THE EFFECT OF MOBILITY ON CHILDREN

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THE EFFECT OF MOBILITY ON CHILDREN

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by

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Andrew Lee Jensen entitled "The Effect of Mobility on Children." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

Major Professor

Accepted for the Graduate and Research Council:

Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Common sense would tell us that moving is not an enjoyable experience. Few would argue that moving brings with it headaches, heartaches, and a need for adjustment. Further, some people believe that moving has a significant detrimental effect on those involved, especially children. But literature on the effect of mobility on children reflects some confusion. Most researchers on the subject concur with Lacey and Blane (1979) when they stated "It has been revealed as a complex problem, inadequately researched and only partially understood" (p. 205).

Each year approximately 20% of the population in the United States move from their place of residence. Of this portion of the population, about nine percent relocate from the community in which they lived (Shumaker and Stokols, 1982). According to historical data, the 20% mobility rate has been a pattern dating back to the 1800's (Koft, 1977). Shumaker and Stokols (1982) compared the mobility rate among seven industrialized nations and found the United States leads the list as having the most mobile society based on a one year rate. Although Long and Boertlein (1976) suggested this rate may be slowing based on data collected during the 1970 census, later data indicate the 20% rate has not declined significantly (Marchant and Medway, 1987). America is a country on the move.

There are many theories explaining why people move,

most based on issues underlying the relocation decision making process. Benefits of a move, such as increased income or better climate, are usually weighed against the cost of the move, such as leaving family behind or changing schools. The desire to improve life by increasing income appears to be a major force behind America's mobility. Thirty-seven percent of families who pull-up stakes move in search of employment or job opportunities (Levine, 1966). Other reasons for moving include: leaving home, marriage, divorce, beginning a family, health considerations, and desire to be closer to relatives.

Although increasing family income is a leading reason for moving, the best predictor of mobility is age (Shumaker & Stokols, 1982). The young adult is inclined to move in order to begin a new career, marry, or start a family. As individuals become older, they are less likely to move. The older person is often less financially able to move or has become strongly attached to the community and is less willing to relocate. Education is also a predictor of mobility. The better educated adult tend to move more often. Job opportunities are more abundant for the well educated, and frequently relocation is expected for advancement.

Income is associated with the distance an individual moves. Longer moves, those outside the county, are more common among the upper socioeconomic strata. Short moves, those within the same county, occur more often among the lower socioeconomic populace (Shumaker & Stokols, 1982).

Overall, most moves (61.9%) occur within the same county (Long and Boertlien, 1976).

Historical migration patterns in regard to long moves center on the expansion of the United States and later employment opportunities. With increased industrialization of the economy, the rural population began migrating toward the industrialized northern cities in search of employment. Shortly after 1930, as the inner city grew and became crowded, movement from the inner city to the suburbs began to occur. This flight to the suburbs was more pronounced among the upperly mobile economic populace. During the seventies, heavy industries, such as steel and car manufacturing, began to decline. This contributed to migration patterns shifting dramatically from the northeast and north central to the preferred climate of the western and southern states. During this same period the mid-east oil embargo created job opportunities in the oil rich state of Texas, which attracted many job hunters from the north.

Moving can be a stressful event, especially for those who do not want to move. Like any stressful event, relocation can have a detrimental effect on some members of the family. Children appear to be more vulnerable to such stressful occurrences (Matter & Matter, 1988). For the child, moving usually means leaving friends behind, entering a new school, handling new academic curricula, making new friends, and dealing with a new environment. Children may experience a lack of support from their mother and father

while they adjust to the new environment themselves. This can occur whether it is a long move or a short move.

Research has been generated on the effects of mobility on children. It has been reported that relocation is associated with children suffering academic and emotional problems, although there are reports that indicate mobility has a positive effect on children. Researchers have analyzed moving and its effect on children in areas, such as academic achievement, family life, and emotional disturbances. For example, Whalen and Fried (1973) studied how relocation affects student achievement among eleventh grade students in Livermore, California. Marchant and Medway (1987) took advantage of the unique mobile conditions of the military and examined adjustment and achievement associated with mobility in military families. An often cited research during the 1960's and 1970's was Gordon and Gordon's (1958) investigation of the relationship between mobility and emotional disturbances among children in four suburban New Jersey counties.

Some variables factored into the studies include: distance moved, recency of move, parental attitudes, socioeconomic level, and intelligence. No study appears to have included all factors in determining the effects of relocation. By using a military population, Marchant and Medway (1987) controlled for many of these variables including distance moved, recency of move, and parental attitudes, but they did not take into account the intellectual functioning

of the subjects. Whalen and Fried (1973) on the other hand examined the effects of intelligence on relocation among children, but they did not look at parental attitudes. The control of certain variables, but not others, may explain why the literature appears contradictory.

This paper plans to examine the literature investigating mobility and its effects on children, pointing out contradictions and reconciling them based on variables used in the studies. Factors that contribute to the effect of mobility on children may include age, sex, intelligence, attitude of parents, socioeconomic level, distance moved, recency of moves, number of moves, support provided to the child, military versus non-military population, and emotional stability among others. By examining the literature, a synthesis can be achieved that addresses contradictions and gives a clearer picture of the effect of mobility on children. By composing a chart that lists different variables and their effect on children and comparing that information across all studies examined, inconsistencies can be explained. This will lead to an analysis of those variables that are most important to the adjustment of the child.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Most researchers focusing on mobility and its effect on children mention in their beginning statements previous studies or articles in the popular press that point out the negative consequences of relocation. Magazine articles are cited that warn against frequent moves and the damage such moves cause children. Books are quoted that suggest a link between relocation and children who are socially and emotionally maladjusted. Scientific literature dating from 1928 to 1987 has been cited by researchers in establishing that mobility has negative consequences on children (Hendershott, 1989; Sackett, 1935).

In Ladies Home Journal, Bettelheim (1971) warns against moving more than once every four to five years. He claimed problems associated with relocation include disorientation that can lead to "the world itself becoming unfriendly if not hostile" (p. 41). He believed a child must be deeply rooted in their physical and human environment in order to experience maximum adjustment. Long (1986) agreed that relocation can be harmful to children. She noted that mobility hurts both the very young and the older school aged child. Very young schoolchildren are particularly vulnerable because they have to adjust to a move at the same time they are leaving the security of home to enter school. Adolescents, moving during their junior or senior year of high

school, experience the stress of leaving behind their all important friends. Academic performance is reported to suffer in English and mathematics among the mobile military child when compared with the less mobile civilian counterpart.

The negative effect of relocation on children has been also addressed in books. Packard (1983) concurred with Bettelheim and reported that moves need to be spaced a few years apart. He suggested relocation should occur in the summer when school is out of session to minimize the consequences. Packard (1972) related many encounters with parents and their impression of how mobility affected their children. He believed the uprootedness of modern life has a negative impact. Although the impact may be minimal for children in the very earliest ages, most other ages feel the ill effects. Preschool children have a need to experience continuity in life which is disrupted by relocation. Teenagers also are at risk because of the strong influence of peers. Breaking old friendships and having to develop a new social net-work at a time when cliques impede the acceptance of new faces puts the mobile teenager at a disadvantage when compared with others.

The concern over the effects of relocation on children has resulted in programs being developed to help children cope with moves. Keats, Crabbs, and Crabbs (1981) created the Summer Visitation Program to meet the social and emotional needs of new students. The program was designed to

make the new family aware of school policies and procedures. It also facilitated communication between the family and school while welcoming the family into the community. Students Assimilated into Learning, also known as Operation SAIL, was developed by Panagos, Holmes, Thurman, Yard, & Spaner (1981). The main purpose of the program was to offer remediation for the incoming students. About 70% of the students were found to have deficits in both academic achievement and classroom behavior. Four principle components made up the pillars of the program: parent involvement, staff development, student assessment, and SAIL learning centers. Although the program had no significant impact on motivation or behavior, it significantly affected academic performance.

The use of limited-goal, brief psychotherapy or family counseling is suggested by Tooley (1970) to counter the maladaptive reactions to moving. Observations that she made at the Children's Psychiatric Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan suggested two critical age periods in which the development of psychopathology is more likely among children. Young adolescents, age 13 and 14 year old, were among those who suffered the most from relocation. The loss of their peers at a time when they are beginning to break ties with their parents added to the stress experienced by this age group and leaves them at high risk. Six-year-olds were also in a high risk group. The disarray associated with moving appears to add to the already stressful event of entering school.

These negative reactions to moving supports the contention that multiple stressors put an individual at a higher risk of displaying maladaptive behavior. Adolescents who were forced to cope with several life stressors concurrently were found more likely to developed disruptive behavior patterns (Simmons et al., 1987). But Tooley (1970) prefers not to define moving as a stress. She believes moving improves adjustment almost as often as it disturbs, so she prefers to define moving as "an abrupt interruption of certain patterns or habits of interaction both among family members themselves and with larger society" (p. 378).

On the other hand, moving is seen as a positive event by Tooley (1970) when the disruption causes a family to rely more on each other thus forming closer family bonds. In the past the family members were entwined in relationships outside the family. The move may create conditions in which each member turns to the other for support enhancing family ties. Tooley believed positive effects of moving are more likely to occur when a required move is supported by the employer. This includes help with locating housing and information about the new community. A social network, which may include old friends, may be in place. This network includes co-employees who made the move earlier in an attempt to climb the same company ladder. A similar social support network in place occurs within the military. The benefits of the infrastructure inherent in the military will be discussed later.

Moving also facilitates therapy for certain children who relocate. Mental health intervention for a child may have been considered for many years. But because services were either unavailable in their community prior to moving or avoided because of a fear of stigmatization, the child was left untreated. Moving places the family in a position to seek therapy by either making mental health services available or leaving behind those who are naive about the benefits of counseling.

Controlled studies have been designed to correct for errors of uncontrolled research and over generalizations made by the popular press and many researchers. Brett (1982) investigated the relationship between job transfer mobility and well-being of male employees, their wives, and their children. Families included in the study consisted of employees who work for large U.S. corporations. Parents were asked to complete a questionnaire concerning physical health, behavior, school performance, peer relationships of their children.

Brett (1982) found no significant relationships among the variables that were consistent across age groups. There was evidence that mobile children, ages 6 to 14, had more difficulty making friends than did their less mobile counterparts. On the other hand, teenagers, ages 15 to 18, missed old friends more and found it more difficult to establish new friendships than younger children. Teenagers also seemed to have had more physical health problems than

did less mobile teenagers. It was found that mobile boys, ages 6 to 14, were less persistent at tasks and mobile girls in the same age group had more frequent behavioral problems than their counterpart. No significant findings related to school performance or attitudes were discovered.

Data collected by Mundy et al. (1989) suggested that residential instability is strongly associated with adolescents who received inpatient psychiatric services in public hospitals serving low income families. The case records of randomly selected adolescent psychiatric inpatients between the ages of 12 to 18 were examined. Variables were classified within six categories: demographic variables, intelligence, residential instability, family composition, negative family life events, and psychiatric symptoms. Analysis indicated that residential instability was associated with caregiver neglect, caregiver abuse, parental separation, multiple hospitalizations, lower I.Q., indices of poor impulse control, and antisocial behavior.

Due to the design and nature of this study, it is not possible to determine whether mobility affects the adolescent's behavior or the adolescent's behavior affects mobility. Since two out of three cases reviewed involved foster-care placement, many with multiple placement, the possibility that a youth's behavior necessitated a move exists. Except for lower I.Q. and to a lesser extent parental separation, all the variables significantly associated with residential instability in this study may be a cause of

residential instability. Acting out behaviors displayed by the adolescents as well as the neglect and abuse were reasons for their placements.

In trying to answer the question "Are movers losers?", Cramer and Dorsey (1970) obtained data on 366 sixth-grade students. The purpose of the investigation was to study the relationship between mobility and reading. The study compared children of enlisted Air Force personnel who had frequently changed their place of residence and pupils who had maintained consistent residence. Non-movers, students who had attended only one school, were compared to students who attended two or more schools. Students were examined using the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test to determine intelligence level and the California Reading Test to measure reading achievement. Corrections for intelligence and age were used in the analysis. The study found mobility did not have an adverse effect on the reading level of mobile children. On the contrary, the more mobile students' reading achievement scores were slightly higher, although not significantly, than their less mobile counterparts.

However, findings by Frazier (1970) indicated a negative relationship exists between mobility and academic performance. Frazier examined disadvantaged students in the third and fifth grades. Data suggested a significant difference in the reading achievement and mean IQ test scores between non-mobile and locally mobile children.

In another attempt to determine whether differences in

academic achievement exist between the high and low mobile student, Whalen and Fried (1973) studied 874 eleventh grade students. Their analysis also took into consideration I.Q. along with socioeconomic status and mobility rate. High mobility was defined as having attended schools in four or more different cities. Lorge-Thorndike verbal IQ scores were used to adjust scores on the Iowa Tests of Educational Development. Only the results of the General Vocabulary test were selected for analysis. The researchers believed that no other test of equal length provided as good a measure of the special type of intelligence needed for success in school-work as did the General Vocabulary test.

The findings concluded that mobility is beneficial for students of high intelligence but detrimental for students of low intelligence, as measured by their level of academic achievement. The researchers hypothesized that the interest and attitudes of higher intelligence students are stimulated by frequent geographic relocations. The study did not find socioeconomic status affected achievement test results. It was recommended that further research include a study of parental attitudes towards mobility. The authors believe children's adjustments are often affected by the attitude of the parent towards the move.

A study that included parental attitudes was conducted by Barrett and Noble (1973). They examined the relationship between mothers' anxieties and children's adjustment to long distance moves. The study included 159 families who moved

long distances, over 50 miles, by a major interstate mover. A questionnaire was developed that focused on the reason of the families' moves, the attitude of family members towards moving, current satisfaction with their new city, the adjustment of family members to the move, and the parents' judgment of the effect that moving had on each of their children. The Louisville Behavior Check List, completed by a parent or significant other, was used to complement the questionnaire. The check list measured aggression, inhibition, learning disabilities, and total disabilities. Nonmilitary children between ages of 3 and 18 were included in the study.

Although parents who had a negative attitude toward relocation perceived maladjustment in their children, as indicated by their completed questionnaire, this was not confirmed by results of the Louisville Behavioral Check List. It was found that the children did not differ from a random sample in the areas measured by the behavioral check list. The data suggested that children 11 or older might have more difficulty making friends than younger children. The mean Total Disability score for children who had moved within the last six months was significantly higher but children appeared to return to their prior level of functioning after a period of adjustment. Based on their study, Barrett and Noble concluded that the perceived negative effect of moving on emotional adjustment is largely unfounded.

In an attempt to correct flaws of previous studies, Marchant and Medway (1987) took advantage of the unique characteristics of a military population. They claimed earlier researchers failed to differentiate the reasons for moving; failed to control for social class variables; and failed to differentiate among various indices of mobility, such as distance moved, location of the move, and the relative recency of the move. By studying enlisted soldiers, their spouses and children, the researchers attempted to control for the effects of various relocation factors while studying the effect of identification with Army life, personal well-being, and children's school achievement and social competence.

Forty military families were studied using the General Well-Being Schedule, the Identification with the Military Scale, the Revised Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist, and the Metropolitan Achievement Test. Children were enrolled in either the second, fourth, or sixth grade. The average number of moves made by the families was 10.7 times while in the military and 4.4 times prior to military service.

Medway and Marchant (1987) concluded frequent relocation was found to be positively associated with higher personal and social competence. The more a child had moved, the greater was his or her participation in social activities. Total life moves was also correlated positively with a child's school achievement. The study failed to find any negative relationships associated with the number of reloca-

tions made by military families.

In another study making use of a military population Collins and Coulter (1974) concluded there was little association between the number of schools attended and either pupil achievement or personal adjustment. They made this claim based on their research of military dependents of the Australian army. Children from grades 5, 6, and 7 were placed in one of two groups according to whether they had moved interstate or overseas, or whether all their moves had been within Queenland. They found a lower mean reading age for children who attended the most schools and had moved the greatest distance.

Medway and Marchant (1987) faulted this study for failing to control or examine many of the factors they believed are important in understanding the interaction between mobility and its effects on children. In agreement with Collins and Coulter (1974), Medway and Marchant believed it is the infrastructure of the military that lessens the stress associated with relocation. The military infrastructure helps relieve the stress associated with finding adequate housing, schools, shops, and needed services such as medical and social support groups. This in turn creates a situation that maximizes the benefits of relocation and minimizes the negative consequences.

In contrast to Medway and Marchant, McKain (1973) found family problems associated with moving are more likely to be found in the Army family in which the wife-mother feels

alienated from society and the Army community. Self-report questionnaires and interview data were collected from 200 noncommissioned officers and their spouses. Problems with children, as measured by selected items from the Midtown Manhattan questionnaire, were significantly correlated with mobility when the wife-mother reported feelings of alienation from Army life. By contrast, the less alienated Army wife-mother appeared more likely to take advantage of support offered in various forms by the military, thus reducing the likelihood of their children experiencing problems.

Mann (1972) studied another unique population. He examined undergraduate college students to determine the effects of residential mobility on their adaptation to stress, novelty, and complexity of the college environment. He theorized high mobility would contribute to the student's effectiveness to cope due to the diversity of experience. Situational and chronic anxiety scales, a classroom preference questionnaire, and the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OBI) were administered to 69 undergraduates. Mann also examined social mobility as an independent variable. The low mobile group was defined as having moved one to three times and the high mobile group having moved four to thirteen times.

The results indicated high residentially mobile students experienced less anxiety than did their less mobile counterparts. This group also scored significantly higher on the theoretical orientation and social maturity scales of

the OBI. Although residential mobility did not affect classroom preference, the socially mobile student preferred a more structured classroom environment. While residential mobility differences were found on several scales of the personality inventory, further analysis indicated that most of the differences were among the males. High residentially mobile males were more intellectually oriented, placed more value on autonomy and independence, and more adaptive than less mobile males. These characteristics are considered to help the student adapt to the stresses of college life. Mann (1972) concluded that residential mobility enhances adaptation to the college environment, based on the Omnibus Personality Inventory scales.

Mann (1972) hypothesized the sex differences found may reflect different sex-role demands on males and females during developmental periods. He believed that female role expectations are sufficiently well defined across environmental settings that females experience less diversity. Also, the developmental tasks which females face do not vary as much from place to place as do those of males

In another study of college students, Fisher and Hood (1988) examined mobility history and sex differences as factors in psychological disturbance. One-hundred and ninty-eight first year residential students completed the Middlesex Hospital Questionnaire (MHQ), the Cognitive Failure Questionnaire (CFQ), and the College Adaptation Questionnaire (CAQ). In addition they provided personal defini-

tions of the term homesickness, completed a questionnaire designed to measure the intensity of homesickness, and listed details pertaining to their history of mobility.

Three possible hypotheses were presented. First, Fisher and Hood (1988) believed the weight of research evidence predicted homesickness would be associated with a higher degree of mobility. Second, their previous research suggested mobility would immunize an individual against homesickness. Finally, they considered the possibility that only some moves away from home would be beneficial.

Results supported the latter hypothesis. Those who reported the least amount of homesickness were individuals who had experience at boarding schools or had left their home and parents for holiday or vacation trips. Other types of mobility did not appear to prevent homesickness. There was little evidence to suggest that psychological disturbance, as measured by MQH or CFQ, can be predicted by personal mobility history.

Schaller (1976) criticized research on geographic mobility for failing to consider academic performance before the move. He found none of the 14 studies he examined (Schaller, 1972) considered the performance of its subjects before their relocation. He believed the ex-post facto design contributed to initial differences between control and experimental groups.

Schaller (1976) examined the records of 895 pupils in the ninth grade and subject marks from third to eighth grade

were examined. He noted the most mobile group differed significantly from the other groups in family composition. It was more likely that the most mobile group came from single parent households. This factor however was not included in his conclusions.

Results indicated that the most mobile group attained significantly lower marks in all subjects in the eighth grade when compared to the other two groups. The third grade records of the students indicated the lower marks existed before the first move. The most mobile group had significantly lower marks in all but one subject dating back to the third grade. Schaller (1976) cautions other researchers to take into consideration the performance of subjects prior to their move.

Hendershott (1989) examined residential mobility and its effect on the self concept and depression among adolescents. She also tested the role of social support from parents and peers as a mediator in the relationship between these variables. Two-hundred and five students who attended the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades were administered inventories designed to measure the dimensions of mastery over the environment, self-esteem, and self-denigration. Measures of depression and social support were also administered. The respondents were grouped according to the number of moves made and the recency of the last move made.

A negative relationship between moving once or twice during the present school year and the measure of mastery

over the environment occurred. Students who moved five or more times and moved during the school year were more likely to report high self-denigration. The only dimension that appeared related to depression was recency of the moves. Many of the negative effects of relocation attenuated when the support of family and friends were added to the analysis.

In reviewing the sample of literature presented it is difficult to say whether moving has a positive or negative effect on children. Virtually all the popular press warns against moves. It is suggested if moves must be made they should be spaced apart and made during the summer months when school is out of session. School programs have been created to ease the transition for students who just arrived from another town. On the other hand, frequent relocation was associated with social competence and higher academic achievement (Medway and Marchant, 1987). Then there were studies suggesting little relationship between moving and negative effects on children (Collins & Coulter, 1974; Schaller, 1976). These conflicting observations parallel those made by Bourke and Naylor (cited in Lacey & Blane, 1979). Their review of 28 studies on the effect mobility has on school attainment revealed that 11 showed no effect, 12 showed lower achievement, and 5 showed higher achievement.

CHAPTER 3

DISCUSSION

Geographic mobility is a complex phenomenon and too broad as a single variable to test independently. As the previous review of literature reflects, researchers examined the topic from many angles. Investigators tried to determine the effects of mobility in regard to a child's level of academic achievement and psychological adjustment. In doing so a large number of variables were examined, and the variables that influenced the adjustment process were numerous. Because of the complexity of the issue, it is impossible to gain a complete understanding using any single study.

The literature gave the impression that the effects of moving should be described in simple terms of either good, bad, or no effect. For example, Whalen and Fried (1973) when presenting related research discussed it in those terms. They cited three studies that concluded mobility had adverse effects on achievement, three studies that found achievement positively affected by mobility, and four studies that showed mobility had no relationship with student achievement. There was no mention under what conditions these results were achieved. This is an important point because the contradictions tend to disappear when variables are taken into consideration.

In his study of literature dating from 1933 to 1972, Schaller (1972) concluded, "it is impossible to give a

clear-cut answer. There is no convergence in the research results, and consequently there is no simple answer. There are both positive, negative and also no effects at all reported in the literature (p. 10)." But the confusion appears to center on the general question: Is moving good or bad for children? This question is too broad to be answered by a simple yes or no, yet, many people seek a simple answer to a complex question.

This tendency is easier to understand when the reasons for asking the question are examined. Many articles have been printed in magazines to help families make informed decisions in regard to a move. One can easily imagine a parent being offered a job promotion if only he or she would relocate. But the turmoil that a teenage child might experience, as suggested by a magazine article, convinces the parent to postpone the promotion. A possible better life was circumvented on the advice received through the popular press addressing the question: Is moving good or bad for your children?

In another scenario, a school system must decide whether to spend a large amount of money implementing a program specifically designed to help the mobile student adjust to a new educational environment. Special classes and communication networks are being considered. The decision to create the program is based on research conducted in the area of geographic mobility and its effect on children addressing the question: Is mobility detrimental to a child's academic

performance?

Many decisions involving the well-being of a family, a child, and a community are based on research on geographic mobility. A closer examination of the literature reveals that if the question asked is too broad, each of the above scenarios could have taken the opposite approach depending upon what was read.

In Australia, the idea of implementing a core curriculum for the country's school system was being considered because of what many believed were the negative effects of mobility (Lacey and Blane, 1979). Children who moved around a lot were thought to be at a serious disadvantage. Their education was described as either repetitive and boring or lacking large sections of important work due to the consequences of moving. The decision that was to be made relied in part on the research conducted on mobility. But Lacey and Blane pointed out the effect of mobility is likely to be small and that "early research seems to have been designed to prove assumptions which have arisen from authors' preconceived notions" (p.205), thus clouding the issue for legislators. The legislators appeared to have been looking for a simple solution to an intricate question, which is a difficult task. There is a need to collate the information provided by the research in order to provide a clearer picture on the topic.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to compare one study to another because of the wide variety of dependent

variables under examination. Mobility affects many aspects of a child's life and only occasionally has a specific dependent variable been examined by different researchers allowing for adequate comparison. Another problem with comparing studies is that each researcher defines variables differently. For example, one researcher defined mobility as moving once, while another defined mobility as moving six or more times. Recency of move and distance moved are variables that had been defined differently and adds to the confusion when comparing one study with another. By taking a closer look at the independent variables examined in this paper, a common denominator can be found that provides a clearer, but by no means a complete picture of the topic. Conditions under which mobility can be considered either advantageous or not should become more evident.

Studies and presentations that did not attempt to control confounding variables are not included in this discussion. This would include presentations made in the popular press, Tooley's (1970) paper, and considerations of Packard (1972). This literature has been criticized (Brett, 1982; Barrett and Noble, 1973) for generalizing from uncontrolled or poorly designed studies and attempting to sell the idea that mobility is damaging to the well-being of the American family. Although information can be gained from such literature, its usefulness in this discussion is inherently compromised by the format in which it is presented. It should be noted that many of the conclusions presented by

these individuals are supported by well controlled research, but their tendency to generalize across a wide range of conditions should be questioned. This again reflects the tendency to view the topic of mobility in terms of either good or bad.

Many explanations have been presented to explain the apparent contradictions found throughout the literature. One explanation of the phenomenon, which I believe is the common denominator, has been overlooked by most researchers. All the studies that link mobility with negative consequences include other variables that can be considered stressors, chronic and acute. The chronic stressors include low socioeconomic status, family troubles, and low IQ. The acute stressors include the onset of adolescence and differences in culture. Simmons et al. (1987) pointed out the negative impact cumulative change has on adolescents. Children who are forced to cope with several life stressors concurrently are at risk. It appears moving is a stress that when added to other stressors has a negative impact on the child. These include, but not limited to, the independent variables presented in Table 1. On the other hand, when other stressors are minimal the outcome of a move can be positive. Table 2 lists variables that help reduce stress associated with relocation. Therefore, it may not be the move per se that causes negative consequences but the stress of the move when added to other significant changes in a child's life.

Age is a significant factor as it relates to the conse-

Table 1.

Description of Variables Associated with Studies that Suggest Mobility has a Negative Effect on Children

VARIABLE	DESCRIPTION
Age	Adolescence
	Five to six
I.Q.	Below 109
Family Background	Low socioeconomic
	Single parent
	Abuse and neglect
Distance Moved	Greater than 50 miles (non-military)
	Greater than 500 miles (military)
Recency of Last Move	Six months or less
Military	Negative identification

Table 2.

Description of Variables Associated with Studies that Suggest Mobility has a Positive Effect on Children

VARIABLE	DESCRIPTION
I.Q.	Above 109
Family Background	Previous separations from parents
Military	Positive identification

quence of moving. Critical ages appear to be adolescence and the age when a child leaves the home and enters school. Adolescence brings with it many changes such as puberty, involvement with the opposite sex, and increased pressure from peers. The adolescent, therefore, is more sensitive to the stress of a move because of the added burden associated with this age. On the other hand, the five or six year child old is leaving the familiar environment of his or her home and entering the unfamiliar environment of school. With the move, the young child must cope with a new home environment and also the new experience of entering school.

Intelligence also plays an important role in the understanding of the effect of mobility on children. Lower IQ is associated with studies that suggest mobility has a negative effect while higher IQ is related to a positive effect. This tendency is also seen in indirect ways. Students who made lower grades throughout their school career, an indication of lower IQ, are affected negatively by relocation. Lower intelligence apparently exacerbates problems associated with relocation while a child with a higher intelligence appears able to handle the added stress and even benefit from the move. Relocation is another stressor added to an already stressful life of those with lower intelligence.

Children from a disadvantaged background respond negatively to relocation. The disadvantages include low socioeconomic backgrounds, families of different composition, and foster care placement among others. Each of these are con-

sidered significant stressors which when added to the stressor of multiple moves places the mobile child at a disadvantage when compared to the less mobile child. The child not only has to cope with the move but also handle possible financial pressures, a one parent household, or abuse and neglect. On the other hand, a child who experienced previous healthy separations from his or her parents adjusted better to subsequent relocations.

When a move is of considerable distance, there appears to be negative consequences for the child. Distance moved is a variable that had been defined differently in various studies. A common feature in the definition appears to be the dramatic difference experienced in separate locations. In the military population this included overseas moves while in the non-military population it included out of county moves. The longer move means the child may need to adjust to a different culture. Lifestyles differ in various parts of the country and are especially different when country borders are crossed. Not only is the home new but so is the town, creating an additional adjustment.

Recency of moves has a negative impact on a child but the negative effect disappears with time. There appears to be some negative consequences immediately following a move but after a period of adjustment most children return to their prior level of functioning. The move itself, which includes packing and unpacking, disruption of normal routines, and becoming familiar with a new environment places

pressure on those involved. The adjustment process takes approximately six months to complete.

The military is a common component of many studies. This population was used by researchers because of the chronic mobility experienced by this group. But conclusions based on the results using this population are dangerous. The unique infrastructure of the military is not shared by the general population and may give the military an advantage. This would include support received by the military family in locating housing and organizations set-up to incorporate the family into its new environment. Changing schools doesn't involve as significant a curriculum change as it does in non-military schools. This in effect reduces the total stress experienced by the military family and by the child which helps explain why the military is prevalent among studies suggesting mobility has a positive effect on children.

Feelings of alienation from military life is associated with the negative consequences of relocation. Feelings of alienation would, to a large extent, negate the advantages of the military. A mother would be less likely to use services provided by the military if she feels alienated and thus would experience more stress during a move than would her counterpart. This stress in turn also would be experienced by her children.

Mobility is correlated with both positive and negative effects. It appears moving in and of itself may be no more

than another one of life's stresses. Moving has advantages for the resilient child under little stress but has disadvantages for the child who is already experiencing numerous stressors.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Every year approximately 20% of the population in the United States relocate. This mobility rate dates back to the 1800's. The leading reason for relocation is economic as individuals are in search of employment or attempting to advance their employment. Along with the bread winner goes the family and the children. Much research, dating as far back as 1928, has been generated trying to determine what effect mobility has on children. Confusion has mounted as the scientific literature on the topic appeared to be contradictory. The popular press warned against moving, basing much of the reasoning on scientific research. But one finds, reading through the literature, numerous reports claiming mobility is beneficial or has no effect on the child at all.

Investigators have tried to explain the contradictions by accurately stating much of the earlier research and some latter research were uncontrolled or poorly designed. But even well designed research showed both positive and negative effects, and no effect at all. Literature as recent as 1989 (Hendershott, 1989) continued to address the contradictions.

The interest appears to be high. Parents make decisions whether or not to move based on their knowledge of how the move will effect their children. Schools spend money implementing programs designed to assimilate new students

into their new environment. Counselors seek information to help treat the emotional problems of new arrivals. Entire states, as is the case in Queenland, Australia, have proposed a common curriculum for their school system to help solve what they perceive as difficulties of the mobile student. But based on scientific literature, no one can answer with a simple yes or no the question: Is mobility harmful to a child?

Studies on mobility should not be used to conclude whether mobility has a good or bad effect on children but rather under what circumstances mobility is harmful or helpful. This study suggests mobility is another life stressor and when added to other stressors, relocation increases the likelihood of impacting negatively on a child. On the other hand, it is suggested when stress is minimal in a child's life, experiences associated with mobility may benefit the child.

Tooley (1970) may have been wrong when she stated mobility is not a stressor. Children can benefit from moving but probably only when other life stressors are minimal. An effort should be made by those involved to reduce problems associated with moving as well as problems in other areas of the child's life in order for the child to gain from the experience. It does not appear the move itself is a problem.

Contradictions among the studies are resolved when variables used in the research are considered. Those studies that suggested a negative relationship between mobility and

adjustment were confounded by initial variables that placed a child at risk. Mobility was associated with positive effects in studies that included variables that help reduce the stress that accompanies relocation. Mobility, therefore, should not be viewed apart from other factors affecting a child's life.

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