
An investigation of the nature of residential mobility in the informal settlements: The case of slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Shammi Akter SATU, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh
Rowshon Ara Akter JUTHI, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh
Chowdhury Md. Zaber SADEQUE, Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh

Abstract

Residential mobility is an important personal and societal issue having immense influence on urban planning. Slum populations consistently report higher rates of residential mobility than other populations (Coulton et. al., 2009; Phinney, 2013; Warner, 2016). While it is clear that low-income families move frequently, it is less clear whether residential mobility represents a positive or negative transition for most poor families. Bangladesh is a developing country and Dhaka, its Capital and primate city, is the most densely populated city in the world. According to the latest census, by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in 2014, 1.06 million people live in slums in Dhaka division (BBS, 2014). The low-skilled slum dwellers lead a deplorable life with high rate of residential mobility. However, the nature of residential mobility of the slum dwellers is not well studied. The objective of this paper is to investigate the important factors and nature of residential mobility in three slums of Dhaka. For the research purpose, 267 households from three slums of Dhaka namely Kallyanpur slum, Agargaon slum, and Karwan Bazar railgate slum were selected through non-probability convenience sampling and interviewed. This study found that residential mobility was influenced by factors which are related to life cycle; employment, income and distress; land tenure and homeownership; neighbourhood condition and grouping issues. It is revealed that the nature of the residential mobility for the surveyed slum dwellers is mainly negative.

Keywords

Residential mobility, slums, Developing country, Dhaka

1. Introduction

The micro approach of movement of households within urban area, defined as residential mobility or intra urban migration, is predominant form of movement in the developed world (Cadwallader, 1992 and Short, 1978). Furthermore, these less dramatic short-distance moves take place within a local housing market (Hedman, 2011) which are deeply intertwined with social relations, socio-economic positions and patterns of daily activities. It is argued that patterns of residential mobility have the power to substantially change the population composition of neighborhoods and potentially also other neighborhood attributes (Hedman, 2011). The life-course perspective provides one of the important theoretical frameworks to explain residential mobility as one of the many related aspects of human development. From this point of view, moving or staying is related to life events such as marriage or divorce; birth of children; children leaving home or attending college; change of employer, income, or assets; and retirement. Several studies have found that these life events are potential triggers of mobility

(Clark, 2005; Clark and Withers, 1999). These events can result in dissatisfaction with the current house, such as when a growing family needs more space, or may change the household's aspirations, such as when a better job leads to increased status expectations. Furthermore, homeownership or residential stability may become more or less salient at particular stages of life, such as marriage, birth of a child, or retirement. These life events tend to be correlated with demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and so forth, and these characteristics are also associated with the probability of residential mobility.

Dhaka, the Capital of Bangladesh, is the most densely populated city in the world (Satu and Chiu, 2017). Being the center of all economic, educational and administrative activities and due to the lack of decentralization policy, people from the whole country tend to migrate to Dhaka. Therefore, many of the immigrants initially concentrate in slums of Dhaka due to low skill, poverty and limited alternatives. The slum dwellers lead a deplorable life. Therefore, it is important to investigate the factors and impacts of residential mobility which is yet to be explored. This research aims to identify the important factors responsible for residential mobility and the nature of such factors. Following this introductory part, the next section reviews the concerned literature to depict the methodology. Later the findings are discussed in brief which is followed by concluding remark.

2. Literature Review

Although residential mobility can be a path to greater opportunity and satisfaction, concern exists that many low-income families move not to better their circumstances but due to unstable housing arrangements and that such moves may have negative consequences. Some studies suggest that frequent moving during childhood undermines educational attainment. (Wood *et. al.*, 1993), but other studies have found little or no effect after other risk factors are taken into account (Murphey *et. al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, relocating may disrupt social ties and undermine a family's social capital (Briggs, 1997), and it has a particularly disruptive effect on children when parents provide only modest emotional support and involvement (Hagan, *et. al.*, 1996).

Slum populations consistently report higher rates of residential mobility than other populations (Coulton *et. al.*, 2009). While it is clear that low-income families move frequently, it is less clear whether residential mobility represents a positive or negative transition for most poor families. Residential mobility can reflect improvements in a family's circumstances, such as buying a home for the first time, moving to be close to a new job, or trading up to a better quality housing unit or neighborhood. It can also be a symptom of instability and insecurity, with many low-income households making short-distance moves because of problems with landlords, creditors, or housing conditions. Similarly, staying in place sometimes reflects a family's security, satisfaction, and stability with its home and neighborhood surroundings, but in other cases it may reflect that a family lacks the resources to move to better housing or to a preferred neighborhood (Gramlich, *et. al.*, 1992; South, *et. al.*, 2005). Therefore, it is important to know what are the actual reasons of mobility of low-income people. Residential mobility has both positive and negative impacts on the family members which actually depends on push or pull factors acting behind the mobility (Murphey, *et. al.*, 2012).

According to the latest census, third of its kind in the country on slum dwellers and floating population conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in 2014, 2.23 million people live in slums across the country while 1.06 million people live in slums in Dhaka division (BBS, 2014). The poor environmental condition and lack of infrastructures pose negative impacts on the physical and psychological well-being of urban slum dwellers. According to the Habitat for Humanity (2016) slums are defined by overcrowded,

unsafe and unhealthy homes with limited or no access to basic services namely water, toilets, electricity, transportation. Such homes are unstable and lack secured land tenure. In the context of Bangladesh, slums are defined as settlements with a minimum of 10 households or a mess unit with a minimum of 25 members and predominantly very poor housing lacking security of tenure with poor environmental services especially water and sanitation. It typically possesses extremely high population density and room crowding where dwellers deprive socio-economic status (Centre for Urban Studies, 2005).

3. Methodology

This paper aims to identify the significant factors and nature of residential mobility of slum dwellers of Dhaka. After consulting the relevant literature, important variables are selected for investigating the residential mobility pattern. Table 1 presents the variables of factors and nature of residential mobility

Table 1 Variables Considered for Analyzing Residential Mobility

Target	Variables
Factors of residential mobility of slum dwellers	Factors related to life-cycle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Marriage ○ Birth of children ○ Domestic violence
	Factors related to employment, income and distress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Movement for job ○ Home rent
	Factors related to land tenure and home ownership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Home ownership ○ Slum eviction
	Factors related to neighborhood condition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Utility services ○ Violence with neighbors ○ Concern about children ○ Social safety
	Factors related to grouping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Religion based groups ○ District of origin
Nature of residential mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Change in job ○ Change in family income ○ Change in the availability of utility services ○ Change in the home ownership status ○ Change in safety of the movers' family members ○ Change in social clashes

Source: Authors, 2017

Three considerably old public slums at varying locations are chosen for investigation. These are Kallyanpur slum, Agargaon slum and KarwanBazar railgate slum. This study follows mixed method approach including both qualitative and quantitative. The data for analyzing the condition of considered factors were collected from primary sources through questionnaire interview of the slum dwellers. A

semi-structured questionnaire was prepared for conducting survey. This questionnaire contained questions regarding socio-demographic information, factors influencing the slum residents to move or stay; and satisfaction of movers and stayers to identify positive and negative moves. Total of 267 household units from three slums were for the questionnaire interview. These samples were selected through non-probability convenience sampling. The adult persons (aged above 21 years) of the households present during the survey were the representatives of the questionnaire interview. The collected data were analyzed through descriptive statistical analysis after processing.

4. Research results and Discussion

4.1 Socio-Demographic Information and Mobility Rate of the Respondents

Most of the respondents are female (78 percent) since during the interview majority of the male members were outside home for working purpose. The slum dwellers struggle for their survival as their earning is very small. They are involved in many types of work such as day laborers, rickshaw/van pullers, shopkeepers, garment workers, housemaid etc. The average monthly family income is about 7000 BDT, where the maximum family income is 16000 BDT and the minimum monthly income is 2000 BDT.

The respondents reported frequent rate of residential mobility. Three families out of every four reported that they have changed their residence several times. About 42 percent and 29 percent of the respondents reported residential mobility more than 5 and 10 times respectively. Majority of the movers (57 percent) moved their residence from one slum to another while rest of them (43 percent) moved within the same slum.

4.2 Factors of Residential Mobility of Slum Dwellers

The important factors that influence the residential mobility are related to life cycle; employment, income and distress; land tenure and home ownership; neighborhood conditions and groupings.

Factors Related To Life Cycle

Marriage, birth of children, domestic violence etc. are most of the significant factors of life cycle events. According to the survey, marriage is found as a moderately significant factor affecting residential mobility. Eighteen percent found marriage as one of the determining issue about deciding to move into a new place. Birth of children is found as a less dominant factor in slum residential mobility with influenced 7 percent of the respondents. In the slums, domestic violence also leads to break down of the family which sometimes results in residential move. About 2 percent of the respondents reported residential mobility for this ground.

Factors Related To Employment and Income

The factors related to employment and income include those factors like movement for job and difficulty in paying home rent. About 16 percent of the respondents reported that the distance of the working place from their living place was the main reason for their residential mobility. Housing rent is considered as one of the important factors of residential mobility. Some respondents marked it as a major factor to residential mobility. While only 19 percent of the total respondents from all three slums were renters, 44 percent among them pointed out that housing rent was the reason for their residential move.

Factors Related To Land Tenure and Home Ownership

Land tenure and home ownership are playing significant role in changing residence of slum dwellers. In Dhaka, slums are located on lands owned by the government, semi-government organizations and

individuals which lead to eviction problems. Generally, whenever a slum is evicted, the dwellers shift their residence to nearby slum or take shelter to a relatives place temporarily. According to the survey, 65 percent of the respondents identified slum eviction as the cause of their residential mobility. Other than land tenure, about 19 percent of the respondents who were renters in the previous slum reported that they consider home ownership as one of the major reasons for residential mobility.

Factors Related To Neighborhood Conditions

The unavailability or poor quality of utility services makes the living condition of the slum unhygienic and also lead to spread of diseases resulting in poor health. The survey data revealed that for 34 percent of the movers the unavailability of the utility services was the main reason for their residential mobility. Other than poor utility service, 9 percent and 5 percent of the movers identified safety and violence respectively as their major reasons of residential mobility. Only 2 percent of the respondents moved from their earlier residences for the welfare of the children.

Factors Related To Groupings

Religion based groups and the district of origin of the slum dwellers are considered under the factors related to groupings affecting residential mobility. Muslims and Hindus are the main religious community living together in the slums. Only one percent of the respondents reported that they shifted their residences due to religious clash among the neighbors. Bangladesh is characterized by regional imbalance and skewed urbanization pattern which lead to migration of the unskilled people in the slums of primate city, Dhaka. However, in the slums people tend to group together who originate from the same district. These groups are sometimes involved in serious conflicts which influence the weaker people to move from the slums. About 8 percent of the movers reported that they shifted from the previous slums due to the conflict arose from the district groups.

4.3 Nature of Residential Mobility of Slum Dwellers

The nature of residential mobility, whether imposing positive or negative impacts on the slum dwellers is investigated and presented in this section. The common factors as identified in the earlier parts are examined in detail to evaluate the impacts of residential mobility.

Change in Job and family income of the Movers

In the analysis, the options worse job and jobless are considered as negative residential mobility and the option, getting better job is considered as a positive impact; while “unchanged” in job does not show the positivity or negativity of the nature of residential mobility. According to the survey data, change in job of movers that is 36 percent of mobility is negative in nature and 26 percent is positive in nature. The increased family income of the households due to residential shift is considered as positive mobility impact while the decreased mobility as the impact of negative mobility. The survey findings revealed that among the 203 movers; 30 percent, 35 percent and 35 percent of the respondents’ family income respectively increased, decreased and remained unchanged.

Change in the Availability of Utility Services and Home Ownership Status

For investigating the nature of the residential mobility, the increase in availability of utility services due to shift in residence is considered as positive mobility while the decrease in availability of utility services is considered as negative mobility. No change in the availability of utility services defines none type of the

above. The utility services of 33 percent of the movers are increased when they changed their residence which shows positive impact. Only 6 percent of the respondents' utility services decreased after changing the residence showing the negative impacts. The utility service of 61 percent of the movers remained unchanged. The mobility in which the movers became home owner from renter is considered as positive mobility impact while the mobility in which the movers became renter from owner is considered as negative impact. The survey data revealed that the status of the home ownership of 54 percent of the movers remained unchanged. Only 9 percent of the movers became home owner from renter showing positive impact and 37 percent of the movers became renter from home owner showing negative impact of residential mobility.

Change in Safety of the Movers' Family Members and Change in Social Clash

When the safety is increased as the decision of residential mobility, it is considered as the positive impact while the decreased safety is considered as negative impact. According to the survey findings, 26 percent of the respondents reported that the safety of their family members increased showing positive impact due to residential mobility while 21 percent of the respondents reported negatively. The safety of 53 percent of the respondents remained same as before. In case of change in social clash, according to the survey data, 36 percent of the respondents reported that the social clash is increased showing negativity while 26 percent respondents reported decreased social clashes after their shift of the residences showing positivity.

4.4 Comparison among the Variables of Nature of Residential Mobility

Among the six variables for assessing the nature and impact of residential mobility on slum dwellers only two presents positive impacts while the other four variables presents negative impacts. Figure 1 presents that the change in the utility services and the change in the safety feelings of the family members are the two variables which showed positive impact. The change in job, change in family income, change in home ownership status and change in social clashes are the four variables which reported more negative impacts than positive ones. Therefore, the survey findings revealed that due to the residential mobility of slum dwellers the average family income and home ownership status lowered, social clashes increased and the number of people with inferior or without job increased.

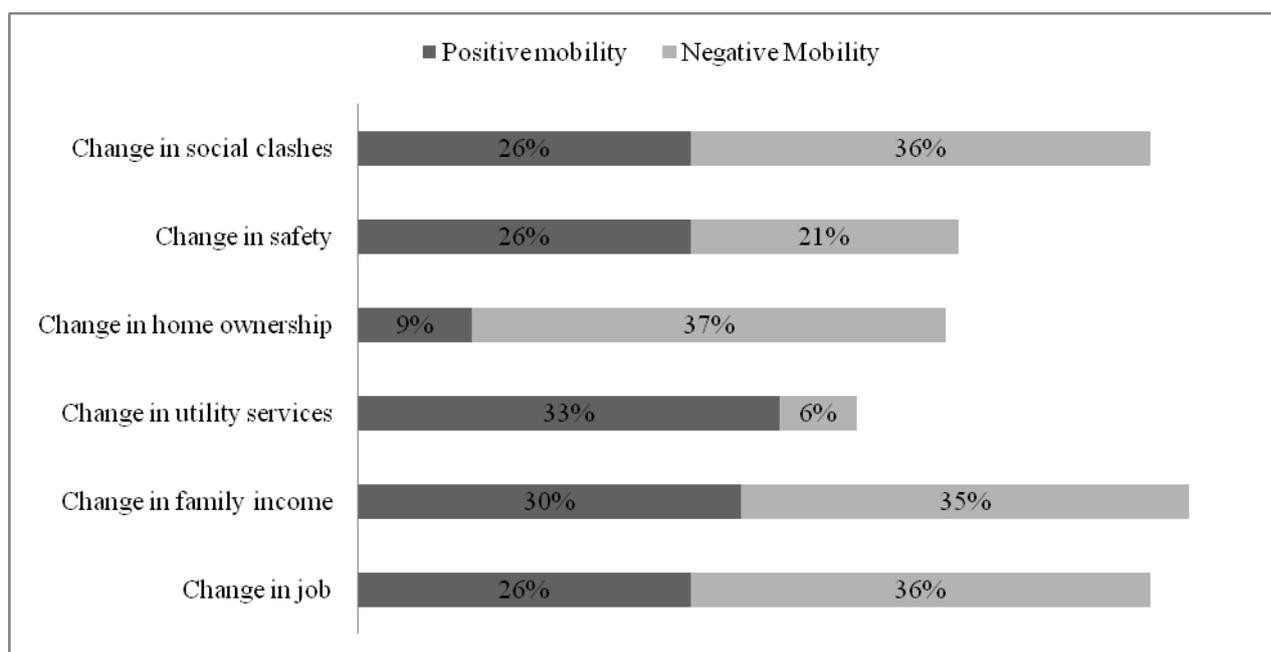


Figure 1: Nature of Residential Mobility of Slum Dwellers

Source: Authors, 2017

5. Concluding remarks

The poor and unskilled workers move their residences one slum to another in search of livelihood, as the unemployment rate for those unskilled people is high. Due to the costly city life and high rent, the unskilled migrant poor people tend to form groups and live in slums with inadequate facilities. The study reveals that most of the slum dwellers have to move for slum eviction and this type of mobility influences the homeownership status and convert the slum dwellers from owners to renters. This also poses negative impact on the socio-economic aspects of the dwellers. Therefore the decision makers should consider about the rehabilitation of slum dwellers before any slum eviction takes place. Since unavailability of the utility facilities is another major reason of residential mobility, it should be of utmost importance to provide the basic utility facilities to the slums at minimum cost. The government should work hand in hand with the non-government organizations (NGO) in this regard. The NGOs should also take initiatives for the provision of income generating activities and poverty alleviation programs to the poor and unskilled slum dwellers. This vulnerable section of the society should be allocated interest free loans for self-employment. Formal and informal education programs and vocational trainings targeting the children as well as the adult illiterate people should be arranged for person enrichment. The government should take effective initiatives so that the negative impacts of residential mobility are reduced.

References

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) (2014) Census of slum areas and floating population 2014, Dhaka: Ministry of Planning, The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Briggs, X., de, S. (1997) Moving up versus moving out: Neighborhood effects in housing mobility programs, *Housing Policy Debate* 8 (1): 195–234.

Cadwallader, M. T. (1992). Migration and residential mobility: Macro and micro approaches. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin.

Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) (2005) National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), MEASURE Evaluation: Slums of Urban Bangladesh: Mapping and Census, 2005. Bangladesh and Chapel Hill, USA.

Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) (1995) Survey of slum and squatter settlements in Dhaka City: Final report. 1996, Dhaka; Urban Poverty Reduction Project and Asian Development Bank

Clark, W. A. V. (2005) Intervening in the residential mobility process: Neighborhood out-comes for low-income populations," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 102 (43): 15307–15312.

Clark, W. A.V. and Withers, S. D. (1999) Changing jobs and changing houses: Mobility outcomes of employment transitions, *Journal of Regional Science*, 39 (4): 653–673.

Coulton, C. J., Brett, T. and Turner, M. A. (2009) Family mobility and neighborhood change: New evidence and implications for community initiatives. Washington DC: Urban Institute.

Gramlich, E., Laren, D., and Sealand, N. (1992) Moving into and out of poor urban areas, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 11(2):273.

Habitat for Humanity GB. (2016) *What is a Slum? Definition of a Global Housing Crisis*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/what-we-do/where-we-work/slum-definition>. [Accessed 19 December 2017].

Hagan, J., MacMillan, R. and Wheaton, B. (1996) New kid in town: Social capital and the life course effects of family migration on children, *American Sociological Review* 61 (3): 368–385.

Hedman, L. (2011) The impact of residential mobility on measurements of neighbourhood effects. *Housing Studies*, 26(04):501-519.

Murphey, D., Bandey, T. and Moore, K. A. (2012) Frequent Residential Mobility and Children's Well-Being. Research Brief #2012-02. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at http://www.childtrends.org/files/child_trends_2012_02_14_rb_mobility.pdf.

Satu, S.A., & Chiu, R.L.H. (2017). Livability in dense residential neighbourhoods of Dhaka. *Housing Studies*, doi: [10.1080/02673037.2017.1364711](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2017.1364711).

Short, J. R. (1978) Residential mobility, *Progress in Human Geography*, 2 (3), 419-447.

South, S. J., Crowder, K., & Chavez, E. (2005) Migration and spatial assimilation among US Latinos: Classical versus segmented trajectories. *Demography*, 42:497-521.

Wood, D., Halfon, N. , Scarlata, D., Newacheck, P. and Nessim, S. (1993) Impact of family relocation on children's growth, development, school function and behavior, *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270 (11): 1334–1338