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An Evaluation of a Supportive Mentoring Program for Teenagers At-Risk of Homelessness: Effects on Academic Performance and Psychosocial Functioning in a Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of homelessness on adolescents' psychosocial functioning and academic performance and explores the efficacy of mentoring programs as a potential intervention. This study aims to examine the potential of mentoring programs to improve the overall well-being of adolescents at risk of homelessness. Homelessness is often linked with negative outcomes in areas such as mental health, social functioning, and academic achievement. Therefore, this study seeks to understand whether mentoring programs can help mitigate these negative effects and promote positive outcomes in these areas. Quantitative assessments, utilizing pre-test and post-test measures, were employed to collect data from a sample of homeless adolescents, allowing for the evaluation of changes in outcomes over time. Participants' psychosocial functioning, academic performance, and experiences with mentoring programs were assessed. Results revealed that adolescents experiencing homelessness exhibited higher psychosocial functioning and academic performance during the post-test following the implementation of the mentoring intervention. The study concludes that mentoring programs serve as a valuable intervention in addressing the negative consequences of homelessness on psychosocial functioning and academic performance among adolescents.

An Evaluation of a Supportive Mentoring Program for Teenagers At-Risk of

Homelessness: Effects on Academic Performance and Psychosocial Functioning in a

Pilot Study

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This research is dedicated to the supportive community at CitySquare and the resilient teenagers, as they collectively inspire hope and drive positive change through their determination and courage.

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INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Homelessness is a pervasive issue in many societies that can have detrimental

effects on the well-being of individuals, particularly adolescents. Homelessness can

negatively impact psychosocial functioning, such as the increased risk of depression,

anxiety, and substance use, as well as lead to academic difficulties, which can have long-

term consequences for young people's development. There are over 111,000 students

enrolled in Texas schools that are currently experiencing homelessness, and of that

111,000, at least 15% of the homeless students are unaccompanied (Texas Network of

Youth Services, 2022). According to Rumberger (2016), experiencing homelessness as

an adolescent increases the probability of them dropping out of school and not

graduating. More specifically, unaccompanied youth and teens who are experiencing

risks of homelessness have higher rates of school dropout compared to accompanied

youth or teens. Failure to complete high school, in turn, is associated with social costs of

billions of dollars and other negative social and individual consequences.

Access to basic needs, such as food, shelter, and healthcare, is critical to a

student's success in school. Unfortunately, many students are at risk of homelessness,

which can result in a lack of access to these resources. The effects of this can be

detrimental to the student's academic performance and psychosocial well-being. For

instance, students experiencing homelessness or a lack of access to resources are at

higher risk of dropping out of school, repeating grades, and performing poorly academically. Additionally, students without stable housing are more likely to experience emotional distress and develop mental health issues. According to the Public Health Post survey (Thomas, 2017), the U.S. Department of Education presented data showing the top challenges that homeless children faced in attending school. The data outlined the challenges that homeless children encounter in addition to the daily struggle to meet their basic needs. The most pressing difficulties encountered by homeless children when attending school were:

- 82%: Family concerns about meeting basic needs for survival

- 43%: Inadequate transportation

- 42%: Inability to complete homework due to a lack of a designated study space

- 30%: Insufficient clothing and supplies

- 29%: Substandard health and medical care (Thomas, 2017).

According to the data, a significant number of homeless children experience resource-related difficulties concerning their education. These challenges pose obstacles that they must overcome, further compounding their already-challenging situation.

<p style="text-align:center">Previous Research</p>

Research has demonstrated that the lack of a high school diploma or GED increases the likelihood of youth and young adult homelessness (SchoolHouse Connection, 2017). Moreover, individuals without a diploma are at a 4.5 times greater risk of living in poverty than their peers who have completed high school (SchoolHouse Connection, 2017). Obtaining a high school diploma is crucial for success in the future, and failure to obtain one can result in a host of challenges. However, many barriers

prevent students from completing high school and receiving their diplomas, including the risk of homelessness. Students who are at risk are especially vulnerable and may struggle with academic performance, as well as mental, physical, and emotional health concerns.

Homelessness is a traumatic experience that can significantly impact the mental health and academic performance of adolescents (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2022). The constant instability, fear, and uncertainty associated with homelessness can lead to a negative mindset, with adolescents experiencing feelings of hopelessness, despair, and shame (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2022). This can be compounded by the stigma and discrimination faced by homeless individuals, leading to further damage to their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. The negative mindset that develops due to homelessness can make it difficult for adolescents to focus on their studies, leading to poor academic performance and a lack of engagement in educational activities. A positive mindset influences how children and teenagers' approach daily life, which influences the development of self-esteem and confidence (Malinowska-Cieślik et al., 2019). A negative mindset can adversely affect a teenager's daily functioning by interfering with their schoolwork and studying because of the decrease in the individual's mental and emotional health (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2020). Additionally, it can have a long-lasting impact on their mental health, contributing to increased rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2020).

Social support is crucial for adolescents facing trauma from homelessness, as it provides a sense of belonging, safety, and stability. Adolescents experiencing homelessness may feel isolated and alone, exacerbating feelings of despair and

hopelessness. Social support from family members, friends, teachers, and community organizations can provide a buffer against the negative effects of homelessness (Connection with Social Supports, 2020). Such support can take many forms, including emotional support, practical assistance, and access to resources such as food and shelter (Connection with Social Supports, 2020). Social support can also provide a sense of validation and help adolescents feel seen and heard, boosting their self-esteem and self-worth. In the absence of social support, adolescents experiencing homelessness may struggle to cope with their situation, leading to an increased risk of mental health disorders and academic difficulties (Connection with Social Supports, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to provide effective social support interventions that can help mitigate the negative effects of homelessness and enable adolescents to thrive despite their difficult circumstances.

Research Gap and Present Study

While there is existing research that highlights the negative impact of homelessness on the psychosocial functioning and academic performance of adolescents, there is a gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of mentorship programs as an intervention for this population. Although some studies have examined the impact of mentorship programs on the academic outcomes of at-risk youth and teens, very few have focused specifically on the experiences of homeless adolescents. As such, there is limited understanding of the unique challenges that homeless adolescents face in relation to academic performance and psychosocial functioning, and how mentorship programs may address these challenges. This research gap highlights the need for further investigation to determine the effectiveness of mentorship programs as an intervention for homeless

adolescents and seeks to gain a better understanding of the factors that contribute to academic success for this population. The current study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How does experiencing trauma related to homelessness affect the academic performance and psychosocial functioning of teenagers?

2. To what extent do mentorship programs improve the academic performance and psychosocial functioning of at-risk adolescents who have experienced homelessness?

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a mentoring program as an intervention to address the negative effects that homelessness has on adolescents. Specifically, the study will utilize the Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive Functioning Scale to examine the students' interpersonal competence, which will refer to the student's ability to navigate social situations and relationships effectively and determine if there is a correlation between their psychosocial functioning and academic performance while participating in a mentorship program. The research study collected data from CitySquare of Abilene, which is a drop-in center catering to teens ages 13 through 18 who are at risk of homelessness.

Key Terms

The following terms will be utilized throughout this thesis:

- *Academic Performance:* refers to the quality of outputs, across multiple subjects, generated by a student or students in academic settings.

- *At-Risk:* refers to students who are identified as being at high risk of academic failure and dropping out. Student hardship refers to circumstances that can jeopardize their ability to finish school, such as homelessness.

- *Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive Functioning Scale:* an assessment of children and adolescents' social functioning, which is done by using a self-report measure that is considered to be an assessment of how well they are reaching their potential by fulfilling various roles in life.

- *Developmental Relationships:* a relationship of closeness with adults, near-peers, and peers that contributes greatly to the ability of young people to shape their own lives, be resilient, and thrive in their communities.

- *Dropout (In Texas):* a student who has not returned to public school in grades 7 through 12 the following fall, has not been expelled, has not graduated, has not received a General Educational Development certificate, has not continued his or her education outside of the public school system, has not begun college, or has died.

- *Homelessness-Related Trauma*: refers to the negative psychological and emotional effects that result from experiencing homelessness or being at risk of homelessness. This trauma can stem from a variety of factors, such as exposure to violence, living in unsafe conditions, lack of access to basic needs and healthcare, and the ongoing stress and uncertainty of not having a stable home.

- *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act:* a law enacted by the federal government designed to assist homeless students in their education.

- *Mentee:* an individual who identifies personal and professional goals, skills, and/ or knowledge that he or she would want guidance in achieving with the help of a mentor.

- *Mentor:* a wise and trusted person who has personal and professional and life experience to assist the mentee in guidance to develop skills, competencies, or goals.

- *Negative Mindset*: displaying a pessimistic outlook towards oneself and the environment.

- *Positive Mindset:* when a person fosters a constructive perspective on life by thinking, believing, and behaving in a manner that encourages an optimistic view of life.

- *Psychosocial Approach/Functioning:* examines how psychological factors and the surrounding social environment influence an individual's physical and mental health and ability to function.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The objective of this literature review is to explore the following: some background on homelessness, the application of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in a mentoring program, the relationship between academic performances and the individual mindset of a student, the association between homelessness and academic performances, the association between homelessness and psychosocial functioning, the correlation that psychosocial functioning has on academic performances, and effective dropout prevention programs and strategies for teens at-risk for homelessness. Moreover, this literature review examines the benefits of programs that implement common strategies and interventions for teenagers at-risk for homelessness.

Background on Homelessness

Homelessness among teenagers is a complex issue that can result from various factors such as family conflict, poverty, mental health issues, and substance abuse (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2022). Students who are homeless or housing insecure are particularly vulnerable and face significant challenges in their academic and personal lives. The lack of a stable home environment; lack of access to basic needs like food, clothing, and healthcare; and exposure to trauma and violence can make a student in school at risk. Homeless students may also struggle with transportation, attendance, and educational continuity, leading to academic challenges and lower graduation rates (National Center for Homeless Education, 2018). Addressing

the needs of homeless students requires a multifaceted approach that includes providing stable housing, access to basic needs, and academic support to help them overcome the challenges of homelessness and succeed in school.

Definition of At-Risk

At-risk student is a term used to describe a student who has a higher likelihood of experiencing academic or personal challenges that could negatively impact their educational success (American Psychological Association, 2010). The factors that contribute to an at-risk student can vary and may include economic disadvantage, homelessness, language barriers, learning disabilities, mental health concerns, substance abuse, or family instability (Smith, 2022). These factors can affect a student's academic progress, attendance, behavior, and engagement in school. Identifying and supporting at-risk students is essential to ensure they receive the necessary interventions and resources to overcome the obstacles they face and achieve academic success (Jones, 2021).

The McKinney-Vento Act

The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that aids homeless students so that they have access to free and appropriate public education. This act defines an *adolescent at risk for homelessness* as "an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and who is at risk of living in a shelter, motel, vehicle, or other inadequate living situations" (National Center for Homeless Education, n.d., para.1). If an individual falls into any of these three categories, then they are eligible to receive equal educational services and support in educational opportunities. Adolescents at risk of homelessness face multiple challenges such as increased stress, poverty, family

instability, and negative educational experiences that can impact their social and emotional well-being, as well as academic performance (Compassion International, n.d.).

Individual Risk Factors that Contribute to Student Dropout

Several concrete and abstract risk factors have been identified for teenagers who are at risk of homelessness and also at a higher risk of dropping out of school. The presence of two or more of these risk factors in a student, particularly in younger age groups, may indicate an elevated risk of school dropout (Gubbels et al., 2019). The trauma and stress resulting from the experience of being at risk of homelessness can negatively impact a student's motivation to engage in schoolwork, ultimately contributing to the risk of school dropout. A newsletter published by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (n.d.) emphasized that knowledge is power and identified the following risk factors for individuals at-risk of high school dropout: a) learning disability, b) early adult responsibilities/home duties, c) high-risk peer group, d) high-risk social behavior, e) school performance, f) school engagement/poor attendance, g) misbehavior, and h) early aggression.

The Application of Maslow's Theory in Mentoring Programs

A theory of motivation known as Maslow's hierarchy of needs proposes that human behavior is driven by five different categories of human needs that must be met by individuals to be motivated as a whole. The hierarchy of needs developed by Maslow consists of five distinct categories, which are:

- Physiological needs: This is the most fundamental level, which includes basic survival needs such as air, water, food, shelter, warmth, and sleep. These needs must be met before any other needs can be addressed.

- Safety and security needs: This level involves the need for safety and security, which includes protection from physical harm, emotional harm, and the threat of danger. This stage encompasses factors such as job security, financial stability, and a safe living environment.

- Love and belonging needs: This stage pertains to social needs, including the need for love, affection, and a sense of belongingness. People in this stage seek out relationships and connections with others and find value in being part of a group or community.

- Self-esteem needs: At this level, individuals seek to establish a sense of self-worth and gain recognition from others. Esteem needs involve the need for respect, recognition, and admiration. This stage also includes the need for personal achievement and a sense of competence.

- Self-actualization needs: The highest level of Maslow's hierarchy involves the need for self-actualization, which refers to the realization of one's full potential and the pursuit of personal growth and fulfillment. This stage involves a deep sense of purpose, creativity, and the desire to reach one's highest potential. (MasterClass, 2021).

According to Maslow's theory, the satisfaction of lower-level needs is a prerequisite for progressing up the pyramid, and as these needs are fulfilled, higher-level needs will eventually be satisfied as well (Cherry, 2022, para. 4). Maslow's theory illustrates that self-actualization is the highest level of needs. Each individual can progress to this level, but unforeseen circumstances, much like homelessness, can disrupt the lower basic needs being met which hinders progression up the pyramid. Maslow's

hierarchy of needs suggests that individuals need to satisfy their basic physiological and safety needs before being motivated to pursue higher-level needs, such as social belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Cherry, 2022, para. 5). The impact of homelessness on the psychosocial functioning and academic performance of adolescents can disrupt the satisfaction of these basic needs, leading to decreased motivation, reduced academic performance, and difficulties with psychosocial functioning (Fowler et al., 2009).

A mentoring program is critical for individuals who want to see personal growth and need guidance to reach those goals. Mentorship programs provide a supportive intervention that addresses these basic needs, thereby helping adolescents to rebuild their self-esteem, sense of belonging, and academic performance (DuBois et al., 2002). Mentees are individuals who participate in a mentoring program and receive targeted interventions to overcome personal barriers and achieve their desired goals (Rhodes, 2005). This is where the role of mentoring becomes crucial. Similar to at-risk teenagers, other vulnerable populations may develop negative mindsets that align with their current circumstances. Therefore, mentoring can play a critical role in empowering individuals to overcome their adversities and achieve their full potential (Rhodes, 2005).

Teenagers at risk of homelessness often experience stressful situations that can generate feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, which can significantly impact their motivation and determination (Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998). Maslow's theory posits that when an individual's needs, as outlined in his pyramid, are met, their motivation to achieve goals increases. Incorporating this theory into mentoring programs can be

particularly effective, as mentors can guide mentees through the pyramid to increase their motivation and achieve higher levels of success (DuBois et al., 2002).

The Link Among Homelessness, Negative Mindset, and Academic Performance

Teenagers who experience trauma from homelessness are more prone to develop a negative mindset that can significantly impact their academic performance (Bassuk et al., 2015). These negative mindsets often result from the feeling of helplessness and hopelessness that arises from the experience of being homeless (Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998). Such mindsets can diminish their determination and motivation to excel in their academic work (Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998). This can result in a range of academic challenges, such as difficulty concentrating, missing classes, and performing poorly on exams (Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998).

According to the research paper titled "The Effects of Positive and Negative Mood on University Students' Learning and Academic Performance: Evidence from Indonesia," positive moods among students at Indonesia University facilitated the development of sophisticated cognitive abilities, resulting in increased adaptability, integration, and engagement in the learning process. These cognitive abilities included memory, categorization, creative problem-solving, decision-making, and learning abilities (Febrilia & Warokka, 2011). According to this study, how students feel affects how they perform academically. When an individual's mental state is hindered by a negative mood, it will reflect on their studying process. Consequently, it is critical to address negative mindsets among teenagers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to promote their academic success.

The Impact of Homelessness on Academic Performance

There is a significant association between experiencing homelessness during adolescence and a heightened risk of not completing high school (National Conference of State Legislatures, n.d.). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were approximately 1.4 million children in more than 13,800 school districts in the U.S. who faced homelessness or lived in temporary housing in 2020. It is estimated that 87% of those identified children will end up homeless in the future if they do not proceed to receive a high school diploma and drop out of school (Leardini et al., 2020). Being at risk of homelessness can place a significant disadvantage on a student's ability to complete their secondary education and obtain a graduation diploma. According to the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (2016), young people who are at risk of homelessness often lack the security and support necessary for academic success. Schools and teachers often try to provide essential resources to prevent teen dropouts, but even these resources are limited at times. This makes performing academically difficult for teenagers at risk for homelessness compared to non-at-risk students. Research presented by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (2016) showed the impact of homelessness on students' achievements that are enrolled in school from third through eighth grade. The data reported that homeless students perform at approximately half the proficiency rate of their housed peers on New York State standardized tests in both English and math (Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, 2016). In the 2013– 14 school year, only 13% of homeless students met the grade standard for English and 17% for math (Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, 2016). The data reveal that homelessness has a lasting impact on students' education, even after they are no

longer homeless (Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, 2016). Students who are at risk of homelessness may not perform on the same level as their peers who are not at risk, due to the lack of financial resources.

The long-term negative consequences of dropping out of school due to homelessness are significant. For example, compared to high school graduates, dropouts have higher unemployment rates, lower income/salaries, are more likely to be involved in criminal acts and/or behaviors, and have higher incarceration rates (Rumberger, 2008). Over the course of a student's educational career, a report showed that homeless students have an 87% higher chance of dropping out of school than their peers who reside in stable housing (Jinghong, 2021). Research also suggests that those who do not complete high school and earn a diploma are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness later in their lives than those who do (Jinghong, 2021). Effective intervention programs can contribute to healthier transitions and greater stability in the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of at-risk students for homelessness in adulthood.

Exploration of the Link Between Homelessness and Psychosocial Functioning

Homelessness is a significant social issue that has far-reaching consequences, particularly for adolescents. The effects of homelessness can manifest in various ways, including psychosocial problems that can have a long-lasting impact on a teenager's overall well-being (Fowler et al., 2009). Teenagers who have experienced complex trauma have shown that they have difficulties recognizing, expressing, and controlling their emotions as a result of trauma exposure (Cloitre et al., 2009). As a result of experiencing stressors associated with homelessness, teenagers may develop internalizing and/or externalizing stress responses that can lead to significant feelings of anxiety,

depression, anger, and even suicidal thoughts (Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998). Such

responses can negatively affect an individual's psychosocial functioning, leading to

difficulties in emotional regulation, relationships, and overall well-being (Toro et al.,

2007). According to The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.), these issues are

prevalent among homeless youth and can have long-lasting consequences if not

addressed through appropriate intervention programs.

- Anxiety: The unmet basic needs of an individual, particularly teenagers at risk for
  homelessness, trigger a survival mode that continuously activates their brain's
  fight-or-flight response. This chronic state of anxiety and exhaustion can hinder
  their ability to perform on the same academic level as their non-risk peers.

- Depression: According to Orben et al. (2020), mental health conditions like
  depression can be linked to risk factors such as peer rejection, bullying, and
  loneliness. Adolescents experiencing homelessness are particularly susceptible to
  these risk factors and social isolation. On the other hand, positive peer
  relationships, like those formed through mentorship programs, can serve as
  protective factors by fostering resilience and lowering the likelihood of
  developing mental health conditions.

- Suicide: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that intentional
  self-harm (suicide) is the second leading cause of death in youth ages 10–24
  (Orben et al., 2020).

Teenagers who are at risk for homelessness may resist the urge to ask for help due

to fear of stigma or discrimination. This resistance can lead to a lack of access to support

services, causing a decrease in their psychosocial functioning and an increase in mental

health issues such as depression and anxiety. The teenagers may start to experience a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, further exacerbating their negative mindset. According to a meta-analysis investigating the link between social support and mental health, incorporating a healthy social support system can lead to significant improvements in mental health. The study also suggests that individuals with vulnerable identities, such as those who are female, disabled, homeless, or school students, require more social support to achieve their life goals (Harandi et al., 2017).

The exploration of the link between homelessness and psychosocial functioning aims to understand how homelessness affects the mental, emotional, and social aspects of an individual's life. Through research and analysis, it is possible to develop effective strategies to support the psychosocial functioning of homeless adolescents, promote resilience, and foster positive outcomes.

How Psychosocial Functioning Affects Academic Performance

The teenage years are a time when social stimuli are especially intense, and social interaction is a fundamental human need (Blakemore & Mills, 2014). Various factors can impact a teenager's ability to meet this need, including being at risk for homelessness, which can adversely affect their mental health and eventually lead to social isolation. To promote stable emotional and mental well-being, it is crucial to address mental health issues among youth, particularly those who may be experiencing homelessness or other forms of instability (Fowler et al., 2009). Teenagers at risk of homelessness may face multiple challenges due to mental health problems, such as a greater likelihood of dropping out of high school, substance abuse, higher unemployment rates, and more

extended and frequent periods of homelessness, according to the National Clearinghouse on Homeless Youth and Families (n.d.).

Psychosocial functioning is a critical aspect of a teenager's mental and emotional well-being, and it plays a significant role in their academic performance (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). A teenager at risk of homelessness may experience feelings of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness, which can hinder their ability to focus, concentrate, and complete schoolwork (Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998). The stress of being at risk of homelessness can cause the teenager to become easily distracted, leading to procrastination and incomplete assignments (Cauce et al., 2000). They may also struggle to establish healthy peer relationships, leading to social isolation and a lack of emotional support (Slesnick & Guo, 2015). All of these factors can harm teenagers' academic performance, making it difficult for them to succeed in school (Fowler et al., 2009). Therefore, it is essential to address and support teenagers' psychosocial functioning to ensure that they can achieve academic success despite the challenges they may face due to their risk of homelessness (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Effective Dropout Prevention and Mentorship Programs

Effective intervention practices are needed to help mitigate the problem of at-risk students not being able to achieve higher academic levels compared to their peers. Integrating the necessary support and identifying the needs of these at-risk students can help decrease dropout rates and lower the amount of homeless youth by providing resources that will focus on the at-risk students' academic performances. Many of the dropout prevention programs and mentorship programs that have been implemented are utilizing similar strategies that are effective. Table 1 presents the common characteristics

of effective dropout prevention programs for at-risk students. The characteristics listed in

Table 1 proved effectiveness by showing an increase in the student's overall academic

grades. When dropout prevention and/ or a mentorship program utilizes the common

strategies in Table 1, it is the most effective and efficient intervention for mentees.

Table 1

Common Characteristics from Effective Dropout Prevention Programs

Program Type	Program Description
School or Class Restructuring	Classes are small, schedules are blocked, career academies are offered, and learning communities are small.
Vocational Training	An internship, a course of study, or an employment opportunity that is related to your career interests or work experience.
Supplemental Academic Services	The provision of remedial education and tutoring, as well as assistance and support with homework.
Community Service	Plans and implements a community service project (combined with weekly life skills classes).
Mentoring, Counseling	Mentorship programs or counselor training programs that guide students. The primary focus of mentors is careers/work, but both mentors and counselors assist students with their issues.
Alternative Schools	Educational and other services (such as behavioral support) are provided in schools to meet the needs of students who cannot be adequately served by traditional schools.
Attendance Monitoring and Contingencies	Monitoring attendance and offering incentives are some methods that are used to increase attendance.
College-Oriented Programming	Curriculum that prepares students for college and academic counseling that is college-oriented.
Multi-Service Package	An extensive program that often includes academic, vocational, and case management components.
Skills Training, Including CBT	There is usually a goal in place for the treatment, such as preventing the use of drugs or improving self-esteem.
Case Management	The main objective of the program is to assist students and their families with appropriate services throughout the duration of the program.

*Note: Dropout Prevention and Intervention Programs for Improving School Completion
Among School-Aged Children and Youth: A Systematic Review.
Reprinted from Common Characteristics from Effective Dropout Prevention Programs (p. 361)
by W. & T. Smith, 2013. Public Domain.*

The Texas Education Agency oversees the whole process of public education at the primary and secondary levels in the state (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2022). As part of its mission to improve the outcomes for all public-school students in the state, the TEA provides leadership, guidance, and support to school systems throughout the state that will assist them in improving student performance (TEA, 2022). TEA has identified and implemented evidence-based programs that support at-risk schools and students. See Appendix B for further data collection from students' involvement in the programs and the effects on their academic performances. The following programs have been proven to be effective evidence-based dropout prevention programs by the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) by analyzing the performance of the school students in each district and school in Texas. During the TAPR analysis of the student's school performance, the student's ethnicity and socioeconomic status are also considered.

a. *Communities In Schools (CIS)*. According to the Texas Education Agency (2022), Bill Milliken created the dropout prevention/mentorship program known as Communities in Schools (CIS) as a solution to support the academic performance of students identified as being at risk. The program aims to address the various challenges that at-risk students face, such as homelessness, poverty, and lack of access to resources, by providing a comprehensive range of services. These services include academic support, counseling, mentorship, and access to health and social services. By addressing the student's basic needs and providing them with the necessary support, CIS seeks to increase their chances of graduating high school and pursuing higher education or a successful career. The program has been successful in improving academic outcomes for at-risk students, with a high

percentage of students graduating from high school and pursuing further education or employment. Once their specific needs are identified, service plans are created that provide beneficial resources and support for the at-risk student. Two consecutive years of receiving CIS services led to significantly better outcomes for students than those who only received CIS services for one year (an average of 20 sessions each year). In terms of grade point average, standardized testing in math and reading, attendance, credit completion, and disciplinary referrals, students who received two consecutive years of CIS services had the highest outcomes (TEA, 2022).

b. *Texas ACE (Afterschool Centers on Education).* This program is fully funded through the Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC). ACE focuses their programs on home assistance, individual and group tutoring other targeted needs-based assistance, as well as enrichment activities such as sports, clubs, and youth development projects that build character, confidence, and leadership skills (TEA, 2022). According to the TEA, when a student attends more than 30 days of the Texas ACE program, they will see various improvements that include:

- a decrease in the student's tardiness and absences

- promotions to higher grades

- middle and high school disciplinary incidents are down

- increase in their overall grade point average

- increase grades and academic scores in English and math (in grades 9–12).

c. *After- or Extended-School Programs.* Under the federal funding of the CCLC, this program provides supplemental assistance to help students build a foundation in

reading and math and connect high school to career and college. Many of the activities that these out-of-school programs offer are one-on-one mentor programs, individual and group tutoring, academic enrichment, the arts, physical activity, hands-on learning, and family engagement (TEA, 2022). It has been found that after-school programs for at-risk students are most effective if they are offered for two years, and students attend two to three times a week during that time.

d. *Community and University Partnerships-Student Success Initiative.* The TEA implemented Community and University Partnerships-SSI as a support program to increase the number of students performing on grade level by leveraging academic, community, and governmental support. During the research done by the TEA with schools and communities, they discovered four systems of practices that would be beneficial for schools and communities struggling:

- a feeder pattern analysis and alignment of the initiative

- establishing strong, intentional partnerships to achieve success

- engaging families from preschool to grade 12 through purposeful engagement

- implementing programs that show effectiveness in academic schooling (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

According to the Community and University Partnerships-SSI, after-school programs that have a stronger relationship with the school's teachers and principals are more likely to improve its students' performance in terms of homework completion, the effort put into homework, positive behavior, and

initiative. Community and University Partnerships-SSI is most effective when implemented into school systems after eight to nine months of its implementation.

The TEA evidence-based programs share common strategies, including an emphasis on improving academic performance and fostering community support and engagement. Several studies have shown that afterschool programs that focus on developing emotional, social, and academic components can lead to increased:

- grade point average (GPA)

- decrease in problematic behaviors/ disciplinary actions

- participation and attendance in school

- sense of self/perception of self

- increase in a positive attitude toward positive interactions

- increase in academic success and performance (test scores)

- school bonding (Smink, n.d.)

These evidence-based programs emphasize the importance of strengthening the partnership between educational and homelessness services. By working together, they have the power to revolutionize a student's life, paving the way to stable employment and a successful transition into adulthood. This can be achieved through the implementation and assessment of dropout prevention programs and mentorship programs for at-risk students, which assist agencies to prevent and end homelessness. The value of education in this process cannot be overstated.

The Foundation of Mentoring

The fundamental principles of mentoring have demonstrated positive outcomes when a relationship is established between a mentor and mentee, working together

towards the mentee's goals. Mentoring can be implemented among the youth population through various approaches, including teachers, friends, family members, and other individuals who can provide growth, development, and guidance in a young person's life (Gallipani, 2021). Mentoring has also been referred to as a relationship between an adult and a child or adolescent from an underprivileged (low economic, low social status) background (Meyer, 2010). Mentoring is particularly important for underprivileged populations because it provides them with a positive role model who can guide and support them through various challenges. A mentor can offer counseling, encouragement, and guidance to help young people develop important skills and achieve their goals. This can lead to improved self-esteem, increased confidence, and a greater sense of personal responsibility. By building a strong relationship with a mentor, young people can develop a sense of trust and belonging, which can help them to overcome obstacles and succeed in life.

A Developmental Relationship Survey done by the Search Institute shows that one in five people of the youth population has zero developmental relationships. The survey also reported that another 20% of the youth population had only one developmental relationship in their life. The findings of this survey concluded that teens who have strong and stable developmental relationships with adults are likely to succeed academically, enjoy working hard, and believe making mistakes is part of the process of achieving their goals (Search Institute, n.d.). Youth and teens who manage healthy developmental relationships during parts of their lives have shown an increase in positive development in different areas, including academic growth, learning, social-emotional growth, and an increase in personal responsibility. In the case of mentoring, a

developmental relationship is built between the mentor and the mentee. Research has validated many reasons why mentoring is important for the teenage and younger adult population (Gallipani, 2021).

   a. *Learning New Things.* When an individual engages in a mentor role, this specific individual is often someone of an older age than the mentee. The reasoning behind this is that mentors will often reflect on their life experiences to teach the mentee new life skills and lessons.

   b. *Receiving Guidance.* Researchers have found that the pre-frontal cortex in adolescents is not fully developed until the age of ~25. The prefrontal cortex performs reasoning, planning, judgment, and impulse control, necessities for being an adult (Paradigm Treatment Centers, 2021). When the pre-frontal cortex is not fully developed, this can cause a teenager to be more susceptible to risky behaviors and poor decision-making. It can be asserted that providing vulnerable teenagers with an active mentor can help them stay on course and steer them toward making positive choices that align with their life objectives.

   c. *Gaining Support.* The social support theory suggests that having a supportive relationship with a mentor can positively impact an individual's personal and social development. Mentors can provide emotional and practical support, guidance, and encouragement, which can lead to increased self-esteem, improved decision-making skills, and greater resilience in the face of challenges. By creating a positive and supportive environment, mentors can help their mentees feel more connected and empowered, leading to better outcomes in various areas of their lives (Scales & Gibbons, 1996).

Ecological Perspective

A research article entitled "Promoting Positive Development Among Youth Experiencing Homelessness: A Systems Approach" emphasizes the importance of using an ecological perspective to create a supportive environment for teenagers at risk for homelessness (Greene et al., 2011). The article highlights that a mentoring support program can play a crucial role in promoting positive development for these youth by providing a range of interventions and resources, including academic support, one-on-one mentoring, and access to outside resources. By using an ecological systems approach, a mentoring support program can provide a more comprehensive and effective approach to supporting teenagers at risk for homelessness. This approach involves understanding the interrelationships between individuals and their environments and developing interventions and strategies that address the complex and diverse needs of the individuals and communities it serves. Overall, this research article highlights the importance of considering both the individual and the larger ecological context in promoting positive development for teenagers at risk for homelessness through a mentoring support program.

A research article titled "Social Support as a Mediator of Mental Health Outcomes Among Homeless, Runaway, and Street-Involved Youth" highlights the positive effects of social support on teenagers at risk for homelessness (Kidd et al., 2007). The study found that social support, including emotional, informational, and tangible support, mediated the relationship between homelessness and mental health outcomes. Specifically, the study found that increased social support was associated with better mental health outcomes, including reduced anxiety and depression symptoms. The article emphasizes the importance of providing social support to youth at risk for homelessness,

as it can have a significant impact on their well-being and mental health. By building supportive relationships with caring adults and peers, teenagers at risk for homelessness can improve their sense of belonging and self-worth, and gain access to the resources and support they need to succeed.

CitySquare Abilene

In the summer of 2022, CitySquare Abilene launched a pilot program that provides teenagers from the ages of 13–18 with a safe space to attend after school (also known as a drop-in center). This drop-in center is aimed at students enrolled in Abilene, Texas school districts who are at risk of homelessness. The mission of this program is to fight the causes and effects of poverty through service, advocacy, and friendship (CitySquare Abilene, n.d.). Although many social services exist in Abilene for at-risk youth, there is not a safe space for teenagers to go to after school to get the help they need. The drop-in center provides basic needs services, mentoring services, counseling services, and academic services to guide and help students achieve their goals (CitySquare Abilene, n.d.). CitySquare uses an integrated approach to achieve values and collaborate within community resources (CitySquare Abilene, n.d.). Intentional integration of partners, beginning at the governance level and extending through the programming, targets beneficial outcomes such as:

- Clarity for a teenager: a teenager in crisis only needs to remember one location rather than being forced to navigate and travel to different service providers,
- Case conferencing and "warm" handoffs: the shared space will facilitate stronger working relationships between service providers aiding the teens,

- More efficient use of Abilene resources: partnering will guard against duplication in areas of specialized staff and hopefully promote other ways to share resources,

- Shared data and assessment of methods: collaboration will facilitate assessments of whether Abilene teens are truly benefiting from the collective efforts and identify adjustments needed (CitySquare Abilene, n.d.).

CitySquare Abilene has identified three main outcomes that guide their efforts toward helping teenagers develop a greater sense of self-worth and prepare for the challenges of adulthood and their future. CitySquare's three primary outcomes from the agency are:

a. *Teens receive basic needs*. Counting the teens who come to the center each day, eating a meal and/ or snacks provided, and use the shower and laundry facilities are measures used to indicate whether teens are receiving basic needs.

b. *Teens engage in a positive path forward*. A collection of data is obtained to see whether the students referred to CitySquare are engaging in opportunities for a positive path forward. Simple counts such as the number of teens using tutoring, counseling services, and information regarding the improvement of grades. The measurement of this data is assessed using different assessments, much like the Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive Functioning Scale and reports made on CitySquare documentation (Connect Our Kids).

c. *Teens experience hope and inspiration*. CitySquare offers different strategies and opportunities for teenagers to increase their hope and inspiration. These strategies include connections to the arts (Palette of Purpose), athletics, faith communities, and mentoring groups (CitySquare Abilene, n.d.).

CitySquare uses an integrated approach within the community resources to utilize common strategies that have been proven effective in numerous other programs designed for at-risk teens (CitySquare Abilene, n.d.). Focusing on the three primary outcomes of this program, CitySquare's target is to provide available resources for teenagers to achieve academically while also having a safe space for the teenagers to go to after school where their voice is heard.

Conclusion

This literature review discussed risk factors for teenagers at-risk for homelessness and different evidence-based interventions that have been implemented by the TEA. Amongst these interventions, common strategies were represented. These common strategies included the focus on academic performances and mentoring as appropriate strategies to utilize in a dropout prevention program for this population. The literature review makes it apparent that teenagers at risk for homelessness have higher rates of dropping out, which in turn, leads to longevity of negative life struggles. The literature makes it clear that students identified as at-risk and receiving intervention services, such as mentoring, can prevent them from dropping out of school and increase their physical, mental, and emotional well-being during their transition into adulthood. Mentorship programs showed that when teenagers are engaged in their communities, schools, faith-based organizations, social groups, and/ or families, can lead to positive impacts on academic performances and psychosocial functioning. To bridge the research gap, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: How does experiencing trauma related to homelessness affect the academic performance and psychosocial functioning of teenagers? To what extent do mentorship programs improve the academic performance

and psychosocial functioning of at-risk adolescents who have experienced homelessness?

To answer these research questions, a unique conceptual framework has been developed

by integrating the findings of the literature review to explain the effects of an enrichment

program on at-risk students who are facing homelessness. The framework highlights the

importance of implementing a mentoring strategy and explores the relationship between

academic performance and psychosocial functioning in these students. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

A Conceptual Framework of the Effects of a Mentoring Program on Students at Risk of

Homelessness
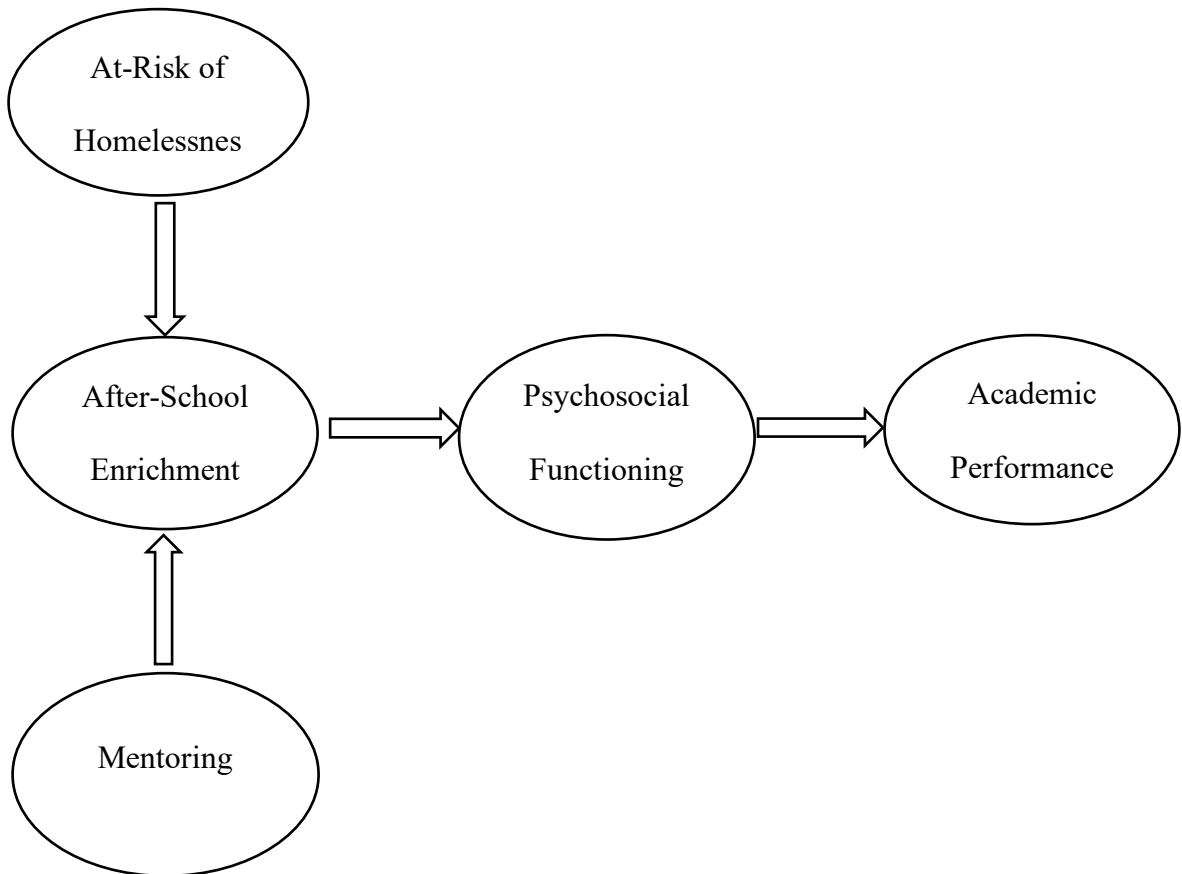
From this framework, the following hypothesis is presented:

- Hypothesis 1: Teens participating in a mentoring program will show higher scores

  on the Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive post-test measures.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study was to investigate the potential effectiveness of a supportive mentorship intervention on psychosocial functioning and academic performance variables. Students at risk of homelessness participated in a community-based after-school supportive mentoring intervention. The overarching goal of the supportive mentoring program is to provide students experiencing homelessness with support and facilitate the development of social and academic skills necessary for the successful completion of high school. As failure to complete high school is linked to a wide variety of adverse outcomes, dropout prevention is essential. The primary research question and resulting methodology are designed to answer whether this supportive-mentoring program is achieving the goal of increasing social relationship skills, improving mental health, and increasing academic performance.

Mentoring Support Program

The mentoring support program in which the participants were involved aimed to provide a range of activities to support their academic, social, and emotional well-being. The program included academic support and tutoring to help participants succeed academically, as well as one-on-one and group mentoring to foster positive relationships and adopt healthy coping mechanisms. Expressive arts therapy was also offered to help participants process their emotions and express themselves creatively. Other activities included life skills training, job readiness/ college readiness support, and financial/

budget literacy education to equip participants with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the future. In addition, the program served as a bridge to outside resources and basic needs, such as housing, food, and healthcare, to ensure participants had access to the resources they needed to thrive. This program aspired to enhance the general well-being of teenagers at risk of homelessness by offering a wide array of interventions and resources. Its goal was to empower them with the necessary skills and support and achieve success in various aspects of their lives.

Research Design

This one-group, pretest-posttest study aimed to test the hypothesis that providing supportive mentoring and social and academic skills training will result in a significant increase (i.e., $p < .05$) in outcome measures of those skills. On October 31, 2022, the ACU Institutional Review Board approved this research study, and this study was able to begin conducting its research (see Appendix A). This study aimed to evaluate changes in participants' social functioning and psychological well-being over time using a pre-test and post-test design. The primary researcher administered the same assessment at two different time points—before and after the intervention—to examine the effectiveness of the mentoring support program in enhancing social functioning and psychological well-being.

Participants

A pamphlet that covered details of the research study was distributed to all individuals (about 15) referred to CitySquare to recruit volunteers. This research study only collected data from voluntary individuals. Although the assessment did not include any identifiable information, the researcher made the effort to abide by ethical issues

regarding confidentiality and data storage and collection. Once the participants completed both pre-and post-assessments, the data were collected in a secured password-protected Google Docs file. The data were only accessed by the principal investigator and the thesis chair in secure locations.

Participants in this study ranged in age from 13 to 18, were enrolled in Abilene public schools during the 2022–23 AY, were in grades ranging from sixth through twelfth grade, and were all referred to the CitySquare Abilene drop-in center program. Because of the eligibility requirements of this program, participants were identified as homeless as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act. This act defines *homeless children and youth* as *"*individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This definition also includes children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason" (The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, 2020).

Measurement

The Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive Functioning Scale (CASAFS) was used to measure both pre-test and post-test scores for social and psychological functioning (Harrison & Oakland, 2002). The CASAFS consists of 24 items and is made up of four subscales, which assess the functioning of children and adolescents in four crucial areas of their social lives (The Spence Children's Anxiety Scale, 2021). These four sub-scales are school performance, peer relationships, family relationships, and home duties or self-care (The Spence Children's Anxiety Scale, 2021). Cronbach's alpha is one of the most widely used methods for evaluating the degree of internal consistency and reliability within a set of scales. Cronbach's alpha level should be at least .70 to show

a minimal level of internal consistency. The CASAFS has reported adequate levels of internal consistency (α of .70–.81) (The Spence Children's Anxiety Scale, 2021).

Academic Performance

The CASAFS school performance subscale is a widely used tool for measuring academic performance among children and adolescents. This subscale collects data on various aspects of academic performance, including attendance, grades, and overall academic progress.

Social Functioning

The pre-test and post-test CASAFS have commonly used tools for measuring social functioning among children and adolescents. This assessment collects data on various aspects of social functioning, including social skills, relationships with peers and family, and overall social adjustment.

Psychological Functioning

The mental health subscale was an additional subscale added to the CASAFS to gather a more precise measure of psychosocial functioning. The mental health subscale was created as a tool to measure psychological functioning among children and adolescents (Smith & Johnson, 2010). This subscale collected data on various aspects of psychological functioning, including symptoms of mental health disorders, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies.

<div align="center">

Data Collection

</div>

To establish a baseline measure for academic performance and psychosocial functioning, CitySquare collected pre-test CASAFS data on the participants' experiences before entering the mentoring program. The pre-test assessment was only given to

participants in the study who qualified and provided consent and assent documentation. Participants completed the pre-test assessment by the end of the Fall 2022 semester. Participants completed the post-test assessment by the middle of the Spring 2023 semester.

Ethical Issues

There were minimal risks to participating in this research study. Apart from confidentiality issues, other ethical considerations that arose from this research study include voluntary participation, especially with the study population. These concerns were addressed by obtaining physical copies of consent and assent forms from both the participant and the participant's legal guardian before completing the online assessment. The consent and assent forms both included an introduction to the research study, information regarding the purpose of the study and procedures, risks and benefits that are possible from the study, privacy and confidentiality requirements, participants' rights, and the contact information of the primary and alternative researcher in case the participant or their guardian had any questions and concerns.

When informing the participants of their rights in this study, participants were made aware that there is no compensation for participating in this research study (participants were not paid to take the pre-test/post-test assessment). If a participant decided they did not wish to complete the pre-test and/or post-test assessment, then they were made aware that they did not have to participate in the assessment. A pamphlet was made and distributed at the CitySquare Abilene location to recruit voluntary participants for the study to decrease the chances of coercion of participating in the study.

Data Analysis

Before summing individual ratings, several responses to items on the CASAFS had to be reverse-coded (REFERENCE to Coding Instructions). Items 5, 11, 12, and 17 were recoded so that low numbers became high and high numbers became low (e.g., 1 = 5, and 5 = 1, etc.). As per the scoring instructions, the "does not apply" rating option was changed to a value of 2.5 to represent the midrange. The total score and subscale scores were calculated using the compute menu item in IBM SPSS. Pre- and post-intervention scores were computed for the total and the subscales. Using IBM SPSS, paired-sample *t*-tests were performed on the total and subscale scores to test the research hypothesis.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Participants

A total of 11 McKinney-Vento homeless teens participated in the study, with a

total of 42 teens involved in the mentorship program. The average age of participants in

the study was 15 years old, with a range of 13–18 years old. The majority of teens

involved in the study were male (64%) and African American (64%), with the remaining

participants identifying as Hispanic (36%). Table 2 represents the different characteristics

of the study population ($N = 11$).

Table 2

*Characteristics of the Sample (*N = *11)*

Variable	Category	n
Gender	Male	7
	Female	4
Classification	Middle School	6
	High School	5
Race	African American	7
	Hispanic	4

Paired-Sample *t*-Test

Tables 3 and 4 represent the results from the paired sample *t*-test run between

each subscale measured in the CASAFS assessment from the pre-test and the post-test.

Table 3 shows that there was a significant improvement in all areas measured. The mean

scores for each category (School Performance, Peer Relationships, Family Relationships,

Home Duties, and Mental Health) increased from pretest to posttest, and the differences

38

between the means were all statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, the standard deviations for each category were relatively consistent across the pretest and posttest, which suggests that the changes were not due to random variation in the data. The t-scores and degrees of freedom indicate that the changes were large and unlikely to be due to chance. The p-values were all less than 0.05, indicating that the probability of observing these differences by chance alone was less than 5%. Overall, these findings suggest that the intervention was effective in improving the studied aspects of participants' lives.

Table 3

Results of Paired-Sample t-Tests for Pretest and Posttest

	Pretest		Posttest				
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	*t*	df	*p*
Total	50.59	8.40	103.32	8.22	-30.62	10	*0.000*
School Performance	8.64	2.69	17.09	2.77	-11.20	10	0.000
Peer Relationships	8.55	2.07	18.09	2.43	-12.64	10	0.000
Family Relationships	10.32	1.55	17.32	0.84	-18.35	10	0.000
Home Duties	7.91	1.76	17.36	3.23	-12.33	10	0.000
Mental Health	15.18	3.22	33.45	2.07	-25.57	10	0.000

Table 4 presents two different estimates (i.e., Cohen's *d* and Hedges' *g*) of the size of the effect of the intervention on the outcomes (i.e., subscale scores). Using criteria suggested by Cohen (Cohen, 1988) standardized mean differences (i.e., Cohen's *d*) can be considered too large when the value is greater than 0.8. As Table 4 shows, values for Cohen's *d* ranged from -3.38 to -9.32 (the negative sign only indicates the direction of the effect, i.e., scores increased from pretest to posttest). A large effect size indicates that changes in variables from the pretest to the posttest are large. The -3.38 value, for

example, indicates that the posttest means for school performance (the least change of all the subscales) was three standard deviation units greater than the pretest mean.

Table 4

Effect-Size Estimates for the Total CASAFS Scale and Subscales

	Measure	Denominator	Estimate	95 % CI Lower	95 % CI Upper
Total	Cohen's *d*	5.71	-9.23	-13.25	-5.21
	Hedges' *g*	5.94	-8.88	-12.75	-5.01
School Performance	Cohen's *d*	2.5	-3.38	-4.94	-1.8
	Hedges' *g*	2.6	-3.25	-4.75	-1.73
Peer Relationships	Cohen's *d*	2.5	-3.81	-5.55	-2.06
	Hedges' *g*	2.6	-3.67	-5.34	-1.98
Family Relationships	Cohen's *d*	1.26	-5.53	-7.99	-3.07
	Hedges' *g*	1.31	-5.32	-7.68	-2.96
Home Duties	Cohen's *d*	2.54	-3.72	-5.41	-2
	Hedges' *g*	2.64	-3.58	-5.21	-1.92
Mental Health	Cohen's *d*	2.37	-7.71	-11.08	-4.33
	Hedges' *g*	2.46	-7.42	-10.66	-4.17

Correlations in Subscales

Tables 5, 6, and 7 present the results of the correlation analysis of the subscales in the Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive Functioning Scale (CASAFS) assessment. The bolded correlation coefficients in the tables indicate that there were significant relationships between some of the subscales. For example, a positive correlation ($r = 0.758$, $p < .05$) between school performance and the peer relationship subscale indicates that as scores on the peer support subscale increase (i.e., improve), scores on the school performance subscale also improve. Similarly, there is a significant positive correlation between the mental health subscale and the school performance ($r = .725$) subscale as well, indicating a strong and positive linear relationship between mental health and school performance.

Table 5

Correlation Matrix for Pretest Scores on CASAFS Subscales

	Total	School Performance	Peer Relationships	Family Relationships	Home Duties	Mental Health
Total	1					
School Performance	0.905	1				
Peer Relationships	0.742	**0.758***	1			
Family Relationships	0.430	0.257	0.050	1		
Home Duties	0.637	0.457	0.263	0.433	1	
Mental Health	0.822	**0.666***	0.495	0.157	0.357	1

*p < .05

Table 6

Correlation Matrix for Posttest Scores on CASAFS Subscales

	Total	School Performance	Peer Relationships	Family Relationships	Home Duties	Mental Health
Total	1.000					
School Performance	0.894	1.000				
Peer Relationships	0.512	0.444	1.000			
Family Relationships	0.521	0.328	0.155	1.000		
Home Duties	0.739	0.531	-0.043	0.484	1.000	
Mental Health	0.806	**0.725***	0.270	0.281	0.511	1.000

*p < .05

Table 7

Correlation Matrix for Posttest-Pretest Difference Scores on CASAFS Subscales

	School Performance	Peer Relationships	Family Relationships	Home Duties	Mental Health
School Performance	1.000				
Peer Relationships	0.419	1.000			
Family Relationships	-0.253	-0.316	1.000		
Home Duties	0.011	-0.231	0.342	1.000	
Mental Health	0.179	0.040	-0.100	0.276	1.000

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a mentoring program as an intervention to address the negative effects of homelessness on adolescents. This research was conducted with participants who identified as teenagers at-risk for homelessness classified under the McKinney-Vento Act. The primary aim of this study was to investigate whether the mentoring intervention that was implemented into a pilot program was shown to have effective results on the desired population, with an emphasis on exploring the outcomes of the effects of the intervention on the teenager's psychosocial functioning.

Discussion of Major Findings

In this section, the present study's results are presented and compared to the existing literature. The study employs a quantitative approach to analyze various psychosocial factors affecting homeless teens' academic performances and concludes the hypotheses under investigation. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which the hypotheses were supported or refuted based on the analysis of the collected data.

Post-Test Scores

The post-test scores on the CASAFS may have increased due to the social support gained from the implementation of the mentoring program for several reasons. Firstly, the mentoring program may have provided a safe and supportive environment for the teenagers to connect with caring adults and peers, which may have improved their sense

of belonging and self-worth. This increased sense of social support and connection may have reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness, which can negatively impact mental health.

Secondly, the mentoring program may have provided access to a range of resources and support services, including academic support, one-on-one mentoring, and access to outside resources. These resources may have improved the teenagers' ability to cope with the challenges they face and build the skills they need to succeed. Additionally, the program may have provided opportunities for positive social connections and meaningful activities, which can improve overall well-being and mental health outcomes.

Overall, the social support gained from the implementation of the mentoring program may have had a positive impact on the teenagers' psychological functioning and social functioning, as measured by the post-test scores on the CASAFS. The program may have provided a safe and supportive environment, access to resources and support services, and opportunities for positive social connections and activities, all of which can contribute to improved mental health outcomes.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study suggest that a mentorship program can be effective in improving the academic performance and psychosocial functioning of teenagers at-risk for homelessness. The findings align with previous research on the benefits of mentorship programs for at-risk youth. The results also suggest that mentorship programs can provide a supportive and positive environment for homeless teens, which can have a positive impact on their overall well-being.

The subscales of the CASAFS assessment, including the additional mental health subscale, showed statistical significance in all tested areas. Analyzing both statistical significance and Cohen's *d* provided a more complete understanding of the effectiveness of the mentoring intervention. Analyzing Cohen's *d* in each subscale provided a way to compare the magnitude of the effect of the mentoring intervention across the study population. According to Table 4, each subscale presents a large Cohen's *d,* which in the case of this research study, can indicate that the mentoring intervention had large effects on the tested areas that were represented in the CASAFS assessment (school performance = 2.50, peer relationships = 2.50, family relationships = 1.26, home duties = 2.54, mental health = 2.37).

The study provides compelling evidence that mentorship programs can have a positive impact on the lives of teenagers at-risk of homelessness. By analyzing data from multiple subscales and calculating effect sizes using Cohen's *d*, the study demonstrates that mentorship can lead to statistically significant improvements in mental health, academic performance, peer and family relationships, and home duties/self-care. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of ongoing research and evaluation to ensure that interventions are effective and tailored to the specific needs of the population being served.

Implications for Research

The research study on the effectiveness of a mentorship program employing a psychosocial approach to enhance the academic performance of homeless teens has critical implications for various stakeholders. The research findings highlight the potential benefits of incorporating mentorship programs for homeless teens in the

educational setting. By addressing both academic and psychosocial needs, schools can provide a more comprehensive support system for this vulnerable group. Educators should consider developing and implementing such programs to improve the academic outcomes and well-being of homeless teens.

The study's results emphasize the value of investing in mentorship programs as an effective strategy to address the educational challenges faced by homeless teens. Policymakers can allocate resources to facilitate the development and expansion of these initiatives in schools and communities, leading to improved educational outcomes for this marginalized population.

As crucial actors in tackling homelessness and its associated issues, non-profit organizations can use this research to inform the design and implementation of their programs. By including mentorship as a core element of their services, these organizations can better address the holistic needs of homeless teens and foster their academic success.

The demonstrated effectiveness of the mentorship program highlights the importance of community engagement in supporting homeless teens. Local businesses, community members, and volunteers can contribute to mentorship initiatives by offering their time, expertise, or resources, creating a community-driven approach to meeting the educational needs of homeless teens.

In summary, the research findings have substantial implications for stakeholders dedicated to improving the lives of homeless teens. By recognizing the importance of mentorship programs that incorporate a psychosocial approach, they can collaborate to develop and implement strategies that not only improve academic performance but also

promote the overall well-being of homeless teens. This, in turn, can empower them to break the cycle of homelessness and achieve long-term success.

Implications for Policy

The research study investigating the impact of homelessness on the psychosocial functioning and academic performance of adolescents and exploring the efficacy of mentorship programs as an intervention has significant policy implications. The study's findings highlight the importance of investing in mentorship programs as a viable intervention to address the psychosocial functioning and academic performance of adolescents affected by homelessness. Policymakers should consider allocating resources, including funding and personnel, to develop and expand these initiatives in schools and communities, leading to improved outcomes for this marginalized population. This can include allocating resources to hire trained mental health professionals, such as school psychologists and counselors, who can provide direct support to students in need, as well as consult with teachers and administrators on mental health-related concerns.

Policymakers can use the research findings to inform the development of new policies or the revision of existing policies targeting the needs of adolescents experiencing homelessness. By incorporating mentorship programs as an intervention, policies can provide comprehensive support that addresses both emotional well-being and academic success. This can include providing ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers and school staff to learn about mental health issues, early warning signs, and appropriate interventions. This will enable them to better support students and create a more inclusive learning environment.

The study underscores the importance of collaboration among policymakers, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations to create a cohesive strategy for addressing the challenges faced by adolescents impacted by homelessness. By working together, these stakeholders can ensure that mentorship programs are effectively designed, implemented, and monitored to meet the needs of this vulnerable group. It is critical to establish partnerships between schools and community mental health services to facilitate referrals and ensure that students have access to comprehensive support and resources outside the school setting.

The research findings can be used to raise awareness about the importance of mentorship programs as an intervention for adolescents impacted by homelessness. By advocating for these initiatives, policymakers can garner public support, which can lead to increased funding and resources for the programs.

In conclusion, the policy implications of this research study are substantial for stakeholders dedicated to supporting adolescents affected by homelessness. By implementing these policy recommendations, schools can create a more supportive and inclusive environment that prioritizes mental health and peer support, ultimately contributing to better academic outcomes and overall well-being for students.

Study Limitations

As a pilot program, this study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting its results. Firstly, the absence of a control group seriously limits the researcher's ability to attribute the results solely to the effect of the intervention. Variables not controlled for (e.g., history, maturation, participant awareness of the research question, etc.) could also play a role in explaining the findings. However, the

fact that the participants responded in a manner that is consistent with the program's goals provides some support for the program's effectiveness. Despite this, future research should aim to include a control group to strengthen the validity of the results and rule out alternative explanations for the observed improvements.

Second, the small convenience sample used for this study is not representative of the larger population of at-risk teenagers. This limits the generalizability of these findings to this sample. Additionally, the duration of the mentoring intervention was relatively short, and as such, the long-term effects of the program on academic performance and psychosocial functioning could not be fully evaluated. Further, since the program was not previously tested, the study may not have captured all potential variables that could influence the outcomes. Additional studies using larger samples of randomly selected participants could aid in enhancing generalizability. However, due to the program's mission to serve all clients seeking services, randomization could be difficult.

Finally, the possibility of recall bias and social desirability bias exist as participants were asked to complete the same instrument retrospectively and then currently. This could result in incorrect or inconsistent responses due to memory recall, changes in perspective over time, or desire to respond in a manner that would make the program look good (i., e., intentionally marking pretest scores low to show greater improvement). Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the results of this study, and future research may benefit from utilizing alternative data collection methods to mitigate the potential impact of recall bias. Pretest measures should be obtained as soon as participants enter the program so that a true pretest measurement is obtained. Similarly, posttest scores should be taken after completion of the program, or at

logical divisions between program segments (e.g., end of the semester, end of the year, etc.).

Conclusion

The present study aimed to shed light on the effects of trauma from being at risk of homelessness on teenagers and their mindset. Trauma can have a significant impact on young people, leading to negative beliefs, emotions, and behaviors that can impede their ability to thrive and succeed, and in the case of this research study, perform successfully in their academic work and increase their psychosocial functioning. Teenagers at risk of homelessness are particularly vulnerable to developing negative mindsets, which can contribute to a decrease in their psychosocial functioning. Research presented in the literature review stated that this negative mindset can be associated with a decrease in psychosocial functioning, including difficulties with social relationships, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. Given the researched benefits from other similar evidence-based mentorship programs, this study tested the effectiveness of the mentoring intervention of a pilot program for teenagers at-risk of homelessness by analyzing different areas of their psychosocial functioning levels (school performance, peer and family relationships, home duties/self-care, and mental health).

Based on the findings reported in the literature review, mentorship programs have a positive impact on the psychosocial functioning of at-risk teenagers in several ways. First, mentors provide emotional support and guidance, helping youth to develop positive coping strategies and build resilience in the face of challenges. This tends to lead to improvements in self-esteem, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. Additionally, mentors serve as positive role models, helping youth to develop positive beliefs and

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behaviors that contribute to their psychosocial functioning. Mentorship programs also provide opportunities for at-risk youth to develop positive social connections and build relationships with caring adults, which can be particularly important for those who may lack such relationships in their lives. By providing a supportive and caring environment, mentorship programs help at-risk teenagers develop the skills and resources they need to overcome negative mindsets and improve their psychosocial functioning.

In conclusion, this study provides evidence that a mentorship program has a positive impact on the psychosocial functioning of teenagers at risk of homelessness. The results indicate that participating in a mentorship program can lead to significant improvements in academic performance, self-esteem, social support, and resilience. Future research is needed to determine the long-term impact of mentorship programs on this population and to identify other factors that may influence their academic and psychosocial outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

ACU IRB Approval Letter

Date: October 31, 2022
PI: Jordan Jones
Department: RES-Residential Student, 20531- Masters in Social Work
Re: Initial – IRB-2022-37
A study of the effectiveness of a Teen Mentorship Program to Improve academic performance

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for A study of the effectiveness of a Teen Mentorship Program to Improve academic performance. The approval is effective starting October 31, 2022.

Admin Check-in Date: --
Expiration Date: --
Decision: Approved

Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Research Notes: The researcher might consider the issues surrounding parental and participant consent. As it stands, the researcher seems to only require one parent to give consent for a child to participate in the study. However, questions might arise if the other parent (or a primary caretaker) objects to the consent given by the other parent.

Additional Approvals/Instructions: This study meets the basic requirements for expedited review.
Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Form within 30 days of study completion. If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, the number of participants recruited changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Modification Form.
If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study, or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB

promptly using the Incident Report Form. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfill any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any of the following:
• If there are any changes in the research (including but not limited to changes in location, members of the research team, research procedures, number of participants, target population of participants, compensation, or risk), these changes must be approved by the IRB before implementation.
• Report any protocol deviations or unanticipated problems to the IRB promptly according to IRB policy.
• Should the research continue past the expiration date, submit a Continuing Review Form approximately 30 days before the expiration date.
• When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Expedited or Full Board, submit an Inactivation Form.
• According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on the ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from the inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
• It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp.
or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.
Sincerely,
Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

Data Collected from the Texas Education Agency in the Abilene Region from Students'

Progress in the Dropout Prevention Programs

Texas Education Agency
2018-19 Progress (TAPR)
REGION 14: ABILENE

Due to the cancellation of spring 2020 STAAR, 2019 and 2018 progress data are shown.

	School Year	State	Region14	African American	Hispanic	White	American Indian	Asian	Pacific Islander	Twoor More Races	Special Ed (Current)	Special Ed (Former)	Continuously Enrolled	Non-Continuously Enrolled	Econ Disadv	EB/EL (Current & Monitored)
School Progress Domain - Academic Growth Score by Grade and Subject																
Grade 4 ELA/Reading	2019	61	59	55	57	60	63	74	80	60	51	60	59	60	54	58
	2018	63	58	60	55	60	69	73	*	56	59	61	58	59	56	58
Grade 4 Mathematics	2019	65	63	62	59	65	56	74	70	64	60	71	62	63	59	54
	2018	65	61	58	59	63	70	76	*	56	60	61	62	58	57	60
Grade 5 ELA/Reading	2019	81	80	79	80	80	83	81	50	77	74	82	80	80	78	82
	2018	80	79	81	79	77	73	83	*	79	78	82	79	79	78	82
Grade 5 Mathematics	2019	83	84	85	83	84	87	91	92	87	82	87	85	84	83	87
	2018	81	80	85	81	79	77	84	*	80	84	75	81	79	81	81
Grade 6 ELA/Reading	2019	42	41	42	36	43	25	59	*	42	32	39	40	42	36	39
	2018	47	44	44	40	46	39	60	*	43	39	40	43	46	40	45
Grade 6 Mathematics	2019	54	57	48	50	62	20	80	*	65	44	57	57	57	50	52
	2018	56	56	57	51	58	64	69	*	57	55	56	55	56	53	60
Grade 7 ELA/Reading	2019	77	76	72	72	78	88	89	*	75	64	78	75	77	72	75
	2018	76	73	73	73	74	82	82	*	75	60	71	73	74	72	77
Grade 7 Mathematics	2019	62	59	49	55	63	57	77	*	61	46	60	58	61	54	52
	2018	67	63	61	61	64	62	78	40	59	61	61	62	63	59	71
Grade 8 ELA/Reading	2019	77	74	71	72	76	94	80	90	71	65	83	75	72	71	76
	2018	79	78	79	77	77	83	83	*	79	71	74	78	76	77	80
Grade 8 Mathematics	2019	82	83	81	82	84	84	85	*	85	70	87	85	79	84	82
	2018	81	79	77	80	78	59	79	*	74	69	78	82	73	79	80
End of Course English II	2019	69	70	75	68	71	73	71	*	74	67	55	70	71	67	65
	2018	67	66	61	63	69	78	82	*	63	51	70	67	65	62	62
End of Course Algebra I	2019	75	71	70	70	71	58	85	*	69	44	56	72	66	67	66
	2018	72	71	65	69	72	75	84	*	68	42	65	72	67	65	64
All Grades Both Subjects	2019	69	68	65	65	70	69	79	76	69	59	68	68	67	64	65
	2018	69	67	67	66	68	68	77	64	65	62	65	67	66	65	68 *
All Grades ELA/Reading	2019	68	67	65	64	68	74	76	74	66	59	66	67	66	63	66
	2018	69	66	66	65	67	69	76	71	65	61	65	66	66	64	68
All Grades Mathematics	2019	70	69	65	66	71	63	81	77	71	59	70	70	68	66	65
	2018	70	68	67	66	69	67	78	56	65	63	65	69	66	65	69

* Indicates results are masked due to small numbers to protect student confidentiality.

- Indicates there are no students in the group.

APPENDIX C

Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive Functioning Scale

Predicted Social Functioning Dimension	**Questionnaire Items**
School Performance	1. I get good marks in math/arithmetic
	5. I get good marks in science
	9. I get good marks in social science and/or history
	13. I get good marks in reading/writing/English
	17. I have trouble with my school work[a]
	21. I am successful at my school work
Peer Relationships	2. I go out to places with my friends
	6. I have friends of the opposite sex
	10. I go to parties or school dances
	14. I have at least one or two special friends
	18. I spend most of my spare time alone[a]
	22. I have difficulty making friends[a]
Family Relationships	3. I have a good relationship with my mother
	7. I have a good relationship with my father
	11. I get on well with my brother(s)/sister(s) (if you have any)
	15. I get on well with my relatives
	19. I have fights with my parent(s)[a]
	23. I have an adult who I can talk to if I have a problem
Home Duties/self-care	4. I help around the house
	8. I keep my room and belongings tidy
	12. I keep my clothes clean and tidy
	16. I shower and keep myself clean
	20. I help with the cooking at home
	24. I help with the cleaning up after meals

[a]Items were reverse scored.