

Roles of community satisfaction and community attachment in the out-migration of rural residents

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a study to determine the impact residents' emotional feelings towards their communities have on their decisions to move from rural areas. Past research is discussed as it relates to the factors of careers, education, and earnings in the decision making process. Also presented are the dependent, independent, and moderating variables, research question, theory for explaining the occurrence, design of the study, suggestions for evaluation methods to analyze the data once collected, and projected applications of the findings. It is expected that with the implementation of this research, a better understanding of the decisions of rural residents to relocate out of these areas will be developed. This improved understanding can aid in the effort to maintain the populations in these areas and provide hope for building sustainable and effective recruiting strategies.

Keywords: rural migration, out-migration, recruitment, community development, relocation

INTRODUCTION

Practitioners have theorized that employment opportunities, occupation, income, and available education in rural regions are the primary deciding factors in residents' decisions to consider the option of migration. For example, Henry (1999) wrote, "To succeed in sustaining regional economic development, policy should be designed to do two things: provide high quality education and [provide] training for human resources... [in order to] prevent a 'brain drain' to competing regions" (p. 39). Previous studies, such as Henry's, assume that there is a simple, direct relationship between the employment opportunities, occupation, income, and available education in these areas and the plans of the regions' inhabitants to relocate. This research explores this assumption to determine accuracy since previous research does not take into account the degree of community satisfaction and community attachment the inhabitants feel towards the areas in which they currently reside. The intersubjective variables of community satisfaction and community attachment act as a filter between the employment opportunities, occupation, income, and available education of the regions and residents' propensity to move. This incidence of local residents considering out-migration into urban areas is a common occurrence in rural regions.

Before inhabitants abandon rural communities, they consider the effects of their decision, an act known as planning. According to Shaffer (1992), employment improvement is a major factor in why citizens move from their communities. Although this is informative, the research fails to consider the possibility that the residents include their satisfaction and attachment to the community in making decisions to relocate. Shaffer only studied the initial thoughts of the population rather than expanding his study to include the inhabitants' happiness with the local environment.

The variables of community satisfaction and community attachment are vital points in the decision making process of individuals considering relocation. For example, individuals may become frustrated with their employment opportunities at their current employer and consider their options. The decision whether they want to leave the region may not be immediately decided based on their unhappiness at work. Rather, they might decide to find a more satisfying job in the same area given that they appreciate their current community.

The planning process of residents in rural regions to relocate appears to be more complex than researchers have previously theorized. The satisfaction of the people in the region contributes significantly to their final decision. Studies have not included this important variable, therefore the results of those studies are incomplete. The results of past studies should be applied with caution in the prediction of the inhabitants' planning to migrate from a rural region due to the fact that the variables of community satisfaction and community attachment were not evaluated. With the additional knowledge from this research, rural communities should have a clearer understanding of the factors involved with out-migration and be better equipped to fulfill the critical needs that could lead to a significant change in the development and sustainability of these regions.

PROPOSED RESEARCH

Research Question

What are the roles of community satisfaction and community attachment in determining the plans of rural residents to migrate to more urban regions?

Proposed Theory

Residents living in rural regions make the decision to begin planning to relocate based on their overall feelings of community satisfaction and their level of community attachment. The factors that lead up to the consideration of changing their situation are employment opportunities, occupation, income, and available education.

Theory Explained

Previous theories have warranted the premise that employment opportunities, occupation, income, and available education to residents in rural regions initiate plans for relocation and represent these theories as simple, direct relationships without considering the residents' feelings of satisfaction and attachment to their communities. While experts have studied out-migration in rural regions as well as investigated the amount of community satisfaction and attachment by residents in those regions, these studies failed to consider the impact these factors have on residents' plans to move.

Community satisfaction is comprised of the factors that residents consider important to their own happiness and impact their decisions of where they reside. Part of community satisfaction is the feeling the people of the community have with the local organizations. Griffin (2011) describes job satisfaction as the degree to which individuals are pleased with their jobs. Byars and Rue (2011) explains that employees' overall perceptions of their employment is defined as job satisfaction. Community satisfaction includes job satisfaction since organizations are a part of communities. Applebaum, Fowler, Fiedler, Osinubi, and Robson (2010) investigated the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational environmental factors and found a strong correlation between these factors and job satisfaction. They further found that dissatisfaction on the job will ultimately lead to turnover. Organizational turnover in rural communities can lead to an out-migration of the population. However, job satisfaction alone does not determine the reasons why residents show an interest in making plans to relocate.

Mississippi is a state that is comprised of primarily rural communities and research conducted in this state can provide insight into rural populations. Shaffer (1992) states, "Job satisfaction...is extremely important to Mississippians; the primary reason given for considering relocation is to find a better job" (p. 65). "Another reason for relocating is greater opportunities, a motivation for both the socially advantaged and disadvantaged" (p. 66). Theories, such as Shaffer's, argue that when individuals have a desire to seek a higher satisfaction for their employment opportunities, occupation, and income they are more likely to want change. The initial reaction to this desire for change could be extreme, for example, a feeling of need to relocate in a drastically different environment, or it could be less drastic, such as a desire to work at another company within the same area. The initial reaction does not lead to a concrete solution

for the situation. Instead, employees consider their options. One of the choices that individuals must consider is the overall satisfaction they have as being a part of the surrounding community.

Furthermore, “[an] indicator of community attachment is personal reaction to departure from the community” (Shaffer, 1992, p. 65). Residents within rural communities consider the attachment they have to the area. This could be especially evident in those residents who have children. While the caretaker(s) of the dependents may have the desire to move, when they consider the attachments they have to the community through their children, their decision to relocate may be altered. Another example of community attachment is the bond parents have to grown children residing in the area. These important variables should be considered in studies that theorize the movement patterns of individuals residing in rural regions. As Shaffer (1992) comments, “[Mississippi] Delta citizens reflect this regional pride, being relatively satisfied with the overall quality of life in their communities and fairly attached to their communities” (p. 64).

Filkins, Allen, and Cordes (2000) report that “community satisfaction has often been linked to the level of satisfaction with a community’s infrastructure, job opportunities, and social support network” (p. 72). While the authors allude to the idea that community satisfaction and community attachment have an impact beyond what has previously been studied, they do not make the connection that residents of rural regions consider relocation based on community satisfaction, but rather focus on discovering another method that can be used to determine if “...social ties may have a greater role in predicting community satisfaction than had been thought previously” (p. 72).

Although rural residents may desire to improve their current position and income, the choice to move is likely deterred based on the satisfaction and connection residents have with the community. Therefore, as the employment opportunities, occupation, and income, increases, the residents’ desires to make plans to move outside the rural region in which they currently reside, is expected to decrease with the intervention of community satisfaction and community attachment. These inverse relationships might be used to assist communities in trying to decrease the out-migration of residents and to create a stronger bond between the current residents and the community, which could effectively improve the current economic conditions of the region.

Another well theorized explanation for rural regions’ residents to consider relocation is the available education. Jones, Thornell, and Hamon (1992) comment on the education found in the rural region of the Mississippi Delta stating, “Mississippi has a long tradition of low educational attainment, and the problem is most severe within the Delta” (p. 90). Many residents fear that they cannot continue their education in the region and consider their options in order to reach their goals. While they may deliberate on these relocation options, they know that other factors play a role in helping them to decide. If another community within the region offers the education they desire, then that option demonstrates that community satisfaction and community attachment impact in the choice to remain within the region. However, satisfaction of the environment within the community in which they currently reside could overrule the decision to relocate for education level purposes and, therefore, discourage the out-migration from the local community.

The argument, as indicated in Figure 1, Table 1, and Table 2 (Appendix A), is that there is an inverse relationship between employment opportunities, occupation, income, and available education and residents’ plans to move as well as their decision where they will move, be it inside the rural region or into an urban area. Specifically, as the available education increases, the outcome is “filtered” through the residents’ community satisfaction and community attachment and the resulting resident’s plan to move is decreased.

For example, a group of residents has reached a point in their careers when they decide a change is needed. In order to make their decision each of them considers their options. All of them want to increase their employment opportunities, occupation, and income; some want to improve their education. In considering their choices, they know local resources that are available to help them achieve their goals, but there are also resources outside the region that can as well. Ultimately, each of them considers their overall satisfaction with their surrounding environment within their community and their attachments with the area. Their final decisions include factors such as an appreciation for their way of life, the amenities available to them, and the atmosphere in which they reside.

The unevaluated variables of community satisfaction and community attachment in the decision making process of rural residents to change their status, leads to assumptions that have the possibility of causing confusion and misunderstanding. With the inclusion of these factors, communities may have a better chance of improving their economic standing by discovering and implementing methods to make their environment more appealing to residents and therefore deter them from making decisions to consider relocating to another region.

Study Design

As presented earlier, the independent variables of employment opportunities, occupation, and income as well as available education will be studied in order to determine the impact the moderating variables of community satisfaction and community attachment have in the resulting dependent variables of planning to move and destination of move. In order to study these factors, the survey instrument will be designed to include relevant questions. The questions will cover topics such as: social demographics, work/occupation/career, education, quality of life, community satisfaction, and community attachment. The participants in the study will consist of a sample of individuals residing in counties located in a rural area.

METHODOLOGY

Procedure

The process of analyzing collected data is one that has to be as flawless and exact as possible. Multiple regression and path analysis are two procedures that will be employed in evaluating the data. Regression allows the researcher to determine the direct relationship between each independent and dependent variable being examined. "Multiple regression is typically used when one attempts to predict a single continuous variable (often called a dependent variable) using two or more continuous or nominal variables (often called independent variables)" (Grimm & Yarnold, 1995, p.10). Furthermore, regression "is used to establish a pattern of relations among variables and to evaluate the degree to which the obtained data conform to the hypothesized relations among variables" (p. 11). This technique will control for other factors in its determination of the relationship for each variable. Regression will supply the researcher with positive or negative coefficients, which will indicate the strength of the relationship between corresponding variables. Regression does not account for indirect paths included in the study. Because of this, the researcher will employ an additional statistical technique to further the study.

The data will be further evaluated using path analysis. Path analysis allows the researcher to take the results obtained through regression analysis a step further. "Path analysis begins with a hypothesized causal model in which the investigator clearly states the predicted relations among a set of variables. The hypothesized manners, in which the variables are related, are often illustrated in a schematic diagram" (Grimm & Yarnold, 1995, p.11). This technique is used to account for all paths being considered in the study. Unlike regression, path analysis allows for indirect relationships within the study to be considered and computed. "The model 'X causes Y' is a regression model, whereas 'X causes Y and Y causes Z' is a path analysis model" (Grimm & Yarnold, p.65). The results from path analysis allow the researcher to present a more detailed analysis of the data.

Path analysis provides two primary results. First, it provides estimates of the magnitude of the hypothesized effects. The estimates are based on the assumption that the model is correct. Second, path analysis allows one to test that the model is consistent with the observed data. If the model is not consistent with the observed data, one can reject the model as being highly unlikely. On the other hand, if the model and data are consistent, one can say that the model is realistic (Grimm & Yarnold, 1995).

Sample Size

As with many statistical procedures, there is no concrete sample size (S_s) that is required to ensure proper analysis of the gathered information. However, since this research involves one of the first data collections using the proposed instrument, there is no good way to estimate the number of S_s that will be needed for the study. Mason and Lind (1993) point out that once the number of S_s is greater than 30 binomial probability predicts a nearly normal distribution of responses. Some statistical procedures dictate a minimum of 50 cases for each variable. Unless specifically indicated, the number 30, then, would appear to be an absolute minimum. To accommodate and ensure that both minimum criteria are adequate, a sample size of 300 subjects will be surveyed. The increase in the sample size should be more than adequate to accommodate some degree of mortality which is not uncommon in many studies.

Reliability and Validity Concerns

Reliability and validity of instruments are crucial to any research and conclusions resulting from said research. Reliability and validity are major issues in research, as well as in sampling, and they should always be considered in questionnaire development. Ensuring the reliability and validity of the process throughout the entire project is vital to the success of the study. Unfortunately, this importance is often ignored (Schoell & Guiltinan, 1992). These issues will be addressed in this study through the use of appropriate statistical procedures that will be used to evaluate the reliability and validity of the instrument.

There is no single technique to determine the reliability of every measurement scale in every situation or application. The numerous methods, which possess varying strengths and weaknesses, determine the reliability of a measurement scale. Though different in their approaches, each of these methods shares the commonality in their attempt to calculate the true variance of the measurement scale (Davis & Cosenza, 1993). The approaches that will be used to address validity and reliability concerns in this study address the concept of internal consistency.

The basic rationale for internal consistency assessments rests on the fact that items in a scale should behave similarly.

Reliability is the degree to which survey results are free from random error (Bowling, 2009). A measurement scale that provides consistent results over time is reliable. A key question regarding reliability is if some phenomenon is measured over and over again with the same measurement device, will the same or highly similar results be achieved. Validity is the ability of an instrument to actually measure the quality or characteristic it was originally intended to measure. In the most common of terms, the validity of a measuring instrument is determined by how well it does what it is intended to do (Alreck & Settle, 1985). An instrument is valid only to the degree that it assesses what and only what it is supposed to measure. Davis and Cosenza (1993) refer to the term reliability as the consistency and stability of a score from a measurement scale. While validity indicates that a measurement tool actually measured what was intended to be measured, reliability indicates that the same answers appear time and again with the same or similar group. To demonstrate validity, it is also necessary to demonstrate reliability.

Split-Half Procedure

The Split-Half procedure is one technique that will be used to measure the validity and reliability of the proposed instrument for this study. The Split-Half reliability formula requires splitting a test into halves, usually by dividing the total test score into scores on the odd items and scores on the even items. Then, a formula is used to emphasize differences between items rather than between respondents. To achieve the split-half technique is not complicated. A multi-item scale is split into two halves. The results of the score of the first half are then correlated with the results of the second half to produce a coefficient similar to the correlation between two forms (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2010). Another observation is that this method evaluates the likeness of a grouping of items meaning that items in a scale should demonstrate analogous behavior (Davis & Cosenza, 1993).

Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951) will also be used to evaluate the reliability and validity of the instrument. This particular procedure is used to evaluate the interitem consistency of a particular instrument. Cronbach proposed his coefficient Alpha (α) to address criticism of the split-half approach. Instead of giving a single coefficient for the test, the procedure gives different coefficients depending on which items are grouped when the test is split in two parts.

PROJECTED APPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The results of this study have the possibility of providing rural communities with valuable information that can be used to retain residents. Through maintaining the population, these areas will be better equipped to provide a higher quality of life. It is expected that a relationship exists between the decision to live in a rural community and the residents' satisfaction and attachment, as that will provide local leaders with the needed knowledge to improve the lives of the residents in areas through factors such as employment, entertainment, politics, education, and socialization. The addition and improvement of these factors can lead to the attraction of future residents, thus providing a possibility for an increase in the local

population. Furthermore, with the residents choosing to remain in the area, an overall atmosphere of happiness can be established as the main attraction for residents and visitors to the communities.

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APPENDIX A

Figure 1. Hypothesized causal model.

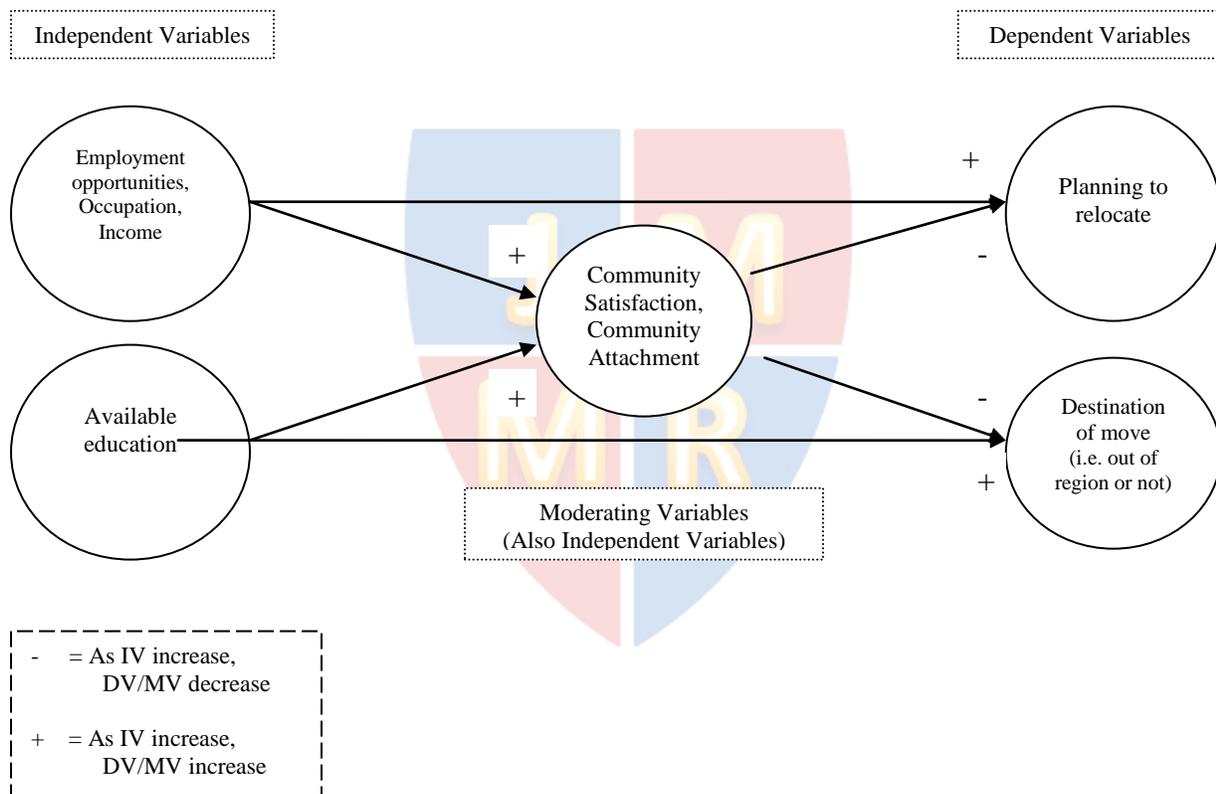


Table 1. Research variables defined.

Variables	Constructive Definition	Operations Definition
Independent: Employment opportunities, occupation, income	The decision to plan to move is originated by the resident's perceived occupation opportunities and the income received.	In order to measure this variable, questions will focus on the current satisfaction level of the residents in the community. Specifically questions will ask about their employment and income and their opinion of the community's employment opportunities
Independent: Available education	The decision to plan to move is originated by the resident's available educational opportunities.	In order to measure this variable, questions will focus on residents' available educational and their desire to further their education. Questions will also cover if they believe they can reach their educational goal while remaining in the community.
Independent/ Moderating: Community satisfaction, Community attachment	The satisfaction of the resident of the surrounding environment within the community in which s/he lives. The attachment of the resident to the region and community. These variables contributes to the outcome of the dependent variables.	In order to measure these variables, questions will focus on length of residency in the community, their perception of the past vs. the current vs. the future of the community, and factors that draw them to be a part of the community.
Dependent: Planning to relocate	The consideration of the resident to relocate in order to attempt to improve his/her living condition. This is contingent upon the employment opportunities and occupation income of the resident and the overall satisfaction the individual has with the community.	In order to measure this variable, questions will focus on residents' plans to move from the community within a specified period of time. Questions will inquire as to reasons for plans to move and factors that contribute to their plans.
Dependent: Destination of move	The resident's plans to relocate within the same region or outside of the region are dependent upon his/her occupational opportunities, income, and happiness within the community.	In order to measure this variable, questions will focus on where residents will relocate if they follow through with their plans to move.

Table 2. Research variables and related sample questionnaire items.

Variables	Sample Questionnaire Items
Independent: Employment opportunities, occupation, income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is your current occupation? _____ - Are you satisfied with your current employment? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No - Does the community in which you live provide acceptable employment opportunities? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No - What is your annual income? <input type="checkbox"/> Below \$20,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$20,001-\$30,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$30,001-\$40,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Above \$40,000 - Are you satisfied with your current income? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Independent: Available education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is your educational level? <input type="checkbox"/> Some High School <input type="checkbox"/> High School Graduate/GED <input type="checkbox"/> Some College <input type="checkbox"/> College Graduate <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced/Professional degree <input type="checkbox"/> Technical School Graduate <input type="checkbox"/> Other - Do you intend to further your education in the near future? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No - Does the community in which you live provide the educational opportunity you wish to obtain? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Independent/ Moderating: Community satisfaction, Community attachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Were you raised in the community in which you currently reside? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No - How many years have you lived in this community? _____ - Do you have children under the age of 18 living in this community? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No - Do you have children over the age of 18 living in this community? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No - Do you have siblings, parents, or grandparents living in this community? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No - If Yes, <input type="checkbox"/> Sibling(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Parent(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Grandparent(s) - Do you believe you are better off now than you were five years ago? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No - Do you believe you will be better off ten years from now? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No - Please rate your satisfaction to the following services offered in your community: (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educational Services 1 2 3 4 5 ▪ Leisure Activities 1 2 3 4 5 ▪ Training and Professional Development Opportunities 1 2 3 4 5
Dependent: Planning to relocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you planning to move from this community within the next year? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If yes, why are you considering moving? _____ - What factors play a part in your plans to move from this community? _____ - How likely is it that you will be living in your current community five years from now? _____
Dependent: Destination of move	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you plan to remain in this region when you move? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No - If no, why are you planning to move outside of this region? _____ - Where do you plan to move? _____ - What distance (in miles) are you likely to relocate from your current residence? _____