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Life Course Events and Residential Change: Unpacking Age Effects on the Probability of Moving

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Abstract

We know that life course events, especially divorce and separation, trigger residential moves, but we know less about how these and other life course events intersect with how far people move and changes to accessing labor markets. This research uses data from the Household, Housing and Income Dynamics Survey in Australia (HILDA) to model a set of life course events and their intersection with the distance of move. I examine “good” life events, marriage and new births, not so good events, divorce, separation and widowhood, and the unexpected event of job loss and their outcomes in the housing market. For the decision to move the models partly parallel other studies of life course events and their role in the mobility decision, but the results provide entirely new results about how age and life course events intersect. I suggest that age is merely acting as proxy for complicated life course intersections with moving. The disruption of divorce and separation, as expected, increase the probability of moving but with different marginal effects over distance. Households move in response to these life events but they are much less likely to change metropolitan locations.

Keywords: Mobility, migration, the life course, labor markets

Introduction

Residential mobility and migration are the processes whereby families change their houses and their residential locations whether it is a neighborhood, a city or a state. Mobility and migration are at the heart of changing metropolitan neighborhoods and communities, in gentrifying some neighborhoods and depopulating others. The outcomes of the myriad individual changes can be seen in new ethnic communities, and the growth of once small towns on the periphery of metropolitan areas into new suburban communities. Along with natural increase the moves of families and individuals continue to modify the residential fabric of cities in the developed and the developing world.

There is a long tradition of studies of residential mobility and migration which have emphasized how moves decrease with age, are slowed by homeownership and the presence of children, but stimulated by higher income and more education (Clark and Dieleman, 1996; DiPasquale and Wheaton, 1996, amongst many studies). The notion of disequilibrium between the current context and a perceived future context is central in much of our thinking about how and why mobility occurs in cities and across regions. Whether it is an employment opportunity or the opportunity to bring housing consumption into balance with housing needs (Hanushek and Quigley, 1978), migration and mobility are the adjustment processes which allow individuals and households to bring their

locations into equilibrium with their perceived needs for specific quantities of housing and access to services and facilities.

Although the disequilibrium and life course approaches have provided important findings about residential change there may have been an overly strong emphasis on the age component in the residential mobility models. With changing family structures, the increase in two worker households and changing organization of labor markets, the process of residential change is more complex and more embedded in changes in the family, as well as in labor markets and housing markets. The shift to studies of the life course to capture the complexity of mobility has been an important new contribution to understanding mobility especially as families wrestle with how to fit their housing needs into changing family and employment needs (Mulder, 1993). That said age is still seen as a primary determinant of residential change and there have been few studies which unpack the life events and consider their relative impact on the mobility process.

In this paper I use a set of life course events to examine both the decision to move and the relationship of those life cycle events to the distance of moves. Specifically, I model (a) the decision to move (incorporating both family status and changes in family status) and (b) for those who move I model the distance of move as a function of family status and change in family status. Finally, (c) I model the change in labor markets and change in job. I use the 10 year panel data from the Housing Income Labor Dynamics Survey in Australia to model these life course events and their intersection with residential change.

Conceptual background

Our theory of mobility has been enriched by being embedded within the life course approach to mobility and migration (Mulder and Wagner, 1993, Clark and Dieleman, 1996). To reiterate, people transition through a variety of “states” and their moves are linked to specific changes in occupations, relationships, and additions and deletions to the family structure. The advantage of the life course over the earlier use of the “stage” in the life cycle is that it does not categorize or segment people into particular age groups, and then attempt to examine their behavior as a response to being in that age group. Rather, the life course examines the process of change, where age is important, but is no longer the defining characteristic of the changes that occur (Rabbe and Taylor, 2010). Thus, of two individuals one may marry early, or right out of college and another much later in their thirties, but both can proceed in a somewhat linear fashion to buy a house and have children, though at quite different points in their age trajectory. Clearly, the marriage “event” occurred at two very different ages but the process is part of a life course and it is that course that is important in the outcome, not the age cohort per se.

Unlike traditional life cycle research that focused on the normative sequencing and timing of events, the life-course perspective emphasizes the

variability in the number, timing, and sequencing of events in parallel careers across people's lives, and in so doing, draws attention to the variability and unpredictable nature of the life course (Rindfuss et al. 1987). The 'disorder' calls into question the utility of thinking in terms of orderly paths in the housing and occupational careers of families. In fact we know that previously marriage occurred in the early 20s and was rapidly followed by children and further housing career moves. Now, marriage takes place much later, if at all, and many households remain without children, or children are also deferred until later in the life course. Increasingly, it is specific events which occur in the life course that are the triggering events which can stimulate residential change.

There is already substantial research on the role of triggering events on migration and mobility in the attempts to understand the role of family change. These studies focus on the effects of childbirth (Clark, Deurloo and Dieleman, 1994), divorce (Dieleman and Schouw, 1989; Dewilde, 2008,2009; Mulder and Wagner, 2012), and marriage (Odland and Shumway, 1993, Mulder and Wagner, 1993) on migration and mobility. Migration and mobility are then adjustment processes which allow individuals and households to bring their locations in equilibrium with their perceived needs for specific locations and quantities of housing in response to changes in family composition. Clearly, changes in any one of the occupational, family or housing careers can lead to changes in the others and often those changes are age-related which brings us back to the previous focus on age effects on migration.

Data, contexts and previous research

The data which is the basis for this research is from the ten waves of the Household, Income and Labor Dynamics in Australia survey (HILDA). The survey is a longitudinal survey of approximately 7,600 households with about 19,900 respondents each year. The survey is modeled on and is similar to surveys in the US (the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, PSID) and the British Household Panel Survey, now the "Understanding Society" study. In the present analysis the mobility measures and variables are drawn from the primary respondent representing the household. It is a yearly survey begun in 2001 and is ongoing. The survey in Australia covers a wide array of economic and labor market measures including detailed data on household composition and migration.

The present study selected variables from the household file and the continuing respondent file (Appendix 1). The analysis relies on the standard variables used in models of mobility including age, marital status, family status (presence of children), a measure of mobility and distance-moved, tenure, income and employment status. The HILDA survey is unusual in the detail on family status changes and on changes in employment status. Variables which measure a marriage event, birth of children, separation, divorce, and widowhood are all coded in the data set.

In Australia as in other countries residential change is highly distance dependent. Most moves involve quite short distances – nearly two thirds of all moves are less than 10 kilometers involving quite local changes (Figure 1). The mean distance moved for the decade (constrained to moves less than 100k for presentation) was slightly more than 12 kilometers though with a fairly large standard deviation (17.4k). Still, there are a significant number of moves of more than 30 kilometers, a distance which almost always signifies a change in labor markets. About 12 percent of moves are of distances greater than 100k most of them between the five major Australian cities, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. The distance results are consistent with those reported by Wilkins, et al (2010).

Studies of internal migration in Australia have a substantial research record with a wide range of papers on both the probabilities of moving and the aggregated flows between cities and regions in Australia (Maher, 1992,1994; Bell and Stratton, 1998; Bell, 2002; Bell and Rees, 2006). There has been an interest too in redistribution effects (Hugo and Harris, 2011; Burnley et al, 2007) and studies of immigration settlement (Hugo, 2008). These papers have provided a basic structure of the changing dynamics of Australian migration and the present paper is designed to extend these studies by taking a micro (individual behavior) perspective on the mobility process.

Some previous research in Australia has already confirmed the broad international findings that younger households who are renters have significantly higher mobility propensities than married owner households with children (Hassan et al 1996; Bill and Mitchell, 2006; Andrienko, 2010), and that most moves are local and of short distance . Studies have also linked mobility to specific aspects of locational disadvantage (Ryan and Whelan, 2010). A specific study of the reasons for move from the 2007-2008 Survey of Income and Housing also emphasized that mobility is age dependent, related to family structure, and is closely tied to the life course (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010- see also Wilkens, et al 2010).

The research in this paper adds to both the regional migration analyses because it considers migration between the major metropolitan areas, and to the local mobility findings because it examines the interaction of distance and the life course. The presentation first examines the commonly used disequilibrium model of residential mobility. I estimate the coefficients for moving related to age, tenure and family status and income. This analysis is the context in which I examine the role of life course change variables and their inter-connection with mobility across distance. The research on the life course events reports three specific analyses of the life course on (1) the role of moving (2) the distance of move for those who move and (3) the impact of changing labor markets measures both as a move of more than 30k and for those who move between metropolitan labor markets.

Analysis and Findings

The context-disequilibrium models of mobility

The disequilibrium model of mobility which fits mobility data in the US and Europe is also a good predictor of mobility in Australia (Table 1). Age, family structure and tenure are all significant and with the correct sign. Younger households are more likely to move but in this case older households are not significantly less likely to move as in some US and European contexts. Being married and owning reduce mobility as does being employed. Renters are more likely to move and those with higher income before the move and even more, higher income after, is associated with moves. The findings are broadly comparable to those reported by Bill and Mitchell (2006) who also model the move as a function of age, family status, tenure and income. Thus far the results are what might be expected from what we think of as the standard disequilibrium/life cycle model of mobility. There is nothing fundamentally new in the analysis to this point. It is the next step which produces new results.

TABLE 1: Logit model of residential mobility (move/no move) as a function of age and household composition (pooled cross sectional coefficients)

| HHMoved | Logit Coeff.. | Std. error | P >Z |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Age | -.0097 | .0033 | .004 |
| Age square | -.0003 | .0000 | .000 |
| Child | .0268 | .0244 | .271 |
| Married | -.0927 | .0230 | .000 |
| Own | -1.3649 | .0424 | .000 |
| Rent | .3015 | .0424 | .000 |
| Pers.p.bedroom | -.3895 | .0252 | .000 |
| Income before | 1.46e-06 | 3.54e-07 | .000 |
| Income after | 2.14e-06 | 3.36e-07 | .000 |
| Employed | -.0579 | .0233 | .013 |
| constant | .2089 | .0762 | .006 |

Prob>Chi Sq .000. Pseudo R²=.1563

Life course events and residential change

There have been a number of previous studies of specific life course events, especially divorce in the explanation of residential change (Dewilde, 2008, 2009; Mulder and Wagner, 2012). These studies document the way in

which divorce “triggers” mobility for at least one of the partners. Still, most of the studies to date have not included complete panoply of life course events and have often not separated divorce and separation, which is an important continuum in the process of family status change. In the first of the three sections on life course events I estimate a logit- model of the probability of moving, with marginal effects and odds ratios, to show the powerful effect of life course events on the probability of moving (Table 2).

TABLE 2: Life course events and mobility outcomes – all moves versus non moves (pooled cross sectional coefficients)

| HHMoved | Logit Coeff.. | Std. error | P >Z | Odds ratio (significant) | Marginal Effects | P>Z |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Age | .0096 | .0071 | .177 | | .0010 | .176 |
| Age squared | -.0006 | .0001 | .000 | .99 | -.0000 | .000 |
| Child | -.0899 | .0363 | .013 | .91 | -.0098 | .013 |
| Married | -.1603 | .0338 | .000 | .85 | -.0175 | .000 |
| Own | -1.4322 | .0659 | .000 | .24 | -.1561 | .000 |
| Rent | .1671 | .0662 | .012 | 1.18 | .0182 | .012 |
| Pers.p.bedr. | -.4469 | .0367 | .000 | .64 | -.0487 | .000 |
| Income before | 2.58e-07 | 4.68e-07 | .581 | | 2.82e -08 | .581 |
| Income after | 2.37e-06 | 4.28e-07 | .000 | 1.00 | 2.58e -07 | .000 |
| Education hd | .0513 | .0337 | .128 | 1.05 | .0056 | .131 |
| Occup. hd | .0572 | .0306 | .062 | 1.06 | .0062 | .062 |
| Marriage | .6544 | .0743 | .000 | 1.92 | .0895 | .000 |
| Birth of child | .4506 | .0625 | .000 | 1.57 | .0573 | .000 |
| Separated | 1.2766 | .1079 | .000 | 3.59 | .2120 | .000 |
| Divorced | .6374 | .1361 | .000 | 1.89 | .0873 | .000 |
| Widowed | -.1202 | .6292 | .849 | | -.0125 | .841 |
| Fired | .1592 | .0670 | .017 | 1.17 | .0174 | .017 |
| constant | .0778 | .1407 | .581 | | | |

Prob >ChiSq. .000 Pseudo R² .16 n=35,261

Life course events, except becoming widowed, are significant and have strong marginal effects on the probability of moving. In fact only the tenure effect is as strong as the marginal effects for life course events. (The odds ratios are included for the significant variables). As one would expect, tenure –ownership-- is significantly associated with not moving and the marginal effect is the largest after the effect of becoming separated. Having a child and being married decrease the probability of moving along with ownership, but it is the powerful positive “good” effects of becoming married and a somewhat less stronger effect of having a child which increases mobility. The “not so good” effects of becoming separated and divorced have equally strong positive pushes to moving. The

unexpected event of being fired is less strongly related to mobility but is significant nonetheless.

What is most fundamental in these findings is the way in which age, a variable which has always been treated as the primary association with residential change, is no longer significant. It seems reasonable to conclude that in fact age is serving as a proxy for a variety of life course events. Age captures many of these events simply because they occur at earlier points in the life cycle. Thus, it is not age per se that is creating the mobility process but rather the events that occur within the aging process. I note however, that age squared is significant, mobility continues to decrease with age, although the marginal effect is small. Traditionally the age squared factor has been positive, suggesting that there is an uptick in mobility for older families. This result questions that outcome and suggests that there may be continuing and increasing mobility in older ages as households postpone retirement and continue the process of labor market participation and associated housing changes. Occupation and education do not have significant associations with mobility although it is possible that they are being subsumed in the positive effects for income after migration, which is positively associated with the migration outcome. Becoming widowed is not significantly related to mobility.

The documentation of the a full set of life course events and the way in which they are almost certainly proxies for age effects moves us toward a better understanding of mobility decision making. Now it is possible to extend this analysis by considering the intersection of the life course events and the distance of move. In this regression model the life course events continue to play the critical role but there are subtle changes in the explanatory variables for distance moved (Table 3).

Neither age nor age squared is related to the distance of move. In terms of family composition having a child decreases the likelihood of moving in relationship to distance. Having a child is negatively related to distance but being married has a positive relationship with the distance of move. These are different outcomes from the findings from the models when we examined simply the decision to move or not. The positive coefficient for marriage and its relationship to the likelihood of a longer distance move can be interpreted as a function of family stability and possibly also related to two worker households. Married two worker households will be willing and indeed may need to move longer distances to achieve two jobs. Owning is strongly negatively related to moving long distances. This is an expected finding as owners put down roots and less easily make long-distance changes. Renters also have low probabilities of moving long distances, a reflection of the lower probability of moving long distance in general. Unlike the findings in the logit models of the decision to move or not, education and occupation are significant and clearly related to the willingness to make long distance moves. The findings are consistent with the returns to migration by increasing human capital with longer distance relocations.

TABLE 3: Distance of move as a function of age, household composition and life course event.

| HHMoved | Coeff. | Std. error | t | P > t |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Age | -.6248 | .4625 | -1.35 | .177 |
| Age square | -.0010 | .0055 | -0.17 | .861 |
| Child | -10.2673 | 2.6297 | -3.90 | .000 |
| Married | 8.6922 | 2.4363 | 3.57 | .000 |
| Own | -94.6045 | 6.2919 | -15.04 | .000 |
| Rent | -34.8421 | 6.4737 | -5.38 | .000 |
| Pers.p.bedr. | -6.4992 | 2.8636 | -2.27 | .023 |
| Income before | -.0000 | .0000 | -0.38 | .702 |
| Income after | -.0002 | .0000 | 4.82 | .000 |
| Education hd | 8.1755 | 2.4602 | 3.32 | .001 |
| Occup. hd | 3.1187 | 2.1594 | 1.44 | .149 |
| Marriage | -6.4197 | 6.7673 | -0.95 | .343 |
| Birth of child | -.9636 | 5.3493 | -0.18 | .857 |
| Separated | 33.0513 | 10.6028 | 3.12 | .002 |
| Divorced | 25.2390 | 12.6657 | 1.99 | .046 |
| Widowed | -1.7954 | 34.1958 | -0.05 | .958 |
| Fired | 14.5054 | 5.6227 | 2.58 | .010 |
| constant | 127.3427 | 10.8593 | 11.73 | .000 |

Prob >ChiSq. .000 Adj R² .1033 n=35,261

With respect to the life cycle events themselves, becoming separated or divorced still play significant roles in association with distance, but becoming married or having a child is unrelated to the distance of move. Being fired is positively related to move distance – recognition that this triggering event may require a longer distance relocation to re-enter the labor market.

Overall, the models show that while the “not so good” triggering events and the unexpected events still play a role in association with the distance of move what I have called the “good” life course events, becoming married and having or adopting a child are not related to the distance of move. To some extent this can be seen as reflecting the way in which family disruption is played out over a larger spatial extent--women returning to families, or men and women moving for new opportunities or setting up new relationships. The good triggers are likely more local in the main and so we do not find any significant relationship with distance.

Life course events and labor market change

The research on residential mobility and migration has also drawn on the relocation literature related to job opportunities and job change. These ideas are explored, again in the context of life course events, for moves less than and greater than 30k as a measure of labor market change, and moves between the five major metropolitan areas in Australia as a measure of major spatial disruption.

For moves across the threshold of 30k as a function of age, household composition and life course events are strikingly similar to those for the model of distance of move (Table 4). Age is not significant, having a child decreases the probability of moving more than 30k but being married increases it. Children clearly affect the likelihood of major changes in location, but marriage is not significant. Both owners and renters are unlikely to change labor markets, or rather it is that owners have a much lower probability of changing labor markets. This shows up in the marginal effects coefficients. As in the regression model of association with distance, education plays a positive role and income increases after the move.

While the life course events of becoming separated, divorced, or being fired, all increase the chance of moving more than 30k, that is, changing labor markets, this is also true for the addition of a child to the family. In some sense this is counter-intuitive to the negative probability of not changing labor markets when there are children in the household. On reflection one must remember that there is literature which suggests that women often exit the labor market when the family changes labor markets and there is a synchronous affect with births (see for example Clark and Davies Withers, 2009).

While the moves of greater than 30k by and large reflect labor market changes, there is of course a literature on long distance commuting and 30k is well within the range of such a strategy. Still, moves of 30k plus is a greater disruption than moving within the same neighborhood or to a new community in the same city. One way of further examining the role of long distance relocations is to select moves which are between the major metropolitan areas of Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. These moves are more than several hundred kilometers and sever ties with jobs, communities, friends and family. I use these moves to further investigate the role of economic factors in migration and the role of life course events.

TABLE 4: Logit model of the probability of moving more than 30k/less than 30k. (Pooled cross-sectional coefficients).

| HHMoved | Logit Coeff.. | Std. error | P >Z | Odds ratio (significant) | Marginal Effects | P>Z |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Age | -.0225 | .0125 | .072 | | -.0006 | .072 |
| Age square | -.0001 | .0002 | .475 | | -2.87e-06 | .475 |
| Child | -.3126 | .0688 | .000 | .73 | -.0077 | .000 |
| Married | .0066 | .0639 | .918 | | .0002 | .918 |
| Own | -1.8766 | .0970 | .000 | .15 | -.0471 | .000 |
| Rent | -.3959 | .0944 | .000 | .67 | -.0099 | .000 |
| Pers.p.bedr. | -.2987 | .0641 | .000 | .74 | -.0075 | .000 |
| Income before | 1.76 e -07 | 8.54 e -07 | .837 | | 4.4e -09 | .837 |
| Income after | 1.81 | 7.55 e -07 | .017 | 1.01 | 4.5e-08 | .017 |
| Education hd | .2272 | .0598 | .000 | 1.26 | .0060 | .000 |
| Occup. hd | .0959 | .0560 | .087 | | .0024 | .087 |
| Marriage | .1138 | .1373 | .407 | | .0030 | .407 |
| Birth of child | .3437 | .1159 | .003 | 1.41 | .0101 | .003 |
| Separated | .5541 | .1811 | .002 | 1.75 | .0182 | .002 |
| Divorced | .6615 | .2184 | .002 | 1.94 | .0230 | .002 |
| Widowed | .3022 | 1.0322 | .770 | | .0088 | .770 |
| Fired | .2858 | .1091 | .009 | 1.33 | .0072 | .009 |
| constant | -.8575 | | | | | |

Prob >ChiSq. .000 Pseudo R² .1103 n=54,398

The model of inter- metropolitan moves is estimated for movers who change cities versus movers who move but who do not change cities. The coefficients for the model of moves between metropolitan areas versus other moves, reveals significant differences and important conclusions about the role of life events in the mobility process (Table 5). As in the other models age is not significant reiterating that there is some support for the notion that by emphasizing age in our past life cycle models we have been overplaying what is in fact a more complex process of household decision-making in the face of specific life course events. At its simplest age is simply a proxy for the kinds of decisions that get made with respect to having children, staying in a relationship or entering a relationship. These measures turn out to be quite different when we examine them from an inter-metropolitan perspective.

The significant age squared variable suggests that it is somewhat older individuals and households who make long-distance inter metropolitan moves. It is also owners who are more likely to move between metropolitan areas. This speaks to the probable status of these movers who have more education and higher incomes before the moves. And, as is usually the case having a child depresses the likelihood of making an inter-metropolitan move. But what is most interesting in the outcomes for the inter-metropolitan moves is that the variables for separation and divorce are negative with quite large marginal effects. Thus, separation and divorce do not necessarily lead to complete disjunction. The negative coefficients speak to a lower likelihood of moving extensive distances after separation or divorce. There are a myriad of reasons which can explain this outcome including the presence of children in the divorced or separated household, and the desire to stay with networks of family and friends who can provide assistance during the difficult times of family breakup.

Marriage itself is unrelated to movement between metropolitan areas and being fired, which was significant in the previous models, is no longer significant for metropolitan mobility. This of course is understandable as moving to find a job within the same labor market or nearby labor market is very different from investing in the uncertainty of making a long distance move between cities on the chance of securing a new job. That separation and divorce act separately is shown in this and the previous models and is a new finding about the role of family change and residential relocation. Separation can be seen as a precipitating event later formalized by divorce. Both trigger moves but the initial step in family breakup is the physical process of separating and moving.

TABLE 5. Logit coefficients for the probability of moving between metropolitan areas. (Pooled cross sectional coefficients)

| HHMoved | Logit Coeff.. | Std. error | P >Z | Odds ratio (significant) | Marginal Effects | P>Z |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Age | -.0022 | .0093 | .815 | | -.0002 | .815 |
| Age² | .0004 | .0001 | .003 | 1.00 | .0000 | .003 |
| Child | -.2050 | .0488 | .000 | .81 | -.0191 | .000 |
| Married | .0828 | .0460 | .072 | | -.0076 | .072 |
| Own | 1.8555 | .0867 | .000 | 6.39 | .2325 | .000 |
| Rent | .6381 | .0862 | .000 | 1.89 | .0530 | .000 |
| Pers.p.bedr. | .5575 | .0487 | .000 | 1.75 | .0512 | .000 |
| Income before | 2.12e-06 | 7.54e-07 | .005 | 1.00 | 1.95 e-07 | .005 |
| Income after | 2.63e-07 | 6.83e-07 | .700 | | 2.42 e-08 | .700 |
| Education hd | .4067 | .0464 | .000 | 1.30 | .0352 | .000 |
| Occup. hd | .0093 | .0412 | .821 | | .0009 | .821 |
| Marriage | -.1681 | .1071 | .116 | | -.0164 | .140 |
| Birth of child | -.3808 | .0829 | .000 | .68 | -.0402 | .000 |
| Separated | -.8382 | .1278 | .000 | .43 | -.1058 | .000 |
| Divorced | -.4854 | .1723 | .005 | .62 | -.0539 | .017 |
| Widowed | .9069 | 1.0676 | .396 | | .0584 | .194 |
| Fired | .0063 | .0874 | .943 | | -.0006 | .943 |
| constant | -.4926 | .1818 | | | | |

Prob >ChiSq. .000 Pseudo R² .1033 n=35,261

Observations and Conclusions

The notion of an adjustment approach to residential change, that we move to adjust our needs for housing, employment and location more generally, is consistent with mobility behavior in Australia. At a simple level, households who are younger move more often, family status is related to mobility (less likelihood of moving with children in the house) and tenure is perhaps the most important associate with the likelihood of moving. On the economic side, being unemployed increases the probability of moving longer distances. At one level the findings are consistent with other research on mobility and residential change. However, at another level the work in this paper provides us with new ways of thinking about the process of mobility in general.

There is a central innovative finding from this research. By emphasizing the mobility process within the framework of the life course, rather than the life cycle, the research establishes that a strong argument in favor of re-evaluating our previous focus on age and mobility. A reconceptualization suggests that in fact

age is a proxy for a series of important life course events. These events, while somewhat age related, are in fact the driving forces behind mobility behavior. It is not age, but events in the life course which are powerfully related to mobility and residential change more broadly. At an anecdotal level we know that people move for good reasons, getting married, having children. Households move for not such good reasons, family breakup and separation and they move because unexpected events happen -- losing jobs and being out of work. This research has documented quantitatively these events and their outcomes. It is these events which we must address more carefully if we are to really understand how the changes in families are related to changes in location and in the migratory behavior of households and families.

What is new and how do the findings increase our understanding of mobility in general and in Australian contexts? The rich detail of the HILDA survey is unusual in the depth of questioning on mobility, reasons for moves and the relationship of mobility to actual life course events. It is that rich detail which has allowed this study to unpack the age effects and to locate the role of panoply of actual life course events to mobility. The research contributes to the existing literature in three ways. First, to re-emphasize an earlier statement I demonstrate that age can be unpacked to show specific events and their outcomes. Second, there are different life course event outcomes in relationship to the distance of move. Different life course effects play out in quite different ways for short and long distance moves. Good life course events are, relatively speaking, unrelated to distance of move but not so good events have quite strong associations with the distance of move. Third, I document that very long distance moves have quite different intersections with life course events. While at one level the data show quite clearly that becoming separated or divorced stimulates mobility (as has been shown previously though not in the context of other life course changes) at another level, inter-metropolitan moves, individuals and households take quite different perspectives on whether to move or not after household disruptions. Quite clearly the evaluation process of whether to move or not is not so much age dependent, as an evaluation of the complex web of family connections and their role in creating and sustaining family relationships.

The moving process is closely interwoven with the life course and it is still the fundamental changes that occur in the life course which are the drivers in the mobility and migration process. This research re-emphasizes the role of our transitions through the life course and how specific triggers create our mobility behaviors, albeit modified by our budget constraints and the economic contexts in which we are situated.

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Appendix: Variables in the analysis of mobility (specific definitions are in the HILDA survey at www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda)

Dependent variables in the models

Moved between waves (dummy 1 yes)
Distance moved between waves
Moved less than 30k/more than 30k between waves
Moved between Metropolitan areas (Five major cities)

Explanatory variables

Age (years)
Age squared
Child (child in the house before move)
Marital status in wave before move
Marital status change
 Became separated
 Became divorced
 Became married
 Became widowed
Number of persons per bedroom
Birth (new baby between waves)
Tenure
 Own before move
 Rent before move
Household income in wave before move
Household income in wave after move
Occupation (professional)
Education (college plus)
Employed (in the workforce)
Job loss (being fired, made redundant)

Figure 1: The distribution of moves by distance (Source: computed from HILDA data)

