

Frequent Family Mobility and Child Self -Regulation

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Abstract

- ❖ Children’s self-regulation has been found to be an important predictor of later school success.
- ❖ This study examined relations between family mobility and children’s self-regulation in preschool.
- ❖ Using a diverse sample of 477 preschool children, results indicated that the number of moves a family made in the past five years was significantly related to lower self-regulation scores in children.
- ❖ The same pattern of results was found after controlling for child gender, age, and Head Start status.
- ❖ These results indicate that higher family mobility is associated with lower self-regulation skills in young children and document the importance of housing stability for children’s positive development.

Introduction

- ❖ Children’s self-regulation (including the ability to follow instructions, focus on materials presented to them, and demonstrate self-control) is a strong predictor of their later academic achievement (McClelland, Acock, Piccinin & Stallings, 2012).
- ❖ A few examples of self-regulation in classrooms include taking turns when playing with a desirable toy, persisting on a task, or remembering the directions for an activity (McClelland, Cameron, Wanless & Murray, 2007).
- ❖ Research has found that kindergarten self-regulation significantly predicted reading and math achievement between kindergarten and sixth grade, and growth in literacy and math from kindergarten to second grade (McClelland & Cameron, 2011).
- ❖ This suggests that self-regulation is vital for academic success and can be seen as a factor in determining which students are at-risk academically.

- ❖ Previous research has also found that highly mobile children are at-risk for low levels of achievement, and that these gaps in achievement persist or worsen over time (Masten & Heistad, 2008).
- ❖ The present study examined if children from families who experience frequent mobility are likely to have lower self-regulation in preschool.

Study Design/Methods Used

- ❖ My URAP project was part of Dr. McClelland’s *Touch Your Toes! Kindergarten Readiness Study* which is examining the reliability and validity of the Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders (HTKS) self-regulation task as a school readiness screening tool.
- ❖ I analyzed the data collected on 284 preschool children in the fall of 2011.
- ❖ The sample was diverse : 50% were girls and 79% of the sample was low-income (enrolled in Head Start).
- ❖ Children’s self-regulation was directly assessed using the HTKS and the Day-Night Stroop task.
- ❖ Information on child gender, age, and Head Start status was also collected.

Goals of the Study

- ❖ The present study examined the following research questions:
 - ❖ 1) How is the amount of moves a family experienced in the past five years related to children’s self-regulation?
 - ❖ 2) Do relations between family mobility and child self-regulation still hold after controlling for child gender, age and Head Start Status?

- ❖ I predicted that more family mobility in the past five years (greater number of moves) would significantly predict lower self-regulation in children after controlling for child gender, age, and Head Start status.

Results

- ❖ For the first research question:
 - ❖ Correlations indicated that the number of times a family moved in the past five years was significantly related to a decreased ability to self-regulate on the Day-Night Stroop task ($r = -.39, p < .05$).
- ❖ For the second research question:
 - ❖ The number of times a family moved in the past five years significantly predicted a child’s ability to self regulate on the Day-Night Stroop task after controlling for child gender, age, and Head Start status.

Table 1. Number of Housing Moves Predicting Child Self-Regulation in Preschool (N = 284)

| Variables | Day-Night Stroop Task of Self-Regulation | |
|-------------------------|--|---------|
| | Coefficient | t-ratio |
| Head Start Status | -.17 | -2.93** |
| Child Age | .16 | 2.80** |
| Number of housing moves | -.12 | -2.03* |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Summary/Conclusion

- ❖ Results indicated that families who move frequently within the past five years were more likely to have children with lower levels of self-regulation.
- ❖ These results point to the importance of consistency and stability early in a child’s life. Without housing stability, it is often difficult for a child to learn how to effectively self-regulate on their own.
- ❖ This is important because the ability to self regulate can lead to higher academic success.
- ❖ These results point to the important influences that frequent housing moves have on children and that preventive steps are needed before mobility occurs.
- ❖ Prevention resources may include stronger social and financial support for families as well as increased awareness of the importance of stability for young children’s development.

References

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