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Displacement in San Mateo County, California: Consequences for Housing, Neighborhoods, Quality of Life, and Health

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

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Consequences for Housing, Neighborhoods, Quality of Life, and Health

In metropolitan regions across the country, residents face constrained, expensive housing markets and rising income inequality. Middle- and high-income households are beginning to seek more affordable housing in accessible neighborhoods with traditionally lower rents and proximity to jobs and transportation.[1] Many low-income households are simply unable to secure affordable rents.[2] As neighborhoods change and housing demand shifts, landlords are presented with a new set of financial prospects. Displacement and evictions are central components of this changing landscape, altering the geography of race and class across regions. Recent studies have found a spike in evictions in San Mateo County, disproportionately affecting people of color.[3]

There is relatively little research on the impacts of displacement on households, individuals, and communities. Existing research has shown that evictions negatively affect the health, quality of life, and economic outlook for households, often with long-term consequences.[4] This study contributes to this small but growing body of research, with results specific to local Bay Area conditions. We assess the relationship between displacement and housing costs and quality, commutes, neighborhood location and quality, mental and physical health, and healthcare access. We completed in-depth phone surveys with 100 primarily low-income tenants who received services from Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLSEPA), which serves low-income communities in San Mateo County. Survey respondents live in and/or were displaced from San Mateo County communities. These surveys provide a window into the consequences of displacement for households in the San Francisco Bay Area, with implications for researchers and policymakers both locally and across the nation.

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The Institute of Governmental Studies is California's oldest public policy research center. As an Organized Research Unit of the University of California, Berkeley, IGS expands the understanding of governmental institutions and the political process through a vigorous program of research, education, public service, and publishing.

Key Findings

1. Tenants report that, aside from being formally evicted, they were harassed out by landlords, priced out by market forces, and pushed out by poor housing conditions.

2. After being displaced, survey respondents were forced to make difficult and precarious tradeoffs when searching for housing (e.g., substandard housing conditions, crowding, moving far away, etc.), limited by both market forces and exclusionary practices.

3. Approximately one in three displaced households reported some period of homelessness or marginal housing[5] in the two years following their displacement. Several of these households remained homeless even months after they were displaced.

4. After being displaced, only 20 percent of households reported staying in the same neighborhood (within one mile of their previous home). Thirty-three percent of households left San Mateo County, generally moving to the Central Valley or eastern communities in the East Bay.

5. After being displaced, households moved to neighborhoods with fewer job opportunities on average, leading to longer, more costly commutes for households who left the county. These new neighborhoods also had more environmental and safety concerns as well as fewer healthcare resources.

6. Displacement was a significant disruption and trauma for respondents and their children. Two out of three children in displaced households had to change schools.

For the purposes of this research brief, displacement is used to describe a household move caused by a landlord action. Such actions include both formal evictions (i.e., due to owner move-in, etc.) as well as actions often characterized as "soft evictions," such as an untenable raise in rent or landlord harassment.

All names used in this brief are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Displacement in San Mateo County, California:

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Introduction

The San Francisco Bay Area housing crisis continues to grow, characterized by skyrocketing rents, a constrained housing supply, a severe mismatch between housing costs and incomes,[6] and the displacement of low-income communities and communities of color.[7] San Mateo County, located about halfway between San Francisco and San Jose in the heart of Silicon Valley, is no exception, despite having one of the highest median household incomes in California ($101,272).[8] Between 2000 and 2015, San Mateo County lost 44 percent of its "naturally occurring" (nonsubsidized) affordable housing for low-income households.[9] The California Housing Partnership Corporation estimates that in 2015 San Mateo County had a shortfall of 25,882 affordable rental homes.[10] A recent study of evictions cases in San Mateo County found that between 2012 and 2015 there was a 59 percent increase in the number of evictions for people unable to pay rent on time and a 300 percent increase in the number of "no-cause" evictions.[11, 12] These evictions disproportionately affected Latinx[13] and African-American households[14] and are enabled by the fact that none of the cities in San Mateo County, apart from East Palo Alto, have significant rent control or just-cause for evictions protections.[15]

How do the region's housing crisis and displacement epidemic affect the lives of residents? This study responds to both the severity of the crisis as well as the scarcity of research examining the consequences of displacement. The goal of this study was to assess the impacts of displacement on tenants' housing cost and quality, commute, neighborhood, mental and physical health, and healthcare access.

The concept of displacement often conjures up images of an eviction notice, a tenant and landlord in a courtroom, or the sheriff forcibly evicting a family from their home. While such an eviction is certainly one scenario, displacement can be caused by a variety of factors in addition to evictions.[16] For the purposes of this brief, displacement is used to describe any involuntary household move caused by a landlord action, which can include such things as unaffordable rent increases or landlord harassment. Displacement disrupts the stability of a household and a neighborhood. It is critical to note, however, that stability is not the absence of mobility; mobility is the ability to choose to stay or to move. Displacement removes that choice.

Not only is displacement motivated by many factors, but these factors are embedded in the complex, layered stories of peoples' lives. This study supports what previous research has shown, which is that tenants often describe moves in a way that highlights their own control over their housing situation.[17] For example, a respondent may at first report that she has never been displaced or evicted or that she chose to move. However, the same respondent may later share that her landlord was harassing her for many months and threatening to evict her, eventually creating a hostile living situation that forced her to leave. While she was not evicted, she was displaced. Respondents' stories of displacement, their search for housing, and their current living situations reflect an effort to preserve and exercise control over their lives despite the imbalance of power between landlords and tenants and the profoundly exclusive, polarized housing and labor markets of the Bay Area.

UC Berkeley researchers surveyed two groups of households, both of whom had received services at Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLSEPA). The first group (n=58) were displaced from their home in the last two years.[18] These clients are hereafter referred to as having been displaced. The second group, which serves as a comparison group, included clients who either did not move in the last two years or moved by their own choice (n=42). These respondents are referred to as households who were not displaced. CLSEPA staff connected the UC Berkeley research team to potential survey participants. The research team then surveyed individuals who agreed to participate. This brief compares the experiences of displaced households to the experiences of households who were not displaced as well as displaced households before and after they were displaced. Only findings that were statistically significant ($p<0.05$) were included in this brief.[19]

A. The Stories behind Displacement

While the primary goal of this study was to assess the *impacts* of displacement, it painted an important picture of the complex, interconnected factors that lead to displacement.

The survey data illustrate household and landlord dynamics that play out against the backdrop of structural inequalities that characterize urban America. Cities across the country, especially in the Bay Area, are facing constrained, expensive housing markets paired with rising income inequality.[20] For low-wage workers, incomes are simply not keeping up with housing prices.[21] Without limits on annual rent in-

creases, many tenants find themselves unable to pay rising housing costs. In the midst of this housing squeeze, middle- and high-income households are seeking more affordable housing in neighborhoods with traditionally lower rents and proximity to jobs and transportation. These forces often result in even greater housing demand, higher rents, and incentives for landlords to bring new, higher paying tenants into their properties.

KEY FINDING 1. Tenants report that, aside from being formally evicted, they were harassed out by landlords, priced out by market forces, and pushed out by poor housing conditions.

Property sales, landlord move-ins, and renovations were common causes of tenant displacement. About one in five displaced respondents cited the sale of their rental as a primary motivation behind their eviction. One respondent described being displaced from his home in Menlo Park, *"The landlord got an unsolicited offer. They offered him so much money he had to sell it. And he couldn't get paid until I got out."* Several respondents shared that their landlords evicted them to complete renovations. While respondents generally agreed that these renovations were necessary, they lamented that they were displaced in the process. As one respondent explained, *"There were problems with the plumbing; mold was an issue in the kitchen and dining room area. The landlord wanted to fix it [. . .]. He did not give my family the option to come back after it was done."* This respondent and his wife lived in their car for three months after they were evicted. Still other tenants expressed skepticism about whether their landlords intended to follow through on selling or remodeling, or if they were using it as an excuse to force out current tenants.

Deferred maintenance and pests played an important role in respondents' displacement stories. Many low-income tenants face extremely poor-quality housing,[22] and survey respondents in this study were no different. When asked about the conditions of the housing they were displaced from, one in three respondents reported pests (e.g., cockroaches, rats, etc.), one in three reported mold, and one in four reported broken appliances. Poor-quality housing conditions have serious implications for health. For example, pests, mold, and other allergens promote the development and exacerbation of asthma, disproportionately impacting low-income households and households of color who tend to live in older, poorly maintained housing stock.[23]

Several displaced respondents described an eviction prompted by their raising a maintenance or pest issue with their landlord, despite state law prohibiting such retaliation.[24, 25] For example, one respondent who was displaced from Redwood City asked the landlord to change his carpet, which was in poor condition. He wanted the landlord to pay for the new carpet, but the landlord refused. Then, the respondent told the landlord that he would pay out of pocket for the carpet, but the landlord said he did not want to rent to him anymore. He sent him an eviction notice. Similarly, another respondent started to have problems with her landlord in Menlo Park when she complained about cockroaches. After that, the landlord told her to move out of her apartment.

"Then [my landlord] started saying he didn't want to accept Section 8 anymore. He wanted to bring in new kinds of people. He asked me to move. He left a note on the door. He said it wasn't working out. [. . . He] said, 'I'm going in a different direction.' I tried to fight him on it, [but there are] no tenant protections in San Mateo [County]."

One in seven displaced respondents reported that some type of landlord harassment or discrimination contributed to their displacement. Respondents described many different types of harassment that they felt were intended to push them out of their home, including verbal harassment and threats, tampering with cars or utilities, and withholding maintenance. One respondent who was previously working as a security guard for Facebook shared, *"I had to get to work, [and the landlord] told me I was in the wrong parking space. [. . .] My landlord towed my car so I couldn't get to work."* His commute was a 10-minute drive from his home in East Palo Alto but close to 40 minutes by bus. Respondents also reported that discrimination played a role in their displacement, noting perceived discrimination by race and physical ability, as well as for using Section 8 housing vouchers. This type of discrimination, except for the use of vouchers, is prohibited by federal and state law.[26]

Whether they were displaced or not, most respondents were struggling financially. Both rent increases and late rental payments were common. The housing cost burden of respondents is not surprising, given that surveyed households were generally very low-income, with a median household income of $25,480, compared to the countywide median of $101,272. In fact, 87 percent of all low- and moderate-income renters in San Mateo County are housing burdened, meaning they spend over 30 percent of their income on rent.[27] Households facing this financial burden often must forego other crucial household needs such as healthy food, healthcare and medications, or childcare.[28, 29]

Many respondents described multiple factors that contributed to their displacement, including issues of payment. Forty percent of displaced respondents reported that an untenable rent increase was a factor in their displacement, and 30 percent said that a late or missed rent payment was a factor. For example, one respondent was evicted along with her husband and son because they were unable keep up with the rent after she and her husband lost shifts at work. Losing these shifts meant a $3,500 loss in income. That is when *"todo se descontroló"* (everything was out of control), and they could not keep up with payments. In addition, several respondents shared that they were forced to leave their residence because longtime or new landlords were no longer willing to fulfill longstanding, informal arrangements for paying rent, such as flexible payment schedules or paying in installments.

> *"Lo que gana no es suficiente para rentar."*
>
> *"With what you earn, it's not enough to pay the rent."*

B. Difficult Tradeoffs to Secure Housing

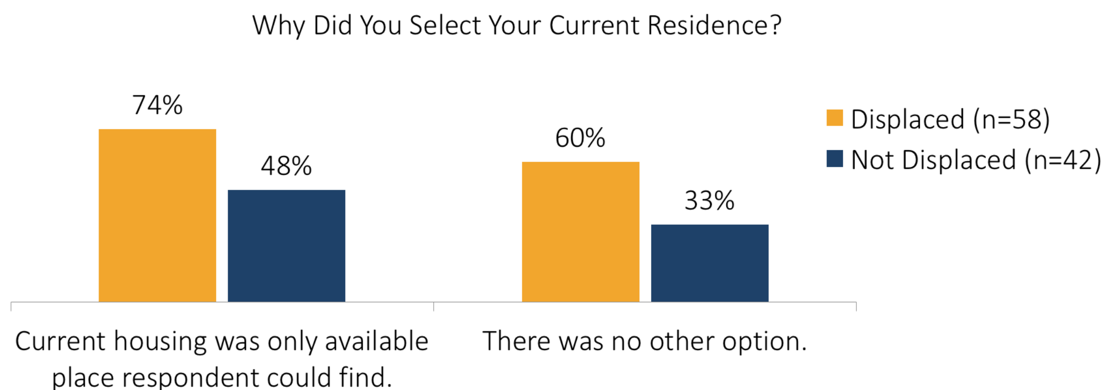
The difficulties of securing housing in the midst of the region's housing crisis are well documented.[30] Within this unaffordable housing market, low-income households, like many of the study respondents, face a desperation and urgency in their search for housing. As one respondent explained, "*The rents are so high everywhere; there's just nowhere to go.*"

KEY FINDING 2. After being displaced, survey respondents were forced to make difficult and precarious tradeoffs when searching for housing (e.g., substandard housing conditions, crowding, moving far away, etc.), limited by both market forces and exclusionary practices.

Households that had been displaced cite desperation and limited choices as the primary reasons for their current housing situation. Compared to respondents who had not been displaced in the last two years,[31] displaced respondents were significantly more likely to have selected their current housing because it was the only available place they could find (74 percent) and/or because they had no other option (60 percent) (Exhibit 1). As one respondent who moved from the city of San Mateo to East Palo Alto explained, *"I moved where I'm living now because it was the only place I found."* In contrast, households who had not been displaced were significantly more likely to cite affordability (74 percent) and access to transit (62 percent) as reasons they selected their current residence. These motivations suggest a more substantial degree of control and freedom of choice for households who were not displaced. This difference in choice may be related to many factors, including the urgency around finding housing following a displacement, the presence of an eviction on a household's rental history, or a more recent move, given that prices have continued to increase dramatically in the region.

Respondents described that, in order to secure housing in their same neighborhood or school district, or anywhere, they were forced to make difficult tradeoffs, including tolerating crowded and poor housing conditions. Crowding was a common problem for households. Respondents shared that the lower rents of a smaller apartment meant limited privacy and strains on relationships with family and friends with whom they were sharing a home. Studies have shown that crowding can negatively impact mental health and increase the risk of exposure to respiratory and other infectious diseases.[32] In addition, researchers have found that children in crowded housing have

EXHIBIT 1. Displaced respondents were significantly more likely to select their current housing because it was the only available place they found and because they had no other options.



lower educational achievement and greater incidence of behavioral problems.[33] Displaced households who could stay in their neighborhood (i.e., moved within one mile of their previous residence) lived in significantly more crowded conditions than displaced households who moved further away, averaging 2.9 people per bedroom compared to 1.9 people per bedroom. This disparity reflects the tradeoffs households were forced to make. One respondent in East Palo Alto articulated this tradeoff, saying, *"I love my neighborhood, even with this rise of multiple people living in one house. [. . . Here you can] get out and talk to each person."*

Similarly, respondents described tolerating poor housing conditions and unresponsive management because their home was more affordable or in a preferable location than other available housing options. These stories support previous research, which has shown that when housing costs are very high, low-income households may accept older or poorly maintained housing. These homes are more likely to contain lead, mold, or pests, which can trigger asthma, as well as dangerous appliances and fixtures that can lead to falls and burns.[34]

"I'm making that sacrifice to be close to my family, to have those great doctors. I know that I'm going to have to make a hard choice very soon. Basically, moving away from my home, the place where I grew up, so that I can support my family solely on my own. Without me taking my kids away from my uncles, aunts, grandmother, teachers, schoolmates."

Several respondents shared that their family had to split up to find housing after they were displaced. For example, after being displaced from their home, one respondent moved two hours away to a town in California's Central Valley, while her partner continued to live in his office during the week, visiting her on the weekends. For another respondent, the distance was even further. After their eviction, she and most of her family moved out of state, but her eldest son stayed in California. *"The move was difficult because [we] all want to be together in California,"* she shared. Even for families that were not forced to split up, when asked where they would go if they had to leave their current home, many respondents said their family would likely need to split up.

Practices of exclusion and discrimination exacerbated housing tradeoffs. Respondents cited a lack of credit as a primary barrier to securing housing, limiting their options. One respondent who was displaced from his home in Redwood City but was able to find another house nearby explained, *"The landlord refuses to fix our apartment, but this was the only place where they did not ask for too much documentation. The other, nicer places needed recommendations and credit."* Another respondent explained that he had to find housing in Modesto, a Central Valley town, because, *"all the places around the Bay Area required a credit check,"* which he couldn't provide. Respondents also cited discrimination when they tried to apply for housing with a Section 8 voucher or if they had children. One respondent shared, *"No one would rent to me. If it wasn't for income not making three times the rent it was the hours I worked. I didn't comply with what they expected of residents. I'm a single mother with young children."*

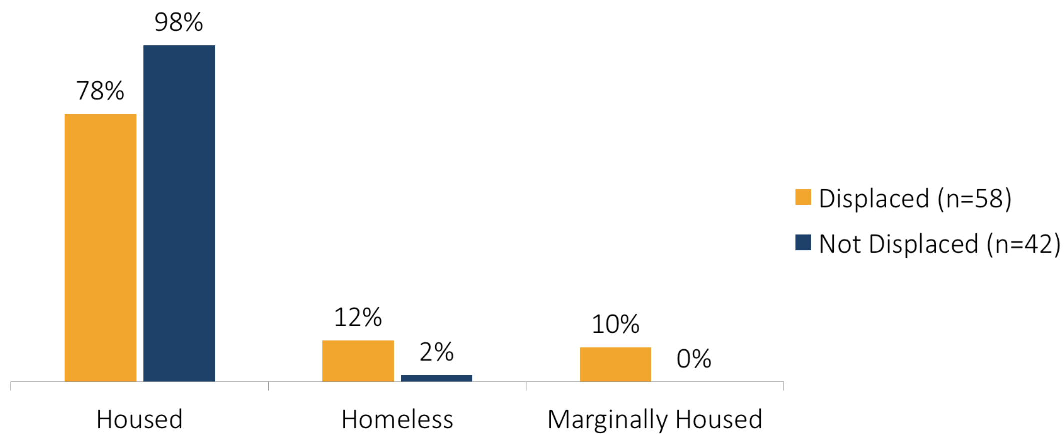
C. Homelessness and Marginal Housing

Homelessness and other precarious living situations were often part of the stories told by displaced survey respondents. For this study, a respondent was considered homeless if they self-reported living in a shelter, in an abandoned house, on the streets, or said they were "homeless." A respondent was considered marginally housed if they self-reported living in a motel or hotel, renting a garage, or living with family or friends without independent space.[35] Research has shown that homeless individuals are at greater risk for stress, communicable diseases (e.g., tuberculosis, respiratory infections, etc.), malnutrition, violence, and harmful weather exposure. Being homeless also makes it more challenging to treat common conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and asthma.[36] Marginal housing can pose many of the same health risks and additional health concerns associated with crowding, depending on the housing arrangement.

KEY FINDING 3. Approximately one in three displaced households reported some period of homelessness or marginal housing in the last two years following their displacement. Several of these households remained homeless even months after they were displaced.

Respondents who had been displaced were significantly more likely to be currently homeless or marginally housed compared to those who were not displaced. Of displaced respondents, 12 percent were currently homeless and 10 percent were marginally housed. In comparison, only two percent of households that had not been displaced were currently homeless and none were marginally housed (Exhibit 2). Most respondents who were currently "doubling up" with family or friends (considered marginal housing) did not anticipate being able to find a different housing arrangement any time soon.

EXHIBIT 2. Displaced respondents were more likely to be homeless or marginally housed.



Latinx households who had been displaced were significantly less likely to be homeless but more likely to be marginally housed and living in crowded conditions. Of displaced Latinx respondents, only three percent were homeless. However, Latinx households were significantly more likely than other survey respondents to be marginally housed and living in crowded conditions.

Respondents experiencing homelessness described feeling insecure, unsafe, and burdened by the effort required to meet their basic needs. One respondent living in his car in San Bruno shared, *"Where I'm at [in my car], I can't stay here forever. Police have been by. I'm sure the people in this neighborhood don't appreciate having someone living on the street."* Another respondent who was evicted twice before being forced to live in his car described his daily routine; *"[I] get up at 4:30 in the morning, sponge bath off at the gas station, get cleaned up and shave. Nobody knows I'm homeless. I try and act like I'm a normal person."*

One in three displaced respondents experienced some period of homelessness or marginal housing following their displacement. Only two percent of respondents who had not been displaced had been homeless and/or marginally housed at any point in the last two years. In significant contrast, 33 percent of displaced respondents had experienced at least one period of homelessness or marginal housing in the last two years (Exhibit 3). Many of these respondents anticipated that these periods would be temporary, but they often spent weeks or months without finding new housing. Several respondents lived for months in hotels or motels while they searched for housing. One respondent described her family's search for housing after being displaced from their home in Daly City, "*During that time we moved away, we were staying at hotels every day [. . .] for eight months.*"

Respondents described the ways in which the instability and costs associated with these periods of homelessness or marginal housing had ripple effects that impacted many different aspects of their lives. After being displaced from her home in Daly City, one respondent who works at San Francisco International Airport explained, "*I was frustrated. Homeless at the time, all I cared about was somewhere to sleep and take a shower and go to work. I didn't want to lose my job and be completely homeless.*" Another respondent and her family lived in motels for four months following her displacement, and she ended up using most of her savings.

EXHIBIT 3. Displaced respondents were more likely to have been homeless and/or marginally housed at least once in the past two years.

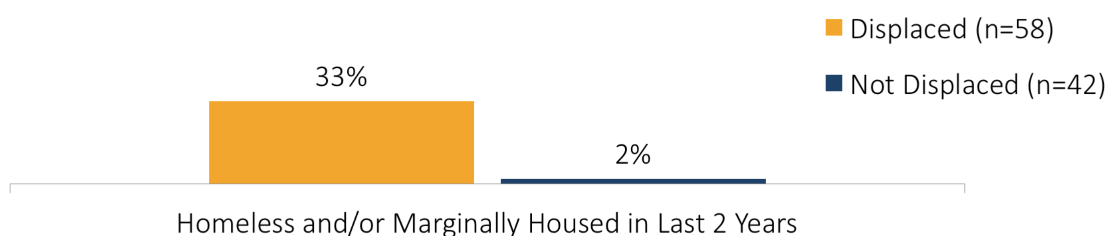
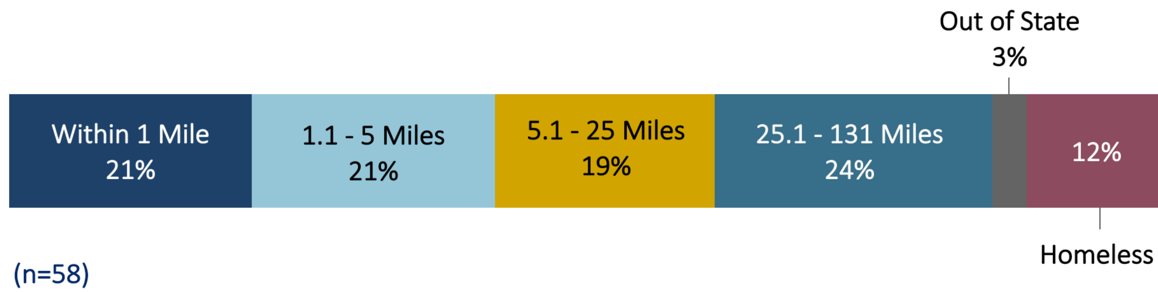


EXHIBIT 4. Only 1 in 5 displaced respondents live in the same neighborhood (within 1 mile) as before they were displaced. One in four are currently living over 25 miles from their original neighborhood.



After her daughter left for college, the respondent went to live at a shelter. However, her daughter subsequently left college to work and support the family financially.

D. Where Do Households Move?

Much of the existing research on displacement in the Bay Area relies on secondary data, which illustrates dramatic demographic changes throughout the region, including increases in people of color, low-income, and renters in the outer areas of the region.[37] Patterns of displacement and mobility can be inferred from these analyses. However, there is very little data available that follows specific households as they move from one neighborhood or county to another. This study allows for this household-level analysis.

Robin's Story

Robin and her husband were evicted from their home. She has a disability and currently uses a wheelchair. Robin's landlord told her she needed to leave because the landlord wanted to move into her room. Since she was displaced in 2014, Robin and her husband have been staying with their adult son in his 1-bedroom apartment and contributing $200 a month towards the rent.

> *"I had two choices, my son's place or the street."*
>
> *"If my son had his own room, he'd have a little bit of privacy. We're all in the same room with him. He can't have his life, he told me, 'You took my life.' I'm trying really hard to get my own place so we can live in peace."*

Robin seemed pessimistic about their ability to find other housing.

> *"It's impossible to get a place. I've been trying for two years to get a place. Now the rent is raised so high, I don't know how we're going to do it [. . .]. He [Robin's husband] can't get a job, because he has to take care of me."*

KEY FINDING 4. After being displaced, only 21 percent of households reported staying in the same neighborhood (within 1 mile of their previous home) (Exhibit 4). Thirty-three percent of households left San Mateo County, generally moving to the Central Valley or eastern communities in the East Bay (Exhibit 5).

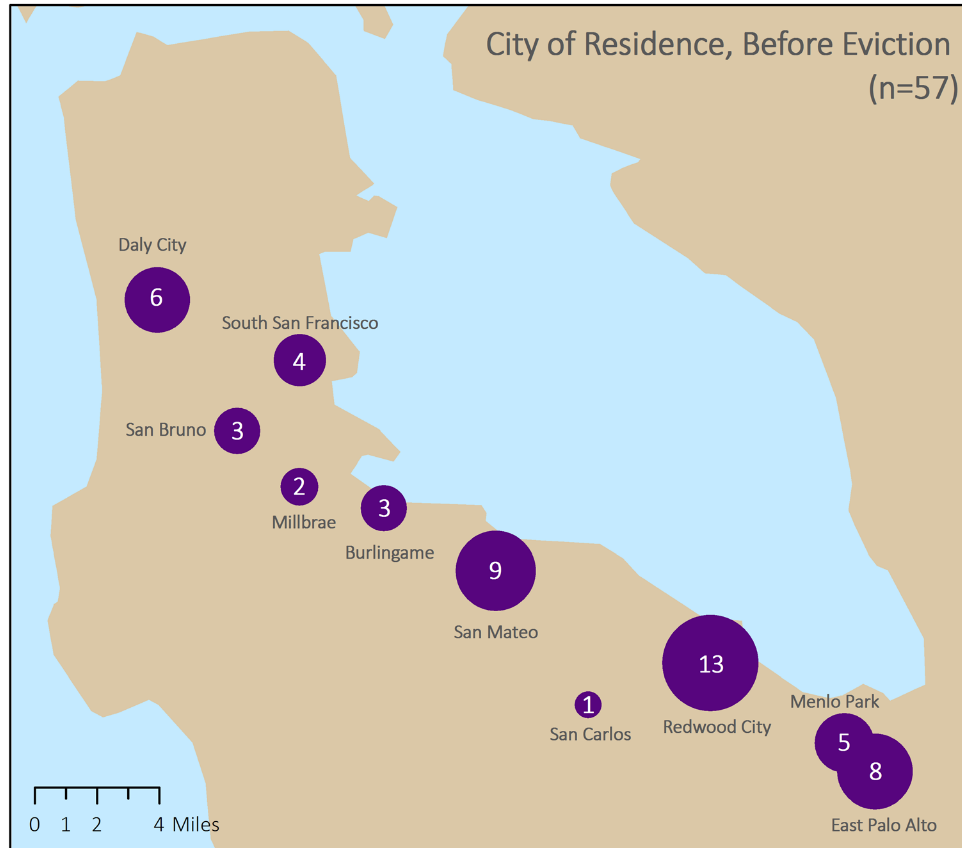
E. New Communities, New Challenges

Most households who can secure new housing after being displaced find their new home in a new neighborhood, city, or even region. These new neighborhoods can be very different than a household's previous neighborhood, especially for the one in three displaced households who no longer live in San Mateo County. While these neighborhoods offer more affordable housing opportunities on average, they lack other types of opportunities and supports.

KEY FINDING 5. After being displaced, households moved to neighborhoods with fewer job opportunities on average, leading to longer, more costly commutes for households who left the county. These new neighborhoods also had more environmental and safety concerns as well as fewer healthcare resources.

Displaced households found new homes in communities with more affordable housing but less economic opportunity. This often translated to longer and more costly commutes. Households who were displaced currently live in neighborhoods with more affordable housing but access to fewer jobs, scoring over 10 points lower on the HUD Job Access index (on a 100-point scale) than the neighborhoods of households who were not displaced.[38] While the change in commute time for displaced respondents who found new

EXHIBIT 5. Most displaced households who left San Mateo County moved to the Central Valley (e.g., San Joaquin, Merced, and Stanislaus counties) or eastern communities in the East Bay (e.g., Vallejo, Pittsburg, Hayward).



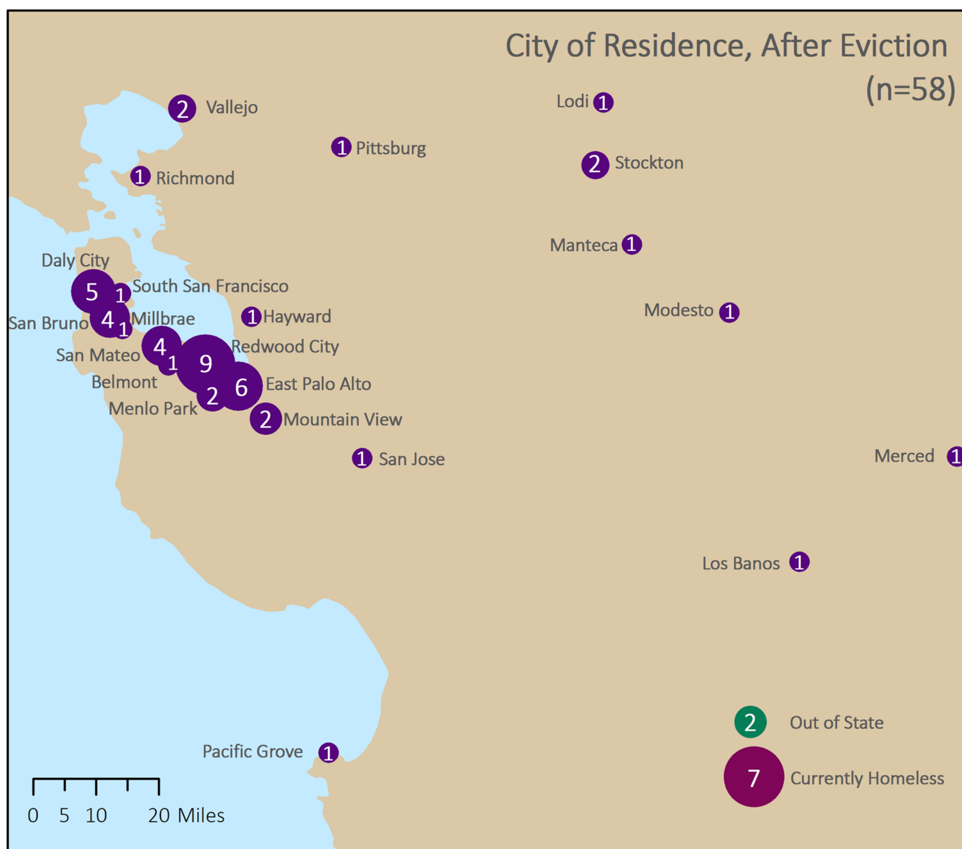
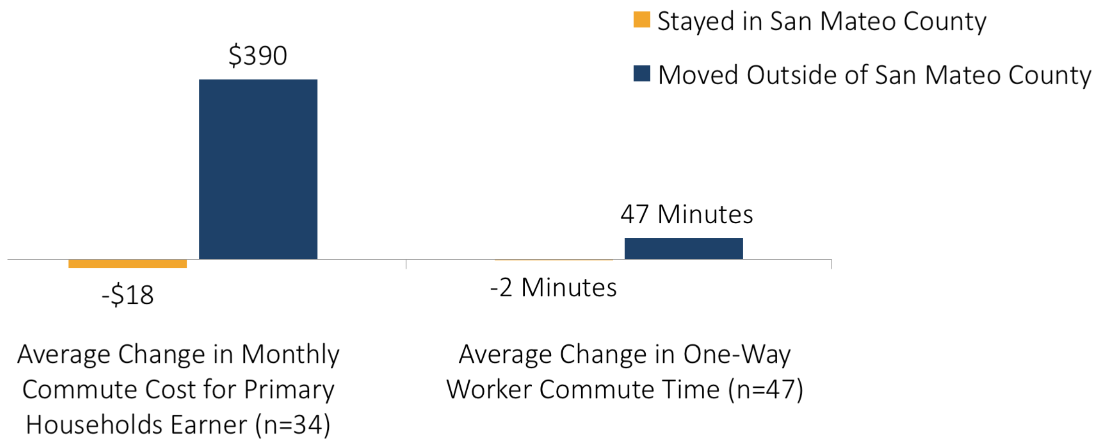


EXHIBIT 6. Displaced respondents who moved outside of San Mateo County saw significant increases in commute cost and time.

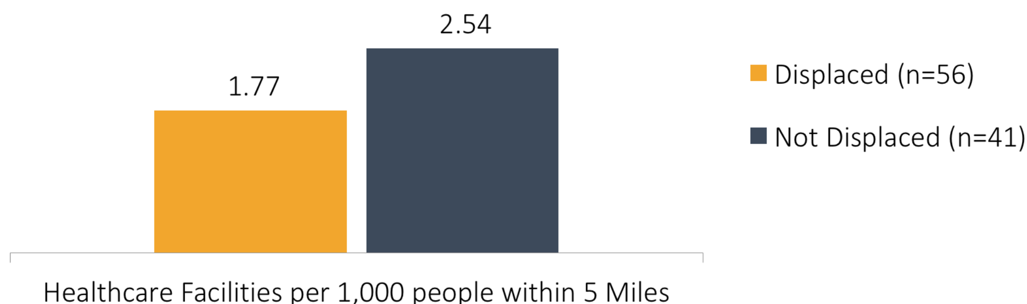


housing elsewhere in San Mateo County was negligible, the one-third of displaced workers who moved outside of the county saw their commute time increase significantly by an average of 47 minutes. Prior research has associated longer commutes with lower rates of physical activity and lower cardio-respiratory fitness as well as higher stress and blood pressure.[39] Similarly, average commute cost for displaced respondents who stayed in San Mateo County was negligible; however, respondents who left the county reported an average increase in commute cost of $390 per month (Exhibit 6). Compared to displaced respondents who found new housing within San Mateo County, displaced respondents who left the county were also less likely to live within a 10-minute walk of public transportation.

Respondents shared how moving far away negatively impacted their employment and commute. As one respondent who currently works as an Uber driver described, *"I'm finding it really hard to get a job or to keep a job out here in Merced. They'll hire you, they'll give you anywhere from 10-12 hours a week. But it's really hard income-wise. What I'm doing right now is I have to actually come to the Bay Area and work here and come back to Merced. It's highly likely that we'll have to move closer."* Another respondent who moved to Stockton still works in Richmond, but now she commutes two hours each way.

Respondents who were displaced felt significantly less safe in their new neighborhood, but perceptions of safety varied depending on where respondents moved. When asked about perceived safety in their neighborhood, displaced respondents were more likely to report feeling safer in the neighborhood from which they were displaced than their current neighborhood. Many respondents who lived in or near their original neighborhoods in San Mateo County shared that their neighborhood was not safe, but they did not expect to move to another neighborhood. As one respondent living in East Palo Alto explained, *"I feel very safe [in my neighborhood], but it's not a safe neighborhood."* Safety concerns were especially salient for women who described feeling limited in where and when they could go out in their neighborhood, especially at night.

EXHIBIT 7. Households who had been displaced currently live in neighborhoods with significantly fewer healthcare facilities available for its residents.



Access to healthcare services was diminished for displaced households, especially for those who had to leave San Mateo County to find housing. Compared to households who were not displaced, displaced households lived in neighborhoods with significantly fewer healthcare facilities. Displaced households lived in neighborhoods with an average of 1.77 healthcare facilities per 1,000 people within five miles. In comparison, households who were not displaced lived in neighborhoods with 2.54 facilities per 1,000 people within five miles (Exhibit 7).[40] Among displaced respondents, those who stayed in San Mateo County were significantly more likely to report having a medical home[41] (88 percent), compared to households who moved outside of the county (56 percent). Having a medical home is associated with improved quality of care and patient experiences as well as reductions in hospital and emergency department visits, which are often expensive.[42] In addition, respondents with chronic health issues shared that the move and distance created challenges in accessing healthcare services. As one respondent explained, *"[Now] I have to change buses to go to my [doctor] appointment. Sometimes I miss my appointments because I don't have the money [for the bus ticket]."*

In addition to a lack of healthcare faculties, the new neighborhoods of displaced households had more environmental and health risks on average than their previous neighborhoods. For respondents who were displaced, their new neighborhoods have significantly poorer air quality (i.e., concentrations of ozone and particulate matter),[43] which may increase the risk of displaced respondents to develop adverse health conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and respiratory illness. In fact, their new neighborhoods have significantly higher incidences of cardiovascular disease compared to their previous neighborhoods.[44]

F. The Trauma and Disruption of Displacement for Adults and Children

While displacement is tied to many material consequences, it is also linked with more personal and psychological disruptions. Previous research has shown that people experiencing housing insecurity are almost three times more likely to be in frequent mental distress than those who have secure housing.[45] Research has also shown that evictions are associated with increased risks of depression and stress that can have impacts for years following the eviction.[46] Survey respondents shared that their children also suffer from the disruption of displacement in school and peer networks as well as the reverberations from family stress and trauma.

KEY FINDING 6. Displacement was a significant disruption and trauma for respondents and their children. Two out of three children in displaced households had to change schools.

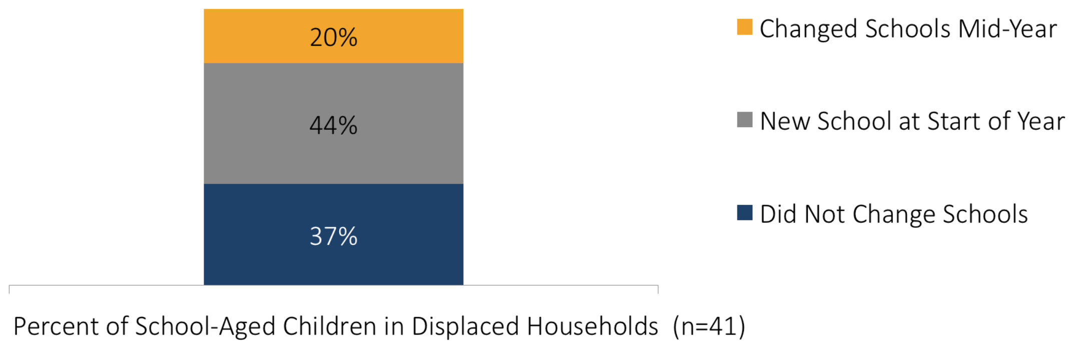
Respondents shared how being displaced was a significant trauma and source of stress for them and their children. Survey respondents described how the shock and stress of their displacement impacted their health and well-being, both during the displacement process and well into the future. One respondent who was displaced and eventually moved out of state explained, *"It was like a sock in the stomach, it took my breath away. I cannot get over this. Every single day has been a black day for me. I just cannot get over it. [. . .] I am struggling."* Another respondent who lived in his Redwood City home for 19 years said the move represented *"un daño psicológico muy grande" (a great psychological harm).* Respondents also described how their own stress impacted their children. *"[Our displacement] was very difficult,"* one respondent said, *"One week I did not eat. I cried a lot. I stressed; my daughter is also with me. [. . .] It lingers. A lot of sadness and a lot of stress."*

Respondents also shared how displacement caused disruption and trauma for their children and their education. About two-thirds of children (64 percent) in displaced households had to change schools. One in five children had to change schools mid-year (Exhibit 8). About two-thirds of parents (61 percent) said that changing schools negatively affected their child's academic performance. For example, a respondent explained that the move to Stockton had affected his children both academically and emotionally, but that they were slowly getting *"back on track."* Another respondent said her main concern following their move to Richmond was that her two children had to change schools, which they did not like. These findings can be considered in the context of the broader literature, which has shown that children in displaced households have more absences, a lower likelihood of finishing school, and a greater risk of educational delays or behavior problems.[47] Changing schools may also mean disconnection from other place-based social services or resources within a school or district.

Conclusions

This study supports the existing literature on the impacts of housing instability and evictions as well as the geographic transformation of race and class underway in the San Francisco Bay Area. Adding to existing research, this study provides nuanced, personal insights into the experiences of individuals and families striving to determine their own future within one of the most constrained and polarized housing and labor markets in the country. While this study reflects only a small sample of respondents, the findings offer an important window into these household experiences. Capitalizing on the inherent power imbalance between landlords and tenants, these market conditions allow illegal landlord practices to flourish, such as discrimination

EXHIBIT 8. Two-thirds of displaced children had to change schools; 1 in 5 changed mid-year.



and retaliation for maintenance requests, and have led to an increase in landlord practices that are legal in most cities in San Mateo County, such as no-cause evictions where the tenant is not at fault. These practices have serious implications for household stability and health.

Displaced households faced a dangerous combination of limited opportunity and urgency in their search for housing, forcing them to make compromises that could be personally painful, socioeconomically limiting, and detrimental to their health. Forced to move away from their neighborhoods, households faced longer, more costly commutes and reduced access to public transit. This can mean more sedentary time commuting and less physical activity and time with families. Forced to pay more for housing, families are more likely to forego other household expenses like food, medications, or childcare. And when forced to accept poor housing conditions, such as overcrowding, mold, or pests, households are at greater risk of asthma, respiratory illness, communicable diseases, and stress. Homelessness and marginal housing, often considered fringe experiences, were startlingly common among displaced households. These living conditions compromised households' safety, social networks, and health. Displacement itself is deeply traumatic, compromising the mental health of households both immediately and for months or years after a family is forced to move. Finally, children bear the impacts of displacement through disruption in both their home and educational environments.

This study represents a modest first attempt to document the individual experiences of displaced households. Certainly, further research is needed to examine the experiences, causes, and consequences of displacement. This work should be expanded to different cities, counties, and regions. Even more urgent, however, is a need to implement policies and strategies to prevent displacement. Displacement is a national problem, a regional phenomenon, and a community experience. We must similarly seek to identify, evaluate, and enact policy change at all levels.

Notes

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[2]Joint Center for Housing Studies, "America's Rental Housing: Expanding Options for Diverse and Growing Demand" (Harvard University, 2015).
http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/americas-rental-housing

[3]The Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County, and Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto, "San Mateo County Eviction Report 2016" (2016).
http://www.legalaidsmc.org/Eviction_Report_2016.html

[4]Matthew Desmond and Rachel Tolbert Kimbro, "Eviction's Fallout: Housing, Hardship, and Health," *Social Forces* 94, no. 1 (August 18, 2015): 295–324.

[5]For this study, a respondent was considered homeless if they self-reported living in a shelter, in an abandoned house, on the streets, or said they were "homeless." A respondent was considered marginally housed if they self-reported living in a motel or hotel, renting a garage, or living with family or friends without an independent space (e.g., sleeping on the couch). Criteria for marginal housing was informed by: Natasha V. Pilkauskas, Irwin Garfinkel, and Sara S. McLanahan, "The Prevalence and Economic Value of Doubling Up," *Demography* 51, no. 5 (October 1, 2014): 1667–76.

[6]Chris Benner and Alex Karner, "Low-Wage Jobs-Housing Fit: Identifying Locations of Affordable Housing Shortages," *Urban Geography* 37, no. 6 (August 17, 2016): 883–903.

[7]Tony Roshan Samara, "Race, Inequality, and the Resegregation of the Bay Area," *Urban Habitat* (November 2016).
http://urbanhabitat.org/sites/default/files/UH%20Policy%20Brief2016.pdf

[8]U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

[9]U.S. Census 2000; U.S. Census American Community Survey, five-year estimates 2010–2015. Naturally occurring affordable housing was estimated based on the number of low-income households who were not rent burdened, excluding all subsidized units.

[10]California Housing Partnership Corporation, "San Mateo County Housing Need 2017," (2017).

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[11]A "no-cause" eviction is one where the landlord gave no reason for the eviction and the tenant was not at fault.

[12]The Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County, and Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto. "San Mateo County Eviction Report 2016," 2016.
http://www.legalaidsmc.org/Eviction_Report_2016.html

[13]Latinx refers to people of Latin American origin or descent; a gender-neutral alternative to Latino/a (pronounced lah-teen-ex).

[14]The Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County, and Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto. "San Mateo County Eviction Report 2016," 2016.
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[15]Just cause statutes are laws that allow tenants to be evicted only for specific reasons, such as rent nonpayment or lease violation. San Carlos, Foster City, and Redwood City each have minimal provisions for a rent review board and mediation and/or a just cause protections for redevelopment/conversion of an existing site.

[16] Miriam Zuk, Ariel Bierbaum, Karen A. Chapple, Karolina Gorska, and Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, "Gentrification, Displacement, and the Role of Public Investment," *Journal of Planning Literature* (forthcoming).

[17]Matthew Desmond and Tracey Shollenberger, "Forced Displacement from Rental Housing: Prevalence and Neighborhood Consequences," *Demography* 52, no. 5 (October 1, 2015): 1751–72.

[18]Displacement may have occurred through a formal eviction (i.e., no-cause evictions, owner move-in evictions, tenant nonpayment, etc.) or through actions characterized as "soft evictions," such as an untenable raise in rent or landlord harassment.

[19]Full details on study methods can be found in the Appendix.

[20]Joint Center for Housing Studies, "America's Rental Housing: Expanding Options for Diverse and Growing Demand" (Harvard University, 2015).
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http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2011/05/housing-and-health.html

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[24]Cal. Civ. Code § 1942.5.

[25]Marcia Stewart, "California State Laws Prohibiting Landlord Retaliation." www.nolo.com. Accessed May 7, 2017.
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https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/FHLaws/yourrights

[27]U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Low- to moderate-income includes households who make less than $75,000 a year.

[28]Margot B. Kushel, Reena Gupta, Lauren Gee, and Jennifer S. Haas, "Housing Instability and Food Insecurity as Barriers to Health Care among Low-Income Americans," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 21, no. 1 (2006): 71–77.

[29]"The State of the Nation's Housing 2016." Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2016.
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[30]JefferyMarino, "Home Sales and Prices Pick Up Steam as Supply Shortage Continues into Spring," *Redfin Real-Time*, April 13, 2017.
https://www.redfin.com/blog/2017/04/march-2017-real-time-housing-market-tracker.html

[31]Respondents who were not displaced either did not move in the last two years or moved by their own choice.

[32]JefferyLubell, Rebecca Morley, Marice Ashe, Linda Merola, and Jeff Levi, "Housing and Health: New Opportunities for Dialogue and Action" (National Center for Healthy Housing, 2011).
http://www.changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/Health%20%20Housing%20New%20Opportunities_final.pdf

[33]Claudia D. Solari and Robert D. Mare, "Housing Crowding Effects on Children's Wellbeing," *Social Science Research* 41, no. 2 (March 2012): 464–76.

[34]BARHII Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative, "Displacement Brief," 2016. http://barhii.org/displacement/

[35]Criteria for marginal housing was informed by: Natasha V. Pilkauskas, Irwin Garfinkel, and Sara S. McLanahan, "The Prevalence and Economic Value of Doubling Up," *Demography* 51, no. 5 (October 1, 2014): 1667–76.

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[43]Respondent address data was combined with healthcare facility data from the CalEnviroScreen 3.0 Index.

[44]Ibid.

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[47]BARHII Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative, “Displacement Brief” (2016). http://barhii.org/displacement/

[48]U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

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Appendix

Methods

For this study, the research team surveyed two groups of households, both of whom had received services at Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLSEPA). The first group of clients received limited-scope legal assistance from CLSEPA and had settled their eviction cases by agreeing to move out or were otherwise pushed out of their home in the last two years. Throughout the brief, these clients are referred to as having been displaced. The second group, which serves as a comparison group, included clients who either did not move in the last two years or moved by their own choice. CLSEPA staff screened clients for basic eligibility and asked clients if they would be willing to release their contact information to the UC Berkeley research team. Forty-three percent of clients screened by CLSEPA agreed to be contacted. UC Berkeley research staff then contacted these clients to conduct in-depth surveys in English and Spanish over the phone.

The survey asked about housing, health, rent, social networks, neighborhood conditions, work, and school. Seventy percent of eligible contacted households (100 respondents) completed the survey (Exhibit 9). Fifty-eight respondents were displaced in the past two years. Forty-two respondents were part of the comparison group, 33 of whom had not moved in the last two years, and nine of whom had voluntarily moved. The median household income of all respondents was $25,480 annually, compared to $101,272 countywide.[48] Sixty percent of respondents were Latinx, 16 percent were white, 12 percent were black, and 12 percent were multiracial.

Quantitative data from the surveys was analyzed with STATA statistical software, using a combination of descriptive statistics as well as chi-square and t-test analyses to assess differences between the two groups and between previous and current housing. Only findings that were statistically significant ($p<0.05$) were included in this brief. Qualitative data, which included open-ended survey questions, audio transcriptions from surveys, and surveyor notes, were analyzed using Dedoose and coded thematically based on original research questions and preliminary quantitative findings.

Recruiting and surveying the individuals in this study presented several challenges. The study population includes individuals who have experienced and continue to experience profound housing and economic instability. The study team often found it challenging to schedule survey phone appointments with potential respondents due to work and childcare schedules, disconnected phone lines, and respondent difficultly finding quiet, private spaces to complete the survey. This was especially true for respondents who were currently homeless or marginally housed.

EXHIBIT 9. Survey Respondents (n=100)