Effects of residential and school mobility on foster children's academic performance

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EFFECTS OF RESIDENTIAL AND SCHOOL MOBILITY ON
FOSTER CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Brigette Vanessa Miller
Mabel Salvatierra
June 2007
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the correlation between residential and school mobility on foster children’s academic performance. The subjects of this study were children ranging from ages 16 through 18, who were placed in out-of-home care and were receiving Independent Living Program (ILP) services, through Riverside County’s Department of Children’s Services.

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, secondary data analysis research method, availability sampling and yielded a total sample size of 71 subjects. The findings indicated that residential and school mobility does affect some aspect of the children’s academic performance, namely their CAHSEE Math Exam scores and their grade level. More than fifty percent of the sample population performed below grade level.

The findings of this study will better inform social workers of the importance of foster children’s residential and school stability and continuity. This study provides suggestions for future research.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the supervisor, Crystal Shackleford of the Riverside County Department of Children’s Services, Metro office, for her relentless dedication and endless support. We would also like to thank the Metro office ILP social worker, Kim Stark for her assistance in the obtainment of children’s academic transcripts, and sharing with us her expertise of foster children’s academic needs. Without your generous support this research would not have been accomplished.

We would also like to thank our wonderful and patient research advisor, Dr. Herb Shon. Without your continuous feedback, support, advice and guidance, this project would not have been a success.

Lastly, we would like to thank our families and friends for their endless support, patience and belief in our efforts. Without your support we would not have been able to accomplish our dream.
DEDICATION

To my mother, Mrs. Joan M. Miller; and my amazing son, Patrick Hawthorne.

Para mi familia, especialmente mi madre, Aida. Por haber venido a este país con la esperanza de una vida mejor para nuestra familia. Sus esfuerzos y apoyo me han dado la oportunidad y la fuerza para seguir mis sueños y hacerlos realidad. Gracias.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

For sake of developing a healthy sense of self, all children need stability and security in their developing years. To do so, children must live in an environment that will allow them to grow, not only physically, but also mentally and emotionally. Sadly, not all children are given the opportunity to live in a stable and safe environment. When a child’s well-being is in danger, Child-Protective Services (CPS) is called upon to assist the family in their hardships to protect the children. The child welfare social worker may find it necessary to place the child in a foster care home for an extensive amount of time. With this placement, the system may begin a detrimental course of mobility. This mobility can allow for CPS to unconsciously fail the child by beginning the process of moving the child from home to home and school to school. This results in a lack of residential and academic continuity for the child. Such a lacking can further result in negative effects such as behavioral, emotional, and academic setbacks.
According to Zetlin and Weinberg (2004a), children who are in the foster care system represent one of the most educationally vulnerable populations in our society. Children in out-of-home care were reported as having a higher rate of absenteeism, disciplinary referrals, and grade retentions (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006). Therefore, children who were in out-of-home care, were more likely to experience academic setbacks and social struggles in class when compared to their non-foster care peers (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003). This critical issue of educational and residential mobility is of great importance because the residual effects of a lack of continuity may affect the child's academic and social performance. A study by Zetlin et al. (2006) found that 75 percent of out-of-home children performed below grade level, while more than 50 percent had been retained at least once in school. Compared to these children, almost 25 percent of the general population had been retained at least once by the beginning of high school (Bachman, O'Malley, & Johnston, 1978). Compared to those students who were not in the foster care system, foster care children were more apt to being retained.
According to the latest Child Welfare Services Report (2004), Riverside County was reported to have 778 children in the foster care system. Out of the 778 children, nineteen of the children had been moved, both residentially and/or academically, at least five times in one year. For the purpose of this study, we referred to children who were not in the care of their parents, as out-of-home children. Out-of-home children are not only exposed to the initial abuse that introduces them to CPS, but also run the risk of experiencing further trauma from a system that can potentially cause an additional academic and emotional delay.

The need for intervention in school and residential mobility was evident, and the state of California was on the forefront of intervention with the implementation of Assembly bill 490 (AB 490), which became effective January 1, 2004. AB 490 was intended to increase school stability and decrease the number of school placements an out-of-home child will experience. The bill attempted to ensure that educational placement decisions were made in the best interest of the child (National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues, 2004). It intended to create a collaborative effort between the
county social worker, the juvenile court, Local Educational Agencies' (LEA's) foster care education liaisons, care providers, advocates and the child, when deciding what was in the best interest of the child's educational placement (National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues, 2004).

As a child moves into the foster care system, the phrase "it takes a village to raise a child" may come into a literal meaning. As a village and/or social system, the foster care system must ensure that a child's educational needs are met on a continual basis. Although AB 490 was a step towards improving the educational outcomes of out-of-home children, it was not enough. It was crucial for the practice of social work to continue assessing the residual effects that residential and academic mobility may have had on a child. It is important for the profession to address the lack of continuity an out-of-home child faces when entering the foster care system. When a child enters the foster care system experiencing loss, abuse, and attachment issues, the social worker must take all aspects of the child's experience to assess where and when to move a child.
The proposed study researched academic and residential mobility and addressed any academic setbacks an out-of-home child experienced. The proposed study assisted social workers in recognizing the importance of conducting a holistic assessment when contemplating when and where to place a child while weighing the possible negative and positive outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at examining the academic effects of residential and school mobility for out-of-home children, specifically foster care children ranging in ages from sixteen to eighteen, who were in the Independent Living Program (ILP).

For various reasons, children may have been exposed to a lack of continuity through their movement from residence to residence, which at times, may have also resulted in moving to various schools throughout the academic year. Research and literature in this area was "almost non-existent" prior to the year 1987 (Martin & Jackson, 2002). Furthermore, the majority of previous studies on educational outcomes of foster children had focused on the experiences of emancipated foster youth,
not children who were currently in out-of-home care and were attending high school. Minimal research had been done on the effects of residential and school mobility on children who were still enrolled in school and in the Independent Living Program.

This study aimed at examining the effects school and residential mobility may have had on the academic performance of out-of-home children. Academic performance was determined by the examination of the following variables: a) high school Grade Point Average (GPA) b) California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) test results, c) current grade level. It aimed at investigating if there were any correlations between residential and school mobility to the academic variables.

The variables were measured by conducting secondary data analysis. This method was done by utilizing availability sampling and having a sample size of approximately 50-80 foster children. It utilized the California statewide Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to conduct the availability sampling. This study drew the random sample from the case files of children who ranged from ages sixteen to
eighteen and were in the Independent Living Program. Secondary data analysis was done by reviewing the case files for residential and school placements and any school records that were included in the case file.

The study was a quantitative study. A quantitative approach was used in the study as an effort to try to determine whether there were any significant correlations between mobility and academic performance. This study had a sample size of 71 participants, which allowed for validity and reliability in the study. Secondary data analysis was better suited for the purpose of keeping the children’s confidentiality and eliminating any harm to the child.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The significance of the study is for the findings to contribute to the social worker’s ability to more carefully assess risk factors when determining a change in out-of-home placement. Specifically, the study may be referenced when reviewing programs that address improvements in the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (Assembly Bill 636), which annually illustrates the results of the program’s performance. The
findings may be used to reinforce and refine the importance of keeping the children in the foster care system, in a more permanent placement.

According to Jones and Lansdverk (2006), foster care children tend to lag behind their non-foster care counterparts in the academic areas of mathematics and language arts skills, due to their frequent residential mobility. Therefore, identifying and overcoming obstacles to permanently placing foster children in this age group became an issue that could not be ignored. Inevitably, these foster care children aged-out of the foster care system and became part of their community. This may be the same community that had inadvertently failed while expecting them to become productive citizens.

In regards to public policy, this study could help support further legislation on ensuring the best interest of the child’s education when planning for placement of foster care children. With policies such as AB 490, which addressed the importance of a child’s educational needs, it was becoming more apparent that a child’s educational needs were as important as all other risk and safety factors.
This study could be used on a policy level to improve the recently implemented Family-to-Family program, which works with available resources in the neighborhood to decrease the chances of a child being placed in out-of-home care and removed from their community. Furthermore, the results of this study could be used by the child’s attorney and/or court dependency unit (CDU) social worker when assessing the educational needs of the child. The findings could better prepare a social worker for placement options, if the agency finds it necessary to remove the child from his original neighborhood.

One last group that can benefit from the results of this study are the educators and the school districts between which the child is transferred. If the educational system had a better understanding of the needs of this population, it could improve the chances that the child’s educational needs be met, no matter where they may be placed. Based on the aforementioned information, this study explored the effects of foster care children’s multiple school placements and residential mobility upon academic performance.
The findings of this study better informed social workers of the importance of foster children's residential and school stability and continuity. The beneficiaries of this study were the children who were directly affected by the number of transitions they inevitably experience and its effect upon their academic performance.

This study was relevant to child welfare practice for the purpose of identifying the importance of the concurrent planning program. This program is used as a tool for exploring permanent placement options for a foster care child while at the same time, attempting to reunify them with their parents. As a placement is considered, the social worker must take into consideration that their residential and educational stability is essential to ensure a solid foundation for their total well-being.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to examine previous studies conducted on the educational experience of children who are placed in out-of-home care. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is academic effects of children who are in out-of-home placement, followed by, behavioral and academic setbacks, and lastly a discussion of the theories used in conceptualization.

Academic Performance of Children in Out-of-Home Care

As children are removed from their homes in which they are at high risk of injury or harm, they are placed in homes far removed from their communities of origin. These placements can vary in options such as group homes, foster care homes, shelters, relatives’ homes, or non-related extended family members’ homes. Some of the placements may be close to home but most of the children are placed a great distance away from home. In 2004, 445 children in Riverside County were moved over 11 miles
away from their original neighborhood when first placed in out of home care. During that same year only 183 children moved within one mile of their original neighborhoods (Center for Social Services Research, 2005).

Zetlin et al. (2004) state that foster children who are moved around the system are often “out of school for large portions of the school year, lose academic credit due to moves made mid-semester, and have incomplete education records due to missing transcripts, assessments, and attendance data” (Zetlin et al, 2004, p.919). High residential mobility and school transfers have been found to adversely effect foster youth. Because the child experiences many moves from home to home, that lack of attachment and stability may impact their educational aspirations. The lack of continuity they experienced hindered their ability to be secure enough to have a positive educational experience. These numbers are of great concern when taking into consideration that the 445 children that moved, were more likely in need of changing schools. Research showed that such moves resulted in lower academic performance and have had a
downward trajectory on a child’s standardized test scores (Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981).

This high degree of mobility, which may result in lower academic performance, can have a lasting effect on a foster care child. According to Pilling (1987), children with low educational attainment were found to experience a more difficult time in obtaining and keeping employment, having stable housing, or being able to enjoy as many leisure activities as their more stable counterparts (as cited in Jackson, 1988).

Another study suggested that children in foster care, who changed schools more often, tended to fall further behind in their academics and learning disabilities tended to be unaddressed, compared to their non-foster care counterparts who lived at least with one parent (Blome, 1997). Still other studies (e.g., Bensen et al., 1979; Levine, 1966; Mundy et al., 1989) showed data that supported the assumption that higher mobility rates among children in lower SES populations were closely correlated with poorer academic performance (Eckenrode, Rowe, Laird, Brathwaite, 1995).

Zetlin, Weinberg, and Kimm (2004) found that among the many problems associated with frequent foster care
mobility, these children were more likely to miss more actual school days, had more problems making up missed school credits, were falling behind academically, were repeating courses that they had already completed, had delays in transmitting cumulative academic records between schools, and more problems in evaluation of their special education status. As social workers appear to be aware of these concerns, studies have found that caseworkers were overburdened with a large amount of cases and became more focused on the children’s healthy well-being and safe physical environment which caused them, inadvertently, to overlook their educational needs (Conger, 2003). Furthermore, the social workers expressed that they did not feel adequately educated on the procedures of each school district and were unsure whom they were to contact when they did encounter a problem (Zetlin et al., 2003).

There were some studies (e.g., Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996; Greene & Daugherty, 1961; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000) that found that there were few to no negative effects on academic performance for a foster care child transferring between schools. For some of the children that came from unpleasant home environments,
Conger (2003) suggested that the transfer from that environment to a new school and atmosphere enabled a child to begin with a fresh start and found that the new school improved their well-being which resulted in better academic performance. Conger and Rebeck (2001) conducted a study in New York that suggested a positive relationship between a foster care child’s school transfer rate and a more stable attendance record.

With the majority of evidence having shown the negative effects of the child moving to out-of-home placement, it is important to begin researching best practices to address these needs. Altshuler (2003) found that educational needs were best met when children had foster care parents who were involved in their education. In addition to, or in instances where the foster care parent had been unable to devote a large amount of time to the foster child, some states had devised documentation, such as an ‘educational’ or ‘health passport,’ that is available to help inform a caregiver of the child’s academic needs. This is used to inform any out-of-home care provider and any new school of any specific needs of the child, to better meet their needs. The ‘educational passports’ contained information
regarding school placement, attendance records, and Individual Educational Plans (IEP’s), if necessary (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2003).

A study in California, suggested that an intervention by the Foster Youth Services program could increase the academic performance and have a positive effect on the graduation rates of foster care children by providing these children with tutoring assistance, utilizing tools to better keep up with school records and/or transcripts, and providing programs that mentor youth who live in group homes (Ayasse, 1995). Similarly, in New York, a new database system called, "The Core Student Record System", which kept track of a child’s GPA, proposed graduation date, current academic grade level, any possible disabilities, and special academic needs, was created to improve the record keeping of foster youth’s academic records (Conger, 2003).

Behavioral and Academic Setbacks of Children in Out-of-Home Care

Out-of-home children come to the attention of CPS, for many reasons and are more apt to experience behavioral problems, and experience additional academic setbacks due to their mobility. Research has found that
foster care children who experienced a high degree of mobility tended to display more deviant behaviors than those in more permanent placements. These behaviors may have included fighting with peers, disrespecting adults and educators, and stealing or vandalizing property. Rowe and Eckenrode (1999) examined the academic difficulties among maltreated and non-maltreated children during their elementary years. Grade repetition was examined and it was found that maltreated children displayed a greater risk of experiencing their first retention during kindergarten and first grade (Rowe & Eckenrode, 1999). It was found that during the educational period between the second and sixth grades, maltreated and non-maltreated children were indistinguishable in their risk of grade retention (Rowe & Eckenrode, 1999). Rowe and Eckenrode (1999) concluded that signs of academic difficulties appeared very early in a child’s academic life. Therefore, academic monitoring should begin to be focused upon during the earlier stages of a child’s cognitive development before academic regressions begin to show.

Zetlin, Weinberg and Kimm (2005) found that foster youth had a higher rate of disciplinary referrals compared to other children, and more than fifty percent
of the youth had been retained in school at least once. This may have been attributed to foster youth having had a multitude of academic difficulties such as weaker cognitive abilities, which adversely effected their scores on standardized testing (Altshuler, 2003; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004a). Foster youth were found to also exhibit behavioral problems in a school environment. These behaviors ranged from “aggressive, demanding, immature and attention seeking behaviors to withdrawn, anxious and over-compliant behaviors” (Zetlin et al., 2005). The behavioral difficulties may have lead many of these children to experience grade retentions, “placement below age appropriate grade level”, and suspensions and/or expulsions (Shin, 2003; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004a, p.918). Eckenrode, Rowe, Laird and Brathwaite (1995) concluded that one of the reasons maltreated children experienced more academic difficulties was because maltreated children were more likely to experience relatively high levels of residential and school mobility. Therefore, these studies connect to the purpose of this research by showing how the lack of continuity, through mobility, can effect a child’s academic performance.
Altshuler (2003) conducted a qualitative study with seven foster care children who were in middle school. The study gathered information regarding the children’s perceptions of the foster care system and how it related to academic performance. The participants for the interview discussed how being in a foster care placement effected their school behavior. Many of the children stated that they did not express their feelings at home, but instead, showed their anger and frustrations at school (Altshuler, 2003). The participants revealed that since being placed in foster care, they believed they have had more behavioral problems at school. Additionally, they also stated that they had no other place or ways of expressing their feelings. Social caseworkers were also interviewed. These social workers stated how they believed the negative stereotypes that come with being a foster child played a role in the teacher’s decision in sending a child to the office, due to behavioral difficulties (Altshuler, 2003). This study suggested that the teacher possibly had preconceived notions of what a foster child’s behavior would look like, therefore, having become less tolerant or patient of the foster child.
Whether it was the teachers’ preconceived notions of how a foster child will behave or not, the fact remained that foster care children may have been more likely to experience behavioral problems when compared to non-foster care children (Shin, 2003; Zetlin et al., 2005). McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White and Thompson (2003) conducted a study on the school experiences of 262 emancipated foster youth and found that 73% had been suspended at least once since the seventh grade and 16% of them had been expelled from school. McMillen et al. (2003) reported “most of the students reported at least one midyear school change since seventh grade, and 58% reported failing a class within the last year” (p.483). Furthermore, approximately one third of the students of this study reported being involved in at least one physical altercation with another student in the past year and verbal fights with teachers (McMillen et al., 2003). It has been evident that low academic achievement and behavioral problems in schools were predictors for a higher rate of drop out in their later years (McMillen et al., 2003).

Despite the overwhelming amount of studies linking low academic performance to foster children’s residential
and academic mobility, Larry Evans' (2004) study concluded how "the overall academic development appears neither enhanced nor hindered by foster care placement" (Evans, 2004, p.527). He further asserts that "enhanced academic achievement is not a primary foster care goal" (Evans, 2004, p.533). According to Martin and Jackson (2002), the child welfare system must have begun to accept responsibility for the disparity in the education of their foster children. Research has concluded that social workers should have taken into account every aspect of the child’s life when preparing a child for emancipation, in particular, the importance of an adequate education experience must have been one of the key objectives (Bloome, 1997; Martin & Jackson, 2002).

Overall, the findings of the literature concluded that foster children were more likely to have behavioral problems, for a variety of reasons, whether it be due to the reason(s) they were removed or the effects of school and residential mobility. Foster children were also at risk of retention due to the effects of school mobility. In the process of transferring from one school to the next, school records were lost, or were never transferred to the new school district, and therefore the child may
have needed to repeat a class, due to the lack of records.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

This study focuses on a foster care child’s residential and school mobility and its affects on their academic performance. Ecological systems theory and attachment theory were used to conceptualize this study.

The attachment theory was used to appreciate a child’s need to have an incessant parental figure in their life. This is needed to better ensure that a child’s development is mentally healthy. According to John Bowlby (1951), “the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment” (as cited in Bretherton, 1992, p.13). Residential mobility affects the relationships between the child and their parental figure. The child’s school setting is another attachment relationship that affects their developmental growth. The formed attachments in both the residential setting and school setting are what will be investigated in this study.
The ecological systems theory is used to view the foster care child in the environment of their out-of-home placement. Each foster care parent becomes a different person in the child’s environment and disruptions in their homeostasis may result in a change in a child’s school placement. According to Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2004), a person must adapt to their changing environment. This is not only a change for the child entering a new residence, or school, but also a change for those whose environment they are entering. Each member of the new environment must find a way to adapt to the change. Foster care providers, educators, and each foster care child must work together to ensure that the changes in placement are done with special consideration for the child’s well-being.

Summary
Previous literature has addressed negative correlations of high mobility to the educational needs of children in out-of-home care. The previous studies have researched the issue utilizing quantitative and qualitative research methods. The qualitative study reviewed a few of the academic needs of the children as
stated by the children, educators, and social workers. There are few studies that have expressly addressed the importance of strong residential stability and the positive educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODS

Introduction

This section will include an overview of the research methods to be used in this study. This section will address the design of the study; the sampling methods; the process in which data is collected, the procedures in obtaining the data; efforts used to protect the human subjects; and the analysis of the specific data.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the correlation between residential and academic mobility and academic performance of out-of-home children, specifically, children between the ages of sixteen to eighteen who were in the Independent Living Program (ILP). Academic performance was measured by examining the foster child's high school transcript and their grade point average (GPA). These transcripts exposed whether they have passed, failed, or did not take the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). They also showed their
grades, academic units and whether they performed below, above or at appropriate grade levels.

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, secondary data analysis research method. A quantitative, cross-sectional, secondary data analysis method was the most appropriate research design for this study because it was the most feasible way to access several of the dependent variables of this specific population at a particular point of time in their lives. Secondary data analysis was utilized in this study because of the accessibility of obtaining high school transcripts as opposed to the more intrusive formality of interviews or distribution of questionnaires to each participant. It was also less costly and time-consuming than it would have been if the researchers had conducted formal interviews with the sample.

One of the limitations of this study was the minimal amount of data that was obtainable. The high school transcripts of each child were obtained by researching their foster care case file. However, the transcripts were not in the same format; every transcript was designed differently. It was limited to grades, GPA, CAHSEE results, and school placements. However, in regard
to school placements, they did not state the school’s name or if it was located out of county. It simply read “out of district.” Due to the transcripts only saying “out of district,” the researchers were not able to identify the number of schools the child attended once they were removed from the initial district or county. Additionally, it did not include absenteeism information, suspension/expulsions, or the number of months attended. This was very limiting when analyzing the data because there were a number of additional variables that should have been taken into account when examining residential and school mobility and their relationship to academic performance.

Another limitation of the study was the sole utilization of secondary data analysis. It may have been more beneficial to not only have analyzed secondary data, but to have also interviewed the children. As mentioned above, there were other variables that were inaccessible to the researchers. The researchers were not able to access the children’s overall academic performance. However, interviewing a child, in addition to analyzing their high school records, would have been beneficial because it would’ve given the researchers a better
insight into the child's personal academic experience and their perception of correlation to school and academic mobility. It would have also given the researchers a better understanding of the overall picture.

Sampling

The sample consisted of children who were placed in out-of-home care and in the protective custody of Riverside County Children's Services. The children ranged from the ages of sixteen to eighteen and were in the Independent Living Program. The children were both male and female and were ethnically diverse. The children had caseworkers that were located in the Riverside Metro office. In order to obtain access to the child's case file, formal consent was needed from the deputy director, and regional manager. Parental consent or the child's consent was not needed because the children were not interviewed or surveyed.

The researchers expected to conduct secondary data analysis on 50 to 80 active case files of out-of-home children. The researchers used probability sampling to choose the sample. The determination to obtain the sample from Riverside County Children's Services was made
because it was the only agency that had high school transcripts of children enrolled in the Independent Living Program (ILP) of Riverside County. The sample was chosen because the youth receiving ILP services were the children who had completed or were close to high school completion. Also, the researchers were able to obtain their high school transcripts by retrieving their ILP files and case files.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data for this study was collected utilizing two different data extraction forms (Appendix A&B). The first form was used to extract information from the subjects' high school transcripts as it pertained to the hypothesis statement. This was used to examine the dependent variables regarding academic achievement among the subjects (Appendix A). The second form was used to extract the frequency of residential and school mobility from participant case files (Appendix B).

The specific information obtained from participants' high school transcripts included current Grade Point Average (GPA), total number of units completed, total required number of units for a particular grade, and
CAHSEE test results. Academic achievement, the major dependent variable of the study, was primarily measured using an interval level of measurement. The CAHSEE test results were measured using a ratio level of measurement.

The independent variables of the study were academic and residential mobility in residential and school settings. These included factors such as age at first placement, age at first referral to the child protective hotline, total number of referrals in the CWS/CMS database, total number of in-county and out-of-county schools, number of Out-of-Home Investigations (OHI referrals), and type of abuse allegations. Both forms included demographic information such as age, ethnicity/race, and gender. The demographic information was measured using a nominal level of measurement.

This study used a mobility data extraction form to collect data regarding moves between schools and placements (Appendix B) and an academic performance data extraction form to collect data regarding academic achievements (Appendix A). These forms had been designed to measure the amount of time a child had moved and their current academic performance, at the time the data was collected. The instruments were created to examine both,
the independent and dependent variables needed to conduct the study. The reason these instruments had been created was due to the fact that there were no available measurement tools to examine the variables needed for this particular study.

The strength of the school mobility/academic performance data extraction forms was that they examined the dependent variables (CAHSEE mastery, GPA, and number of units completed) that the peer group in which the subjects that were measured were known to have experienced. This was expected based on statistics in the CWS/CMS reports that indicated that this demographic group was more likely to have been in, or have attended school. The largest limitation of this measurement instrument was that there was no way to measure the behavioral effects of residential and school mobility. Although the instruments could have been created to include those variables, the available transcripts did not include that information. The measurement instrument also had a limitation of addressing the degree of absenteeism, as that information was unavailable to the researchers. These forms were pretested using the Internal Consistency Reliability also known as the
'split-half' method. Similar results were found if half of the sample was examined. The validity of these forms was accurately measured using content validity in which other experts were invited to view the findings.

Procedures

Data for this study was gathered by extracting information from high school transcripts of children receiving services from the Independent Living Program (ILP) of Riverside County’s Department of Public Social Services (DPSS). The coordinator of the ILP was solicited for access to the files and permission was granted. The researchers, Brigette Miller and Mabel Salvatierra, obtained files that met the criteria for the study and reviewed all available data. The eligible files were then cross-referenced in the CWS/CMS database system to extract information about any residential mobility.

The data collection took place in the Children’s Services division of the DPSS by the researchers. The collection procedure consisted of the researchers utilizing the aforementioned data collection instruments (Appendices A&B). The school/residential mobility data extraction form was used to extract data pertaining to
the subject’s residential placements and number of school placements. Examining the placement information in the CWS/CMS database and recording the information on the data extraction form analyzed the number of residential placements. The number of school placements were extracted by examining the high school transcripts in the file and recording the information onto the data extraction form (Appendix A).

The GPA, CAHSEE mastery, and total number of high school units completed were recorded on the academic performance data extraction form (Appendix A). This information was extracted from the high school transcripts.

The allowed time to examine each transcript and information in the CWS/CMS database took approximately 15 minutes, for a total time of 7 days when the files were examined for less than 4 hours a day. Based on these calculations, all data extraction took approximately two weeks.

Protection of Human Subjects

Due to the highly vulnerable position of the children involved in this study, preventive measures to
ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the participants had to be taken. First, each transcript and data extraction form was coded with an ID number to ensure anonymity. No personal or identifying information such as names, birth dates, or name of schools were recorded on the data extraction forms. Once the data needed from the case files were obtained, the case files were returned to the caseworker while the researchers kept only the data extraction form with the ID number and a copy of the high school transcript with all identifying information omitted. The individual participant's identifying information was deleted on any and all copies of transcripts.

The high school transcripts, case records, and data extraction forms were kept confidential throughout the study. The case records were kept with the caseworker at all times, and once the information needed was extracted, the case files were returned to the caseworker. No case files were ever taken out of the Metro Children's Services office. The only individuals who had access to the data were the researchers Mabel Salvatierra and Brigette Miller, and their research advisor. When all information was entered into the computer, all extraction
forms and copies of high school transcripts were destroyed, by placing the forms into the county approved shredding container.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed utilizing a secondary data analysis method. Demographic variables were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions and measures of central tendency. Inferential statistics of data analysis was used to assess the correlation between the residential mobility and/or school mobility (independent variables) and the GPA, CAHSEE results (passing/not passing), and number of high school units completed (dependent variables) by adolescents in out-of-home care.

A cross-tabulation test, also known as the chi-square test was used to determine the relationship, if any, between the number of residential and school placements and a foster child’s academic performance. The strength and direction of the effects of an out-of-home adolescent’s residential and/or school mobility and their GPA, CASHEE mastery, and number of completed high school
units was assessed using Pearson’s product moment correlation coefficient, also known as Pearson’s r.

Summary

This chapter gave an overview of how and through whom the data was collected for this research project. The CWS/CMS database was researched and responses were recorded using the School Mobility/Academic Performance & Abuse History/Residential Mobility Data Extraction Forms to examine the hypothesis that academic and residential mobility adversely affects children in out-of-home care. The findings of this study are discussed further in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this research project. The researchers found a number of significant adverse effects of multiple residential and school placement changes on a foster care children's academic performance. Demographic data are presented to describe the sample population. Tables are also provided to describe the sample as well as give a visual description of the data collection findings, in addition to the demographic statistics.
Presentation of the Findings

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1. Gender and Ethnicity of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APIA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Reported</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 describes the frequency distribution of gender and ethnicity of the sample. Females (56.3%) represented more of the sample population than did males (43.7%), but the difference was slight. Although our sample consisted of an ethnically diverse population, African Americans represented the largest ethnic group in our study (34.7%) followed by Whites (30.6%). APIA, which for the purposes of this study, has been defined as being Asian, Filipino, or of Pacific Islander decent, represented the smallest number of subjects (4.2%).
Table 2. Two-tailed Correlation Matrix for Study’s Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total # of School Placements</th>
<th>Total # of Residential Placements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total # of School Placements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.250(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Residential Placements</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 2 shows the correlation matrix that was calculated for the relationship between the subjects’ number of residential placements and the total number of school placements. A moderate positive correlation was found \((r = .036, p < .05)\). This shows that children who change residential placements are more likely to change school placements.
Types of Abuse

Table 3. Types of Abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Abuse</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Neglect</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caretaker Absence/Incapacity</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Abuse</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Risk/Sibling Abused</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial Risk</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Neglect</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Abandonment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to Protect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Endangerment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrupted Guardianship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All subjects in our study (n = 71) were children that had received substantiated and/or inconclusive reports of multiple types of abuse. For the purposes of this study, "inconclusive findings," was defined by the researchers as "any allegations of abuse that may or may not have happened". With the lack of valid evidence to substantiate a number of the allegations of abuse against the children, it was deemed infeasible to determine which
type of abuse caused the children the greatest amount of harm. With each subject falling victim to multiple types of abuse the total percentage of "types of abuse" equal a number greater than 100%. Of our sample, Table 3 shows that most of the subjects encountered two types of abuse (31.0 %), followed by encountering three different types of abuse (25.4 %). The vast majority of the subjects in our study (80.3%) encountered general neglect, caretaker absence/incapacity (76.1%), and physical abuse (43.7%).

Girls appeared to have been victim to more General Neglect and Caretaker Absence/Incapacity than did boys (42.2 % versus 38.0 %). African Americans and Whites were reported to have an equal amount of General Neglect and Caretaker Absence/Incapacity reports (26.8 %).

Placement Changes

The mean age of the subjects when they were first referred to CPS was 8.18 years old (SD = 4.334). The highest percentage (9.9%), equally, of the subjects were referred to Children's Services at age six, eight, and eleven. The mean age of the subjects' first out of home placement was 11.72 years old (SD = 4.775). The highest percentage of subjects (21.1 %) were first placed in out-of-home care at the age of 16. Table 4 shows that 35
(49.3%) of the subjects experienced OHI involvement. Of those 35 subjects, once in out-of-home care 14 of the subjects (19.7%) experienced one allegation of subsequent abuse with their substitute caregivers, with one subject (1.4%) experiencing seven additional allegations of abuse by their substitute care providers.

Table 4. Frequency of Out-of-Home Investigations Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of OHI Referrals</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 71</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average number of placements experienced by the subjects was a little more than five (mean = 5.31, SD = 4.871) total residential placements while in the care of Children's Services. Many of these subsequent residential placement changes were due to further abuse.
allegations while in the care of others, based on the number of OHI referrals. These out-of-home caretakers may have been extended relatives, foster care parental figures, or group home staff. Efforts were made to determine the types of abuse while in out-of-home care, however, the efforts were unsuccessful.

The subjects were enrolled in an average of about two and one-half (mean = 2.48, SD = 1.462) schools while in out-of-home care, with an average of .69 (SD = 1.05) of those schools being outside the boundaries of their original county. For the purposes of this study, "total schools" was defined as "the total number of high schools (grade 9-12) the subject had attended." More than one-third of the sample's 71 subjects (38%) were enrolled in two schools with four (2.8%) subjects having attended six-seven different schools. For the subjects who attended school outside the county boundaries, 21 (29.6%) of the subjects attended one school in another county, while one (1.4%) student attended three schools and another (1.4%) student attended five different schools in at least one other county. The changes in school placements between Riverside County and any of the other
counties presented difficulties in locating up-to-date academic records.

Table 5. Pearson r Correlations for Age of First Placement, Age of First Referral, and Total Number of Types of Abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age of 1st Placement</th>
<th>Age of 1st Referral</th>
<th>Total Types Abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of 1st Placement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.546(**)</td>
<td>-.282(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of 1st Referral</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.467(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Types of Abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In Table 5, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the subjects' age at first placement and the total number of types of abuse that has been reported during the subjects' childhood. A moderate negative correlation was found ($r = -.282$), indicating a statistically significant negative linear relationship between the two variables at the 0.05 alpha level.

Children whose reported abuse had resulted in their detainment from the original home at an earlier age, tended to experience more abuse throughout their
childhood as evidenced by the correlation (.017), which is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed). This evidently had little effect on the subjects’ high school GPA. Of the sample population, most of the subjects (36.6%) had a GPA between a 2.0 and a 2.99, which equates to approximately a “C” average, followed by 35.2% of the sample that had a GPA between a 1.0 and a 1.99, which equates to approximately a “D” average.

Table 6. Two-tailed Correlation Matrix for Age of 1st Placement, Age of 1st Referral, and Current Grade Point Average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age of 1st Referral</th>
<th>Age of 1st Placement</th>
<th>GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of 1st Referral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.546 (**)</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of 1st Placement</td>
<td>.546 (**)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 6 shows a Pearson correlation was calculated for the relationship between the subjects’ age at first placement in out-of-home care and their current high school GPA. A weak, negative and statistically insignificant correlation was found ($r = -0.016$).
The age of a child’s first placement in out-of-home care is not related to their current high school GPA, based on the correlation (.016) that is insignificant at the .05 level.

A Pearson correlation was also calculated for the relationship between subjects’ age of first referral and age of first placement. A strong positive correlation was found ($r = .546, p < .01$), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Children who were referred to CPS at an earlier age tended to be placed in out-of-home care at an earlier age, based on the correlation ($r = .546$), which is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.
Table 7. Ethnicity and California High School Exit Exam Exam Math Crosstabulation by Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>CAHSEE Exam Math (N = 71)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passed</td>
<td>Not Passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APIA</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Percentage</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 shows a higher percentage of African-American subjects (18.3%) passed the CAHSEE Math Exam than other ethnic groups in our sample population. However, a higher percentage of Latino/Hispanic subjects (8.5%) did not pass the exam compared to other ethnic groups in the sample. The study revealed that, of the total sample population, 25.4% have not taken the exam and there was no information available on 12.7% of the sample.
Table 8. Two-tailed Correlation Matrix for Total Residential Placements, Total School Placements, and Current Grade Point Average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total # of Residential Placements</th>
<th>Total # of School Placements</th>
<th>At Grade Level</th>
<th>CAHSEE Exam ELA</th>
<th>CAHSEE Exam Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Residential Placements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.250(*)</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>.263(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of School Placements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.270(*)</td>
<td>-.046</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Grade Level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.358(**)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.358(**)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAHSEE Exam ELA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.917(**)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAHSEE Exam Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In Table 8 a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between subjects’ number of residential placements and the effect on the subjects’ GPA. A modest, but positive correlation was found (r = .111, p < .05), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Children who change residential placements more often tend to not pass the CAHSEE Math Exam based on the correlation, which is significant (.027) at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). A Pearson correlation was calculated for the relationship between subjects’ total number of residential placements and the passing of the CAHSEE ELA Exam, which was
statistically insignificant \( r = .223, p > .05 \). Although the relationship between the number of residential placements and their ability to pass the CAHSEE ELA Exam was not statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha level, this statistic approaches statistical significance. Thus, total number of residential placements is not closely related to a subject passing the CAHSEE ELA Exam.

In Table 8 a Pearson correlation was also calculated for the relationship between subjects’ number of school placements and their current grade level. A modest positive correlation was found \( r = .270, p < .05 \), indicating a linear relationship between the two variables. Children who change school placements more frequently tend to be below their academic grade level, based on the correlation (.024) that is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Similarly, a Pearson correlation was calculated examining the relationship between subjects’ number of residential placements and their current grade level. There was a weak correlation that was not statistically significant \( r = .089, p > .05 \). The number of residential placements is not related to children’s academic grade level, based on the
correlation (.089) that is not significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). The majority of the female subjects (31.1%) were found to be at grade level and the majority of the males subjects (26.8%) tended to be below grade level.

Table 8 shows a Pearson correlation for the relationship between the subjects’ number of school placements and the subjects’ CAHSEE ELA Exam. There was a weak negative statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($r = -.046, p > .05$). It was evident that the number of school placements does not tend to affect a child’s ability to pass the CAHSEE ELA Exam, based on the correlation (.705) that is not significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). A Pearson correlation was also calculated for the relationship between the subjects’ number of school placements and the subjects’ CAHSEE Math Exam. There was a weak statistical significance relationship between the two variables ($r = .061, p > .05$). The number of school placements did not appear to affect a child’s ability to pass the CAHSEE Math Exam, based on the correlation (.613) that was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Table 9. Two-tailed Correlation Matrix for Total Residential Placements, Total School Placements, and Current Grade Point Average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total # of Residential Placements</th>
<th>Total # of School Placements</th>
<th>GPA in Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Residential Placements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.250(*)</td>
<td>-.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of School Placements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA in Categories</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 9 shows a Pearson correlation was calculated for the relationship between subjects' number of residential placements and their GPA. There was a weak negative statistically significant linear relationship between these two variables ($r = -.111$, $p > .05$). Multiple residential placement changes tend to not affect children's GPA, based on the correlation (.359) that was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). A Pearson correlation was also calculated for the relationship between the subjects' number or school placements and their GPA. Although the relationship between the number of school placements and their GPA was not statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha level ($r = -.203$, $p > .05$), this statistic approaches
statistical significance and should be considered with a larger sample population.

Table 10. Crosstabulation of Ethnicity and At Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>At Grade Level (N = 71)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APIA</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Reported</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Percentage</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 shows the subjects, categorized by ethnicity, and their status of being at current grade level. Based on the crosstabulation, 14 African Americans subjects represented the largest group that is at grade level (19.7%). The 12 Latino/Hispanic subjects ethnic group represented the majority of subjects who were not at grade level (16.9%). Of the 71 subjects 48.6 were at grade level and 51.4 were below grade level.
Summary

This study’s univariate statistics included frequencies, percentages, and mean scores for continuous variables. We found that about one-third (34.7%) of the respondents were African American (the highest represented racial group, followed by the second most represented group, Whites, at 30.6%). Most of the subjects experienced General Neglect (80.3%), followed by Caretaker Absence/Incapacity (76.1%). Most of the subjects (9.9%) were referred to CPS as early as age six. The subjects were placed in out-of-home care most often (21.1%) at age 16. After being initially removed from their original home, most (16.9%) had experienced two residential placement changes. While in out-of-home care 19.7% of the subjects were again referred to CPS for subsequent allegations of abuse.

This chapter has shown data resulting in evidence that there is a significant correlation between a foster care child’s residential and school mobility and their academic performance. Frequencies were run on the independent demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and type of abuse) to illustrate the sample population. Frequencies were also run on variables related to a
child's placement in out-of-home care, such as age of first placement and total number of placements. Pearson's correlation was then run on the independent variables and dependent variables to examine the strength of their relationships, if any.

The use of bivariate data analysis was used to examine any relationships between the independent variables (number of residential and school placements) and the dependent variables (GPA, CAHSEE Math and ELA passing status, and current grade level). These findings failed to illustrate a strong correlation between a foster care child's GPA and their mobility, although, the researchers were unable to determine if the classes the children were taking were academic or non-academic classes. It is important to note that there was a strong correlation between foster care children's mobility and their failure rate of the CAHSEE Math Exam, as children cannot graduate from high school without passing that exam. Thus, it can be argued that foster care children who experience a greater amount of changes in their residential placements and school setting placements are at a greater risk of not passing the required CAHSEE
exams on time, resulting in a probable delay in their high school graduation.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Discussion

The focus of this study was on the effects of residential and school mobility on foster children’s academic performance. The study examined foster children who were entering the emancipation process of the foster care system, by participating in the Independent Living Program (ILP). Children ranged in ages from 16 to 18. While there has been limited research conducted on the effects of mobility on foster children’s academic performance, specifically children in high school, some researchers (e.g., Zetlin et al., 2004) have found empirical evidence showing how high residential and academic mobility negatively affects foster children’s academic performance. This study tested this relationship and provides recommendations for social work practice, policy and further research. Limitations to this study were also discussed.

Research Findings

The study consisted of 71 subjects. More than half of the subjects (56.3%) were females and 43.7% were
males. African Americans were the largest represented ethnic-group in this sample (34.7%), followed by Whites (30.6%), Latinos (27.8%), and Asian and Pacific Islander Americans (4.2%). This finding is similar to previous studies that found that compared to other races/ethnicities, African American children are over-represented in the child welfare system (Lu, Landsverk, Ellis-Macleod, Newton, Ganger, & Johnson, 2004). Although this study did not primarily focus on examining ethnic and racial differences, demographic findings of this study further confirmed that African American children continue to be over-represented in the child welfare system.

The subjects in this study had a mean age of 8.18 years when they were first referred to the Department of Children Services. Referral does not necessarily mean they were detained from their original households. Referral means there was an initial investigation into possible child abuse at the age of 8 years.

Erik Erikson’s theory of developmental stages suggests that all children between the ages of 6 and 12 are working through the stage of industry versus inferiority. According to Zastro and Kirst-Ashman (2004),
school is a major focus during this stage. In order to successfully complete this developmental stage, children must feel a sense of productivity and success in their school activities. However, if children experience failure in school, peer relationships, or any other activity, they may develop a sense of inferiority. Our findings suggest that our participants were working through the developmental stage of industry versus inferiority when they were first referred to the Department of Children Services. Because the subjects have potentially been victims of abuse during this crucial developmental period, the children’s future academic performance may be hindered or impacted. Rowe and Eckenrode’s (1999) assertions that signs of academic difficulties appear early in children’s lives also align with our findings; therefore, factors impacting children’s future academic performance are potentially present before residential and/or academic mobility even occurs.

In addition to age at first referral, the study also concluded that the average age of first residential placement was 11.72 years of age. If developmental stages continue to be assessed, this age group continues to be
in Erikson’s industrious versus inferiority stage. However, because this stage ends at 12, children are transitioning between Erikson’s next stage, which he refers to as identity versus role confusion. The stage of identity versus role confusion is described as the developmental stage when young people begin to explore themselves and begin to develop a sense of identity (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2004). Moving residentially and/or academically at this stage in life may be a difficult adjustment because they are working through tasks that require young people to explore themselves and look for their identity. One common way of finding identity is by associating with groups of people and/or engaging in activities that may provide a sense of individual confidence.

The study also examined the relationship between the independent variables of residential and academic placement. These findings suggest that children who change residential placements are also more likely to change schools. The average number of residential placements experienced by the subjects in our study was approximately five placements between the time of first placement and the time the study was conducted. Also,
these subjects experienced a change in schools on an average of two and one-half times between the time of first referral and the time the study was conducted.

The study found that more than one-third of the sample’s 71 subjects (38%) had attended two schools, with four of the subjects (2.8%) attending six to seven different schools. The reasons for high residential mobility may have been due to an unexpected finding in our study. Due to further reports of abuse, almost fifty percent (49.3%) of our sample had allegations of abuse while in out-of-home care. The findings signify that although children are initially removed from their original households for substantiated abuse, they may continue to be at risk for further abuse. Our findings suggest that the number of substantiated reports of abuse is positively correlated to residential mobility.

The dependent variable of academic performance was measured by examining grade point averages (GPA), performance in standardized testing (CAHSEE), and grade level. The results indicated that 36.6% of the total sample had a GPA between 2.0 and 2.99, followed by 35.2% of the population having a GPA between 1.0 and 1.99. A Pearson’s R statistical test was run for the dependent
variable (GPA) and two independent variables (number of residential and number of school placements). No statistically significant correlation was found between these variables. Additionally, little variance was found in GPA; therefore it was not a very effective measure of academic performance. It should also be noted that although there was not a great statistical positive correlation between number of school placements and GPA, the correlation could change if the study included a larger sample size.

In the state of California children must pass a standardized test known as the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The CAHSEE measures proficiency in Math and English. When measuring ethnicity and its correlation to standardized testing, the study found that there was a higher percentage (18.3%) of African American subjects passing the CAHSEE Math portion compared to other ethnic groups in our sample. Latino/Hispanic subjects had the highest percentage (8.5%) of not passing the CAHSEE Math portion of the test.

The reason for the disparity between African-Americans and Latino/Hispanics is unknown, but may be attributed to other issues in public education.
regarding standardized testing. Another possible explanation for the disparities in testing scores, may be due to the probability that Latino/Hispanic children may come from bilingual or monolingual households. Furthermore, because the CAHSEE exam is offered to only eleventh and twelfth grade students, 25.4% of the population had not taken the exam. Not being at the qualifying grade level could have accounted for the 25.4%, but other possible reasons for this disparity between Latinos’ and African Americans’ CAHSEE scores could be related to other factors such as mid-year changes, absenteeism, misappropriated grade placement, etc. For 12.7% of the population, there was no information on their transcripts regarding CAHSEE results.

The findings also concluded that children who change residential placements tend to not pass the CAHSEE Math section. When the study measured the number of residential placements and the CAHSEE English Language Arts (ELA) section, findings showed that residential placements did not have an affect. This suggests that children’s performance is more affected on the CAHSEE Mathematics section versus the English section. A topic
for further study could be the reasons explaining why this phenomenon occurs. The CAHSEE results coincide with what previous studies have found (Altshuler, 2003; Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981; Jones and Lansdverk, 2004; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004a).

Despite this being a small sample size, the study did not include the general population of students outside of the foster care system as a control group. We do not know how this group would compare with less mobile and non-foster children. However, studies have found that foster care children tend to lag behind in areas of Mathematics, Language Arts, or any other standardized test due to their high residential/and or school mobility (Altshuler, 2003; Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981; Jones and Lansdverk, 2004; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004a).

Lastly, the study found that a little more than half (51.4%) of the population was below grade level. Our study coincides with the findings of Zetlin et al. (2004) that 75% of out-of-home children performed below grade level. Explanations for the finding of below grade level students are correlated with mobility in school placements. Our study found that children who change school placements are more likely to be below grade
level. Some reasons for this correlation can be noted by the researchers’ observations as they were conducting data collection. For example, the researchers’ noticed that school movements were made mid-school year and mid-semester; transcripts were at times incomplete, and children were repeating courses due to the changes of schools. This supports the following previous researchers’ findings: due to children’s high mobility, children are out of school for large portions of the year; students lose academic credits due to changes made mid-semester; students have incomplete school transcripts; and students experience delays in transferring cumulative records from one school district to another (Zetlin et al, 2004; Zetlin, Weinberg, and Kim, 2004).

Although school mobility was found to be correlated with being below grade level, residential placement was not positively correlated with grade level. There was no indication of a relationship between the number of residential placements and its effect on grade level. One possible reason for this may be changes in children’s residential placements while they remain enrolled at the same schools. Ethnicity and gender were also examined and
we found that African Americans were the largest group (19.7%) at grade level while Latino/Hispanics were least likely to be at grade level (16.9%). With regards to gender, more females (31.1%) were found to be at grade level, with 26.8% of males falling below grade level. The reasons for this disparity cannot be answered by this study’s data.

Limitations

There were several limitations that have potential in influencing the results of this study. These limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results of the study. The study utilized availability sampling, which resulted in a sample size that was fairly small. This sample consisted of a total of 71 subjects. This sample size is a small portion of the actual total number of individuals who are in the ILP. Also, the locality of the sample was limited to one Department of Children Service office, Riverside County Metro Office. These findings cannot be generalized to other offices within Riverside County’s Department of Children Services or to other counties, such as the counties of San Bernardino, Los Angeles, etc.
Another limitation to this study was encountered at the beginning of the research. This limitation was the inability to obtain foster children's educational passports, also known as their cumulative file. Additionally, this study was initially to be conducted on middle school children. However, it was impossible to obtain school records for middle school children. Because of this limitation, obtaining transcripts for high school students in the ILP was more feasible. The educational passports reportedly contain absenteeism records, behavioral problem/suspension reports, records of involvement in special education classes, and any other academic related information. The researchers attempted to contact the Riverside County Office of Education and the Riverside Unified School District to obtain records. However, both offices refused to give the researchers any records reportedly because educational passports/cumulative files were not reaching schools on time and not every district's files were up-to-date. This limitation suggests that the study could not accurately assess academic performance because of school absenteeism and other behavioral problems not being accounted for.
Due to not being able to access foster children's educational passport/cumulative file, the researchers decided to conduct the study on teenagers that were in the ILP. The ILP social worker had transcripts for the subjects; however, some transcripts were not being routinely updated. Data and information in the transcripts was last updated between six to twelve months prior to data extraction. Therefore, transcripts may not have accurately reflected whether the children graduated from high school or moved between various out-of-county schools.

An additional limitation to school transcripts was varied formats of the transcript form. There was no uniform standard of how a transcript should display student information. Despite this, the researchers' interpreted the findings to the best of their ability, which could have further added to error or invalidity. For example, some transcripts stated the name of the school that was out-of-county, whereas others would simply read "out-of-county." Thus, the latter data could not specify whether it was the same or multiple school placements.
The lack of information about the reasons and/or causes for the number of residential placements was also a limitation. The statewide CWS/CMS system would not state the reason(s) for change in placement when it was listed as an out-of-home placement. This limitation left the researchers to question why the children were being removed from their out-of-home placement despite there not being a record of referral indicating abuse.

Lastly, the major limitation of this study was the absence of a control group to compare the researchers' findings. Researchers did not have a non-foster care control group to compare the effects of residential and school mobility on academic performance. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the general population of foster care children. The findings in our study are merely a reflection of the 71 subjects who are under the care of social workers in the Riverside County Department of Children Services, Metro office.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice and Future Research Considerations

After examining the findings of the study, the researchers were able to make recommendations for social work practice and future research considerations.
A lack of up-to-date transcripts was a constant theme in the study. The ILP worker stated that some of the reasons for this were that the schools take a long time to send transcripts; children move frequently and it is difficult to keep up with their school mobility; some children run away from their placement and the social worker does not know if and where they are attending school; and, lastly, there is only one ILP worker in each office and keeping up-to-date transcripts can be difficult.

A recommendation for this limitation is for case carrying social workers and/or ILP social workers to remain up-to-date with the children's semester records. After each semester, the social worker or an assistant can contact the school and request the children's most current transcript.

Another recommendation is for the social worker or assistant to contact the children's school and ask for their cumulative file and most recent transcript during the time of their removal from school or home. This will assist the children when enrolling in new schools and avoid repetition of courses. If the social worker cannot obtain the cumulative file, they can request the file to
be sent to the new school. The social worker can then obtain an updated transcript and physically take it to the children's new school.

Another recommendation is to change the policy concerning the transfer of educational passport/cumulative files. The researchers discovered that school administrators were simply not enforcing the transfer policy. The policy does not seem to be implemented across the county of Riverside. Possible solutions for lack of accountability could be to implement set timelines for the transfer of educational passports/cumulative files.

The study found that 49.3% of the population had further reports of abuse while in out-of-home placements. These findings suggest that children continue to be at risk while in "protective" custody. However, there is a lack of information on the statewide CWS/CMS system that explicitly identifies the reason(s) for removal from residential placements. The researchers recommend that social workers enter more detailed information pertaining to removal from out-of-home placements in the CWS/CMS system. Additionally, a Team Decision Making (TDM) meeting should be held when the social worker is
considering detaining children and placing them in other homes. Efforts should be made to enhance continuity in the children’s lives by attempting to keep them in the same school district and school site despite being removed to different homes.

Future Research Considerations

The findings of this study left the researchers asking many unanswerable questions. For example, given that the Latino/Hispanic group fell below grade level at higher rates than others, future research should study the reasons causing their disparity in academic performance. In this study, Latino/Hispanic children had the highest rate of not passing the standardized CAHSEE Math exam. To explore the bases for this, future research can measure residential and school mobility and its effects on standardized testing for the Latino/Hispanic community.

The study also found that residential placements were correlated with students not passing the CAHSEE math section, while having no effect upon the CAHSEE ELA. The researchers did not have access to the subjects and could not obtain their opinions as to why there was a
difference in testing results. Future research should focus on reasons why there is a difference between the CAHSEE math and ELA with regard to residential placements.

Future research considerations can also be held with a different population. There are few studies on middle school children that are in the foster care system. This study found that the average age children are removed from their homes is at age 11. Children who are 11 years old are typically in the sixth grade. Some school districts classify sixth grade as middle school. The research could focus on academic performance before or after detainment during their middle school years.

Lastly, future research should consider having a control group with which to compare their findings. The findings in this study could not be compared to a control group, which limits its generalizability to other foster group populations. The sample size should also be larger. There were findings that were not statistically significant in this study, but have the possibility of being significant if the sample size were larger. Future research should consider having a larger sampling size that includes different Children Service offices, while
having a control group to which to compare their findings.

Summary

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that residential and school mobility do have an effect on some aspect of the children's academic performance. Additionally, the study also concluded that African American children were overrepresented in this study, and there was a significant academic disparity between Latinos and all other ethnic groups. The Riverside County Department of Children Services and the child welfare field may benefit from changes in several areas. Areas of improvement can be applied to future research and policy implementation that requires the collection of accurate up-to-date transcripts, timely transfers of transcripts, and the enforcement of the AB 490 law. Additionally, future research can also conduct a research with a control group, examine differential findings pertaining to race/ethnicity, and examine the possible reasons for the high probability of further abuse while in out-of-home care. County Policy can direct social workers to be educational advocates for the children by keeping
up-to-date with their records and keeping their best interest, including academic success in mind when contemplating further academic and/or school mobility.
APPÊNDIX A

SCHOOL MOBILITY/ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

DATA EXTRACTION FORM
Data Extraction Form
School Mobility/Academic Performance
(Retrieved From: High School Transcripts)

Current Grades: 9 10 11 12

Total number of school placements: ______________

Out of the total number, how many were:

1. Out – of – county: ______________
2. In – county: ______________

Total Weighted GPA: _______________________

Total number of units completed: _______________

At grade level? ☐ 1. Yes ☐ 2. No

CAHSEE Exam ELA: ☐ 1. Passed
☐ 2. Not Passed
☐ 3. Not Taken
☐ 4. Not available

CAHSEE Exam Math: ☐ 1. Passed
☐ 2. Not Passed
☐ 3. Not Taken
☐ 4. Not available

On time high school graduate: ☐ 1. Yes ☐ 2. No ☐ 3. Not Applicable
APPENDIX B

ABUSE HISTORY/RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY
Data Extraction Form
Abuse History/Residential Mobility
(Retrieved From: Case file, CWS/CMS)

Participant Demographics:
Sex: □ 1. Male □ 2. Female
Ethnicity: □ 1. African American
□ 2. White
□ 3. Asian
□ 4. Pacific Islander
□ 5. Filipino
□ 6. Latino/Hispanic
□ 7. Native American
□ 8. Other

Age: ________________

Abuse History: (Check all that apply)
Type of abuse: □ 1. General Neglect
□ 2. Physical Abuse
□ 3. Sexual Abuse
□ 4. Emotional Abuse
□ 5. Caretaker Incapacity
□ 6. Parent Abandonment
□ 7. Severe Neglect
□ 8. At Risk/Sibling Abused
□ 9. Substantial Risk
□ 10. Failure to Protect
□ 11. Disrupted Guardianship
□ 12. Child Endangerment
ID #:

Total number of CPS referrals: ______________________
Age of first referral: ______________________
Age of last referral: ______________________

Residential Mobility:
Age of first placement: ______________________
Total number of placements: ______________________
OHI involvement: □ 1. Yes □ 2. No
Number of OHI involvements: ______________________
REFERENCES


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This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:
   Team Effort: Brigette Miller & Mabel Salvatierra

2. Data Entry and Analysis:
   Team Effort: Brigette Miller & Mabel Salvatierra

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
   a. Introduction and Literature
      Team Effort: Brigette Miller & Mabel Salvatierra
   b. Methods
      Team Effort: Brigette Miller & Mabel Salvatierra
   c. Results
      Assigned Leader: Brigette Miller
      Assisted By: Mabel Salvatierra
   d. Discussion
      Assigned Leader: Mabel Salvatierra
      Assisted By: Brigette Miller