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Money As An At-Risk Factor For Student Loneliness

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MOBILITY AS AN AT-RISK FACTOR

FOR STUDENT LONELINESS

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ABSTRACT

Student alienation is a complex and difficult experience for adolescents. One factor that counteracts alienation is peer acceptance. Often the changing of schools makes it difficult for adolescents to be accepted by their peers. This lack of peer acceptance often brings on feelings of loneliness. This study sought to determine if changing schools had a significant effect on student loneliness. Twenty mobile, or new, middle school students were compared with 26 stable students, who had been at the middle school since the beginning of their sixth grade year, to see if changing schools had a significant effect on student loneliness. The instrument for this causal-comparative study was the Children's Loneliness Questionnaire (CLQ), a self-administered, 24-question survey. Mobile students scored significantly higher on the loneliness scale than stable students. This may indicate that mobility is a possible at-risk factor for student loneliness.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Today it seems that more and more adolescents are feeling a sense of alienation. There are more families with both parents in the workplace than ever before. Also, there is an increase in one-parent families. This all leads to less time spent with the adolescent. Many children, especially teens, are left to fend for themselves (Eisenberg, 1991).

This isolation from the parents puts a greater emphasis on the child's ability to fit in at school and with peers. Middle-school-aged children might have it the toughest. It is during this time in their young lives that they are going through numerous changes. Such changes include hormonal changes, preoccupation with the self, family relationships, and role changes (Gullotta, 1983). With all of these new changes, and less guidance from the home, it should be no surprise that many adolescents experience a sense of alienation.

Historically, the family was more important than education. Young women resigned themselves to raise families and young men followed in their father's path of work. There was little mention of peer groups for youths. It was not until the labor force movement that the family's dependency shifted. It moved from the internal dependency on the family unit to a more external dependency upon employers. This movement redefined education for young people and started a trend of putting less emphasis on the family unit (Gullotta, 1983).

Today that same trend has ballooned into a society of more independent people. While people have become increasingly independent, there is still a need for social interaction, especially for adolescents. With the family becoming less cohesive, it becomes even more important for adolescents to feel comfortable in their school environment. They need a sense of belonging.

According to Alfred Adler, an Austrian psychologist who specialized in individual psychology, there is an innate need of all humans to live in harmony and friendship with others (Hergenhan & Olson, 1999). In a 1933 lecture, Adler stated, "All the problems we meet in life are essentially problems of social adaptation. Children who have failed to solve the vital problem of social interest—who lack cooperation and a desire for contributing to the well-being of others—will always meet significant problems later in life" (Adler, 1998). Many of these difficulties arise with seemingly ordinary social situations of development, like the entry into public schools. Some children lack adequate ability to cooperate and contribute, and find such situations quite anxiety arousing (Adler, 1998). This was Adler's concept of social interest. One condition of people who have unhealthy social interest is neglect. Neglect causes the child to feel worthless and angry and to look on everyone with distrust (Hergenhan & Olsen, 1999). Neglect may not be felt from parents alone. Adolescents can experience neglect from peers, friends, and school as well. Alienation is one negative byproduct of neglect.

One way adolescents can feel a sense of belonging is through a stable school life. While remaining in one school for a substantial period of time cannot

ensure adolescent happiness and identity, it can help adolescents develop a sense of belonging. Kids may better understand their role in the school. It is also easier making friends, keeping friends, and getting involved in school activities if the child remains at that same school (Myers, 1999).

Most parents would agree that keeping a child in a stable environment is better for the child than moving into a new school. However, sometimes this cannot be helped. Circumstances may force a child into a new school; parental divorce and job changes are two examples of factors that may be out of the parents' control (Myers, 1999).

There are times, though, that a change in schools may not be absolutely necessary. Rather, it is a convenience for the parents. Many parents view a move as an independent entity. They do not see numerous moves as being harmful to the child. The parents believe each move is a fresh start, a chance to begin again. Unfortunately, they do not consider how this may contribute to the child's sense of alienation. It can be difficult enough for children to make friends, especially middle school adolescents. With each new school, it becomes more challenging for teens to fit into already established peer groups. Likewise, it can be just as hard to fit into the school system itself. If the child enters a new school after the school year has already begun, extra-curricular activities and clubs have already been established. These adolescents often find themselves on the outside looking in. This can leave the child feeling alienated from just one move. The problem is compounded for the child who moves from school to school. These children may

feel as if any attempt to fit in is useless, because they will be moving again (Myers, 1999).

Myers (1999) terms this belief the disruption hypothesis. The general idea is that moving interferes with the ability of children to form social and intimate ties by subjecting them to continual disruption and upheaval. Moving acts as a social and psychological barrier to the development of social ties in childhood. In addition, the child may become accustomed to a more solitary social life (Myers, 1999).

While many support the disruption hypothesis, it also has its opponents. Other researchers like Burchinal and Bauder (1965) argue that the negative view of mobility stems partly from the high value placed on stability. Fischer (1984) argues that social life depends largely on factors involving social class, ethnicity, and stage in the life cycle, not on factors such as mobility. Myers (1999) has termed beliefs such as these the opportunity hypothesis. This theory states that moving provides opportunities to make new friends and join new groups, especially if moving removes a child from a negative neighborhood or school environment.

Not only are there two schools of thought on the effects of moving the child, with respect to possible alienation, but the results of previous research has also been somewhat confusing. Prior literature has focused on what to do with already alienated children (Page & Scanlan, 1994; Tucker-Ladd, 1990; Edwards, 1995) and how alienation affects them (Williamson & Cullingford, 1998). While many studies indicate that mobile students report a sense of alienation, they do not

relate the alienation to moving. The studies show many factors that influence a child's alienation, such as socioeconomic status, abuse, and ethnicity (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Lang, 1996). However, little empirical research has examined the impact of moving on the child's alienation.

Another problem with the previous research is the broad concept of alienation itself. There are many dimensions that make up alienation, such as powerlessness, meaningless, normlessness, and social estrangement (Mau, 1992). It is difficult to determine exactly what is being investigated when alienation is studied. The child's alienation could be the result of a variety of factors. Since alienation is such a multidimensional concept, prevention can be difficult. Identifying an at-risk factor would seem beneficial. One such sign is loneliness. Bullock (1993b) found that socially isolated and rejected children reported feelings of loneliness. Another report found peer acceptance to satisfy children's needs for belonging and to help counteract feelings of alienation (Calabrese, 1989 in Page & Scanlan, 1994).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to compare the degree of loneliness experienced by "mobile" students and by "stable" students. Mobile students in this study are defined as those that have entered their current middle school (grades 6-8) after the completion of sixth grade in another school. Stable students in this study are those students who have been at the same middle school since the beginning of their sixth grade year. It is hypothesized that mobile students will experience a higher sense of loneliness than their stable peers.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Individual Psychology states the innate need of all humans to live in harmony and friendship with others. This was captured in Adler's concept of social interest. Adler believed that, although unique, individuals are characterized by inner harmony and a striving to cooperate with fellow humans (Hergenhahn & Olson, 1999). Adler stated that individuals acting in accordance with social interest have feelings of self-worth, self-value, courage, and optimism and they view others optimistically as persons of value and dignity who are worthy of respect (Adler, 1956). Neglect is one condition that prevents individuals from achieving healthy social interest. Neglect can cause feelings of worthlessness, anger, distrust, and lack of belonging. Neglect can be felt from a number of sources: parents, peers, friends, and the school, as well (Hergenhahn and Olson, 1999). The importance of a sense of belonging and making friends becomes even harder for those children who are mobile, and hence, may lead to a sense of neglect from peers and thus an underdeveloped social interest.

Mobility Rates

Our society is highly mobile. Each year in the United States approximately 20% of the population moves and between 20-30% of primary-grade children change schools (Nelson & Simoni, 1996). Moreover, these figures probably underestimate mobility because of the inadequate systems for compiling data on this phenomenon (Nelson & Simoni, 1996). Another study, taken from The Condition of Education (1995) reports 31% of an eighth grade class changed schools two or more times between first grade and the middle of eighth grade.

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Ten percent changed schools two or more times between the middle of their eighth grade year and their twelfth grade year. Gerald Bracey (1997) reports that a study in Los Angeles estimates that only 33% of the students who started in first grade would receive a full six years of instruction at the same elementary school.

Americans once held the ideal of a student attending the same neighborhood school from kindergarten all the way though the elementary grades. Unfortunately, the reality is that today's student is becoming highly mobile (Holmstren, 1996). Taken from Holmstren's 1996 report, several studies showed the rise of student mobility. A Government Accounting Office (1994) report stated one in six of our nation's third graders had attended three schools since the first grade. At urban schools, the number is often double that. According to a State Department of Education (1995) report, 98% of the children in one New Jersey public school had spent part of the year somewhere else. The same report had another New Jersey school with a mobility rate of 89%. In 1996 the percentage of students in Montgomery County, MD, who had attended at least two schools in one academic year had nearly doubled since 1983. In Florida, where the statewide mobility rate was 37% in 1996, one school in Osceola County had a mobility rate of 84%. Finally, in one Houston elementary school the mobility rate was 50% in 1996.

Student mobility is not restricted to American children alone. An estimated 100,000 Australian children relocate and change schools every year. Children and youth in the five to fourteen age category constitute one of the most

highly mobile groups in Australia, with 42% of males and females moving in any one-year period (Fields, 1995).

Mobile students in Australia are also subject to the same effects as American children. Children who change schools have been reported to experience social difficulties such as lower peer acceptance, lower social skills, and difficulty fitting into the classroom environment (Fields, 1995).

Effects of Mobility

The effects of mobility can be hard on everyone, including early elementary school children. These children who frequently change schools are more likely to experience academic, social, and emotional problems than students who do not change as often. This has been especially true among low-income, ethnic minority students and appears to be related to the large rates of school dropout (Nelson & Simoni, 1996). The same study found students who had the hardest time adjusting to school were also the ones who had changed schools frequently. Nelson and Simoni (1996) found, with respect to mobility, a sizable portion (35%) of the 2,524 children studied in the early grades changed schools over a 3-year period; 5% changed schools more than once. The overall yearly mean for mobility (13.4%) is somewhat lower than that reported for students in junior and senior high school within that district (23%).

While changing schools can be hard on elementary school children, adolescence appears to be the age when the effects of migration are most pronounced (Myers, 1999). Moving detracts from social integration. Children have fewer avenues for social integration because moving disrupts developmental

processes necessary to participate in social and personal relationships (Myers, 1999). In Myers (1999), Burgess, Locke, and Thomes (1965) argued:

> Migration introduces family members to new patterns of behavior and tends to individualize family members and free them from familial control. When a family relocates, developmental tasks may become more stressful than normal. Migration, then, adds an additional life stage that families must negotiate. For children, this negotiation of life events embedded in personal development may be especially troubling. Mobile children need to adapt to a new home, neighborhood, school, peers, and confusing experiences while separated from familiar places and persons. This displacement can be stressful…As a primary stressor, migration may produce secondary stressors. These may include an increase in social isolation and a loss of social support associated with separations from family, friends, neighbors, schoolmates, and teachers; changes in the child's affective state that could be associated with other problems; and changes in the affective states of parents and siblings that may represent an additional stressor for the child (p.777).

As troublesome as mobility, or changing schools, is on the adolescent, it has led to many school related problems. This is where the majority of research on mobility has focused—on the negative consequences of changing schools. Some of the major problems are lower academic performance, school dropout, and alienation.

Academic Performance

According to John Eckenrode, Ph.D., in the Brown University Child Adolescent Behavior Letter (1996), higher rates of mobility are linked with poorer academic performance. In a study of 530 school aged children in kindergarten through twelfth grade, Eckenrode found that low test scores and grade repetition could be linked to mobility (Eckenrode, 1996). Eckenrode also stated:

> Moving may also affect the child's emotional state which could be linked with learning difficulties. Discontinuity in the curriculum and teacher expectations also could be a factor as the child moves between schools,

and, finally, the difficulties that parents and siblings experience as a result of mobility may be additional stressors for the child (p. 2).

All of these factors may reduce the student's sense of self-esteem and control. His environment feels increasingly unpredictable, and stable sources of attachment become less available. Eckenrode also stresses the importance of policy that could help stabilize the lives of these children by attempting to reduce the unnecessary school transfers.

Frankel and Forlano (1967) found that standardized test scores for transient children were significantly below those of nontransient children (Heywood & Thomas, 1997). Levine, Wesolowski, and Corbett (1966) found that the more frequent the change of school for students, the poorer the grades (Heywood & Thomas, 1997). Auer, Lahr, and Docter (1978) conducted a study in a major urban area in Southern California. After controlling for a variety of socioeconomic factors, they found that the rate of student turnover was a significant, negative partial correlate with the schoolwide average reading performance in their sample of 435 schools (Heywood & Thomas, 1997). Ingersoll, Scamman, and Eckerling (1988) studied the influence of mobility on reading scores in the Denver public schools and, after correcting for socioeconomic status, concluded that mobility had a negative influence on achievement (Heywood & Thomas, 1997). Studies prepared for an urban New Jersey district suggested that continuous years in the district improves the performance of students (Heywood & Thomas, 1997).

In Bracey (1994) the Government Accounting Office found that children who had changed schools frequently were more likely to be below grade level. It also found third graders who changed schools three or more times were more likely to be below grade level in reading and math than those who had moved less often. Frequent moves also accounted for more children repeating a grade. Three or more moves led to a 20% level of repetition. When two schools were attended, 12% repeated a grade, and 8% repeated for those who had attended one school (Bracey, 1994).

School Dropout

One problem that arises from poor grades and mobility is student dropout. Children who frequently transfer from school to school are more prone to dropout than those who have a more stable school career. Student mobility definitely depresses achievement (Bracey, 1994).

The reasons for school dropout are just as complex as are the reasons for poor academic performance. Jordan and Lara (1996) reported a study that used national data to show race-ethnicity and gender differences as reasons for early school dropout. Factor analyses show that separate reasons for dropping out include school-related and family-related causes, as well as influences from peers and mobility. While Hispanics and African-Americans cited family and school-related reasons for dropping out, whites cited alienation from school more often than any other group (Bracey, 1994).

Changing schools can make it difficult for adolescents to identify with school. According to Finn (1989), students disengage or become alienated from

school because they cannot identify with the school. Identification is an internal state comprised of belonging and valuing (Schlosser, 1992).

At sometime during a child's years in school, he or she develops an attitude about school and education in general (Entwisle and Hayduk, 1988, in Travis, 1995). Contributing factors to such an attitude include the school environment, personnel, and activities. These factors become even tougher on those mobile students who are not accustomed to the school, their peers, and the school's activities.

At-risk students, who may already have lower grades, often view school as an unwelcoming place, which leads to their alienation and disengagement. Over time, as the alienation, or disengagement, increases for these students, they put forth less and less academic effort, and eventually dropout. These factors are known as internal school factors (Jordan & Lara, 1996).

External factors may also impact a child's success at school. Factors such as holding down a job, caring for a family member, interacting with the neighborhood peer groups all play a critical role in the stability and development of the adolescent. Therefore, these social forces external to the school may interfere with student success, and in some instances lead to dropout (Jordan & Lara, 1996).

Alienation

Alienation is a hard concept to identify. Different studies have defined alienation in a number of ways. According to Mackey (1978), alienation is a feeling of separation and disconnectedness (Tucker-Ladd, 1990). Mau supplies

further support as to the difficulty of defining alienation. In a study by Mau (1992), alienation has been defined as "a 'free-floating' and global human condition (Israel, 1971; Aiken & Hage, 1970; Srole, 1956), explaining aberrant behavior ranging from disconnections from work assignments (Erikson, 1986) to political disenchantment (Nettler, 1957)." Alienation has also been defined in Mau's (1992) study has also defined alienation as powerlessness, social estrangement, and other multidimensional feelings related to a specific context (Blauner, 1964; Seeman & Anderson, 1983; Clark, 1959).

With so many different definitions and meanings, alienation becomes a difficult concept for school officials, parents, and even the children to understand. Limited research has focused on a multidimensional construct and even less on a global construct of alienation (Mackey & Ahlgren, 1977; Hoy, 1972; Bickford & Neal, 1969, in Mau, 1992). Mau's (1992) study operationally validated the multidimensionality of alienation in a school context.

Four dimensions of alienation seem applicable to a school context: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social estrangement. Powerlessness indicates that students place high value on a set of goals, but at the same time has low expectations of meeting those goals. Students who feel powerless often act out by rebelling and cutting class. Some students feel more powerlessness than others do. Those with poor academic performance and those with poor relations with teachers and peers may be more likely to feel powerless. Meaninglessness is a lack of connectedness between the present and future. Students may not see the connection between academic performance and the

rewards which come in the future. Normlessness refers to the belief that socially unacceptable behavior is required to achieve goals. These students often reject the legitimacy of school officials to make decisions for them. Social Estrangement is a lack of integration in a friendship network and/or minimal participation in an organization. Socially estranged students are "loners" and do not participate in school activities. Because they attend classes regularly, they often are not identified as alienated by school officials (Mau, 1992).

To further explore the connections between the school environment and adolescent alienation, Tucker-Ladd (1990) conducted a case study combining quantitative and qualitative research methods in a midwestern high school. The study measured alienation in the school's population and student perceptions of school climate. Additionally, in-depth interviews with sample groups of less-and-more-alienated students provided specific information about how these students perceived the school. This multidimensional research found significant relationships between student alienation and various aspects of the climate in these students' school. Like previous studies, it also found many differences between the more-alienated students and those who were less so. Specifically, it showed that more-alienated students felt teachers and other students did not respect them because they were not good students or were not members of status groups in the school. They saw the school as unchanging, felt powerless to make changes they wanted, were hostile toward the student government, and were unfamiliar with and uninvolved in existing change mechanisms in the school.

More-alienated students disliked many school rules and felt that teachers judged and treated them more harshly than certain other when rules were enforced.

The difficulty understanding exactly what alienation is and the impact it has on students can be seen from these two studies. On one hand, powerlessness often causes students to rebel and cut classes. Conversely, socially estranged students often attend classes regularly but are still very alienated. What should parents and school officials look for when trying to identify alienated children?

Since mobility has been shown to place children at a higher risk of becoming alienated, this factor may be one for school officials to investigate (Myers, 1999). Unfortunately, by the time children are alienated, they already show signs of social estrangement and loneliness (Page & Scanlan, 1994). According to Page and Scanlan (1994), loneliness is a part of social estrangement. They report that peer acceptance has been shown to satisfy children's needs for belonging and help counteract feelings of alienation and loneliness. Secondly, loneliness can have a serious affect on children. Not only can loneliness lead to school problems such as poor grades and dropout; it has been shown to put children at a greater risk for drug use and suicide (Page and Scanlan, 1994).

There are many factors that can lead to loneliness. Some of these factors include: death of a parent or significant person; divorce of parents; conflict within the home or at school; moving to a new school or neighborhood; losing a friend, possession, or pet; and routinely being rejected by playmates (Bullock, 1993a). With so many factors contributing to loneliness, simply identifying a child as lonely does not tell why the child is lonely.

While there is a substantial body of research regarding perceived loneliness in adults, considerably less is known about loneliness in childhood populations (Peplau & Perlman, 1982, in Page & Scanlan, 1994). A search of the literature has yet to show a direct link between mobility and loneliness. However, studies continue to indicate that children suffer from loneliness. According to Asher, Hymel, and Ranshaw (1984) and Luftig (1987), more than 10% of children in grades three through six reported feelings of loneliness (Page & Scanlan, 1994). Moore and Schultz (1983) found estimates of lonely high school students ranged from 8% to 16% of all students (Page and Scanlan, 1994).

While less research has been found on children compared with adults, even less information has been found for middle school students. Most of the research has been on elementary and high school students.

Purpose of Study

With limited research available to show a direct link between mobility and loneliness in adolescents, this study sought to fill this void. Previous research has connected mobility with poor academic performance, dropout, and alienation. Loneliness, as a part of alienation, may also be a result of mobility. Therefore, this study attempted to establish mobility as one at-risk factor for loneliness. It is hypothesized that the study will show a significant difference in the perceived loneliness of mobile students versus stable students.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study's sample was drawn from one of the two public middle schools in a city of 60,000 found 25 miles outside St. Louis, MO. The school's enrollment is approximately 750 students. The school is comprised of mainly middle class students. The gender distribution is approximately 50% male and 50% female. Approximately 90% of the school population is Caucasian, and the rest is mainly African-American. The age range for this middle school is approximately 11-15 years (sixth through eighth grade). This study used subjects from the seventh and eighth grades, with ages ranging from 12 to 15.

The procedural technique for selecting a sample was to first obtain a list of new students in seventh and eighth grades. The students who had entered the middle school during the first semester of their seventh or eighth grade year were considered new students. Fifty adolescents made up the "new student" group. It comprised 20 new seventh graders and 30 new eighth graders. The other group participating in the study was the "stable student" group. These children were compared to the new students. The stable group was formed by randomly choosing 20 seventh graders and 30 eighth graders from the entire class list. Before selecting the stable group, efforts were made to ensure that all new students were omitted from the list. Hence, only those students who started at the school in the beginning of their sixth grade year were eligible for selection. This group would have had at least a year to fit in, make friends, etc. Only new

seventh and eighth graders were used so that those new students would have entered a school where peer groups had already been established.

The gender makeup for this study was 56.5% males (n = 26) to 43.5% females (n = 20). Only 46 out of the possible 100 questionnaires were returned. Of the identified 50 stable students, 26 returned surveys (13 males and 13 females). Of the 50 possible mobile students, 20 consented to participate (13 males and 7 females).

The ethnic breakdown of the 46 students in the sample was 91.3% Caucasian (n=42). There were two Hispanic subjects (4.3%), and only one African-American and one Asian subject (2.2%), respectively. The mean age of the participants was 13.39 years, with a standard deviation of 0.80.

Instruments

The instrument in this study is Steven Asher's Children's Loneliness Questionnaire (CLQ) (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994) (Appendix A). The purpose of this survey is to measure children's perceived feelings of loneliness.

The CLQ is a 24-question survey. There are 16 primary questions, or items, which are focused on feelings of loneliness and social adequacy. There are also "filler" items that ask about children's hobbies and other activities. These filler questions are included to help the child feel more relaxed and open about expressing their feelings (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994).

For standardization, elementary and middle school aged children were used. Two hundred children were tested (89 girls, 111 boys). The standardization group was also comprised of 80% whites, 16% blacks, and 4% Asian or Hispanic.

All socioeconomic groups seemed represented. No actual norms were reported (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994).

The administrative procedure is a very simple measure. The instructions for the children are included at the top of the questionnaire. Scoring is also simple and straightforward. Children use a 5-point Likert scale to indicate levels of loneliness. Items 2, 5, 7, 11, 13, 15, 19, and 23 are the filler items and are not included in the scoring. Scores for the sixteen 5-point items are totaled, producing a potential range from 16-80. Items 3, 6, 9, 12, 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, and 24 are reverse-scored. After a final score is totaled, higher scores reflect more loneliness (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994).

The major form of validity reported on the CLQ is a type of known-groups validity. The CLQ has an excellent internal consistency, with an alpha of .90 for the 16 primary items. A one-year test-retest correlation of .55 suggests a good long-term stability (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994).

One weakness of the CLQ, for the purposes of this study, is the correlation with social status. This study does not distinguish students on the basis of social status. A major strength of this instrument is the simple nature of the test. It is quick and easy for both the students and the administrator. This is quite useful in a school setting and to receive as many responses as possible (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994).

A demographic sheet (Appendix B) was sent to the students. The information on this sheet included age, gender, and ethnic makeup of the student.

Procedures

The study began by obtaining a list of all new seventh and eighth grade students to the middle school for the current school year. New students were those who entered the school anytime from the beginning of the year to the end of the first semester. The stable group was chosen from only those students who had been at the school since the beginning of sixth grade, which made up approximately 450 students. Selecting approximately every tenth name from an alphabetical list randomly created the sample. This created a group of 50 subjects.

The questionnaires were mailed to the subjects' parents, with a letter seeking parental permission. If the parents agreed, and then if the subject agreed to participate, the questionnaire was filled out and returned in a self-addressed stamped envelope that was included with the questionnaire.

The research design chosen for this study was causal-comparative. This design was chosen because two pre-determined groups were being compared. The independent variable, moving into a new school, could not be manipulated. The student population was categorized into mobile and stable students. The effect, degree of loneliness, and the alleged cause, moving into a new school, had both already occurred and were now being studied in retrospect. This was the reason for choosing causal-comparative as the research design.

The two groups were different on the independent variable (IV) because subjects were either stable or new students. The groups also differed in how long they had been at the school. Mobile students had been at the school for a

maximum of one semester, while stable students had been at the middle school for either one and a half or two and a half years (depending on what grade they were in). The purpose of this study was to see if the new students would have a higher degree of loneliness than the stable students.

The data analysis used for this study was the t-test for independent samples. The t-test was used to determine if the difference between the mean scores for the two groups was significant.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to see if there was a significant difference between the mean scores on the Children's Loneliness Scale (CLQ) for stable and mobile students. A t-test for equality of means for independent samples was used to compare the scores on the CLQ (see Table 1).

Table 1

Children's Loneliness Scale (CLQ) for Stable and Mobile Students

Groups	N	M	SD	t	p*
Stable	26	23.04	6.21	-2.146	0.041
Mobile	19	29.90	10.93		

*critical value 0.05

The twenty-six stable students had a mean loneliness score of 23.04, with a standard deviation of 6.21. The twenty mobile students' mean loneliness score was 29.90, with a standard deviation of 10.93. The t-test value was –2.146. The p-value was 0.041. Using a 0.05 level of criterion for significance, the difference between the two groups was thus significant. Hence, the research hypothesis, mobile students score higher on the loneliness scale than stable students, was supported for this particular study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study's hypothesis was that students who were more mobile would have a higher sense of loneliness. More specifically, students who entered a new school would have a higher perceived sense of loneliness than stable students (those who had been at the school from the beginning). The findings of this study strongly indicated that mobility had adversely affected an adolescent's sense of loneliness.

The results support existing research on loneliness. Fields' (1995) Australian study showed the same difficulties for Australian children as for American children: mobile students had lower peer acceptance, lower social skills, and difficulty fitting into the classroom environment. Nelson and Simoni (1996) reported the children who had the hardest time adjusting to school, and those most likely to experience social problems, were the mobile students. Myers (1999) found that moving disrupts developmental processes necessary to participate in social and personal relationships. Eckenrode (1996) also found moving may further the social isolation and increase the loss of social support from friends, schoolmates, and teachers. He also stated the importance of stabilizing the lives of children by attempting to reduce the unnecessary school transfers.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the difficulty of generalizing the results to the general population. The study was conducted in one school where the subjects were mostly white and from middle class.

A second limitation of the study is the small sample size. There were only 50 mobile seventh and eighth graders entering the school for that particular year. There was a low return rate (46%) and all the subjects were volunteers. One problem with a low return rate of volunteer subjects is that only the most extremely lonely children may have returned their questionnaires. The most secure stable students and the loneliest mobile students might have been the ones who volunteered to participate.

A third limitation of the study is that the loneliness may reflect the impact of outside factors and not due to mobility. Some of the possible outside factors that may have influenced the scores are socioeconomic status and a child's home life, including family breakup due to divorce. This information was not collected for this study.

A fourth limitation is the time of year the questionnaire was administered. The subjects took the CLQ after the completion of the first semester, in February 2000. Some of the mobile students entered the middle school at the beginning of the school year, while others entered just weeks before the study. This gave some mobile students more time to adjust than others.

Implications

While this study was simple in design, with just one hypothesis being tested, it has tremendous implications for practice and future research. Unfortunately, school personnel do not have the time nor the resources to check students to see if they are, or may be, at risk of becoming alienated, which may lead to further failures at school (poor grades and dropout). If schools wanted to check on new students, they would need a quick, easy, and unobtrusive measure that would give them insight into the students' peer status. Students' levels of perceived loneliness would be one way to check on the students and could possibly be used as an at-risk sign for students who might later become alienated.

Finding out if a child is lonely or not would not guarantee prevention of alienation or even fix the loneliness. However, knowing this could allow schools to intervene and help mobile students (who are having trouble fitting in) feel as though they do belong and are part of the school environment. This could be accomplished by establishing discussion groups or a "buddy system" program for those mobile students.

The recognition of the link between mobility and student loneliness is important. If schools, parents, and the child know that a change in schools may result in higher levels of loneliness, it may help alleviate some of the stress on the child. It may help the student understand they are not alone in their feelings, that it is natural to feel lonely when changing schools. Furthermore, their loneliness may not be because of anything the child has done or due to a possible lack of social skills. With regard to schools and parents, early awareness may allow for

the creation of measures to lessen or eliminate the loneliness and possibly prevent future alienation.

This study was conducted to give awareness to school personnel and parents on the affect mobility have on students. Alienation is the larger problem, but prevention often requires attacking the root of the problem. Since this study linked mobility to loneliness, and since loneliness is a factor for the larger problem of alienation, then identifying mobile students could keep them from becoming at-risk for alienation and future school problems.

Recommendations for Future Research

One future research study could focus on loneliness, controlling for socioeconomic status, race, and other outside factors. Another study could increase the sample size by surveying more than one middle school and including children of different ethnic backgrounds. The age range could also be expanded to include elementary and high school students to se if there is a differential impact of moving on loneliness across the age groups. A final recommendation would be to determine if loneliness is also a contributing factor for academic performance and school dropout.

CLQ

Below are 24 statements. Please read each statement and indicate how true it is for you using the following rating scale:

> 1 = That's always true about me
> 2 = That's true about me most of the time
> 3 = That's sometimes true about me
> 4 = That's hardly ever true about me
> 5 = That's not true at all about me

Please record your answer in the space to the left of each item.

_____ 1. It's easy for me to make new friends at school.
_____ 2. I like to read.
_____ 3. I have nobody to talk to in my class.
_____ 4. I'm good at working with other children in my class.
_____ 5. I watch TV a lot.
_____ 6. It's hard for me to make friends at school.
_____ 7. I like school.
_____ 8. I have lots of friends in my class.
_____ 9. I feel alone at school.
_____ 10. I can find a friend in my class when I need one.
_____ 11. I play sports a lot.
_____ 12. It's hard to get kids in school to like me.
_____ 13. I like science.
_____ 14. I don't have anyone to play with at school.
_____ 15. I like music.
_____ 16. I get along with my classmates.
_____ 17. I feel left out of things at school.
_____ 18. There are no other kids I can go to when I need help in school.
_____ 19. I like to paint and draw.
_____ 20. I don't get along with other children in school.
_____ 21. I'm lonely at school.
_____ 22. I am well liked by the kids in my class.
_____ 23. I like playing board games a lot.
_____ 24. I don't have any friends in class.

Demographic Sheet

Gender: _____ male _____ female

Age: _____

Race: _____ White

_____ African-American

_____ Hispanic

_____ Asian

_____ Other

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