

Family dynamics among urban to rural migrants:

A study of households moving out of urban areas in New Zealand

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While deeply appreciative of the input of all those people and organisations named above, the analysis and findings given in this report are the responsibility of the Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit.

1- Introduction

This paper sets out a further analysis of data collected by the Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit for a major study which is focussing on migration from urban centres to minor urban and rural areas in New Zealand'. The project has reached a scale that means it now has a wealth of information about a particular rural population ('recent' urban migrants to smaller towns and rural areas), and indeed represents one of the largest pieces of independent social research that has been carried out in rural New Zealand.

As such, the research represents a source of information about rural communities in general, and consequently the Ministry of Agriculture has requested (and funded) further analysis of the data, with particular reference to family dynamics and the social sustainability of rural towns. We recognise that there are difficulties in applying data collected for the purposes of answering one research question to another, even though the two are related. The results and analysis in this paper are therefore necessarily constrained to the exploratory and indicative. However, we also consider that such work can provide some useful indications of how households and families are changing, and what things they are perceiving as positive and negative aspects of life, after moving from urban areas to smaller towns and rural areas.

The paper begins by setting out some background to the original research project and the rationale behind it. Results from the further analysis are then presented and discussed. This is followed by discussion of some of the issues raised with regard to the implications for rural families and communities, but we reiterate that this discussion is based on an initial and partial analysis, and as such should be regarded as indicating potential issues, rather than definite findings.

1.1. Background

The underlying hypothesis of the research is that there has been an increase in the movement of low income and beneficiary households from urban areas to peripheral towns and rural areas, as a result of the programme of social policy reforms introduced from 1991 on. This hypothesis was conceived in response to a combination of circumstantial and anecdotal evidence which we at the Family Centre came into contact with².

The research is based on a series of surveys. These involve visiting all households in selected towns in a given region, and asking people whether they had moved from an urban area, since 1985. After every household in these towns has been visited, the survey population of in-migrants is generated. Thus, the survey is derived from a census of the towns, rather than from randomised or representative sampling. Survey fieldwork in this project has so far been carried out in the Southern Wairarapa, Northern Waikato-Coromandel

and the South Island (West Coast, and North of Christchurch), and is currently underway in the Kapiti/Horowhenua region.

1 - see Waldegrave and Stuart 1997a, 1997b

2 - This evidence included newspaper reports of empty State and private rentals in Wellington, especially Porirua (Evening Post 28/1/95, Sunday Star Times 13/3/94), social service agency reports in rural areas and urban areas reporting such movement (Brooks 1993, Smiley et al 1989, Waldegrave and Sawrey 1993) and our own experience as an organisation working with low income households in Lower Hutt. A potential for an increased low income movement to rural areas has also been identified by the studies of housing stress (Keams et al 1991, Kearns et al 1992), rural population issues (Davey and Kearns 1994, Kearns and Rankin 1994, Pomeroy 1992) and Maori Population and housing issues (Bathgate 1987, Douglas 1986).

1.2. Focus at the New Analysis

Rural communities have undergone dramatic and fundamental change since the major processes of reform which began in the mid 1980's. The impacts of these reforms and of other changes in the economic and social context of rural New Zealand, on rural communities have been discussed by a number of commentators (Fairweather 1989, Martin 1995, Press and Newell 1994, Sandrey and Reynolds 1990). These studies illustrate the hardship which individuals, families and communities are facing throughout the 'rural downturn'.

Pomeroy (1997) provides an overview of many of the factors involved in change in rural New Zealand, with a particular emphasis on strategies which may be employed to support such communities to adjust to new environments. She notes the need for rural communities to become innovative in their strategies to develop economic growth and prosperity, and comments that change within communities needs to be managed and informed by a knowledge of what is happening among different communities

- the ultimate success of rural communities may well depend on how much attention these communities direct towards managing the social component of community' and family life, and towards addressing social processes in realising economic opportunities. (p 14)

The analysis presented here takes this need for knowledge of the social component of communities as a starting point. The surveys undertaken represent a significant database of information about a particular rural population, and as such can help inform discussion and decision making about the impact of population change and major policy reform on rural areas, particularly those within range of large metropolitan centres.

We have therefore revisited the responses to questions that may provide some indication of issues of family dynamics and social sustainability within this specific rural population. In particular we will set out changes in household composition and income, particular advantages and disadvantages different groups see in living in rural areas, as opposed to urban areas, and comparisons of affordability and accessibility of essential items for different groups in the migrant population³.

3 - However, we should also make clear that there are limitations in the data set. Given the focus of the research question, the information about rural families and communities generated is specific to certain populations, and there are several factors which influence the nature of the results provided by participants, compared to the 'general' rural/small town population.

These include: most of the households surveyed are 'peripheral' (within relative geographical proximity) to major urban 'core' centres - Wellington, Auckland/Hamilton, and Christchurch; Most towns surveyed were of sufficient size to be officially defined as 'minor urban' or 'rural centre' rather than rural area units; and the target population included only those who had moved to the towns from an urban area (as defined by Statistics New Zealand) since 1985,

2 - Results

2.1. - Response Information

For the purposes of this analysis we will treat all respondents, from all the towns in the three surveys, as 'one population'. We consider this is appropriate, as we are looking for common characteristics and issues for this particular population - that is people who have moved to small towns and rural areas from urban areas. However, it should be kept in mind that each town is individual and unique, as are the particular areas they are located in. For specific information about these areas, the reader is directed to research reports from the Family Centre.

The towns which make up this survey are listed in Table 1 below. This shows that the surveys in the Southern Wairarapa and Northern Waikato/Coromandel had relatively similar levels of recent migrants in the total population (21% and 20.4% respectively), while the ratio of recent urban migrants to other residents was somewhat higher in the South Island towns (27.4%),

Overall, urban migrants since 1985 made up 22.4% of all those living in the towns, and our survey includes 16.7% of all the households visited (1301 out of 7790). Our survey teams managed to interview 74.4% of all those who identified themselves as 'recent' urban migrants.

Table 1. Total Households, Migrant Households and Responses by Town Surveyed

Town	Total Households	Total Eligible Migrant Households		Total Responses	
	N	N	% of households	N	Respondents as % of total pop
Featherston	763	175	22.9	129	16.9
Martinborough	485	88	18.1	55	11.3
Cartenton	1481	311	21.0	220	14.9
Total Sth	2729	574	21.0	404	14.8
Wairarapa					
Coromandel	407	101	24.8	93	22.9
Huntly	2315	466	20.1	371	16.0
Te kauwhata	329	56	17.0	42	12.8
Total Nth Waikato	3051	623	20.4	506	16.6
Granity	115	40	34.8	38	33.0
Reefton	427	75	17.6	57	13.3
Blackball	123	29	23.6	25	20.3
Dobson	96	11	11.5	8	8.3
Taylorville	100	14	14.0	9	9.0
Leithfield	59	17	24.6	16	23.2
Leithfield Beach	156	81	51.9	64	41.0
Woodend	503	179	35.6	113	22.5
Amberley	354	73	20.6	30	8.5
Amberley Beach	67	32	47.8	31	45.3
Total South Island	2010	551	27.4	391	19.5
Combined Total	7790	1748	22.4	1301	16.7

2.2. Household Composition

Table 2 below sets out the composition of respondent households, when last living in an urban area, and when interviewed. The single largest group of people leaving urban areas, according to these definitions, was 'Couple Headed' households (40% of those moving), followed by 'Couple' only (27%), 'Single Person Alone' and 'Sole Parent' households (both at 13%). This breakdown is roughly similar to national figures, though all other 'family households were between 2% and 3% more common among the survey population than in national figures. The one exception to this was 'Single Person Alone' households, which made up 20% of households

nationwide, as at the 1991 Census (Statistics New Zealand, 1992).

Table 2 also shows respondent household composition at the time of being interviewed. 'Couple Headed' and 'Couple' households still make up the two largest categories (37% and 27%), though both of these have experienced a slight fall in numbers (8% and 1% respectively). The 'Single Person Alone' and 'Sole Parent headed' categories have both increased (21% and 28% respectively). The number of 'Sole Parent' households is noticeably higher among the urban-rural migrant population, after having moved (17%) than national figures (11%).

We do not suggest that the move from urban areas to town has caused these changes, or that the two were necessarily related. However, it would seem clear that there is a pattern within overall movement, in that some households moving to rural areas are also moving from being couples (with or without children) to singles (with or without children), and that the population is more likely to consist of family households, and especially sole parent households.

Table 2. Household Composition⁴ in Previous Urban Area and Current Small Town

HH Composition	Previous Urban Area		Current Small Town		% Change
	N	%	N	%	%
Sole Parent Headed	169	13.0	216	16.6	27.8
<u>Couple</u>	355	27.3	352	27.1	-0.8
Couple Headed	521	40.0	482	37.0	-7.5
Single Person	170	13.1	205	15.8	20.6
Alone					
Flatmates	56	4.3	34	2.6	-39.3
other	20	1.5	9	0.7	-55.0
Invalid	10	0.8	3	0.2	-70.0
TOTAL	1301		1301		

4 - Households have been grouped in the following manner.

Sole Parent Headed - A sole parent and child/ren resident, excepting those with a couple resident.

Couple - Only one couple, and no-one else resident

Couple Headed- A couple and at least one other person resident, including households with both couples and sole parents.

Single Person Alone 'A dwelling where only one person is usually resident.

Flatmates - A non-family household involving two or more people who rent the property from a private or state landlord.

2.3. Household Income

Table 3 illustrates the estimated annual net income of respondents when leaving urban areas. We should note that there are several shortcomings to this income data, which we do not have space to set out here⁵, other than to make clear that it should be analysed with caution. However, the responses provided by participants do supply some information about household income dynamics for those moving.

The left-most columns of the table show that those in the lowest income bracket make up the largest group of migrants, with 479 or 37% of households. The middle income bracket had the next largest group of migrants, at 31%. Only 19% of those moving were in the highest income bracket. 14% of respondents did not reply to this question.

Table 3 also shows that the lowest income bracket has increased by the greatest amount, comparing situations before and after the move. 49% of those interviewed were in the lowest group when interviewed, increase of 33%. The numbers in the middle income group fell by 11 %, while the numbers in the highest income group fell by 22%.

Table 3. Estimated Net Annual Household Income in Previous Urban Area and Town by Household Composition In Current Town

Income Group (NET \$000 P/A)	Previous Urban Area		Current Small Town		% Change
	N	%	N	%	%
0-19,999	479	36.8	638	49.0	33.2
19,999-39,999	405	31.1	362	27.8	-10.6
40,000+	242	18.6	190	14.6	-21.5
Invalid	175	13.5	111	8.5	-36.6
TOTAL	1301		1301		

Table 4 below sets out the household incomes of respondents in the two situations, immediately prior to leaving, and at the time of being interviewed. This enables an examination of income dynamics within each income group, comparing when they last lived in urban area, and their contemporary situations. By selecting one row, and moving from left to right, we can see how the incomes of those in one group when leaving have changed.

5 Briefly, these shortcomings are as follows: Firstly, there was a high rate of non-response to the questions about income levels, and we do not know anything about the income levels of those who chose not to answer this question. Secondly, it is very difficult to consistently get accurate estimates of net and/or gross incomes, given the general complexity of such an estimate. Thirdly, where only gross incomes have been given, a calculation based on RD tax rates has been applied, to get a net estimate, This assumes all the earnings are those of one person in one job. This is not necessarily (indeed probably is not) the actual tax rate that applies to the household income. Fourthly, we have not applied equivalence scales to this information, so our income groups apply to households of different size and may not reflect the relative wealth of different households within them. Fifthly, a CPI adjustment has not been made. \$18,999 might have meant something very different, in terms of living costs, in 1985 than it did in 1995.

It is apparent that the continuity of incomes, at an individual household level, varies considerably according to the level of income when leaving urban areas. If we follow the top row, from left to right, we can see that 428 of the 479 in the lowest income group (89%) remained within this lowest category. The next cell shows that 39 (8%) moved up to the next income level, and only 14 (3%) experienced a significant increase in income, up to the highest income group.

Those in the middle group had different outcomes. 28% of those in the middle group leaving urban areas had moved down to the lowest group by the time of interview, 65% were still in the same group, and 7% had increased income to the next bracket.

Of those in the highest bracket when leaving, 21 % had fallen to the lowest bracket, and 17% had fallen to the middle bracket, while 59% were still in the same bracket. Clearly, a number of those in these two brackets have experienced falls in income, after moving to rural areas

It is also apparent that 47 people who did not respond to the income question for when they were last living in a city, recorded low incomes in the rural areas. This means that some of the increase in the lowest income group can be attributed to households who did not give income information for urban areas. However, this was less than the number moving from middle (112) and upper incomes (51).

Table 4. Net Household income Group in Previous Urban Area by Current Small Town

Income Group Then	Income Group Now									
	0-19,999		20,000-39,999		40,000+		Invalid		Grand Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0-19,999	428	89.4	36	7.5	14	2.9	1	0.2	479	100.0
20,000-39,999	112	27.7	263	64.9	29	7.2	1	0.2	405	100.0
40,000+	51	21.1	41	16.9	143	59.1	7	2.9	242	100.0
Invalid	47	26.9	22	12.6	4	2.3	102	58.3	175	100.0
Grand Total	638		362		190		111		1301	

2.4. Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Living in Smaller Towns

A series of questions in each survey investigated how respondents felt about their move away from urban areas. Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8, show participants responses to questions about particular advantages and disadvantages they considered there were to living in the town they were in, as opposed to the last urban area they lived in.

Table 5 shows the perceived advantages of living in towns, by the household income source (beneficiary or non-beneficiary) of respondents at the time they answered the questionnaire. For both income categories the physical location or environment of the town was most commonly named as an advantage of towns over urban areas (33% of beneficiaries and 36% non-beneficiaries). The next most common responses were "lifestyle" (27% beneficiaries, 32% non beneficiaries) and "Community" (21% and 25% respectively). Perhaps the most noticeable difference between the two is that beneficiaries were more likely to see no advantages than non-beneficiaries (16% compared to 11%). Despite some differences in the proportions of responses however, the ranking of responses is similar within the two categories.

Table 5. Advantages of Living in Country as Opposed to Urban Area, by Income Source⁶

(Multiple Responses Possible)

Advantage	Beneficiaries		Non Beneficiaries	
	N	%	N	%
Community/People	126	20.6	167	24.6
Lifestyle	168	27.4	216	31.8
Cheaper Housing/Land	88	14.4	81	11.9
Cost of Living	53	8.6	51	7.5
Location/Environment	203	33.1	247	36.3
Better for Children	39	6.4	41	6.0
Other	93	15.2	114	16.8
None	97	15.8	77	11.3
Invalid	0	0.0	1	0.1
Total Responses	857	141.4	995	146.3
Total Respondents	613		680	

Table 6 below shows that differences between beneficiary and non-beneficiary households are more apparent when we examine the factors they named as disadvantages of living in their town, as opposed to urban areas. While "Lack of/inferior facilities" was the most common response for both categories (43% beneficiary, 51% non-beneficiary), non beneficiaries were more likely to name 'Distance/Isolation' as a disadvantage (31% compared to 24% for beneficiaries). Also, beneficiaries were nearly twice as likely to talk about lack of employment as a disadvantage of rural towns than non-beneficiaries (15% compared to 8%).

- 6** The following definitions have been applied to household income source.
 "Beneficiary-a household where respondent reported no-one received any income from a source other than a benefit.
 "Non-Beneficiary" a household where respondent reported at least one person received money from a source other than a benefit

Table 6. Disadvantages of Living in Towns as Opposed to Urban Area by Income Source.

(Multiple Responses Possible)

Disadvantage	Beneficiaries		Non Beneficiaries	
	N	%	N	%
Community/People	66	10.8	57	9.3
Lack of/Inferior Facilities	266	43.4	313	51.1
Distance/Isolation	145	23.7	209	34.1
Lack of Employment Environment	87	14.2	53	8.6
Cost of Living	28	4.6	23	3.8
Other	56	9.1	70	11.4
None	40	6.5	47	7.7
Invalid	152	24.8	138	22.5
Total Responses	1	0.2	1	0.2
Total	841	137.2	911	148.6
	613		680	

Table 7 below provides information about perceived advantages and disadvantages by ethnicity, with the survey population grouped into Maori and non-Maori⁷ households. The table shows that 'Location/Environment' is again the highest in both groups (36% non-Maori, 31% Maori), and that the overall ranking of advantages are quite similar (that is, for non-Maori and Maori Lifestyle was next most commonly named, then Community, then Cheaper Housing/Land).

There were discernible differences in the two groups though. Maori were much less likely to talk about "Lifestyle" than non-Maori (21% compared to 32%), and, to a lesser extent "Community" (16% Maori and 24% non-Maori). Maori households were more likely to speak of being Closer to Family (8% Maori, 4% non-Maori), or to state there were no disadvantages at all (19% Maori compared to 12% non-Maori). They were also much less likely to provide multiple responses (the total number of Maori responses adding up 117% of total respondents, whereas non-Maori responses added to 38% of respondents).

7 Household Ethnicity has been classified according to the following criteria

Maori - The respondent reported any Maori as currently and usually resident (including those where people from other ethnic groups were resident) Non-Maori - The respondent did not report any Maori resident

Table 7. Advantages of Living in Country as Opposed to Urban Area, by Ethnicity Maori/Non-Maori

(Multiple Responses Possible)

Advantage	Non Maori		Maori	
	N	%	N	%
Community/People	255	24.3	40	16.1
Lifestyle	336	32.0	51	20.5
Cheaper Housing/Land	135	12.9	35	14.1
Cost of Living	84	8.0	20	8.0
Location/Environment	376	35.8	76	30.5
Better for Children	70	6.7	9	3.6
Closer to Family	46	4.4	20	8.0
Other	124	11.8	18	7.2
None	126	12.0	48	19.3
Invalid	1	0.1	0	0.0
Total	1553	148.0	317	127.3
Total Respondents	1049		249	

Further differences are between Maori and non Maori are apparent in Table 8, which depicts participants perceptions about disadvantages of living in towns as opposed to urban areas. Non Maori were more likely to talk about a 'Lack of/Inferior facilities' than Maori (47% and 36% respectively), and 'Distance/isolation' (31% non-Maori compared to 20% of Maori). Maori were more likely to speak about a Lack of Employment (15% and 7%), and to see no disadvantages (28% and 21%). Though there are exceptions, the differences between Maori and non-Maori seem to roughly mirror the differences between Beneficiary and Non-beneficiary.

Table 8. Disadvantages of Living in Towns as Opposed to Urban Area, by Ethnicity (Maori/Non Maori)

(Multiple Responses Possible)

Disadvantage	Non Maori		Maori	
	N	%	N	%
Community/People	77	7.3	20	8.0
Lack of facilities	326	31.1	53	21.3
Distance/Isolation	323	30.8	50	20.1

Inferior Services	162	15.4	26	10.4
Lack of Employment	73	7.0	36	14.5
Environment	31	3.0	7	2.8
Cost of Living	110	10.5	26	10.4
Other	84	8.0	21	8.4
None	220	21.0	69	27.7
Invalid	1	0.1	1	0.4
Total	1407	134.1	309	124.1
Total Respondents	1049		249	

2.5. Problems Affording Essential Food

A series of questions in the first two surveys investigated participants' evaluations of the affordability of essentials - in particular food and medical care. Table 9 below correlates the respondents' perceptions of their problems affording essential food in urban areas, by their problems when interviewed. The percents in the table refer to the entire population, and add up to 100. The table therefore tells the proportion of the population who reported different levels of problems affording food, at the two different times, and by moving along the axes, we can get a picture of the relative changes in food affordability experienced by households.

The most obvious finding is that a majority of respondents reported no change in the affordability of food. This is demonstrated by a total of 71% of the population being in the grey shaded cells, along the diagonal of the table. At the bottom right of the table, we can see that most respondents (62%) reported no problems at all affording essential food in urban areas and rural towns. In contrast, a very small number (0.3%) are at the top left, reporting major problems affording food in both urban and rural areas.

For those who did report a change in affordability however, there does seem to be a trend toward finding more problems in rural towns. This is shown by the percent scores in unshaded cells, below the diagonal, which represents those who reported more problems affording adequate food after moving. 19% of the sample are in this category (4.4 % having experienced a significant increase in difficulties, from either few or no problems, major, or quite a lot of problems). Conversely, 10% of respondents are above the diagonal, in the black shaded cells, and reporting improved affordability of food.

Table 9 Proportion of Population Reporting Problems Affording Essential Foods in Previous Urban Area by Current Small Town

Affordability Then	Affordability Now				
	Major Problems	Quite a lot of problems	Some problems	Few problems	No problems at all
Major Problems	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.7
Quite a lot of problems	0.1	1.0	1.5	0.8	0.8
Some problems	0.1	0.4	4.6	0.8	2.7

Few problems	0.2	0.6	1.2	2.7	2.2
No problems at all	0.9	2.7	5.7	7.0	62.0

Total percents in table = 160.

Those along the diagonal (shaded grey) reported no change in affordability after moving

Those below it (no shading) reported more problems affording food after the move.

Those above it (shaded black) reported less problems affording food after the move

A breakdown of this information, again by income source and ethnicity reveals interesting trends within this overall direction. Table 10 demonstrates the proportional changes in participants assessment of the affordability of essential foods, after moving to smaller towns and rural areas, according to their source⁸. Of these two groups, the greatest change in the perceived affordability of food was among non-beneficiaries. In particular, the proportion of non-beneficiaries reporting 'No problems at all' fell by 13%, while the proportion reporting 'Some' or 'Few' problems increased by 8% and 4% respectively. Those reporting the highest level of difficulty, ('Major', or 'Quite a lot' of problems) changed only slightly, increasing by a combined total of 1.4%.

There was less perceived change in the affordability of food among beneficiary households. Only the 'Few problems' category increased by more than 5% (at 5.1%), while the proportion reporting 'No problems at all' saw the next most significant change, falling by 4%. All the other categories remained within 1% of the proportion when last in urban areas.

It is clear that Non-Beneficiary households were most likely to consider that essential food was less affordable after moving to smaller towns and rural areas. This may reflect the relative differences in the foods that non-beneficiaries and beneficiaries were buying in the cities (e.g. Non Beneficiaries may be more likely to be purchasing convenience foods). It may also indicate that working households face particular costs in country areas (eg. travel), which place pressures on budgets that do not exist in the larger urban areas.

8 - We should note that there was significant increase in the number of beneficiary households after the move from urban to rural areas. The percents in this table refer to the total within each response category. as a proportion of the total number of households with these income sources (that is benefit and non-benefit) at that time.

Table 10. Change in Proportion of Population Reporting Problems Affording Essential Food After Moving, by Income Source

Level of Problem	Change	
	Non Benefit	Benefit
Major Problems	0.1	-0.8
Quite a lot of Problems	1.3	0.1
Some Problems	7.8	-1.0
Few Problems	3.5	5.1
No Problems at All	-12.7	-3.5

Table 11 provides this information for Maori and non-Maori households in the surveys. In this table, a similar pattern is apparent for Non-Maori as was noted for non-beneficiaries. There was a marked fall in the proportion reporting 'No problems at all' (12%), small increases in the 'Some' and 'Few' problems categories (5% and 4% respectively) and very minor increases in the 'Major' and 'Quite a lot of problems' categories (2% combined total).

The changes in these different categories are less marked for Maori. There was a 6% fall in the proportion reporting 'No problems at all', but also reductions in the 'Major problems' (2%) and 'Quite a lot of problems' (2%) categories. These reductions did not occur for Non-Maori, Beneficiaries on Non-Beneficiaries. The only increases were in the 'Some' and 'Few' problems categories (4% and 7% respectively). There has therefore been some 'contraction' of responses among Maori households, after the move, toward the central categories, as a result of reductions in the proportions at either end of the response spectrum.

It would seem that Non Maori are experiencing greater change, for the worse, in problems of affordability of food. As a larger proportion of Maori households were in the beneficiary category, this result reflects some of the differences between benefit and non-benefit households discussed above. However, the reduction in the proportion of the Maori population experiencing most difficulties was greater than for other groups noted here (Non-Maori, Beneficiaries and Non-Beneficiaries). This may reflect greater contact and support from whanau, access to non-market food sources, such as shellfish, or other 'traditional' foods, in rural areas, as opposed to urban.

Table 11. Change in Proportion of Population Reporting Problems Affording Essential Food after Moving, by Income Source

Level of Problem	Change	
	Non Benefit	Benefit
Major Problems	0.6	-2.4
Quite a lot of Problems	1.5	-1.5
Some Problems	5.4	3.5
Few Problems	4.1	6.8
No Problems at All	-11.6	-6.4

2.6. - Affordability of Medical Care

A series of questions in each of our first two surveys looked at how participants felt about the affordability of medical care, including Doctor, Dentist and Prescription, after moving to rural towns. There is not space within this paper to detail the responses to these questions, so we have employed a scoring system, based on these responses, to produce an aggregate estimate of affordability⁹.

This aggregate estimate shows, in Figure 1, that most people felt care after the move from urban to rural towns was more expensive, but there were variations within our groups. Non-beneficiaries were more likely to feel that care was more expensive than non-beneficiaries, with a score of -1.5, compared to -4.

Figure 2 shows us that there was a very noticeable difference in perceptions of affordability, according to our two household ethnicity categories. On average, 12% more non-Maori thought medical care was less affordable from doctor, dentist and prescription after the move. Conversely, 7% more Maori felt medical care was more affordable than it had been in urban areas. This may reflect access to iwi based and other Maori health services that have become available recently.

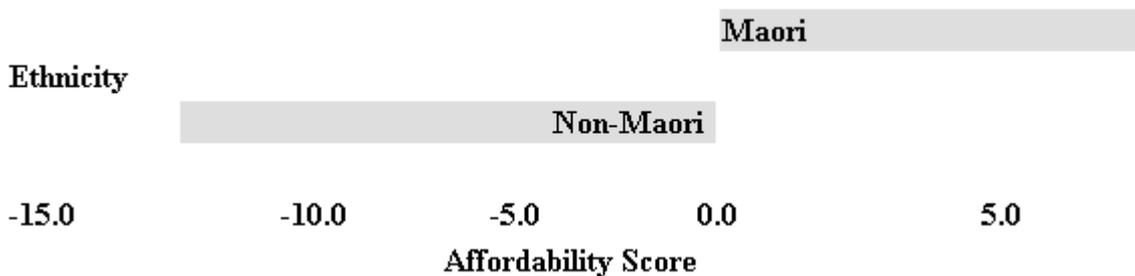
Figure 1. Overall Affordability Score for Medical Care in Rural Areas, Compared to Previous Urban Areas, Household by Income Source



(NOTE: scores less than zero indicate lesser affordability; scores greater than zero indicate greater affordability)

Respondents were asked to say how affordable they felt doctors, dentists and prescription medicines were in current towns, compared to urban areas, on a five point scale. Briefly, the 'affordability score' was produced by taking the average number of respondents in the 'positive' ends of the scale and subtracting from this the average number of respondents at the negative end of the scale. A positive score indicates that, overall, more people felt care was more affordable, while a negative score indicates that more felt it was less affordable.

Figure 2. Overall Affordability Score for Medical Care in Rural Areas, Compared to Previous Urban Areas, Household by Income Source



(NOTE: scores less than zero indicate lesser affordability, scores greater than zero indicate greater affordability)

3 - Discussion

The results set out above provide an exploration of the experiences of households and families migrating to rural areas. This was examined in terms of household composition, perceived advantages and disadvantages of living in rural towns, and a comparison of the affordability of essentials when living in these different places. Particular emphasis was placed on analysis for beneficiary and non-beneficiary households, and Maori and non-Maori households. While of an initial nature, the results do suggest issues for small towns that are experiencing in-migration from large urban areas.

The profile of household types was little different in the small towns from households in the urban areas. However, there was a tendency for household composition to change from couples and couples with children before the move, to single people and sole parents after the move. There were a relatively high proportion of 'family' households moving and fewer single people.

While it is difficult to comment about the relative importance of these trends in the absence of information about other households in the towns (for instance, this may be typical of all households, not only migrants), this does suggest some change in the demographic composition of the towns that may need special consideration, even if only among the in-migrant population. For instance, sole parent households may require particular services (such as medical care, education, and child care), and are more likely to be consumers of essential goods and services. Alternatively, they may provide a greater casual/part time workforce for smaller rural businesses. Decision-makers need to be aware of the demographic implications of movement into their areas, in order to make the best decisions about the kinds of initiatives that are likely to stimulate local opportunities.

Responses to questions about income suggest that there was a general fall in incomes, even given the limitations in income, information that have been noted. The numbers of households in the lowest income category increased by 33%. Possible reasons for this income loss are varied, ranging from retirement movement, to loss of employment at the time of or after moving, to employment income earners no longer being part of the household.

Despite this, it seems clear that most of the people moving are not in a high-income group, and that those incomes are lower after moving, for whatever reason. Again, this has significant implications for towns looking to boost their economies, especially because much the current literature attributes such movement to higher income, lifestyle migrants (Wellington Regional Council 1993, Butt City Council 1993, Koziol and Bu 1993).

We have shown that the different groups (namely beneficiary and non-beneficiary, Maori and non-Maori) tended to agree on the advantages of living in rural areas compared to urban. These were largely 'physical', 'aesthetic' things, like the environment, the community, and the lifestyle. For towns on the periphery of urban areas who may wish to attract migrants, this suggests the sorts of attractions urban residents may find in rural life. Certainly, these results indicate that people felt the towns were qualitatively 'better' places to live.

The disadvantages noted by the different groups point to some issues that may need to be addressed in these towns. For non-beneficiaries and non-Maori in particular, the lack of facilities, and the distance and isolation of the towns seems to have been the major issue. While these were also the most common responses among Beneficiary and/or Maori households, these groups were more likely than Non-beneficiaries and non-Maori to name a lack of employment as a disadvantage. The combination of lack of facilities (from hospitals to shops) and lack of employment may not be surprising, but it may indicate areas that need attention, especially as counter migration from urban areas seems to be a consistent, if not growing feature of population movement in New Zealand.

This was amplified in participants assessments of the affordability of essentials - namely food and medical care. While the majority of the respondents reported no change in the affordability of essential food, a notable proportion (19%) noted worsened situations, which was nearly double the number who noted improved situations. The finding that 32% of respondents reported problems of varying magnitude affording essential foods when interviewed further confirms the impression that the migrant population surveyed is a lower income one.

Such findings were echoed in perceptions of affordability of medical care. We have seen that both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries felt medical care was less affordable in rural towns, but that this was more accentuated in the case of non-beneficiaries (this should be seen in the overall context of reforms in the health and welfare sectors, which may have made care more difficult to afford for those migrant households anyway). It is difficult to speculate as to why beneficiary households would feel the affordability of care has changed less after the move than non-beneficiaries. One possibility is that such low income groups were already having difficulty accessing medical care in urban areas, and therefore do not notice as much change when they move to a rural area with fewer facilities.

We have also seen that Maori households perceived medical care in the rural centres as more affordable, while non-Maori described it as less affordable. As noted above, this may be due to these Maori households having access to recent iwi based, and other Maori, social and health services. If this is the case, then these services have clearly had a significant and positive impact on the health of many of those Maori households that have moved.

4 - Conclusion

The discussion above is an initial and partial exploration of data about a particular rural population, recent urban migrants. The analysis set out could obviously benefit from being broadened to include other aspects of the results, such as the reasons people moved, housing tenure, ways of earning income, benefits received and overall satisfaction with the move. However we do consider that this paper has shown useful information can be extracted from the data set, and that some issues for rural towns, especially those peripheral to metropolitan centres, can be discerned.

In particular, though people from all income groups are moving from urban areas to rural towns, there is a significant proportion of low-income movers in this population. For some of these households, their incomes are decreasing and they are experiencing varying forms of hardship. Low-income in-migrants will be spending on essential items in local businesses, thereby boosting the local economy. However, from a policy perspective, they may place demands on particular facilities, and have a need for different facilities, and may have difficulty accessing to employment.

The results also suggest areas of potential development for these towns. People are clearly naming certain things as advantages of the towns over cities, and have made decisions to move to these towns. Over 80% are happy with that choice (Waldegrave and Stuart 1997b, forthcoming 1998). These are factors that towns can market in order to attract urban migrants or tourists. The services, facilities and local activities boosted by increased population from in-migration are often also the kinds of services which attract tourists to small towns. Newcomers bring new ideas and diversity. Well managed, this can add to the town's economy by encouraging tourists to increase their local expenditure in the town. The in-migration of people may also provide a population and needs basis from which towns and regions can argue and/or market for, the return or development of different facilities, such as schools, health care and retail outlets.

It should also be remembered that any migrants to a town will usually be spending a significant amount of their income in that town. This is especially the case for low income and/or beneficiary households who would be less likely to travel long distances to shop. Such migration could therefore provide a stable basis for business in these towns, though it may be skewed toward 'essentials', as opposed to luxury or niche goods.

As noted above, the changes in households we have shown suggest both constraints and opportunities for rural centres, as a result of the increasing trend of movement to towns and rural centres from urban areas. In order to maximise the opportunities, people in those towns and centres can be helped by awareness of the different kinds of movement happening in their region, or the different needs and characteristics of those groups that are moving and the opportunities for enterprise development arising from a larger and more diverse population. This suggests a need for policies at both central and local government levels, that can take cognisance of these issues

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