Childhood Residential Instability and Exposure to Police-Initiated Contacts in Adolescence

A Longitudinal Analysis from Birth to Age 14

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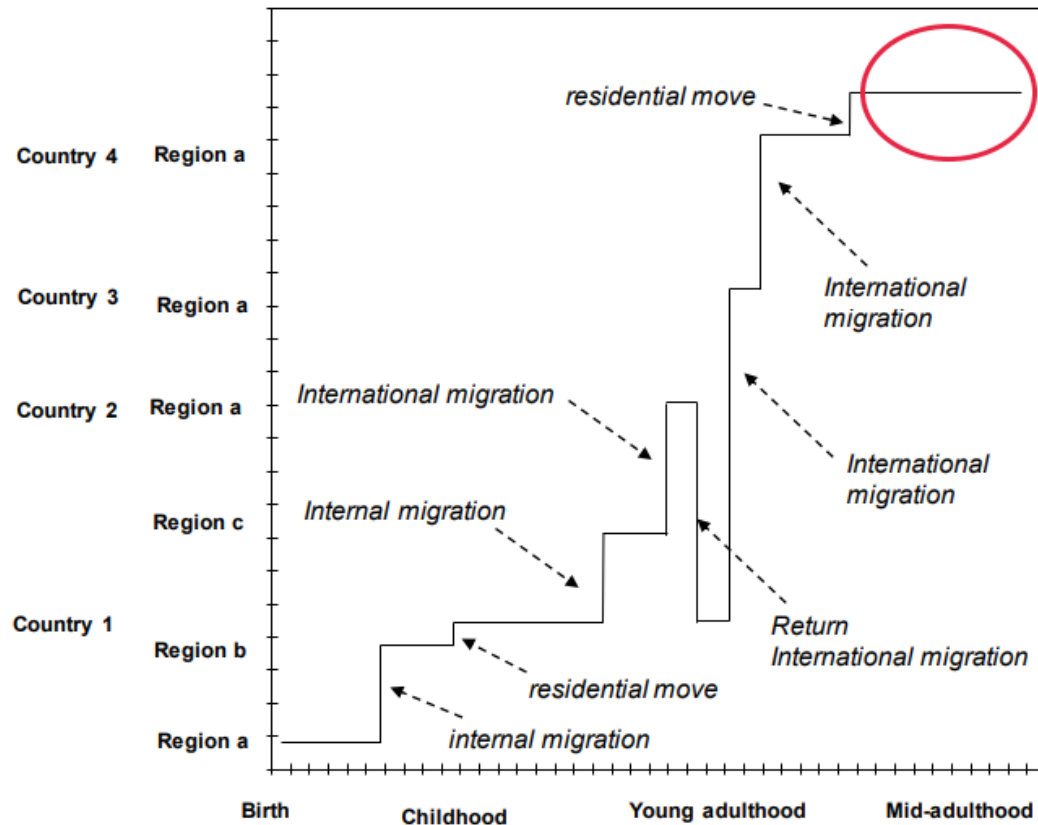Autonomous University of Barcelona

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Understanding spatial mobility
from early life into adulthood

Period: Jan 2023 – Dec 2027

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Example of a fictitious individual trajectory
Bernard et al. (2017)

There is growing recognition that mobility is more complex and diverse than binary approaches suggest, e.g., lifetime sedentarism, chronic residential mobility, circular international migration, return migration, etc. Hence, underlying axioms of a one-way permanent migration or views that denote that individuals migrate through clearly demarcated life cycle stages are increasingly obsolete.

→ Mobility as a process vs. mobility as an outcome
→ Frequent mobility as an adverse experience
→ Immobility & downgrading of housing conditions

Component 1:
Mapping lifelong mobility

How is spatial mobility "lived"?

Component 2:
Explaining lifelong mobility

How earlier life influences movement?

Component 3:
Outcomes of lifelong mobility

What are the consequences of lifelong mobility?

Outcome
The probability of an adolescent being involved in a police-initiated contact (stop and search, formal warning and arrest) by age 14.

Why is it important?
Youth-police contacts represent the first entry point to the criminal justice system. Enduring effects on multiple life domains are reported in extant literature, including:

→ Mental health issues
→ Substance abuse behaviours
→ School disengagement
→ Diminished educational expectations
→ Distrust in police
→ Future unlawful activities
→ Future arrest
→ Legal cynicism

Literature gaps

→ Legal and policing practices are mainly oriented towards individuals' criminal propensity (Sampson and Smith, 2021)

→ Even within ecological studies, housing tends to be marginalised as an explanatory factor (Almquist and Walker, 2022)
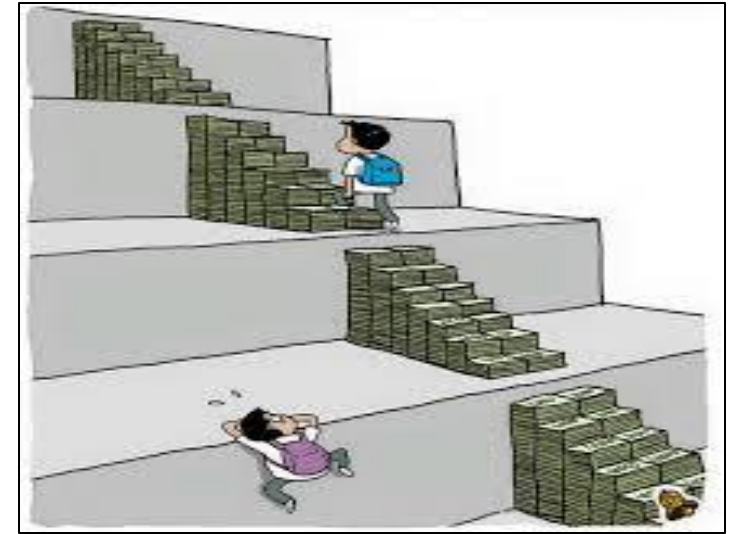
Three reasons to focus on housing

Access to homeownership has become extremely complex (income-house price gap)
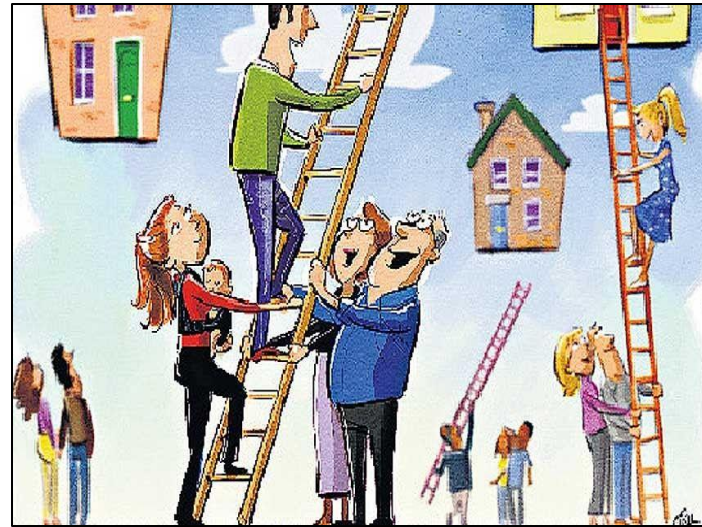
The housing crisis is contributing to deepening social inequalities

Deciphering within-individual variability in residential mobility frequency

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Millennium Cohort Study (S1-S5)
→ Analytical sample (N=11,176)
→ Selection criteria: 1. families who entered the cohort in 2001 and were still there in 2015; 2. complete information about youths' contact with the police at age 14

DV=Youth-police contacts at age 14
→ '*ever* been *stopped or questioned, given a formal warning or caution*, or *arrested*'
→ Binary (0-1)
→ Prevalence=15.1%
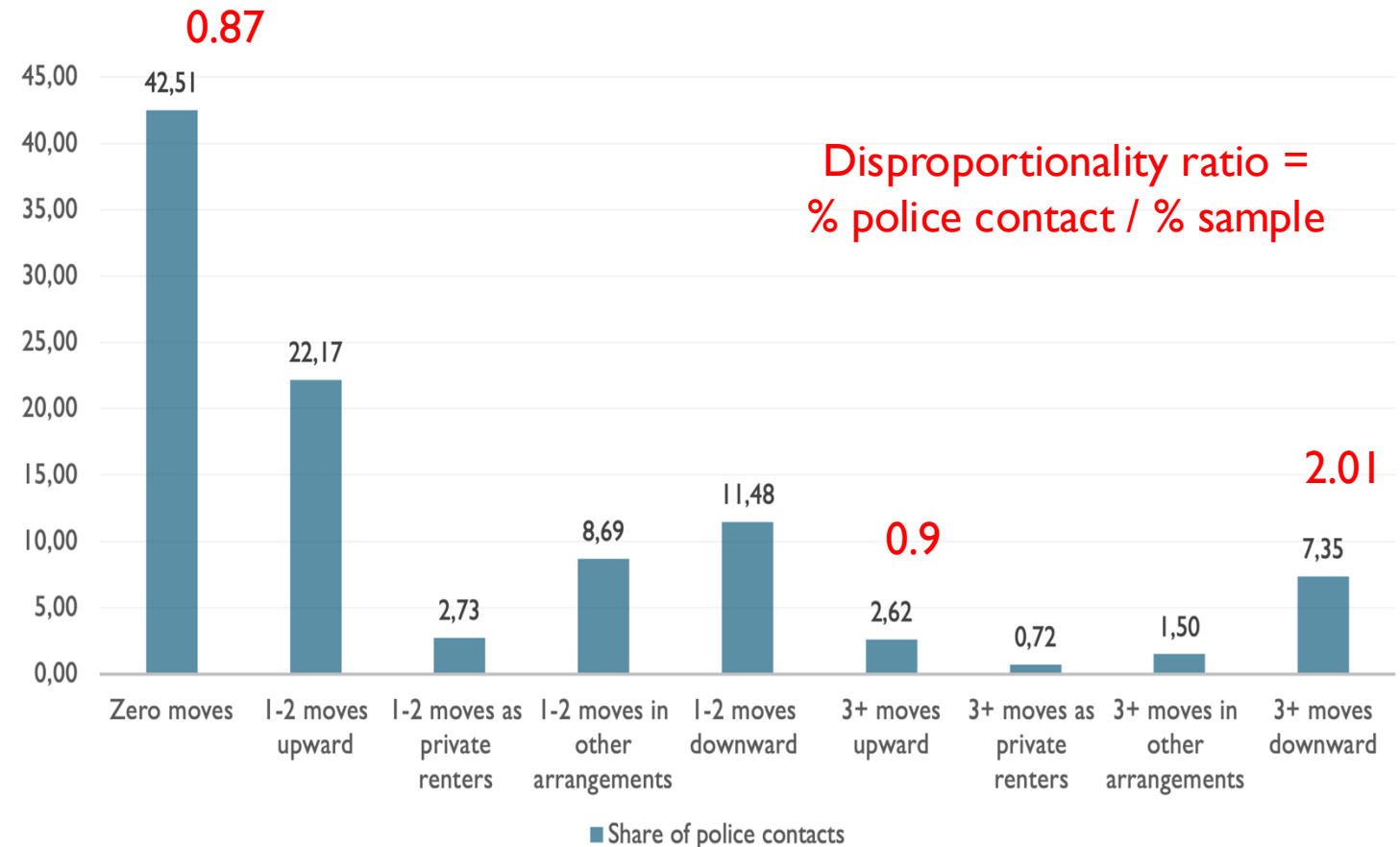
Housing tenure trajectories between 0-11 (ref.=no moves)

→ Shifts in tenure
 ← stable homeownership ↑ upward
 ← private renters
 ← other arrangements, inc. social housing
 ← irregular tenure ↓ downward
→ No. of moves (1-2 v. 3+)

Reasons to move:
→ Eviction or cost-burdened (ref.=other)

Disproportionality ratio = % police contact / % sample

Chart values — Share of police contacts:
Zero moves: 42,51 (0.87); 1-2 moves upward: 22,17; 1-2 moves as private renters: 2,73; 1-2 moves in other arrangements: 8,69; 1-2 moves downward: 11,48; 3+ moves upward: 2,62 (0.9); 3+ moves as private renters: 0,72; 3+ moves in other arrangements: 1,50; 3+ moves downward: 7,35 (2.01)

Confounders

→ Mother's age at CM's birth
→ Parent's highest academic level (ref.=NVQ levels 4-5)
→ CM's Age in months (mean-centered)
→ CM's Sex (ref.=female)
→ CM's Race (ref.=White)
→ Country of residence (ref.=England)
→ ONS urban-rural classification (ref.=urban less sparse)
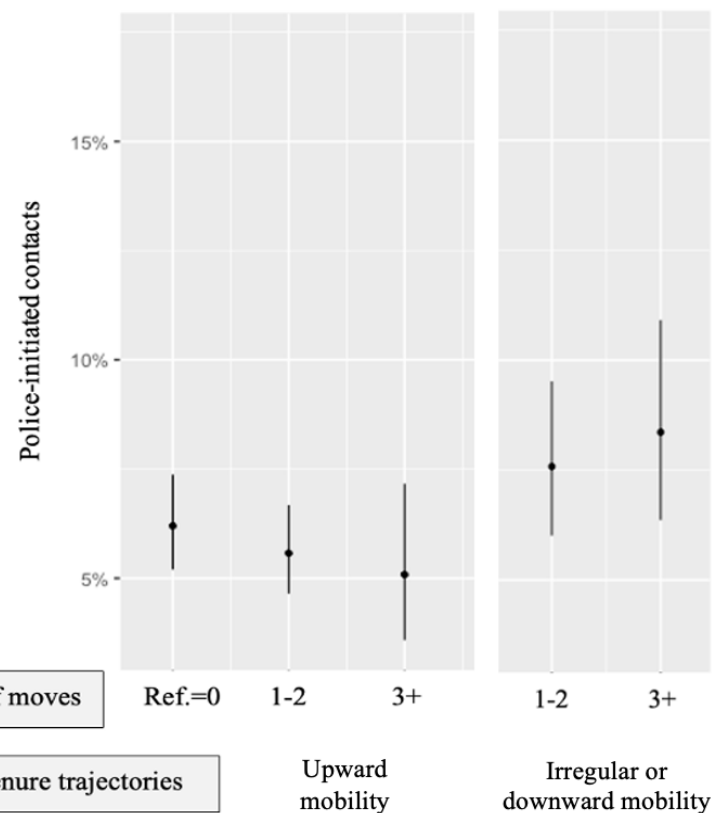→ Adverse childhood experiences
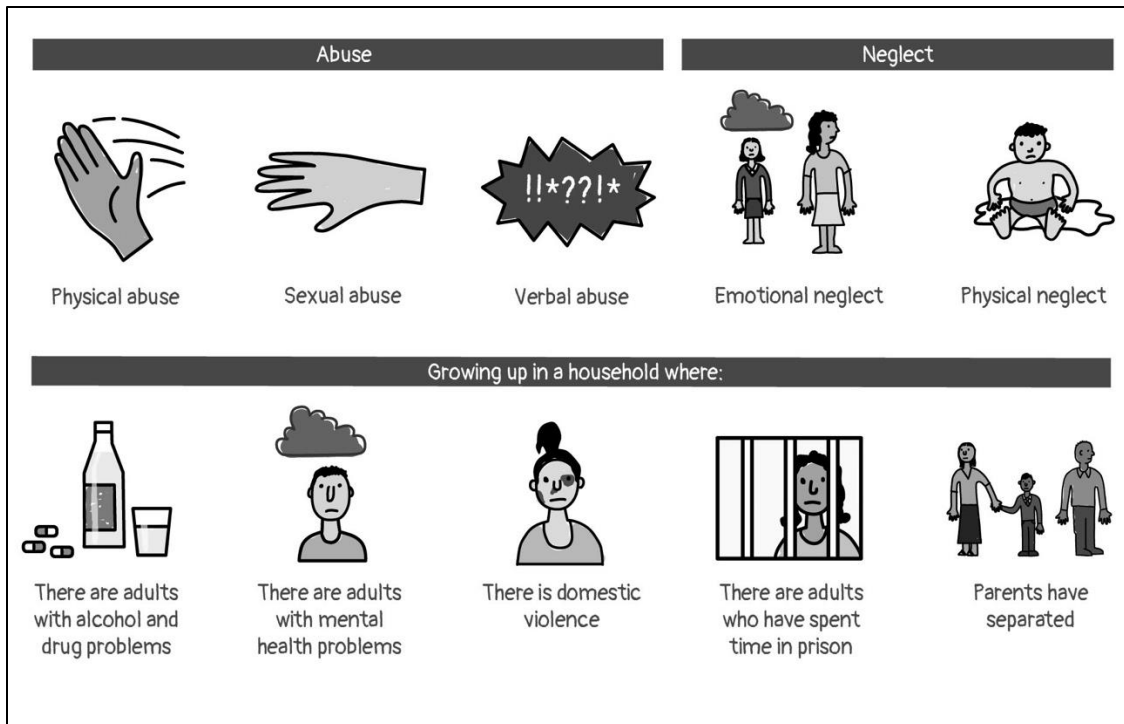
Mediators

→ Externalising behaviour scale from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

→ School disengagement index, retracing how often children self-report trying their best at school, find school interesting, feel unhappy at school, get tired at school, feel school is a waste of time, and misbehave or cause trouble in class

→ Property delinquency (taken something without paying it, written things or spraying paint on a building or urban furniture, and/or damaged things on purpose in public spaces)

→ Substance use (tried a cigarette, and/or had an alcohol drink)

→ Social severance, based on the MCS grid of social support ('family and friends help [them] feel safe, secure and happy', 'there is someone [they] trust whom [they] would turn to if [they] had problems', and 'there is no one [they] feel close to')

Technicalities

We estimated unadjusted and adjusted logistic regressions of the association between childhood internal mobility and exposure to police-initiated contacts in adolescence at age 14. Robustness checks were also run for each feature of youth-police interaction separately (i.e., stops, warnings, and arrests).

To explore mechanisms through which these associations might manifest, we run mediation tests. Coefficients across nested nonlinear models cannot be directly compared because of a model rescaling after including additional variables. Therefore, the KHB decomposition method was preferred as it adjusts for this rescaling (Karlson, Holm and Breen, 2012). Also, it provides information about the size of the mediating effect of each mediator included in the equation.

All analyses were conducted in RStudio (version 2023.06.1+524), using multiple imputations by chained equations (20 imputed datasets) and weights to generate results that are nationally representative of the UK.

Police-initiated contacts

15% -

10% -

5% -

| Number of moves | Ref.=0 | 1-2 | 3+ | 1-2 | 3+ |

| Housing tenure trajectories | | Upward mobility | | Irregular or downward mobility | |

Results

The number of moves being equal, adolescents whose families have experienced frequent downward housing mobility are more likely to be involved in a police-initiated contact compared to stayers.

Results of the Wald test ($x2=6.9$; $p<.01$) show that the same number of moves (3+) correspond to statistically different levels of exposure to youth-police interactions depending on whether they were undertaken in an upward (OR=0.81; CI=0.57–1.12) vs. downward trajectory (OR=1.38; CI=1.06–1.77).

Any experience with eviction or unwanted mobility due to the need to cut housing costs down was associated with a 47.8% increase in the odds of police contact (OR=1.47; CI=1.06–1.77).

→ Accumulating adverse experiences in childhood is significantly associated with exposure to police contact at age 14
→ Black adolescents had 51.2% more odds of being stopped, warned, or arrested by the police than White adolescents
→ Adolescents living in Scotland have significantly higher odds of experiencing contact with a police officer than adolescents in other countries of the United Kingdom

Mediation tests

→ Two mediators consistently mediate the association with police-initiated contacts: externalising behaviour problems (13.2–21.5%) and school disengagement (7.1–11.7%), measured at age 11 (i.e., the last year of primary school, which overlaps with the end of our trajectories of housing tenure)

→ The mediating effect of social severance ranges from 1.5–6.3%

→ Unlawful behaviours against the property significantly mediate this association (5.5–12.5%) as it does, to a lesser extent, substance use (2.1–11.6%)

→ On average, however, mediation analyses show that, for adolescents enduring housing hardship, engaging in property delinquency and substance abuse mediate only about a third of the association between moving and the outcome

Conclusions

Ceteris paribus, childhood residential mobility is not detrimental per se for youth-police encounters, not even when relocations occur repeatedly in a matter of a few years. Results from logistic regression models indicated that the same number of moves may lead to opposite outcomes.

Upward housing tenure trajectories, defined as stable homeownership or later access to it, might compensate for the negative impact of moving and show a negative association with adolescent police contact.

Conversely, even one isolated move can make a huge difference if undertaken in the social rented sector, which typically reduces neighbourhood choices to disadvantaged areas (Butler and Hamnett, 2012), or in a deregulated private rented sector, with related problems of housing affordability (Zang and Pryce, 2020).

Housing hardship emerges in our analyses as a significant driver of social isolation and conduct problems.

Limitations

→ Attrition rates
→ Self-reported reasons for a move are measured inconsistently in the MCS (i.e., multiple-choice questions vs. dichotomous yes-no answers, depending on the survey's sweep)
→ There is unobserved heterogeneity within the category of stayers as well. Future studies should look at cases where staying put means degrading the housing conditions

Implications

→ A definition of mobility as the frequency of moves alone might be somewhat misleading
→ It is reasonable to assume that redirecting public spending to alleviate housing insecurity (the source of the problem) rather than to its symptoms (criminal behaviours) will have positive spill-over effects in other spheres

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Thanks!

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