

# Older Veterans – Possible Forerunners of Migration: Migration Patterns of the Elderly Veteran Population Versus the General Elderly Population, 1960-1980

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*We provide a descriptive comparison of the interstate migration patterns between the general elderly population and the elderly veteran subpopulation for the migration periods 1955-60, 1965-70, and 1975-80. National surveys have shown that, in general, veterans have higher income levels than the general population. Given that high socioeconomic status is associated with long-distance migration, we hypothesize that veterans, as a group, are more mobile and move longer distances when compared with the general elderly population. Additionally, new destination sites are usually discovered by those who have relatively higher socioeconomic status. Thus, it may be that elderly veterans are the forerunners to new destinations.*

The United States veteran population is in a state of transition. In a word, it is aging. Roughly 2.9 million veterans were 60 years of age or older in 1960; by 1970, this number had increased slightly to approximately three million individuals (Veterans Administration, 1960, 1970). Primarily because of the large aging World War II veteran cohort, the number of elderly veterans rose sharply between 1970 and 1980, top-

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AUTHORS' NOTE: This research is supported by the Veterans Administration Central Office, Investigator Initiated Research Program, Project No. 85-028. We gratefully acknowledge Charles F. Longino, Jr., Jeanne C. Biggar, and Lynne R. Heltman for their encouragement and advice. We thank John G. Demakis, William Stiers, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

The Journal of Applied Gerontology, Vol. 8 No. 4, December 1989 451-464  
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ping 5.95 million veterans in this age group by 1980 (Veterans Administration, 1980). Population estimates from the Veterans Administration show that the elderly veteran group has continued to grow rapidly; there were an estimated 9.9 million veterans aged 60 or older as of March 31, 1988 (Veterans Administration, 1988). The number of older veterans will continue to increase into the next century as they become a growing segment of the general elderly population. This group creates special challenges for the Veterans Administration in its ability to meet the health care needs of an aging patient population. The location and mobility patterns of older veterans, especially those with limited financial resources and/or inadequate health insurance, will play an important role in determining the demand for and impact on health care services in different areas of the nation.

This study provides a descriptive comparison of the interstate migration patterns of the general elderly population and the elderly veteran subpopulation for the migration periods 1955-60, 1965-70, and 1975-80. The study focuses on the major receiving states for all three periods and the major sending states for 1965-70 and 1975-80 (data on the origin state for interstate migrants for 1955-60 are unavailable through the Public Use 1-in-100 Sample). Finally, the mobility rates of the two populations under investigation are examined.

### **Purpose**

The authors have chosen to study the elderly veteran subgroup for a number of reasons:

(1) The proportion of the 60+ veteran population between the ages of 60 and 64 (the "young-old") in 1960 was 39% (Veterans Administration, 1960). The proportion in this category by 1970 had dipped to 34% (Veterans Administration, 1970). By 1980, however, almost half of the veterans 60 and over (49%) were between the ages of 60 and 64 (Veterans Administration, 1980). The percentages for the general elderly population in the 60-64 age bracket, by contrast, were 25%, 27%, and 24% for 1960, 1970, and 1980, respectively. The Public Use Samples from the Bureau of the Census, especially the 1980 files, provide a unique opportunity to study a subgroup of the elderly population of which a large proportion is just entering "old age."

(2) The vast majority of the veteran population is male, whereas females dominate the general elderly population. In 1980, for example,

women comprised only 5.7% of the older mobile veteran group; in the general elderly population that moved across state lines, 57.3% were females (Longino, Biggar, Flynn, & Wiseman, 1984a, p. 149). The "sex" differential between the veteran group and the general elderly population will provide an interesting comparative component.

(3) Migration histories appear to be important in the decision to relocate. A past "successful" relocation may influence another move on retirement (Wiseman, 1980). Previous vacations to or personal contacts in other areas of the country may result in a permanent relocation (Biggar, 1980; Litwak & Longino, 1987; Pampel, Levin, Louviere, Meyer, & Ruston, 1984). Most individuals who served in the armed forces relocated to other areas of the country or abroad during their tour in the military. These individuals had at least limited exposure to other locations. "[T]he increased migration experience of the GI generation due to the war and to being transferred about as they climbed the corporate ladder also predict higher levels of retirement relocation" (Longino, Wiseman, Biggar, & Flynn, 1984b, p. 727).

(4) National surveys have shown that, in general, the veteran population has a higher educational attainment and higher income levels than the general population (Langberg & Wells, 1984). Given that high socioeconomic status is among the variables associated with long-distance migration, it is hypothesized that veterans, as a group, have been more mobile and have moved longer distances when compared with the general elderly population. This hypothesis is supported further by the facts presented above: The older veteran population, during the time under investigation, has a greater proportion of "young-old" individuals than the general elderly population, more are men and therefore are more likely to be married, and they are more likely to have had a previous migratory experience. All of these facts lead to the hypothesis that the elderly veteran group has had a greater propensity to move than the general elderly population. In addition, new destination sites are usually discovered by those who have relatively higher socioeconomic status, are younger, and are married. It may be that the elderly veteran group has been, in fact, the forerunner to new destinations.

Comparison data for this study come from the benchmark study of elderly migration conducted by the research team of Longino, Biggar, Wiseman, and Flynn. Research findings in their study of aged migration, based on the U.S. Bureau of the Census Public Use Microdata files, showed that, other than participation in the labor force, characteristics

of elderly migrants were similar to those of general migrants. Although they relocated across state lines only half as often as the general population, elderly migrants vis-à-vis elderly nonmigrants were younger and had more education, higher income, and greater independence. Additionally, elderly migrants were found to have a positive impact on their destination communities (Biggar, Cowper, & Yeatts, 1984, p. 186). Although their theory is not fully developed, the Longino et al. (1984a) research team contends that elders are forerunners of general migration trends. In addition,

Movement of older Americans out of the Northeast and Midwest into Florida, California, Arizona, and Texas foreshadowed general population shifts. More specifically, older Americans led the Sunbelt migration phenomenon, discovered in the late 1970s (Biggar, 1980). Older Americans reversed the urban-to-rural turnaround in the 1970s, foreshadowing the same migration among other interstate migrants in the 1980s (Longino, 1984). While participating in these trends, elderly migrants populated entirely new retirement communities such as Sun City, Arizona and dramatically altered the population age structure of several states (Graff & Wiseman, 1978).

Just as the interstate migration patterns of elderly persons are different from, and perhaps predictive of those of the nonelderly population, it is likely that subgroups within the mobile elderly population also exhibit divergent patterns.

### **Past Studies of Elderly Migration**

Prior to the 1970s, the elderly were not as mobile as they have become in recent years and, since many of the elderly were retired and not participating in the labor force, they were typically excluded from analysis. In recent decades, however, the relocation opportunities of this population have become quite favorable. By the 1970s, more and more workers reaching the age of 60 were covered by pensions and/or Social Security, giving many elderly persons the economic freedom to migrate if they chose to do so. Complementing these social structural changes was the vast expansion of commercialized recreation and retirement communities (especially in the Sunbelt) aimed specifically at attracting older people. Although elderly interstate mobility is not a new phenomenon, recent decades have seen larger shifts in the geographic distribution of the aged through migration than prior years.

Recent research has established that the elderly migrate for reasons different from those of the younger population. Most younger people seem to relocate primarily for economic purposes. The retired person, for the most part, is not influenced by labor market trends in the decision of where to live. The literature on relocation during retirement cites many personal and financial reasons, including climate and other "amenity" considerations (Speare & Meyer, 1988); other environmental/quality-of-life factors such as low population density and low crime rate (McLeod, Parker, Serow, & Rives, 1984); local living expenses/cost-of-living differentials (Serow, 1987; Serow, Charity, Fournier, & Rasmussen, 1986; travel time to friends and relatives and other kinship-related considerations (Longino, 1979; Serow, 1978; Speare & Meyer, 1988; Yee & van Arsdol, 1977); availability of health and social services (Patrick, 1980); widowhood (Speare & Meyer, 1988); and the desire to return to one's state of birth ("return migration") (Longino, 1979, 1985).

There is also increasing acknowledgment that elderly migrants at various ages are not representative of the general elderly population. The elderly population is comprised of individuals with very different profiles. "The term 'elderly' is not all inclusive, because it refers to a diverse population, and the level of needs and the types of roles that can be played vary enormously according to their social, psychological, and health characteristics" (Yeates, 1979: 73). Litwak and Longino (1987) acknowledge this heterogeneity in the mobile elderly population by defining three types of moves an individual might make on retirement: "1) an immediate post-retirement move, primarily for amenity reasons; 2) a move to be near a primary caretaker when the person becomes moderately disabled and can no longer manage without help; and 3) a final move to an institutional setting when the caretaker can no longer handle the burden" (p. 270). It is probable that most of the moves made by elderly veterans over the past 3 decades fall into the first category. As this population ages, more moves of the second and third types will be found.

### Data Sources

The data for this analysis come from the 1960, 1970, and 1980 Public Use Samples. Veterans aged 60 and above were stripped from the 1980 elderly 1-in-20 sample at the University of Miami; the 1960 and 1970

elderly 1-in-100 data tapes were sent from the University of Virginia, and veterans were stripped from the tapes at Northwestern University. Unfortunately, the 1960 and 1970 census data do not provide as much detailed information regarding veterans' period of service as do the 1980 census data. However, veteran status (coded as a dichotomous "yes/no" variable) is available for all three time periods, making longitudinal comparisons possible. Published and printed results on the general elderly population from the Aged Migration in the United States Project, also known as the Retirement Migration Project, were used for purposes of comparison.

The Veterans Administration's Central Office Research and Statistical Division provided information on veteran populations for 1960, 1970, and 1980. This information enabled the authors to derive migration rates for the veteran subgroup. A migration rate is defined here as a simple percentage of the number of older interstate movers in the elderly population.

### **Elderly Veteran vs. General Elderly Destination States**

Table 1 provides data on the top destination states for elderly veterans and elderly nonveterans for 1960, 1970, and 1980. Several noteworthy patterns over the 3 decades deserve comment:

(1) *Elderly veterans migrate to Florida, California, Arizona, and Texas.* These four destinations were consistently the top four relocation sites at all three points in time for the veteran subgroup. The general elderly migrants did not exhibit this rank-order pattern until 1980, although Arizona and Texas were attracting more general in-migrants with each passing decade. This finding may be an indication that veterans are forerunners to new destinations.

(2) *While still an important destination, California is losing its attractiveness for both groups.* Conversely, Florida, Arizona, and Texas are all exerting a stronger pull for both groups, although the increase does not appear to be as great for veterans to Florida and Arizona as for the general elderly in the 1975-80 period.

(3) *New destinations seem to appear sooner and/or rise in rank faster for the veteran group than for the general elderly population.* This phenomenon can be seen in the appearance of Arkansas and Washington in the 1965-70 period and Oregon in the 1975-80 period. Additionally,

**Table 1. Top Ten Destination States for Interstate Migrants, Elderly Veterans versus Nonveteran Elderly, 1960-1980**

State	1960			1970			1980		
	Nonveterans <sup>a</sup>	Veterans <sup>b</sup>		Nonveterans <sup>a</sup>	Veterans <sup>b</sup>		Nonveterans <sup>a</sup>	Veterans <sup>b</sup>	
	%	%	State	%	%	State	%	%	State
FL	21.9	24.6	FL	24.3	26.9	FL	26.0	27.9	FL
CA	13.4	14.6	CA	9.9	11.0	CA	8.8	8.8	CA
NJ	4.2	4.4	AZ	4.1	6.0	AZ	5.5	6.5	AZ
NY	3.9	2.9	TX	4.0	3.6	TX	4.7	4.7	TX
IL	3.4	2.5	OH	3.5	3.2	NJ	3.1	2.5	AR
OH	3.1	2.4	VA	3.2	2.7	PA	2.5	2.5	NJ
AZ	3.0	2.3	IL	2.9	2.5	NC	2.3	2.5	NC
TX	2.9	2.3	NY	2.9	2.4	IL	2.3	2.3	OR
PA	2.9	2.3	IL	2.8	2.4	NY	2.2	2.3	WA
MI	2.2	2.2	MO	2.2	2.1	WA	2.2	2.2	VA
						IL			
						NY			
						OH			
						WA			

No. of Elderly (in thousands):

19,901      2,919      24,508      3,030      29,690      5,947

No. of Migrants:  
(Migration Rate)

784,812      146,200      954,414      139,600      1,319,400      334,600  
(3.9%)      (5.0%)      (3.9%)      (4.6%)      (4.4%)      (5.6%)

<sup>a</sup>Data were derived by subtracting the veteran subpopulation from the general elderly population figures presented in Longino, C. F., Jr., Biggar, J. C., Flynn, C. B., and Wiseman, R. F., *The retirement migration project: A final report to the National Institute on Aging, 1984a*.

<sup>b</sup>Data are from research supported by the Veterans Administration IIR No. 85-028.

Missouri ranked sixth on the veterans' 1965-70 preference list, while ranking only tenth for the general elderly. An exception to this "rule" is the rapid rise of North Carolina as a destination for both groups. The veteran in-migration did not precede the general in-migration to this state, which exerted an equally strong pull on both groups, attracting roughly 2½% of migrants from each.

(4) *Arkansas, North Carolina, Washington, and Oregon appear to be on the rise as primary destinations for the veteran subgroup.* In contrast, the general elderly migrants have discovered only two of the four states: North Carolina and Washington. An interesting test of the "forerunner hypothesis" of the elderly veterans will be to examine the general elderly migratory patterns to Arkansas and Oregon in the 1985-90 period.

(5) *Virginia ranks in the top ten destinations for veterans for all periods, but does not appear on the general elderly list for any period.* A possible explanation for this situation could be the number of military facilities in the Norfolk-Newport News and Washington, D.C. areas. It is possible that many of the veterans retiring in this geographic location had previously been stationed in Virginia. Virginia ranks fourth in the number of U.S. military training centers, behind California, Texas, and North Carolina, all of which are popular destination states for the mobile elderly veteran population. Further, the presence of social networks could be a factor in the popularity of relocating to this state. Only a detailed analysis of the migrants' characteristics, however, can fully answer this anomaly.

### **Elderly Veteran vs. General Elderly Sending States**

Table 2 presents the major sending, or origin, states for the two populations under investigation for 1970 and 1980. A few points of interest emerged from examining these data:

(1) *The top five sending states for veterans in the 1965-70 period are identical in terms of rank to the top five origin states for the general elderly in 1975-80.* Between these two periods, California replaced Illinois as the second-ranked sending state, Florida replaced Pennsylvania as fourth, and New Jersey replaced Ohio as fifth for the general elderly population. Thus, the rank-order of the top five origin states for the general elderly in 1975-80 mirrored the rank-order of the veteran



**Table 2. Top Ten Origin States for Interstate Migrants, Elderly Veterans versus Nonveteran Elderly, 1970 and 1980**

State	1970		1980				
	Nonveterans <sup>a</sup>	Veterans <sup>b</sup>	Nonveterans <sup>a</sup>	Veterans <sup>b</sup>	Nonveterans <sup>a</sup>	Veterans <sup>b</sup>	
State	N (%)	State	N (%)	State	N (%)	State	N (%)
NY	135,000 (14.2)	NY	18,800 (13.5)	NY	198,960 (15.1)	NY	44,040 (13.2)
IL	76,000 (8.0)	CA	11,300 (8.1)	CA	109,400 (8.3)	CA	31,600 (9.4)
CA	63,100 (6.6)	IL	10,300 (7.4)	IL	96,560 (7.3)	IL	23,440 (7.0)
OH	47,700 (5.0)	FL	6,100 (4.4)	FL	77,920 (5.9)	NJ	16,960 (5.1)
PA	46,900 (4.9)	NJ	6,100 (4.4)	NJ	70,040 (5.3)	OH	16,880 (5.0)
MI	46,600 (4.8)	PA	6,100 (4.4)	OH	69,120 (5.2)	PA	14,840 (4.4)
NJ	44,000 (4.6)	MI	6,000 (4.3)	PA	66,160 (5.0)	FL	14,080 (4.2)
FL	39,900 (4.2)	OH	5,700 (4.1)	MI	58,000 (4.5)	ABROAD	14,040 (4.2)
TX	25,700 (2.7)	TX	4,600 (3.3)	MA	37,200 (2.8)	MI	13,200 (3.9)
IN	24,900 (2.6)	IN	4,300 (3.1)	IN	32,000 (2.4)	MA	9,800 (3.0)

<sup>a</sup>Data were derived by subtracting the veteran subpopulation from the general elderly population figures presented in Longino, C. F., Jr., Biggar, J. C., Flynn, C. B., and Wiseman, R. F., *The retirement migration project: A final report to the National Institute on Aging*, 1984a.

<sup>b</sup>Data are from research supported by the Veterans Administration IIR No. 85-028.

elderly's top five sending states in the previous decade. This fact, in addition to indicating that the veteran elderly are the forerunners to new destinations for the elderly population as a whole, may also signal

trends in out-migration patterns. Only further research can support or refute this speculation.

(2) *Migration out of the Northeast and Midwest is evident for both groups.* Clearly, there is a pull away from the Northeast and Midwest regions for both types of elderly interstate movers, although there are some mixed indicators of a continuing exodus. New York, for example, is the top sending state for both groups. However, the percentage increase between the two periods of time was very small for the general elderly, and actually declined for veterans. On the other hand, New Jersey continues to send an increasing proportion of migrants, and Massachusetts has emerged as a primary sender for both groups. The Midwest, by and large, appears to be sending fewer migrants. Illinois, Michigan, and Indiana all show proportionally fewer elderly leaving their areas in the 1975-80 migration period. On the other hand, Ohio appears to be sending more migrants, especially in the veteran subgroup.

(3) *California shows an increase of out-migration for both groups.* The accelerated growth of the out-migration rate from California is perhaps the clearest finding in this section. The out-migration rate for the general elderly population from this state jumped from 6.6% to 8.3% over the decade. A similar, though slightly smaller, increase can be seen for the veteran elderly: The percentage of all veteran migrants coming from California during the time frame under investigation increased from 8.1% to 9.4%.

(4) *The category of "abroad" has reached the top ten origin list for the veteran group.* Although it is not particularly surprising to find that the "abroad" category sends proportionally more migrants from the veteran subgroup than from the general elderly population, it is noteworthy that the proportion of out-migrants from foreign countries is large enough to rank in the top ten origin list.

### **Interstate Migration Rate of the General Elderly vs. the Veteran Elderly**

The study findings show that the veteran segment of the elderly population is more mobile than their nonveteran counterparts at all three points in time (see Table 1). Similar trends over the decades are found in both groups. The 1955-60 migration rate for the general elderly

population was approximately 3.9%, and remained stable until 1965-70. There was a sizable increase in 1975-80, bringing the migration rate for this group up to 4.4% by the end of the third decade. The actual number of migrants increased at all three points in time.

The veteran subgroup showed a 5.0% migration rate in 1955-60. In 1965-70, however, the rate dropped to 4.6% as the actual number of migrants *decreased* from 146,200 to 139,600. This dip in interstate travel among elderly veterans reversed itself in 1975-80, in terms of actual number of migrants (334,600) and interstate migration rate (5.6%).

In sum, the data do support the hypothesis that the veteran subgroup was more mobile vis-à-vis the nonveteran population at all three points in time: 3.9% versus 5.0% in 1960; 3.9% versus 4.6% in 1970; and 4.4% versus 5.6% in 1980.

## Discussion

This article has presented some general findings about the similarities and differences between general elderly and elderly veteran "gross" migration patterns. The next step in the authors' research will be to examine the net migration to and from selected states and to compare and contrast the characteristics of the two migrant groups. If major differences between the two groups in terms of socioeconomic status and independence are found, this will constitute further evidence that veterans are indeed the forerunners to new destinations for the elderly population as a whole. Another good test of this hypothesis will be to examine the general elderly population's 1985-90 movement to states such as Arkansas, Oregon, and Virginia, states that have already made the "top ten" destination list for the elderly veteran group.

It is also essential to examine the origin-destination state linkage for the two groups, to examine migration patterns between states that are larger than expected, and to assess the impact of older veteran migrants on their destination communities. Several specific questions must be answered: Are the migration streams for veterans the same as for the general elderly? If not, how and why are they different? Which streams are salient for the veterans and not for the general elderly? How do the streams differ in terms of socioeconomic status and independence between the two groups?

The need for research aimed at the migratory patterns of the elderly to inform social planners, health services coordinators, and public policy officials has been discussed at length in the gerontological and demographic literature. If area planners are advised about how many older people are predicted to move into their region and the characteristics associated with this group of newcomers, better estimates can be made regarding the types of social services, health services, and recreational facilities that will be needed. Studies on the migration patterns and characteristics of the aging veteran could have an impact on the Veterans Administration's ability to forecast the demand for health care services in different parts of the country. This ability will become increasingly important as the aging veterans move into the "frail-old" category. Future census data may show a very different profile of the elderly veteran subgroup as the typical move shifts from the amenity prototype to the more dependency-related prototype.

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