tend to be in less desirable neighborhoods; these neighborhoods also tend to have more minorities. If one of the goals of the voucher program is to deconcentrate poverty and minorities, then additional incentives to landlords and/or subsidies may be necessary to overcome market constraints.

Second, the high cost of housing in Orange County reflects the lack of supply caused not only by the reluctance of landlords to accept vouchers, but by years of lagging production that have led to a serious undersupply of low- and moderate-income units. Regulations for certain federal programs could target a substantial portion of funding to housing construction and rehabilitation in areas of significant undersupply. For example, jurisdictions receiving Community Development Block Grants could be required to show a commitment to housing production before funds could be used for other projects such as repairing curbs, gutters, and sidewalks.

Third, the goal of deconcentrating poverty may be best served by policies aimed at moving people out of poverty. While this research did not examine self-sufficiency efforts or economic development programs, it is reasonable to recommend increased attention to these potentially complementary strategies. They would involve long-term investment to increase employment opportunities and the chance for social advancement within poor neighborhoods through improved education and training, as well as targeted economic development policies.

The goals of deconcentrating poverty and minorities received a lot of attention in the 1990s, mostly as a result of the Gautreaux program and the MTO experiment. However, these goals have been less visible in the past few years as the Bush administration focused on reducing funding for vouchers and putting forth proposals to restructure the program to be more “flexible.” Concern on the part of housing advocates about these policies should be heeded since reduced funding most likely means that fewer lower-income households will receive assistance and relaxation of a strong portability policy³⁴ translates into

³⁴ In a 2004 HUD webcast and subsequent clarifications from the department, denial of voucher portability was mentioned as a last resort for HAs with insufficient funds (HUD 2004; National Low Income Housing Coalition 2004).

a further lack of commitment by the federal government to a serious low-income housing policy agenda.

Finally, the last renaming and restructuring of the voucher program placed “choice” in the title of the program, but this study indicates that choice for voucher holders is limited and suggests that it may not lead to broader societal or policy goals such as deconcentration of poverty and parity in neighborhood quality across racial and ethnic groups.

In the next reformulation of the voucher program, we would be wise to question seemingly positive titles using words such as “flexible,” since they may be a similar use of semantic license masking negative consequences for low-income households in need of voucher assistance.

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