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.

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?
- 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.

Results
- 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.
- 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 ($N = 284$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head Start Status</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
<td>-2.93**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>2.80**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of housing moves</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>-2.03*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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References