



CRITICAL REVIEW OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH ON PARENTAL RELOCATION POST- SEPARATION/DIVORCE



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Critical Review of Social Science Research on Parental Relocation Post-Separation/Divorce

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*The views expressed in this report are those of the authors
and do not necessarily represent the views of
the Department of Justice Canada*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Relocation, as an issue in the context of family law, typically involves the proposed move of a separated or divorced parent with a child to a new residence a substantial distance away from the non-moving parent. Unlike local moves that may include a move to a residence in the same neighborhood, relocation typically requires a change to an existing custody and/or access arrangement due the new distance between the child and the non-moving parent. Due to the complexity of factors to consider in relocation cases after separation and divorce, it is one of the most challenging types of cases related to child custody matters within the family justice system.

In Canada, current case law applies the principles of *Gordon v. Goertz*, a Supreme Court decision from 1996. However, there has been criticism that this case provides insufficient guidance, which contributes to the high rates of litigation. The “best interests of the child” is the basis of the decision, and there are no presumptions in favour of either parent.

Pursuant to *Gordon v. Goertz*, in determining the best interests of the child, the court should consider, amongst other factors¹:

- 1) The existing custody arrangement and relationship between child and the custodial parent;
- 2) The existing access arrangement and the relationship between the child and the access parent;
- 3) The desirability of maximizing contact between the child and both parents;
- 4) The views of the child;
- 5) The custodial parent’s reason for moving, only in the exceptional case where it is relevant to that parent’s ability to meet the needs of the child;
- 6) Disruption to the child of a change in custody; and
- 7) Disruption to the child consequent on removal from family, schools, and the community he or she has come to know.

Many other factors can impact whether a move is beneficial to a child and the parents, including (but not limited to) parental income; the level of satisfaction of both parents about the parenting arrangement post separation and the decision of one parent to relocate; the neighborhood in which the family resides; and presence of/influence of new partners of either parent, etc.

While the field is replete with summary reports and literature reviews of the various factors that should be considered and the potential impact and long-term consequences of relocation for families, the majority of these reports include, but do not distinguish between, relocation studies versus studies on local moves of short distances, nor general research about parent-child relationships, nor relocation with non-divorced samples. Therefore, there is a need to critically examine the research specific to relocation within the context of separation and divorce to isolate which factors are most influential in ensuring the best outcomes for children and families.

¹ *Gordon v. Goertz*, [1996] 2 S.C.R. 27

The purpose of this report was to conduct a comprehensive and critical review of Canadian and international social science research on relocation of families, particularly as it applies to families post-separation or divorce. To this aim, the author excluded studies that included court based analysis of relocation cases, relocation studies of non-divorced populations, and studies that only considered local moves and/or did not distinguish local moves from relocation post separation and/or divorce. The rationale for excluding these non-relocation studies is that the literature about relocation is already cluttered with the mixing of different types of moves (relocation to a different location versus moving residence) and many reports do not adequately control for the type of family structure included in the reviews, thus making any extrapolation of these findings to the context of separation and divorce problematic.

In order to isolate the empirical evidence on post-separation/divorce relocation, the author completed a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of the social science evidence to retrieve studies that explored relocation within the context of separation and divorce. The REA approach was used to systematically detail the information retrieval process for the included and excluded studies, to assess the methodological quality of the relocation studies based on a standard assessment form, and to ensure transparency of the review process and results generated from the REA approach.

By only including relocation studies, factors related to relocation within separating populations were considered, including: 1) reasons for the move; 2) age of sample; 3) children's input into decision; 4) resulting relationship with each parent; 5) post relocation custody and contact arrangements; 6) the economic impact of relocation; and 7) the impact of relocation on children.

Based on a comprehensive review of the empirical evidence, 11 studies that focused on relocation within the context of separation and divorce were located, retrieved and appraised based on a common standard for assessing the methodological quality of the studies. Results of the critical appraisal found that the majority of social science research studies on relocation are of poor quality. No high quality studies were located. Overall, the project's findings demonstrate the need to move away from oversimplified considerations for relocation and to embrace a more comprehensive approach to fully capture the various factors that are relevant to consider when considering the strengths and limitations of relocation.

The lack of empirical evidence on relocation to inform decision-making regarding predicting positive outcomes for children suggests the importance of focusing on the best interests of each particular child on a case-by-case basis. Relying on evidence not directly related to relocation issues can be misleading, faulty and not representative of the unique experiences of families involved in relocation disputes.

Future studies should clearly operationalize relocation within the context of divorce. More high quality social science research is needed to distinguish relocation from local moves. Future studies should include larger samples of separating and divorcing families with standardized measures to explore the potential long-term impact of relocation on children and parents. Qualitative studies can also advance our understanding of the contextual factors that could be considered when assessing the risks and benefits of relocation for children and parents following separation and divorce.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Families move for a variety of reasons including economic necessity, work related reasons, as well as divorce and remarriage (Austin, 2012; Bala & Harris, 2006; Glennon, 2007; Gottfried 2002). Gottfried (2002) notes that in divorced and separated families, “the needs of both parents to secure or retain employment, pursue educational or career opportunities, relocate with a new spouse, or seek support of other family or friends renders it unlikely that divorced parents will permanently remain in the same location” (pp. 476).

Unlike the more common “local move” when each parent moves to different homes but in the same general geographical location, “relocation” disputes arise when a parent wants to move with the child a significant geographical distance away from the other parent. Depending on the factors associated with the move and the child’s previous relationship with the non-moving parent, relocation has the potential of disrupting or changing the children’s level and quality of contact with their non-moving parent. In addition, factors such as the reason for the move (economic, to be close to extended family), the child’s temperament, the child’s age, the quality of the parent-child relationships, etc., can all impact on outcomes for children in relation to relocation.

Relocation disputes are widely regarded as one of the most controversial and difficult issues in family law internationally (Carmody, 2007; Stahl, 2006; Tapp & Taylor, 2008). Family court professionals including judges, lawyers, mediators, and social workers are given the daunting task of sorting through the conflicting and competing interests regarding the potential benefits and limitations of relocation proposals. When disputes about relocation surface within the context of custody disputes, these cases often present a three-way competition between the needs of the child, the needs of the relocating parent, and the needs of the remaining parent.

1.1 *Definition of relocation*

Separation results in the restructuring of relationships, including changes in parent-child relationships, sibling relationships and co-parent relationships with former partners (Saini, 2012). The breakdown of intact families also requires parents to move to separate households as they transition to these newly defined relationships. Generally, moving after separation is “a shift in address ... involving a shift in location through space that can vary from a few feet in the case of a shift from one apartment or room to another within a structure to thousands of miles to another country or from one end of the country to the other” (Rossi, 1980; p. 18). But more specifically, it is important to distinguish *local moves*, moves of short distances and usually within the same locality, which do not have an impact on the parenting schedule, from a *relocation*, where one parents proposes to move with the child to a different geographical location from the non-moving parent thus potentially impacting the parent-child relationships.

It is not uncommon for individuals to make several local moves during their lifetime as they experience economic, employment, family, and life cycle changes. These changes can be both positive (e.g. moving to a bigger house to accommodate an expanding family) and negative (e.g. being evicted from an apartment for failure to pay rent) depending on the circumstances of the

move. Local moves therefore are not unique to separated and divorcing families as these can occur across the lifespan and for various reasons.

Relocation is the term used to denote longer distance moves between distinctly different localities, for example to a different city, province or potentially another country. Relocations occur for many reasons, including in the context of an intact family. For example, the family unit as a whole may move from one city or province to another. Within the context of separation and divorce, which is the focus of the present paper, depending on the nature of the child's relationship with the non-moving parent, a relocation may reasonably be expected to have a significant impact on that relationship.

1.2 Current social science evidence on relocation

Sifting through the current social science evidence regarding relocation is complicated because several of the studies relied on by professionals do not directly address the issue of relocation within the context of separation and divorce, but instead consider more broad implications of both local moves and relocation (Pettit, 2004; Simpson et. al. 1994; South et. al. 2005; Wood, 1993) or explore separation and divorce without direct focus on cases of relocation (Riesch et. al. 1994; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2009). It is important to note that these articles are often referenced in reviews of relocation, notwithstanding that the primary purpose of these studies are not related to the issues of relocation following separation and divorce. Caution is needed to safeguard against making erroneous generalizations beyond the purpose of these primary studies.

Despite the large body of literature regarding local moves and relocation outside the context of separation and divorce, there is surprisingly little empirical research evidence about relocation disputes within the context of separation and the impact they have on family members to assist with determining when an application for relocation should be supported by the courts (Braver, Ellman & Fabricius, 2003). Stahl (2006) believes that “the key to finding the answers in this area of child custody is research. More is needed.” (p. 173) Behrens (2003) concurs:

There is a vital need for research that contributes to knowledge about the results and the effects of court decisions that restrict, or enable, relocation. Decisions on these matters are based on a range of assumptions or guesses about what will happen as a result of a particular decision, and yet there is no empirical evidence that explores the aftermath and helps to make these assessments. It is difficult to have a great deal of faith in a process that involves making such important decisions for children and their parents yet is so unpredictable and has no follow up mechanisms to assess the results and impacts of the decisions (Behrens, 2003, p. 589).

In the absence of social science evidence to guide decisions regarding relocation, courts appear to have relied instead on indirect social science evidence about the potential effects of local moves on children (Austin, 2008, 2012; Braver et al., 2003; Kelly, & Lamb, 2003; Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). As another example, Kelly and Lamb (2003), considered the literature on attachment relationships in infants and toddlers and the ways in which relocation may likely impact parent-child relationships of young children of different ages. Research on the negative

impact of multiple local moves on children's overall growth, development and school functioning (Wood, Halfon, Scarlata, Newacheck & Nessim, 1993) has also been used to demonstrate the potential impact of relocation on children. Extrapolating the results of the general literature on children's mobility to relocation in the separation and divorce context is problematic. Studies of the impact of mobility on children do not always account for other adverse factors that may moderate negative relationships found between mobility and child adjustment that may have contributed to the moves, such as lower socioeconomic circumstances, living in high risk neighbourhoods, employment issues, distance of the move, and the impetus for it, etc. (Austin, 2012). Dong, Anda, Feletti, Dube, Brown and Giles (2005) for example found a relationship between childhood experiences of high mobility (e.g. eight plus moves) and children's negative health outcomes (e.g. increased risk of smoking, alcoholism, depression and attempted suicide) but could not isolate these negative outcomes due to the frequent moves from other adverse experiences (e.g. living in poverty). Studies on mobility also tend not to consider circumstances in which children may be harmed because of limited residential choices prevent moving out of neighbourhoods that impede educational and life chances of children due to economic barriers. Just as frequent moving may harm some children's educational attainment, other children may be harmed by immobility and the long-term exposure to high-risk neighbourhoods. Pettit (2004) for example found that mobility out of high poverty areas has been found to be beneficial for children.

When considering literature reviews of the evidence, it is important to consider the potential for source bias, which is the non-systematic selection of studies to include in a review. Selection bias can have huge implications to the conclusions of the report if unaddressed. Wallerstein, for example, significantly influenced how the courts dealt with relocation cases when she wrote her *amicus curiae* in the United States case *Marriage of Burgess*², where she argued for a presumption in favour of allowing the custodial parent to relocate with the child. Much of this position was based on her own small, non-representative sample and a few low quality studies that showed no association between child adjustment and amount of father-child contact (Braver et al. 2003). Despite the selection bias of the studies included in Wallerstein's brief, the court agreed, helping to begin an international trend in court decisions to permit custodial parents to move with the child. For example, in a New Jersey Supreme Court decision (*Baures v. Lewis*, 2001) that was heavily influenced by Wallerstein's *amicus curiae*, the court affirmed "the simple principle that, in general, what is good for the custodial parent is good for the child" (p. 28).

The problem is further complicated when the courts rely on indirect social science about the factors associated with relocation and when there is insufficient scrutiny about the quality of studies included in these judgements. Braver et al. (2003) recognized that the court has typically relied on weak methodological studies on relocation. Likewise, Austin (2012) has emphasized that borrowing knowledge from the non-divorced population to extrapolate findings for relocation cases within the context of divorce is problematic. It is therefore in this context that this report includes a systematic critical appraisal of existing evidence specific to relocation within the context of separation and divorce. The main goal of this paper is to critically assess the current literature specific to relocation and to assess the strength of their conclusions.

² *Marriage of Burgess*, (1996)13 Cal.4th 25, 51 Cal.Rptr.2d 444, 913 P.2d 473

1.3 Outline of the report

The overall focus of the report is to present the critical appraisal of the empirical evidence of relocation within the context of separation and divorce. The first part of the report presents the information retrieval strategy and screening process for selecting the studies included in this review. The second part of the report is to detail the grading criteria used for assessing the methodological quality of the included studies. The reporting of the methodological strengths and limitation of the included studies is first displayed in the table of included studies and then in a descriptive analysis across the included studies. The last section of the report presents cautions and considerations when attempting to generalize the empirical evidence to client-based decisions, and the tentative conclusions that can be drawn from the research undertaken to date.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this project has been to report on a comprehensive and critical review of Canadian and international social science research on relocation of families, particularly as it applies to families post-separation or divorce. To improve existing knowledge about relocation, this project included a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of the social science evidence to retrieve studies that explored relocation within the context of separation and divorce. The REA approach was used to systematically detail the information retrieval process for the included and excluded studies, to assess the methodological quality of the relocation studies based on a standard assessment form, and to ensure transparency of the review process and results generated from the REA approach.

The review included published and unpublished Canadian and international (e.g., United States, England, Australia, and New Zealand) literature on relocation in the context of separation and divorce. Unpublished articles as well as conference presentations were identified through contact with key persons working in the area. The REA follows established guidelines for the inclusion of published reports (pre-determined inclusion criteria), standard critical appraisal of the evidence and data synthesis to ensure the information retrieval process is explicit and that the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies are transparent.

2.1 *The search for relevant studies*

When searching for published studies in electronic databases the following relevant electronic databases were included: Medline; Sociological abstracts; ASSIA; ERIC; Digital Dissertations @ Scholars Portal; Social Services Abstracts; Social Sciences Citation Index; Family Studies Abstracts; CINAHL; EMBASE; All EBM Reviews - Cochrane DSR, ACP Journal Club, DARE, CCTR, CMR, HTA, and NHSEED; and ISI Web of Knowledge.

Grey literature articles (i.e. unpublished manuscripts, conference proceedings, topical bibliographies, and curriculum vitae's lists) were searched by: Internet search engines (Google, Yahoo, and Altavista), government websites, and organizational websites (CECW, CWLA, etc.). Search term combinations inputted in each database included the following: (*exp relocation; exp mobility; geographic move.mp.; geographic mobility.mp.; geographic relocation.mp.; residential mobility.mp.; residential relocation.mp.*) AND (*exp divorce/; divorce.mp.; separation.mp.; relationship termination; marital separation; divorced persons*).

2.2 *Critical appraisal of the evidence*

To be included in the analysis, included studies needed to have some semblance of a qualitative or quantitative research design, an indication of how cases were selected for the study, information about the data gathering procedures and measures employed, and information about the data analysis methods, along with the findings. This means that numerous clinical and opinion, court file analyses and review articles on the subject of relocation were not included as they do not provide this important information about research design that enables one to evaluate

their findings³. Furthermore, many of these review articles mix findings related to relocation of divorced populations with other indirect findings about children and families in the general population (e.g. overview of local moves in non-divorced populations) and parent-child relationships generally (see for example, Austin, 2012).

In assessing the credibility and precision of the current scientific evidence, it is important to recognize that not all research designs are equal in minimizing biases and controlling for risk of error in the results (Saini, Johnston, Fidler & Bala, 2012). Some research methods provide better evidence than other methods when seeking answers to specific questions. Saini et al., (2012) note that qualitative interviews are preferred for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and are valued for their hypothesis-generating capacity, but they are not well suited for making inferences beyond the study sample. Qualitative studies often include small sample sizes, in-depth interviewing techniques, and consider the local contextual factors of the sample, making it difficult and perhaps misleading to make generalizations beyond the sample participants. To make more sound inferences beyond the sample, it is best to use quantitative surveys using random sampling techniques from a known population. Moreover, when randomized control comparison groups are used within quantitative surveys, studies are better able to isolate any associational relationships found in the target sample that are different from the comparison group.

Methodological rating of the quality of the studies were based on the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) system (Atkins, Eccles, Flottorp, Guyatt, Henry Hill, et al., 2004). In rating the quality of evidence across study designs, it is important to consider the unique methodological considerations for each of the methods used, as there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach for assessing quality (Saini et al., 2012). The quality assessment tool used in this report, therefore, has been adapted from conventional quality appraisal tools to provide sufficient flexibility in rating studies across designs. The author acknowledges, however, that this quality assessment tool favours quantitative designs because of its ability to produce empirical generalizations beyond the samples included.

Determination of quality was determined by the GRADE over eight specific dimensions:

1. Did the study use a random selection from the population parameters that would allow one to generalize the results of the study widely to other similar populations?

³ Four different types of articles were excluded from the review due to relevance to the goals of the project. The first type of article rejected was the *literature review* (e.g. Austin, 2008a, 2008b, 2012; Waldron, 2005; Wallerstein & Tanke, 1996; Warshack, 2000) as these were not primary data sources of empirical evidence. The second type of article rejected was the *court case analysis* (e.g. Bala, Bertrand, Wheeler, & Holder, 2012; El Fateh, 2009) as these considered how the courts dealt with cases of relocation rather than considering the social sciences. The third type of article rejected was the *mobility study* (e.g. Artis, 2007; DeWit, Offord, & Braun, 1998; Frojd, Marttunen, & Kaltiala-Heino, 2012; Gilman, Kawachi, Fitzmaurice, & Buka, 2003; Norford, & Medway, 2002; Woods et al., 1993) as these addressed issues of mobility more generally and they were not specific to the context of separation and divorce. The fourth type of article rejected was the *divorced-sample local moves and/or unspecified moves* (e.g. Adam, & Chase-Lansdale, 2002; Jeynes, 1999; South, Crowder, & Trent, 1998; Speare & Goldscheider, 1987; Stirtzinger, & Cholvat, 1991; Tucker, Marx, & Long, 1998) as these were not specific to relocation issues, but instead focused on the number of moves that families make after separation and divorce. Rejecting these types of articles resulted in very few papers included that focused specifically on relocation relevant samples, but this was important so that conclusions made based on this review would be based on the most relevant articles.

2. Did the study use a comparison or control group that helps to verify the hypothesized preconditions or presence of the effect (or conduct systematic intra-group comparisons)?
3. Did the study use standard measures (those consistently applied within the study) or standardized measures with reported psychometric properties (those consistently applied across studies) for the dependent (DV) and independent variables (IV)?
4. Are data gathered from multiple sources of informants (versus a single source) so that different perspectives of relevant observers are considered (e.g. mothers, fathers, child, clinician, etc.)?
5. Did the study systematically control for extraneous variables that may have influenced the magnitude of the effect (e.g. influence of siblings, age, gender), and/or alternative explanatory factors for the effect (e.g. inter-parental conflict that might explain long term outcomes or problematic/abusive parenting that might explain the child's attitudes to the relocation)?
6. Did the study design establish a temporal order between the dependent and independent variables in order to test for direction of effects or causality?
7. Were the selection and exclusion criteria, response rates and subject attrition explicitly defined and explained so the kind of sample the findings pertain to is clear?
8. Is there sufficient sample power (as determined by sample size, and magnitude of expected effects for independent and control variables) in order to be able to detect robust, statistically significant and clinically important findings?

2.3 *Scoring the studies*

Scoring of the GRADE was based on calculated the scores across the eight dimensions of quality and dividing by two, which resulted in a total score of quality according to the GRADE criteria of quality. The reason for dividing the eight dimensions by two is to create four categories of quality, from very low quality to high quality.

- *Very Low Quality* — (scores 2 or less). Any estimate of effect is very uncertain.
- *Low Quality*—(scores 3-4). Further research is very likely to have an important impact on confidence in the estimate of effect and is likely to change the estimate.
- *Moderate Quality*—(scores 5-6). Further research is likely to have an important impact on confidence in the estimate of effect and may change the estimate.
- *High Quality*—(scores 7-8). Further research is very unlikely to change confidence in the estimate of effect.

The GRADE has been used previously to assess the quality of empirical research within the separation and divorce field. Saini, et al., (2012), for example, used the GRADE to assess the quality of evidence regarding 39 empirical studies on alienation. Assessing the quality of the methodological strengths and limitations of the empirical evidence used to support legal positions in family law matters provides the reader with critical information about the potential strengths and limits of applying the evidence to client-based decisions.

3.0 RESULTS OF THE INFORMATION RETRIEVAL AND INCLUSION OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The information retrieval of electronic databases resulted in 3221 titles and abstracts that were located. To be included, the criteria by which each study was measured against and needed to meet all three were: 1) the article was a study (e.g. cross sectional, longitudinal, experimental, or qualitative); 2) the study included relocation as a variable in the analysis or included samples where relocation had occurred, and 3) the study included samples of individuals who were separated or divorced. Two independent raters coded the studies as either accepted or rejected based on the inclusion criteria.

After the initial screen by both coders, 3089 were rejected, 68 were duplicates, 18 were disagreed upon and 16 were accepted (an inter-rater reliability of 99.9%). The 18 abstracts that were disagreed upon were then discussed between the coders and a decision to include or exclude them was made. Twenty-four studies from the electronic databases were included in the second screen. The information retrieval also included a reference check of recent summary reviews by leading authors in the field of relocation (e.g. Austin, 2008, 2012; Taylor, et al., 2010). Each summary article was reviewed for additional references not captured by the information retrieval of the electronic databases. This resulted in the retrieval of 19 additional studies that met the initial inclusion criteria. In total, 33 studies were passed to the final screening. Upon closer examination of all included studies, 22 studies were excluded because they did not specifically address relocation within the context of separation and divorce. The majority of these excluded studies either did not control for family structure or they did not specifically include separated or divorced samples. The final sample of empirical studies based on this systematic information retrieval of potential studies resulted in 11 studies that met the inclusion criteria (see Table 1).

Table 3.1: Included studies for critical appraisal

| | Source of Research and Purpose of Study | Study Design | Principal Findings | Study Strengths, Limitations and Explanation of Ratings | R ⁴ |
|----|---|---|---|--|----------------|
| 1. | <p>Asher, S. J., & Bloom, B.L., (1983). Geographic mobility as a factor in adjustment to divorce. <i>Journal of Divorce</i> 6(4) 69-84.</p> <p><i>Purpose of study:</i> Determine if men and women of separation and divorce have different outcomes from relocation.</p> | <p>N=83</p> <p>Divorced persons identified based on divorce decrees from Weld County, Colorado and recruited by letter. Also recruited from the separation and divorce program at the University of Colorado who were recently separated.</p> <p>Age: 22-58 years old Gender: 41 males and 42 females Ethnicity: Unknown SES: Poverty line - Lower class</p> <p>Research Method: Telephone interview with participants in a structural interviews format. Symptom checklist, affect balance scale, delighted-terrible scale</p> | <p>While male and female movers did not differ in their reasons for moving, female non-movers based their decision significantly more often than male non-movers on the availability of social supports.</p> <p>The person who chose to move following the disruption of their marriage tended to have a history of more frequent mobility during childhood.</p> <p>Male movers were more poorly adjusted. Female non-movers were more poorly adjusted.</p> <p>No information about the impact of the move on the children.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Random sampling method not used 2. Did not use a comparison or control group 3. Standardized measures with reported psychometric properties were used 4. Data was gathered from multiple informants, both parties of separation or divorce 5. The study controlled from extraneous variables 6. There was a significant sample size 7. A selection and exclusion criterion was defined. 8. Temporal Order not followed | 5 |
| 2. | Behrens, J., & Smyth, B. (2010). Australian family law | N=38 | Almost half (48%) of the relocation cases involved | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Random sampling method not used | 2 |

⁴ R = rating score.

| | | | | | |
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| | <p>court decisions about relocation: Parents' experiences and some implications for law and policy. Federal Law Review, 38(1), 1-20.</p> <p><i>Purpose of the study:</i> Explore the experiences of parents in relocation cases in AUS court</p> | <p>Recruited through parties who had a contested court order in relation to relocation in 2002 – 2005. Age: unknown Gender: 11 female, 27 male Ethnicity: Unknown SES: Unknown</p> <p>Research Method: Qualitative data through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Quantitative aspect with detailed analysis and coding of the population of judgments in relocation cases for the same period.</p> | <p>parent-child contact that occurred on weekends and in school holidays before the court proceeding related to relocation and an additional one third (30%) of cases involved little or no contact, or no overnight stays. Shared care was reported to be occurring in 11% of cases, and in a similar percentage of cases contact was occurring more frequently than every other weekend (11%).</p> <p>Relocation was rarely the end of a parent-child relationship, but rather could be seen as a significant point of transition which parents managed differently depending on their own parenting styles, their relationships, their personal resources and the support available to them.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Did not use a comparison or control group 3. Standardized measures not used 4. Data was gathered from multiple informants 5. The study did not control for extraneous circumstances 6. There was not a significant sample size 7. Selection and exclusion was not defined 8. Temporal Order not followed | |
| 3. | <p>Booth, A & Amato, P. (1993): Divorce, Residential Change, and Stress, Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 18:1-2, 205-214</p> <p><i>Purpose of study:</i> To explore the relationships between divorce, mobility and relocating (respondents were asked if they moved to</p> | <p>N= 1439</p> <p>Recruited through a random – digit – dialling procedure from telephone interviews conducted with 2033 married individuals less than 55 years of age.</p> <p>Age: up to 55 year olds Gender: unknown Ethnicity: unknown</p> | <p>657 of the 2033 participants changed residence. Those who divorced were much more likely to change residence than those who did not. No gender difference.</p> <p>Changing communities was not a factor that distinguished parental stress of those whose marriage remained</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Random sampling method used 2. Use a comparison or control group 3. Standardized measures not used 4. Data was gathered from multiple informants 5. The study controlled for extraneous circumstances 6. There was a significant | 6 |

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| | a different community), and factors regarding it. | SES: unknown Research Method: Telephone interviews at three points with same participant. Multivariate Analysis of findings. | intact from those who divorced. | sample size 7. Selection and exclusion was defined 8. Temporal Order followed | |
| 4. | <p>Braver, S. L., Ellman, I. M., & Fabricius, W. V., (2003). Relocation of children after divorce and children's best interests: New evidence and legal considerations. Journal of Family Psychology, 17(2), 206-219.</p> <p><i>Purpose of study:</i> To examine whether relocation or child or parent caused disadvantages for college students.</p> <p>Relocation defined as: "whether either of your parents ever moved more than an hour's drive away from what used to be the family home?"</p> | <p>N= 602 students (170 of whom had moved with one parent more than an hour's drive away from what used to be the family home).</p> <p>Recruited through large south-western university fall semester intro to psychology class in 2001.</p> <p>Age: Unknown Gender: Unknown Ethnicity: Unknown SES: unknown</p> <p>Research Method: Comprehensive Research Questionnaires of 14 variables were administered. Youth whose parents were separated/divorced answering more questions than those of families who are not divorced.</p> | <p>Students from families in which either a mother or father relocated, with or without the child, were worse off.</p> <p>The children of divorced parents who moved away from parent showed less favorable scores on several variables (hostility, parents getting along, inner turmoil and distress, parental support, and current global health)</p> <p>Those students whose parents both remained in the same geographic location had more positive outcomes than those who had a parent relocate with or without the children.</p> <p>While this is the most widely cited empirical study undertaken in this field, the study does not address the actual distance of the move away (only that it was at least</p> | <p>1. Random sampling method not used.</p> <p>2. Use of a comparison of students of divorced families whose parents did not move.</p> <p>3. Standardized measures not used</p> <p>4. Data was gathered from only one source</p> <p>5. The study did not controlled for extraneous circumstances</p> <p>6. There was a significant sample size</p> <p>7. Selection and exclusion was not defined</p> <p>8. Temporal Order not followed</p> | 3 |

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| | | | <p>one hour drive away) and so caution is needed in interpreting the results because the ongoing contact with the non-moving parent due to the move away is unclear.</p> <p>Retrospective accounts need to be considered with caution given that temporal order cannot be established.</p> | | |
| 5. | <p>Fabricius, W. V., & Braver, S.L. (2006). Relocation, parent conflict, and domestic violence: Independent risk factors for children of divorce. <i>Journal of Child Custody</i>. 3(3-4): 7-27.</p> <p>Purpose of study: Impact of relocation on children of divorce.</p> <p>Relocation defined as: “whether either of your parents ever moved more than an hour’s drive away from what used to be the family home?” *Used same sample as Braver et al., 2003</p> | <p>N= 602 (same sample as Braver et al., 2003)</p> <p>Recruitment through an undergraduate research class in a large southwestern state university. Only students with divorced parents participated.</p> <p>Age: Not reported Gender: Not reported Ethnicity: Not reported SES: Not reported</p> <p>Research Method: Participants filled out questionnaires. Data was analysed using repeated measures ANOVA</p> | <p>In this retrospective study, relocation was associated with negative outcomes for young adults over and above the associations of conflict and violence with negative outcomes.</p> <p>Moveaway status accounted for twice as much variability (9%) in parents getting along than did the only other significant factor, severity of conflict (4.4%).</p> <p>Retrospective accounts need to be considered with caution given that temporal order cannot be established.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Random sampling method not used. 2. Use of a comparison of students of divorced families whose parents did not move. 3. Standardized measures not used 4. Data was not gathered from multiple informants 5. The study did controlled for extraneous circumstances 6. There was a significant sample size 7. Selection and exclusion was defined 8. Temporal Order not followed | 3 |
| 6. | <p>Freeman, M. (2009). Relocation: The reunite</p> | <p>N=36</p> | <p>Many parents complained that there were constant</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Random sampling method not used (selection bias due | 2 |

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| | <p>research. London: Reunite (available online at www.reunite.org)</p> <p><i>Purpose of study:</i> To explore parent-child patterns through the relocation decisions made by the United Kingdom courts.</p> <p>Relocation defined as “where leave to remove from the United Kingdom had been sought”</p> | <p>Recruitment occurred through 89 letters sent to lawyers in 2008 in Scotland and Northern Ireland for parents.</p> <p>Posted an invite notice on their website, participants directly contacts the researcher</p> <p>Age: Not reported Gender: 25 male, 11 female Ethnicity: UK SES: Not reported</p> <p>Research Method: Semi-structured telephone interview format based on a questionnaire. Data was analysed in terms of categories and themes.</p> | <p>problems in exercising the contact that had been ordered by the court granting permission to relocate.</p> <p>No direct evidence, but both mothers who moved away and fathers who were left behind (mostly the latter) noted concerns about how the relocation impacted the children.</p> | <p>to recruitment strategy)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. No use of a comparison or control group 3. Standardized measures used 4. Data was not gathered from multiple informants 5. The study did controlled for extraneous circumstances 6. There was not a significant sample size 7. Selection and exclusion was define 8. Temporal Order not followed | |
| 7. | <p>Grundy, E. (1985). Divorce, widowhood, remarriage and geographic mobility among women. Journal of Biosocial Science. 17(04) 415-435</p> <p><i>Purpose of study:</i> Explore links between divorce and relocation</p> | <p>N= 1971 Census records</p> <p>Census data from the 1971 census in England and Wales and National Health Service Central Register and OPCS.</p> <p>Age: 16 – 59 Gender: female Ethnicity: UK SES: unknown</p> <p>Research methods: completed data extraction and interval analysis of marriage and divorce</p> | <p>Remarried women after divorce had high rates of geographical moves and there seemed to be an increase of moves made around the time of remarriage, shortly after the first marriage.</p> <p>No information about the potential impact of these moves or the impetus (i.e., downward mobility, moving for employment, etc).</p> <p>No information about the</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Random sampling method used. 2. No use of a comparison or control group 3. Standardized measures used 4. Data was not gathered from multiple informants 5. The study did not controlled for extraneous circumstances 6. There was a significant sample size 7. Selection and exclusion was defined 8. Temporal order followed | 4 |

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| | | | outcomes for children. | | |
| 8. | <p>Parkinson, P., Cashmore, J., & Single, J. P. (2011). Reasons for relocation. Canadian Journal of Family Law. Retrieved from Social Science Research Network: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1965299.</p> <p><i>Purpose of study:</i> To consider the reasons for relocating</p> | <p>N=80</p> <p>19 children also interviewed</p> <p>Recruitment through contacting solicitors who work in family law and asking them to refer their clients who had sought advice regarding relocation in last 6 months. Clients contacted researcher directly.</p> <p>Age: Not reported Gender: 40 male, 40 female Ethnicity: Australian SES: Not reported</p> <p>Research method: Mixed method of quantitative and qualitative Participants were interviewed, qualitative analysis completed.</p> | <p>Mothers wanting to move closer to family and friends most significant reason to want to move.</p> <p>Applicant parent has more than one reason to move. Women's reasons relational, men's perception tends to focus on logistics.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Random sampling method not used. 2. No use of a comparison or control group 3. No standardized measures used 4. Data was gathered from multiple informants 5. The study did not control for extraneous circumstances 6. There was not a significant sample size 7. Selection and exclusion was defined 8. Temporal order not followed | 2 |
| 9. | <p>Smyth, B., Temple, Behrens, Kaspiew, & Richardson (2008). Post separation mobility in Australia: Some preliminary data on behavior, disputes, and attitudes. <i>Relocation Disputes in Australia</i>, ed. Behrens, J., Smyth, B., & Kaspiew, R., Australian National University, Canberra, pp. 17-43.</p> | <p>Used third wave of the Caring for Children after Parental Separation Project</p> <p>Fifty-four separated or divorced parents (27 mothers, 27 fathers) took part in the focus group discussions about different aspects of parent-child contact.</p> <p>Respondents were asked: 'If a resident parent wants to move</p> | <p>Disagreements over one of the parents moving were the least common dispute (20% of resident mothers had this type of dispute in comparison to 33% of non-resident fathers). Yet, respondents rated these relocation disagreements as the most difficult to manage.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Random sampling method used. 2. No use of a comparison or control group 3. Standardized measures not used 4. Data was gathered from multiple informants 5. The study did not control for extraneous circumstances 6. There was not a significant sample size | 3 |

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| | | interstate with the children, should they be allowed to do this – (a) regardless of other circumstances? (b) only in certain circumstances? or (c) not in any circumstances? | | 7. Selection and exclusion was defined 8. Temporal order not followed | |
| 10. | Taylor, N.J., Gollop, M., & Henaghan, R.M. (2010). <i>Relocation following parental separation: The welfare and best interests of children</i> (Research Report to the New Zealand Law Foundation). University of Otago, Dunedin: Centre for Research on Children and Families and Faculty of Law. | N = 114 parents Recruitment: through family lawyers and media publicity to take part in the study. Method: Three-year study on relocation following parental separation from 2007 to 2009 | Mothers most often wished to move with 61 (84%) of the mothers desiring to relocate, compared to only two of the fathers. Thirty-one fathers (76%) had opposed their ex-partner's proposed relocation – 11 successfully, 19 unsuccessfully, with one case still to be determined by the Family Court. More mothers successfully relocated (39) than those who were prevented from moving or who, after parental discussion, had agreed not to move (19). | 1. Random sampling method not used. 2. No use of a comparison or control group 3. Standardized measures used 4. Data was gathered from multiple informants 5. The study did not control for extraneous circumstances 6. There was a significant sample size 7. Selection and exclusion was defined 8. Temporal order not followed | 4 |
| 11. | Verropoulou, Joshi, Wiggins (2002). Migration, family structure, and children's wellbeing: A multilevel analysis of the second generation of the 1958 Birth Cohort Study. <i>Children and Society</i> , 16, 219-231. | N= 1,472 UK Cohort National Child Development Study | Relocation in response to family change, including parental separation and stepfamily formation, was not found to have a negative impact on children's wellbeing. | 1. Random sampling method used. 2. No use of a comparison or control group 3. Standardized measures not used 4. Data was gathered from multiple informants 5. The study did not control for extraneous circumstances 6. There was a significant | 4 |

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Note: The following offers explanation to the ratings made in the above table.

1= *Very low Quality* — (scores 2 or less). Any estimate of effect is very uncertain.

2= *Low Quality*—(scores 3-4). Further research is very likely to have an important impact on confidence in the estimate of effect and is likely to change the estimate.

3= *Moderate Quality*—(scores 5-6). Further research is likely to have an important impact on confidence in the estimate of effect and may change the estimate.

4= *High Quality*—(scores 7-8). Further research is very unlikely to change confidence in the estimate of effect.

4.0 CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF INCLUDED STUDIES ON RELOCATION POST-SEPARATION/DIVORCE

The results of this critical appraisal of the literature on relocation suggests the need for caution when interpreting social science research on relocation as there remain no definitive answers that can be derived from the social science research to guide practice. Based on the critical appraisal of the 11 included studies (see table 1), 3 studies were very low quality (scores of 2 or less) indicating that any estimate of effect is very uncertain, 6 studies were low quality (scores 3-4) indicating that further research is very likely to have an important impact on confidence in the estimate of effect and is likely to change the estimate. Two studies were of moderate quality (scores 5-6), indicating that further research is likely to have an important impact on confidence in the estimate of effect and may change the estimate. No studies were of high quality (scores 7-8); where studies are of high quality it indicates that further research is very unlikely to change confidence in the estimate of effect. Studies with the highest rating (due mostly to large sample sizes) were not the studies most relevant to the type of relocation (geographical relocation) as these studies were more likely to mix relocation samples with local move samples, which is not surprising as relocation is a lower frequency phenomenon and requires a specific group of participants.

4.1 *Cautions and issues with the studies*

Based on the overall low quality of the studies reported, the review of findings across the 11 studies should not be considered as generalized comments about relocation, but rather considerations and cautions when considering the factors of each relocation case. Locating relevant, up-to-date data is an ongoing issue; over a third of the studies reviewed are over ten years old. As well, many of the studies did not directly consider the effects of relocation on the children involved and did not address outcomes specific to children. It is with this caution that the included studies are further considered to provide insight into the various factors related to relocation and children's adjustment post separation and divorce.

4.1.1 Methodological issues

The studies analyzed in this paper had an eclectic range of methodological designs. Some studies used qualitative self-administered questionnaires, interviews and surveys (Asher & Bloom, 1983; Booth & Amato, 1993; Freeman, 2009; Parkinson, Cashmore & Single, 2011), while other studies used more quantitative questionnaires (Braver et al., 2003; Fabricius & Braver, 2006). A mixed-methods approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews and detailed data analysis and coding of surveys and ratings was also used (Behrens & Smyth, 2010), and another completed data extraction and analysis from a compilation of data from national census' (Grundy, 1985). Lastly, some studies used a time event history model in a longitudinal study (Parkinson et al. 2001; Taylor & Gallop, 2010). There remains no standard method for studying relocation within the context of separation and divorce.

The majority of studies were replete with methodological flaws such as lack of random sampling, inability to demonstrate temporal order, and the overemphasis on single sources of

data. Although some efforts were made across studies to control for extraneous variables, the majority of these studies overlooked several key variables, such as parental conflict, exposure to domestic violence, and child maltreatment. In fact, less than a quarter of the reviewed studies discussed domestic violence. There is also an overreliance in the relocation literature on the use of self-reported measures. The inclusion of secondary sources (e.g. a teacher's perspective or a copy of the student's academic records) is important to include so as to triangulate with the information provided by parents within these studies.

4.1.2 Location of studies

A majority of the studies on relocation were conducted in the United States. None of the 11 included studies were from Canada. Relocation studies, other than the United States, included studies from Australia, Finland, Denmark, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Due to the vast geographical space and regional differences across Canada, it is imperative that relocation be studied within the Canadian context.

4.1.3 Definitional issues

One of the major limitations of the empirical evidence on relocation is the lack of consistency in defining relocation. Moving after separation can include: moving to a home in the same neighbourhood, to a different city, to a different province and to a different country. There is no consensus on the distance required to distinguish relocation from the more common local move that occurs after separation and divorce. This lack of standard definition of relocation makes it difficult to compare results across studies given the lack of consistency in the variable considered. Many studies (see footnote # 4) were excluded because they focused on local moves (residential mobility) rather than geographic relocation following separation and divorce. To move the field forward, it is important to clearly define and operationalize terms such as 'relocation', 'local moves' so that there is a common understanding and method for measuring moves across studies.

4.1.4 Operationalization of concepts

There also remains no consistency in operationalizing⁵ major concepts related to children's outcomes across studies. For example, measuring "children's outcomes" ranged from assessing substance use, to behavioural problems (which vary in definition), to sexualized behaviours. The difficulty in assessing children's outcomes post relocation is that there remains no consensus in the literature regarding the primary and secondary outcomes for children. For example, positive outcomes for children can include: emotional and behavioural adjustment, academic performance, positive parent-child relationships, positive peer supports, satisfaction, etc. Without a clear framework for assessing children's outcomes, different conclusions can be made about the relative merits of relocation, simply by focusing on different outcomes.

⁵ This means how the concepts are defined and measured in terms of the research.

4.2 *Factors that have been identified relevant to relocation in reviews*

The following provides the results regarding the factors that have been identified as relevant to relocation based on the 11 empirical studies included in the review. By only including relocation studies, factors related to relocation within separating populations were considered, including: 1) reasons for the move; 2) age of sample; 3) children's input into decision; 4) resulting relationship with each parent; 5) post relocation custody and contact arrangements; 6) corollary issues of child and/or spousal support; division of property; and 7) the impact of relocation on children.

4.2.1 Reasons for the move

When parents are seeking to relocate, it is often because at least one of the parents considers the move to be positive for themselves and for the child, such as better employment, housing, education, family support, getting away from family violence etc.

Of the studies that considered reasons for relocating, the main reasons for relocation were related to parental divorce, financial hardship, job advancements, family residential improvements, and remarriage (Fabricius & Braver, 2006;). Asher & Bloom (1983) found that the most frequent reason for moving cited by males was job considerations (55%), while females most often mentioned the presence of a social support system (65%). Forty percent (40%) of both male and female movers stated they left the community in which they had lived while married in order to create some physical distance between themselves and their former spouses. Forty-eight (48%) percent of the movers were returning to an area where they had lived previously. Fabricius and Braver (2006) found that many mothers were motivated to move to get away from their ex partner due to domestic violence concerns. Interestingly, Behrens and Smyth (2010) found that one of the main reasons for leaving of an Australian population was the need to find oneself.

Parkinson, Cashmore and Single (2011) found that seventy-nine reasons for moving were given by the 28 women interviewed. These reasons included: "Move closer to family and/or friends; returning home; lifestyle, including financial reasons; new partner; getting away; escaping violence; work/new job; education for children; and other" (p. 12). According to the fathers interviewed, the reasons included: "lifestyle including financial reasons; move closer to family/return home; work/new job; new start/'get away from me'; new partner" (p. 21).

4.2.2 Age of sample

The studies included a broad range of ages of both children and parents. For example, Freeman (2009) studied youth ages 0 – 18. In contrast, Fabricius and Braver (2006) focused on undergraduate students as young adults looking back in time. Given the nature of the studies, it is not possible to offer any conclusions about the age of the child and the impact of a relocation.

4.2.3 Children's input into decision

A limited number of studies included discussions about the views and preferences of children when relocation was being decided. Taylor and Gallop (2010) included the results of interviews with 44 children who moved and they generally expressed acceptance of and satisfaction with

their situation, whether or not they moved. Factors that were found to assist children in adjusting to relocation included: 1) making friends in the new location and getting involved in extracurricular and sports activities; 2) moving closer to extended family members; 3) moving at a younger age; 4) being able to take personal belongings and pets with them to the new location; and 5) having the support of their parents and siblings.

4.2.4 Resulting relationship with each parent

Braver, et al., (2003) found many negative effects of relocation for children. Both children moving away with mother and remaining with mother while father moved were significantly higher in distress than children where both parents did not move. Children had better total rapport with their parents and saw both as role models significantly more when there had been no moves.

Regarding a child's relationship with their father after relocation, Fabricius and Braver (2006) (using the same sample as Braver et al., 2003) found that move away status accounts for 4.5% of the variability in students' relationship with their fathers, which is similar to that accounted for by "domestic violence ever" (5%) and father hitting mother after the divorce (3%). Parental relocation after divorce itself showed to contribute to the negative impact on children's long-term relationships with their fathers, their adjustment to their parents' divorce, and their ongoing experience of their parents' relationship. These negative long-term outcomes could not be completely accounted for by exposure to parent conflict or domestic violence before, during or after the divorce. Likewise, Parkinson, et al., (2010) found that relocation of a child from a parent could lead to estrangement from the left-behind parent.

Studies documented that relocation can impact both parents' relationships with their children but that the impact is different depending on the factors of the situation. Behrens & Smyth (2010) showed that relocation was rarely the end of a parent-child relationship, but rather could be seen as a significant point of transition which parents managed differently depending on their own parenting styles, their relationships, their personal resources and the support available to them. The authors described two types of long-distance parenting: 1) Separate Homes, Separate Lives: where parents knew little of the child's life with the other parent; 2) Parental Engagement in Both Locations: where the parent was actively involved in the child's life regardless where the child was.

4.2.5 Post relocation custody and contact arrangements

Behrens and Smyth (2010) found that almost half (48%) of the relocation cases involved parent-child contact that occurred on weekends and in school holidays before the court proceeding and an additional one third (30%) of cases involved little or no contact, or no overnight stays. The authors identified three groups to describe the most common patterns both pre- and post-relocation: 1) Rough Roads: most common, this group was characterized by a series of conflicts leading up to relocation request, often continuing after the relocation; 2) Smoother Paths: for this group, relocation was the main reason they were fighting, with conflict dissipating both pre- and post-relocation; and 3) Separate Pathways: the least common situation, where one of the parents has little to no contact with the children and other parent both pre- and post-relocation.

Once relocation occurred, Freeman (2009) found that non-moving parents experienced diminished contact with the child. Several parents reported that indirect contact (e.g. the use of the telephone and/or the Internet) designed to supplement the infrequent physical visits between a parent and child, rarely happened and could not be relied upon as a method of maintaining contact. Indeed, Parkinson, Cashmore & Single (2010) found that even when a request to the court for relocation was granted, contact did not always occur or it temporarily took place but then stopped over time. Where relocation does occur, contact can sometimes seem to end due to "estrangement", sometimes leading to children choosing not to see the parent they no longer live with/near .

Parkinson, Cashmore & Single (2010) found that access after a move could decrease due to estrangement, where the child no longer wants to visit their other parent. As well, there can be an issue with compliance, where parents do not follow the arrangements that the judge's decision stipulated. Often this is in connection to the cost of travel required for access to occur as stated above.

Freeman (2009) found that the costs of international contact must be realistically considered by a court ordering contact, and must not be brushed aside as one of the burdens that a left-behind parent must bear. It may not be possible for the left behind parent to afford the cost of travel and the children may suffer as a result of little to no contact with that parent.

4.2.6 Economic impacts of relocation

Three studies found specific results related to the effect of mobility and relocation on income. Economic strain on both the mover and the non-moving parent was found to be associated with each parent's amount of social support, whether they repartnered, and whether the non-moving parent changed residence. Parkinson, Cashmore, & Single (2010) found that finances are often cited as a motivation for relocation. Although not having a direct impact on income, both parties frequently face large financial burdens due to the cost of court and travel costs if relocation is granted.

4.2.7 The impact of relocation on children

The lack of longitudinal studies specific to relocation makes it difficult to assess the causal links regarding the consequences for children post relocation. In other words, without assessing parent-child relationships prior to relocation, it is not possible to make any inference about the potential contribution to relocation even if parent-child relationships are found to be strained post relocation. Behrens and Smyth (2010) did not find evidence regarding the negative psychological well-being of children after relocation. In contrast, other studies did show some negative effects on children and youth. Fabricius and Braver (2006) found, for example that relocation is a risk factor for children, over and above the risks associated with parent conflict and domestic violence. They did not find clear evidence that moves benefited children by reducing the levels of parent conflict from what they would have been had the move not occurred.

Interestingly, some studies showed specific effects of relocation on children based on gender of both the parents and the children. Braver, et al., (2003) found that children's overall health was significantly lower when a student moved with his or her mother than when neither parent moved. Also primarily female students showed a decrease in health when relocated away from their father.

5.0 DISCUSSION, CAUTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Professionals dealing with relocation cases have a number of factors to consider from social science research on children and families. The main issues that impact relocation case decisions include: the non-residential parent's continued relationship with their children; the potential benefits for and risks to children related to relocation ; the need for long-distance parenting plans in the event of a move; and the rights of the parent wishing to relocate.

Despite the growing literature regarding relocation, there remains uncertainty about the potential impact of relocation on children and parents based on the current available evidence. Warshak (2003) notes that relocation "brings potential benefits to children along with the hazards... weighing and integrating all of these factors is a tall order. Even decisions that appear at first glance to be easy may carry unexpected consequences." (p. 381)

Given the lack of high quality social science research on the factors associated with relocation and outcomes for children, the most appropriate analysis should focus on the best interests of each particular child on a case-by-case basis. As noted by Kelly and Lamb (2003):

...it is seldom possible to identify the predictable and universal consequences of any event as complex as parental divorce or relocation. In the case of relocation, both benefits and costs typically exist, and must be contrasted when determining how children's interests might best be served. In every case, it is thus important to evaluate the potential costs and benefits of both permitting and prohibiting the children's relocation. (p.202)

In each individual case, factors to be considered include: the stated reasons for relocation by the moving parent; any past history of domestic violence and the level of safety created by the move; how the move will enhance the quality of life for the moving parent and child; reasons for opposing relocation by the non-moving parent; the impact of the move on the relationship between the non-moving parent and child; the views and preferences of the child; the age and developmental stage of the child, family and friend relationships of the child at the current and proposed residences; the level of engagement by both parents in the child's academic and extracurricular activities; the child's family and extended social support available at each location; and the opportunity for the child to remain in contact with the non-moving parent via technology (e.g. videoconference, email, instant message) should the move be permitted (Austin 2012; Bala & Harris, 2006; Glennon, 2008; Henaghan, 2011; Saini, Mishna, Barnes & Polak, 2013; Warshak, 2003).

Currently, a general consensus amongst social science researchers appears to be emerging that the best way to decide relocation cases is to provide individual assessments of each case presented, without an assumption for or against relocation and with "the best interests" standard as paramount in each assessment (Austin, 2012).

The lack of guidance provided by the social science evidence clearly supports the need to consider the individual factors of each case rather than making broad assumptions about who

should and should not move post separation and divorce. The social science research literature, is replete with contradictory findings on the importance of the child's relationship with both the custodial and non-custodial parent. It remains unclear how to best apply the various research findings when weighing relocation options. Henaghan (2011) reached a similar conclusion:

Social science can report the experiences of children and parents after separation, and measure how children cope. The difficulty lies in deciding which variables should be given weight in determining outcomes for each particular child. The variables range from the child's own particular internal resources, to the physical and economic surroundings they live in, through to their relationships with parents, peers and others in their life. Determining which one, or combination of these variables, leads to which outcomes is not a precise task. We simply cannot know how life would have been different if a child had, or had not, relocated with a parent (p. 235).

5.1 Considerations and Cautions

5.1.1 The state of the evidence

The extant body of empirical research on relocation comprising 11 studies was reviewed and assessed by conventional standards of quality in order to draw empirically supported general conclusions. As a group the empirical studies were found to be methodologically weak with very limited ability to generalize the results of any one study. The clinician should be wary of the numerous knowledge claims in this field and realize that the empirically supported findings are relatively few. It should be cautioned, however, that these conclusions are likely to change as new and better quality of research becomes available.

5.1.2 Reason for the move

There are a variety of reasons why parents may want to move following separation and divorce. These can include economic reasons, employment opportunities, to return to their place of origin, to be closer to their supports.

5.1.3 Age of the child

To date, there are no defensible estimates of the impact of relocation based on the children's age. It is important, however, to consider each individual child's development, temperament, resiliency and social networks.

5.1.4 Post relocation custody and access arrangements

There has been little systematic follow-up of the potential negative or positive consequences of relocation on children. Retrospective accounts provide some indication of the potential consequences but these are plagued by bias and errors in attribution. Findings are mixed about whether any effects of relocation are longstanding and it seems related to variables uncontrolled in the current evidence.

5.1.5 Children's views

There is a lack of attention in the literature regarding children's views and preferences about relocation. More attention regarding the views and perspectives of children is needed to help inform practice and policy decisions. With the focus on confidentiality and anonymity, social science research involving children's views (e.g. surveys, interviews) provides a unique opportunity to listening to children's thoughts and feelings without further involving them in the conflict between their parents.

5.1.6 Outcomes of relocation

The problem with assessing the outcomes of relocation is that the data used to test these multivariate models have all been derived from cross-sectional studies that are unable to assess the directionality of effects. Only longitudinal studies can ensure that independent variables precede dependent variables in time in order to assert causal direction. As a result, the mixed results about the outcomes of relocation points to the variability of outcomes across families and that each situation should be considered individually rather than making broad generalizations.

5.1.7 Treatment/Intervention

No studies were located to examine the potential benefits of treatment and interventions to support parent-child relationships during and after relocation.

5.2 Conclusion

The negative impact of divorce on children is well documented in the research, as are the protective factors that mitigate the negative impact that divorce and separation can have on children (Austin, 2012, Bala & Harris, 2006, Glennon, 2008, and Wallerstein & Tanke, 1996). What is less clear is how this research applies to relocation. Wallerstein & Tanke (1996) note that relocation for a child who has already experienced the divorce of their parents can represent yet another incident of trauma, while other research identifies the correlation between the well being of the custodial parent and the well-being of the child (Glennon, 2008).

Methodological issues in relocation research have also contributed to the contrasting and unclear findings on relocation. Different definitions of 'moving', different outcome variables, different ways of measuring each outcome variable, and different ages of children studied has impacted the ability of professionals to draw clear findings and implications from the relocation research (McLeod, 2006). Unfortunately there is surprisingly little empirical research evidence about relocation disputes and the impact they have on family members to assist the courts with this task (Braver, Ellman & Fabricius, 2003).

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APPENDIX A SEARCH STRATEGY

For published studies in electronic databases will include relevant electronic databases, such as:

- 1) Medline;
- 2) Sociological abstracts;
- 3) ASSIA;
- 4) ERIC;
- 5) Digital Dissertations @ Scholars Portal;
- 6) Social Services Abstracts;
- 7) Social Sciences Citation Index;
- 8) Family Studies Abstracts;
- 9) CINHALL;
- 10) EMBASE;
- 11) All EBM Reviews - Cochrane DSR, ACP Journal Club, DARE, CCTR, CMR, HTA, and NHSEED; and
- 12) ISI Web of Knowledge.

Searches for grey literature articles (i.e. unpublished manuscripts, conference proceedings, topical bibliographies, and curriculum vitae's lists) will be searched by:

Internet search engines (Google, Yahoo, and Altavista)
Government websites
Organizational websites (CECW, CWLA, etc).

Professional experts on mobility and those who have completed previous reviews on the subject will be contacted for additional sources, including William Austin (US), Nick Bala (Canada), Nicola Taylor (New Zealand).

In addition, the Principal Investigator will work closely with the Department of Justice Canada to ensure all potential studies are included in this review.

APPENDIX B

SEARCH TERM STRATEGY

Primary Search Terms for Information Retrieval (Note: the search strategy is based on OVID and will be adapted for the additional electronic databases as specified in Appendix A)

1. exp relocation
2. exp mobility
3. geographic move.mp.
4. geographic mobility.mp.
5. geographic relocation.mp.
6. residential mobility.mp.
7. residential relocation.mp.
8. 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7
9. exp Divorce/
10. divorce.mp.
11. separation.mp.
12. relationship termination
13. marital separation
14. divorced persons
15. 9 or 10 or 11 or 12 or 13 or 14
16. 8 and 15

APPENDIX C

RAPID EVIDENCE ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) provide a systematic structure to identify and control for different types of bias in existing studies and to establish the comparability (or incomparability) of different studies to consider the potential cumulative effect of what the existing evidence is telling us (Davies, 2003).

Undertaking a systematic review takes time, typically two years. Users of research and evaluation evidence often need quicker access to what the existing evidence is telling them. To this end, REAs have been developed for use in public policy research and evaluation. REAs are based on the principles of a systematic review.

The functions of an REA (Davies, 2003) are to:

- 1) Search the electronic and print literature as comprehensively as possible within the constraints of a policy or practice timetable;
- 2) Collate descriptive outlines of the available evidence on a topic;
- 3) Critically appraise the evidence;
- 4) Provide an overview of what the evidence establishes

The benefit of conducting the REA for this project is that it will allow the Principal Investigator to quickly determine the inclusion of studies so that a stronger emphasis can be placed on developing a thorough and systematic appraisal of these included studies to assess the reliability and validity of the studies and to determine issues of generalizability and applicability.