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Kelleris, Ariane B.

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The Relationship between Frequent Relocation and Childhood/Youth Behaviour

Ariane B. Kelleris

Introduction

The scale of cross-boundary travelling is so immense, "hyper mobility" is becoming central to contemporary existence. One cannot help but wonder if there are certain factors that contribute to this continual movement, often across national borders?

People migrate for many reasons, obviously to look for better economic opportunities, but also to escape from war, persecution, violence and disasters. However, there is an additional dimension: could it be that certain people are predisposed to migratory behaviour? Jennings (1970), for example, introduced the term "mobicentric man" to describe the behaviour of individuals who value motion and action very highly and who are constantly "on the move." Later, Morrison and Wheeler (1976) used the term "pioneering personality" to describe individuals who appear to prefer to relocate geographically. Morrison and Wheeler claimed that, in the decision to emigrate, the need for novelty per se might play as decisive a role as the perceived economic opportunity in the destination country.

Taylor (1969) described three major types of migrants. According to the author, "resultant migrants" are those who are pressured by the situation to move; they seize a single predominating opportunity to leave, without considering it much in advance. "Dislocated migrants" were defined as those who choose to migrate because of "dislocation" from their primary group; for example, they join their spouses, who have already emigrated to another region. But the most typical, Taylor claimed, are the "aspirers": individuals who migrate because of overall dissatisfaction with how they have been doing. Taylor (1969) wrote, that they move because they aspire to improve overall life quality for themselves and their children.

In an in-depth study of Navajo Indians, Kolp (1965) found high achievement motivation to be associated with a tendency to travel in constant search of more challenging goals, which he termed "restlessness".

Since "achievers" are constantly looking for something more challenging and want to avoid routine, they tend to become restless and mobile under conditions

that reduce challenges and limit their strivings (Kolp, 1965). If the social environment does not allow for "efficient" or productive behaviour, "high achievers" may migrate in order to find better opportunities. Descriptions of immigrants as "adventurous and risk-taking" and "more energetic and enterprising than those left behind" fit into a personality of someone with high power and achievement motivation (Bonka & Frieze 2001: 4-5).

The question of cultural/social identity and rootlessness has occupied me for most of my life. By the time I was six years old, I had lived in three countries, and spoke as many languages. My parents were born in Iceland and France, my grandparents in Denmark, Switzerland and Iceland. I was born in Denmark, but immigrated to the US when I was 14 years old. When people asked me where I came from, I struggled immensely. After many transatlantic flights and roaming through a lot of countries, trying to figure out where I belonged, I settled in Denmark.

Six years ago my Danish husband and I moved to Canada with our three children/youths, now aged 13, 15 and 17. They have further fuelled my interest in examining the subject of moving across cultures. As children moving into adolescence, I have observed their existential struggles, as they address the same developmental tasks of their peers, in addition to having to deal with leaving their country of birth and settling into a new country. These past six years, we have had to relocate eight times, and they have attended more than nine schools since we left Denmark. My brave and resilient girls have often expressed to me how complex their feelings are on the subject and how it has altered their being.

Living in Canada has given my family and I an opportunity to experience first-hand life as an immigrant in a multicultural society. Like so many modern-day travellers, the trip across borders is the least of our concerns; we often discuss what it would be like if we were to return "home" to Denmark. This article is not about my family and I, and yet, we are some of the many rootless ones, whose search for their identities is a reflection of the places and daily lives they choose (Kelleris 2004).

In this article, the term "youth" is used interchangeably with the term "adolescent" and relates to middle adolescence (ages 13-16) and late adolescence (ages 17-19). Most of the cited research refers to children and relocating. Unfortunately only few data is available at this time aimed specifically at the targeted age group, as indicated above. Hence the frequent referral to childhood/youth data. It is, however, the belief of this author that although the developmental frame of reference is not the same, some of the basic assumptions about the effects of relocation on children, can be transferred to youth.

It should also be noted that although a significant amount of literature has addressed the effects of immigration, focus has primarily been on socio-economic/political factors, as opposed to psychological ones. For the purpose of this article, relocation is used generically to describe all those involved in the process of moving.

Aside from having a personal interest in the subject, it is highly relevant in current Europe, with increased migration, the breakdown of national states and reestablishment of new ones, often based on cultural and ethnic identities. Mass migrations of people are changing the cultural landscapes. With the increased pressure on the troubled areas of the world, we all have a commitment to accept and integrate newcomers into our societies. This requires a willingness to adapt, not only from those who come but also from those who live in the receiving society.

It is my sincere hope that the reader gains a better understanding of how complex the subject of relocating (across borders) is, and at the same time catch your interest, so perhaps you will find this article informative and useful in dealing with multicultural people in general, and (multicultural) adolescents specifically.

Discussion

Relocation at any age is a major challenge, requiring a wide range of skills and resources. The challenges of starting a new job, adapting to a new school, as well as the logistics of getting new support systems established in the community requires emotional surplus. Likewise the severing of friendships and social network as well as establishing new relationships after the move are tasks that require both social and emotional skills. Physically packing and unpacking household items requires careful planning and attention to detail. Finally, the sheer amount of time and resources lost to the transition itself is likely to put a strain on any individual as well as the family.

Researchers studying problem behaviour in children and youths are now starting to consider family relocation as one of several possible causes. It has been hypothesized that when a family relocates to a new community, a youth's behaviour can become problematic due partly to breakdown in the social network. The extended family, school, friends and neighbours, who previously helped regulate the child's behaviour, are suddenly absent, creating in effect a void.

Studies on relocation

Previous studies of geographic relocation as a risk factor for problem behaviour in children and youths have produced inconsistent results as indicated below.

A high rate of residential mobility has been related to a wide range of negative outcomes for children and adolescents, including problems with social, emotional, and educational functioning (Brown & Orthner 1990; DeWit 1998; DeWit, Offord and Braun 1998; Pittman & Bowen 1994; Simmons, Burgeson Carlton-Ford & Blyth 1987; Simpson & Fowler 1994; Stokols & Shumaker 1982; Vernberg 1990).

According to a significant study on the effects of moving and childhood problem behaviour (DeWit, Offord and Braun 1998), evidence gathered does suggests that young people who move frequently or have relocated recently are more likely to have problems in school, exhibit difficult behaviour and abuse substances as a result of weakened parental supervisory capacity, disciplinary practices and child emotional attachments to family, school, church as well as community. The total number of moves had a larger effect on childhood problems. Compared with non-movers, children who reported three or more moves were more likely to engage in problem behaviour.

Stokols & Shumaker (1982) tested the hypothesis that early adolescents who experience multiple life changes within a relatively short time span will experience more difficulties adjusting than their counterparts who have a longer time to cope with these changes. By surveying students and gathering data regarding students' grade point averages, they confirmed that multiple changes, including geographical mobility, impacted the children negatively. Girls tended to have lower self-esteems, and both males and females demonstrated declines in grade point averages and extracurricular participation.

Simpson and Fowler (1994) examined whether or not geographic mobility affects a child's emotional and behavioural adjustment and school functioning. Analyzing data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey of Child Health (data on health and demographic characteristics, emotional/ behavioural variables, school functioning, and geographic mobility) of 10,362 US school-age children, they concluded that a child who moves more than three times is at risk of experiencing emotional and behavioural problems as well as related school problems. However, it is important to consider the types of families that tended to move, such as families who continued to change jobs, as well as student/parent attachment.

Vernberg (1990) examined if relocation affects experiences with peers and the impact moving may have on developing intimate relationships. For the year following a child's move, he studied the peer relationships of 36 mobile adolescents and 37 non-mobile adolescent. He found that those students, who had moved, reported fewer contacts with friends and experienced less intimacy and sharing in their relationships with their best friends. Males who moved experienced more rejection from peers than did their female counterparts.

However, his research covered only the year after a move and did not examine whether or not moving impacts the development of intimacy in later years.

DeWit (1998) analyzed 3,700 surveys from young adults (ages 18 to 35) to determine if geographic relocation had an impact on the onset of drug use and the progression to drug-related problems. He concluded that respondents who moved as children were more likely than non-movers to be introduced to drug-use at an earlier age. These drugs included marijuana, hallucinogens, crack/cocaine, and prescribed drugs, but did not include alcohol. In addition, more movers tended to report lifetime use of marijuana to help solve problems than did non-movers.

The behavioural effects found in the above studies are contradicted by other research. Brown and Orthner (1990) found no significant differences in self-esteem, alienation, depression, or life satisfaction between non-movers and movers. Pittman & Brown (1994) concluded that, although moving may negatively or positively impact a child, depends mainly on the child's attitude towards the relocation and its personality attributes.

Several studies of the post-move adjustment problems among children concluded that frequent moving sometimes leads to actual improvements in behaviour, enhancements in the quality of parent-child relations, and more effective coping mechanisms (Kroger 1980; Stroh & Bret 1990).

A study (Tucker, Marx & Long 1998) found evidence amongst children who had moved an average or above average number of times were not significantly harmed, if they lived with both biological parents. However, if the children lived in other family structures, any moves adversely affected school life. The only indicated exceptions were those children residing in hyper mobile families (moved in excess of 8 times).

Wheaton (1990) has suggested that life events (including family moves) may actually enhance mental and physical well-being by liberating individuals from highly undesirable or stress-inducing situations. Similar arguments can be made for youths, specifically those having difficulties with peers or problems at school.

A number of investigations using prospective data have concluded that moving does not lead to child behavioural problems or significant delays in growth and development. Instead, the best predictor of post-move adjustment appeared to be the level of adjustment before the move.

Kantor (1965), in her study of more than 800 school-age children, found that symptom levels of mental health remained virtually unchanged after a

geographic move. She concluded that after a move, well-adjusted children remain well adjusted and troubled children remain troubled.

Normative life events and moving

Considering all the above arguments, research does consistently indicate that moves can potentially increase the risk of adverse outcomes when they coincide with potentially stressful normative life events and changes such as; arrival of a new sibling, a move to a new school, or the onset of adolescence.

Given that normative adolescent development is characterized by dramatic changes in physical development, social relations, identity, sexuality and behaviour, high levels of family instability might be related to increased difficulty negotiating these normative transitions and to poorer adolescent outcomes across a variety of developmental domains.

Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford & Blyth (1987) suggest that adolescents need an "arena of comfort" involving continuity in at least some spheres of their lives. Continuity in one's physical home may provide one such "arena of comfort," and disruptions in the physical home may be especially problematic when they occur in conjunction with the normative developmental changes and challenges of adolescence.

Adolescents in particular may be adversely affected by frequent uprooting because of severed ties to peers, which play a key role in defining individual self-worth. Evidence of substantial age effects were confirmed by Haveman and colleagues who found that for a large sample of young adults, disruptions to physical location between the ages of 4-7 or 12-15 were most damaging to academic performance and future prospects for high school graduation (Haveman et al. 1991).

Some moves appear to be more successful than others and can result in positive personal development. Therefore, an important consideration in the selection of outcome measures is that they capture both negative and positive psychological functioning.

Negative and positive emotion regulation

Researchers interested in understanding the generally negative effects of residential moves on children and youths, have proposed potential mediators such as the loss of familiar physical environments, activities, and routines, the loss of social support networks, and decreases in parent well-being and in the quality of parent-child relationships (Cohen, Johnson, Straining & Brook 1989; Hendershott 1989). There are significant negative effects of residential mobility on child and adolescent outcomes above and beyond pre-existing family

characteristics that may contribute to residential mobility (Cohen et al. 1989). In some cases, characteristics of the child or family, such as the age or sex of the child, family structure, and level of parental support, may moderate the effects of residential moves (Simmons et al. 1987).

When considering possible measures to capture negative functioning, prior research linking personality and depression argued for the inclusion of a depressive symptoms outcome measure (Krueger 1998b).

Research on the effect of positive emotions in coping with stressful contexts indicates that positive emotions help buffer against stress. For instance, positive coping strategies, such as positive reappraisal, problem-focused coping, and infusing ordinary events with positive meaning are related to the occurrence and maintenance of positive affect. These findings suggest that positive emotions are valuable tools for establishing enhanced outcomes in well-being (Folkman & Moskowitz 2000).

Problem-focused coping includes cognitive and behavioural problem-solving efforts to manage the stressor itself, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies are cognitive and behavioural efforts to minimize emotional distress (Folkman & Lazarus 1980). Thus, context-specific measures of social support assesses both the help that the respondent receives with the concrete tasks associated with moving and the amount of emotional support received regarding the transition.

Furthermore, when considering relationships with positive functioning, personality has been associated with a wide variety of measures such as positive affect, self-esteem and psychological well-being (Costa & McCrae 1980).

The broaden-and-build theory envisages that positive emotions are useful in several ways. Relating this theory to coping, suggests that positive emotions guide present coping behaviour. By examining psychological resilience from subjective, cognitive, and physiological angles, Fredrickson's investigation provides greater insight into the reasons why resilient individuals are able to effectively cope with stressful experiences, whereas others facing similar conditions do not fare as well.

By recognizing the benefits that positive emotions have on negative emotion regulation, during times of stress, individuals focus on pursuing novel and creative thoughts and actions. Thus, through exploration and experimentation, in time they may be able to build an arsenal of effective coping resources that help buffer (psychologically and physiologically) against negative emotional life experiences (Fredrickson 1998, 2001).

The role of humour as a coping mechanism

Numerous studies have supported the anecdotal view that humour and laughter are therapeutic for reliving tension and anxiety (Kuiper and Martin 1998; Lefcourt et al. 1995). Whereas stress is linked to psychological distress (Giliis 1992), humour appears to buffer an individual against the negative effects of stress (Abel 1998; Martin and Dobbin 1988). Furthermore, research reveals that a good sense of humour is related to muscle relaxation, control of pain and discomfort, positive mood states, and overall psychological health including a healthy self-concept (Kuiper and Martin 1998).

Kuiper et al. (1995) found that individuals with a high sense of humour changed their perspective when coping with negative life events by viewing these events more positively than those with a low sense of humour.

Abel (2002) addressed the cognitive-affective shift via cognitive appraisal associated with humour and related coping strategies. The results support findings from other studies, revealing the significance of humour in cognitive appraisal of stress, the cognitive-affective shift produced by humour, and the relationships between sense of humour and certain coping strategies. Furthermore Lefcourt's et al. (1995) suggestion that humour is linked to both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies was supported.

Humour may thus afford the opportunity for exploring cognitive alternatives in response to stressful situations and reducing the negative affective consequences of a real or perceived threat.

Gender and relocation

The extent to which relocation experiences vary by sex may depend on the stage of child development. Simmons et al. (1987) found that many life transitions (e.g., changing schools, residential mobility, family break-up, pubertal development) had a negative impact on the self-esteem of their sample of pre-adolescent girls but not on the boys. They attributed the greater vulnerability of girls to a growing preoccupation with peer regard and physical appearance as well as difficulties coping with early pubertal development.

Evidence suggests that the acceptance of newcomers varies by sex. For example, Feshbach and Sones (1971) found that girls displayed less friendly reactions toward same-sex newcomers than boys. Likewise, Brown & Orthner (1990) found that boys were subjected to fewer instances of rejection than girls.

Conversely, other studies have found that boys fared less well making friends following a move (Vernberg 1990; Vernberg, Ewell, Beery & Abwender 1994), which may indicate the use of ineffective coping strategies in the adjustment process.

It is however interesting to note that the only large-scale study to examine male/female differences in the effects of moving on child psychopathology failed to find a significant gender effect (Cohen et al. 1989).

Short- and long-distance moves

Compared to short-distance moves, long-distance moves may have more negative behavioural consequences to the extent that they are more likely to involve a change of schools, dissolve close friendships, and attenuate extended family ties. Long-distance moves may also be determined by a different set of demographic and socioeconomic circumstances.

Glick's study (1992a) of geographic mobility among American families found that a majority of the long-distance moves were the result of job transfers, while the majority of short-distance moves were associated with changes in family structure (e.g., parental divorce, family formation) or neighbourhood dissatisfaction.

Kroger (1980) found that significant reductions in self-concept were observed for moves involving great distances; however, the frequency of moving and moving in the recent past did not adversely affect adolescent self-concept.

Whether relocation has positive or negative effects on the adjustment of children/youths relates to many variables, such as the distance of the move, the frequency of moves, and parental attitude toward the move. Moving can also be more difficult for those family members who have the least choice about the decision, such as the children and, in an employment situation, the spouse of a transferred worker.

Degree of personal control

Life events theorists consider "degree of personal control" over a particular event to be an important determinant of healthy psychological functioning in young people (Newcomb & Harlow 1986). For some children/youths, perceptions of control over the event may influence whether moving is perceived and responded to as stressful.

Stroh's (1990) analysis of the effects of corporate mobility on children's post-move adjustment found that children's involvement in the decision making process preceding the move was a key determinant of self-confidence after a move. The study furthermore noted that the major factors, which accounted for the children's adjustment, were the children's prior adjustment, parental satisfaction and self-confidence.

Those who believe they can exercise some measure of control over their emotional life are more successful in their self-regulatory efforts than individuals who believe they are at the mercy of their emotional states (Bandura 1997a, 1999). A strong sense of coping efficacy reduces vulnerability to stress and depression in taxing situations and strengthens resiliency to adversity. Efficacy beliefs also play a key role in shaping the courses lives take by influencing the types of activities and environments people choose to get into.

Additional factors

Factors such as characteristics of the child, special needs, or ethnic differences may also contribute to difficulty in relocation for particular children. For example, a child with specific academic needs may move from a school with excellent resources to one with limited resources. Similarly, a child may move from a diverse community to a more homogeneous one where he or she is a member of a minority group.

Straits (1987) found that the extent to which moving inhibited school progress among a national sample of teenagers was a direct function of the degree of cultural difference between the point of origin and the point of destination. Cultural difference was defined as how places differed in terms of their position on a rural-urban continuum, the difference in educational attainment of adults, and the distance of the move.

Under ordinary conditions, children generally adjust to the move after a relatively short amount of time. Although for an intact family, extended family members and friends may be missed, children still have the support and presence of their parents when the family moves together. For an intact family, the move can be a positive event. Stokols and Shumaker (1982) report some studies that indicate preventing a move may be more harmful than moving, where benefits are derived from moving.

> Researchers need to examine children's family or home environments in a dynamic rather than in a static or snapshot fashion. It is not only the quality of children's home environments at any one time, or even the average quality of their home environments across time, but the degree of change or discontinuity in those environments that deserves attention. Repeated disruptions in the relationships and physical surroundings that define a child's "home" may be important contributors to adolescent adjustment problems. At the least, they are important markers of increased risk for adjustment problems. (Adam & Chase-Lansdale 2002, 802).

If home is where the heart is, disruptions of home may be near the heart of increased adjustment problems expressed by these adolescents.

Rootlessness and existential homelessness

Having lived in many places one cannot ignore the dichotomy experienced of "being on the road again", and the eternal search for "belonging somewhere, somehow". Mobility provides a deep sense of satisfaction derived from the freedom of constraints. However the ensuing lack of affiliation to people, places and continuity comes at a hefty price, which might be the denial of a greater fundamental part of human nature, as will be discussed. Recently a new type of descriptive imagery has emerged, namely that of the existential homeless in the global village.

> People like me learn to exult in the blessings of belonging to what feels like a whole new race. It is a race, as Salman Rushdie has said, of "people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves--because they are so defined by others--by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves." … To understand the modern state, we are often told; we must read V. S. Naipaul. (He) is considered the definitive modern traveller in part because he is the definitive symbol of modern rootlessness; his singular qualification for his wanderings is not his stamina, or his bravado, or his love of exploration--it is, quite simply, his congenital displacement. Here is a man who was a foreigner at birth, a citizen of an exiled community set down on a colonized island. Here is a man for whom every arrival is enigmatic, a man without a home--except for an India to which he stubbornly returns, only to be reminded of his distance from it. …the poignancy of a wanderer who tries to go home but is not taken in, and is accepted by another home only so long as he admits that he's a lodger there… We airport-hoppers can, in fact, go through the world as through a house of wonders, picking up something at every stop and taking the whole globe as our playpen or our supermarket. We do not have a home; we have a hundred homes - and we can mix and match as the situation demands. "Nobody's history is my history," the Japanese-English novelist Kazuo Ishiguro, a great spokesman for the privileged homeless, once said to me. "Whenever it was convenient for me to become very Japanese, I could become very Japanese, and then, when I wanted to drop it, I would just become this ordinary Englishman." Instantly, I felt a shock of recognition: I have a wardrobe of selves from which to choose. And I savour the luxury of being able to be an Indian in Cuba or an American in Thailand; to be an Englishman in New York. But what is the price we pay for all of this? What is the new kind of soul that is being born out of this new kind of life? For us in the transit lounge, affiliation is as alien as disorientation. We become professional observers, able to see the merits and deficiencies of anywhere, to balance our parents' viewpoints with their enemies' positions. I wonder, sometimes, if this new kind of non-affiliation may not be alien to something fundamental in the human state. The refugee at least harbours passionate feelings about the world he has left; the exile at least is propelled by some kind of strong emotion away from the old country and toward the new--indifference is not an exile's emotion. But what does the Transit Lounger feel? What are the issues that we would die for? What are the passions that we would live for? (Lyer 1993, 14).

Rootlessness is difficult to define; Feelings of yearning, searching, grasping to belong. Sensing lack of attachment, alienation, problems with self-identity, which can give cause to anxiety and restlessness. Often described as a privileged life, yet a continual existential dilemma to those who experience it. Being rootless can perpetuate the continual search for utopia, and to find out where "home is".

Perhaps the best way to define this phenomenon is by listening to what the young people I interviewed in Geneva said (Brynjolfsson 1983). "I never feel homesick; I have no "home", or roots in a country". "I cannot describe it, but I am trying not to let it bother me". "I feel lost like I don't belong anywhere. It's a pain." It does not feel good. In one side you have to do what your parents say, and in the other you have to be like the people in school. It's very difficult". "I live between reality and utopia; I always think the next morning everything will be fine etc...."

> It is perfectly normal to feel foreign in a foreign country. What is not normal is to feel foreign in your own country. This is the essential feature of the conflict: you do not feel that you belong there, but you feel that you ought to do so... It has been said that the Ecolint graduate (International School in Geneva) is at home everywhere, but it would be more accurate to say that he is not quite at home anywhere. It is not for nothing that some turn to wanders... (Dormer, former student).

In moving to a new environment, these youths, described by many as living between two worlds, third-cultures kids and the rootless ones, often face a variety of problems such as: feelings of inferiority or inadequacy because of difficulties with language and acculturation, starting new schools and attempting to make friends. Encountering additional troubles by accepting differences in cultural milieu, coupled with resistance on the part of the local community to newcomers. Their parents' professional obligations requiring travelling and absences from their family, difficulties of spouse to find work, and make contacts. Encountering additional stressors due to overall difficulties of settling into the new community.

Cross-cultural studies on the effects of frequent moves

The following studies of active-duty military families and kids in missionary families indicate parallels to the aforementioned mobile multicultural families, as expressed through practical as well as emotional concerns.

There are approximately 1.2 million children in the US armed service families. Research shows that on average, military families move every two to three years. Few studies have explored the psychological adjustment of children in these families, and in particular, the effects of frequent geographic mobility on the military child.

A study conducted by Finkel (2001) examined the effects of geographic mobility, as well as aspects of family environment, maternal adjustment, and various demographic variables on the psychosocial adjustment and behaviour of children in military families. Participants were 86 children in active-duty military families and their mothers. Mothers completed a questionnaire that assessed the family's rate of geographic mobility. Also rated were aspects of their psychological adjustment, family environment, their children's behaviour, and overall adjustment, and their children's adjustment since the most recent move. The children completed questionnaires that assessed feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, self-esteem, peer relationships, attitudes towards their mothers, and how they felt about the most recent move.

Results demonstrated that the rate of moving did not predict children's psychosocial adjustment, although the length of time the child had lived in their current residence did predict children's adjustment. In addition, family environment, maternal psychological well-being, the child's adjustment following the most recent move, and the child's attitude toward the mother all predicted specific aspects of children's psychosocial adjustment and behaviour. Specifically, a more positive mother-child relationship and less maternal depressive symptomatology predicted lower levels of loneliness and social anxiety in children. A more cohesive family environment and better mother-child relationship predicted higher self-esteem among children. A positive attitude toward the most recent move, a positive mother-child relationship, and fewer difficulties following the most recent move, predicted lower levels of externalizing and internalizing behaviour.

Importantly, findings suggest that aspects of the family environment and maternal adjustment, as well as the length of time the child has lived in their current residence, may be more important than the rate of geographic mobility for predicting the psychosocial adjustment and behaviour of children in military families.

Wooten's study (1998) explored the psychological, emotional, social, and relational impact of frequent relocation as a result of a military lifestyle. Specific variables investigated included the impact of moving on a sense of rootedness, belonging, and intimacy. She offered the following definitions: Rootedness, "to feel a sense of roots, attachment, or tie to a family, place, home, and geographical location". Belonging as "to claim ownership or feel a sense of connection, bond, or affiliation within a group, family, organization, or place".

Intimacy is defined as "to expose oneself by expressing feelings openly and honestly or to connect with another individual in a relationship filled with veritable expression and trust". It was hypothesised that experiencing a

transient military lifestyle may contribute to a feeling of rootlessness or lack of roots. Difficulties with a sense of belonging and intimacy were also suspected. The author concluded: (1) Military brats (defined as children of military personnel), and spouses did not feel a sense of rootedness to place. However, moving did increase rootedness within their family unit. Retirees did not feel moving impacted rootedness to place or family. They felt rooted within the military culture. (2) Military brats and spouses felt moving took away their sense of belonging. Retirees disagreed. (3) Military brats experienced difficulties with intimacy, making new friends, and emotional disclosure. Spouses and retirees felt that intimacy increased within the family and military subculture.

Another very interesting research project was conducted by Gilliland (2003). He explored the impact of the missionary kid experience on marital satisfaction. Fifty-eight missionary kids (MKs), primarily alumni from a boarding school in Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa, participated in this study.

Missionary kids were defined as: individuals who spent at least three of their formative years outside of their passport culture. MKs live in cultures other than the cultures listed on their passport. MKs generally speak a second language, have been exposed to a variety of ideas and values, have travelled extensively, and develop the ability to adjust. MKs do not, in general, have roots and often they are restless. Home is a vague concept to them. Because of their high mobility, MKs relationships are either marked by quick intensity or prevailing shallowness. They often struggle with personal identity and experience unresolved grief.

The above research projects demonstrate how complex and perplexing rootlessness can be. Gilliland´s (2003) study furthermore compliments Vernberg's (1990) research on the impact moving may have on developing intimate relationships.

Searching for home

The notion of home as refuge or haven, to escape if needed, from the outside world. "In this, the home serves emotional coping; it exists, as a place to retreat to from things that one cannot do much about for the time being. Thus, various acts of residence confer upon housing coping values that become captured in the notion of "home." (Hartig, Johansson & Kylin 2003).

According to Vivero & Jenkins (1999), culturally homeless (rootless) individuals are often characterized by the "beneficial" aspects of multicultural experiences, such as cognitive resources and flexibility, multiple problem-solving strategies, independent thinking, the ability to adapt to constantly changing social environments, acute social perceptions, and a greater variety of

experiences on which to draw from. Nonverbal communication skills are often a particular strength, probably due to having to rely on observation skills in addition to having the ability to decode cultural cues.

However, as explained in the above section on rootlessness, these individuals are often characterized as being restless, superficial, and they often struggle with personal identity and feelings of alienation. Home as a concept is often vague, and becomes a source of continually search.

Theoretical Framework

Social control theory

A theory of interest as it relates to the study of childhood/youth relocation is Travis Hirschi's (1969 & 1994) Social Control Theory (also known as Social Bonding Theory).

The Social Control Theory argues that social constraints (e.g., child/youth attachment to family, school and extra-curricular activities) prevent or inhibit the occurrence of problem behaviour, which occurs when emotional attachments to important agents of socialization disappear. The weakened social bonds signify a loss of commitment by the young person to the conventional social order (society) and a lack of response to the sanctions of significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, coaches etc.) on inhibiting problem behaviour. Within this framework, geographic relocation is viewed as a force that threatens to weaken bonds to the conventional social order.

Proponents of Social Control Theory (Krohn, Massey, Skinner & Lauer 1983) argue that "attached" young people are hesitant to engage in problem behaviour because such activities risk invoking a negative response from significant others whose opinions are valued. Commitment to and involvement in conventional activities (e.g., school work, athletics, church, and youth clubs) lessens the likelihood of problem behaviour because the young person is well-integrated into the conventional social order (i.e., the committed person has less time to engage in problem behaviour) and is committed to the pursuit of socially approved goals (e.g., educational attainment, i.e., the committed person has a stake in conformity). Finally, the occurrence of problem behaviour is expected to be low among young people who espouse strong beliefs in the conventional values, norms, and expectations of society.

Based on review of relevant literature and Hirschi's Social Control Theory, DeWit, Offord and Braun (1998) tested the following hypothesis: geographic relocation (measured in terms of total moves and recency of the last move) increases the risk of childhood problem behaviour by weakening parental disciplinary practices and child bonds to prosocial institutions such as the family, school, and community.

From a descriptive analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youths (NLSCY) data based on Person Most Knowledgeable (PMK), and self-reports of 3,224 pre-adolescent Canadian children, two primary study objectives included:

1) Understanding of the underlying mechanisms linking the number and recency of childhood geographic moves with problem behaviour; and (2) identifying the conditions under which frequent and recent moving is associated with problem behaviour. Tests for significant interaction or moderator effects were performed for measures of geographic relocation together with important control variables. The latter included the child's sex, living arrangements, neighbourhood climate, family socioeconomic status, level of family dysfunction, and parental depression. DeWit, Offord and Braun's (1998) study demonstrated that frequent moves, especially three or more moves, and to a lesser extent a recent move, may be associated with a heightened risk of behavioural problems among preadolescent Canadian children. Frequent relocation was often associated with children's behavioural problems via its positive impact on ineffective parental disciplinary practices, weakened child attachments to family, and weakened attachments to school. Particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of moving were children from single parent or reconstituted families and those coming from dysfunctional families. Among females only, moving within the past two years was strongly associated with a heightened risk of indirect aggression (PMK reports).

These findings closely parallel the results of recent studies of geographic relocation among school-age children in the United States (see for example, Simpson & Fowler 1994). One plausible explanation is that families of children who have moved once or twice are moving for reasons pertaining to normative life changes such as the birth of a new child or parental upward occupational mobility.

In contrast, many families of children who have moved three or more times may have been forced to do so out of economic necessity as a result of unstable parental employment and severe poverty. These unfavourable circumstances could explain the comparatively higher rates of behavioural problems experienced by this group.

Social cognitive theory

Bandura's Social Cognitive theory (2001) is also of interest as it relates to the study of stressful life events (relocating), and adolescent psychosocial development.

The Social Cognitive Theory argues that people's beliefs in their capability to exercise control over their own functioning and over environmental events is

central to personal agency. Choice behaviour can profoundly affect the direction of personal development and although personal efficacy serves a regulatory function in all major transitions of life, it is especially important during adolescence when experimentation, effort, and testing limits becomes part of the process of constructing an identity. Adolescents are faced with many challenges; one of the most important of these is to renegotiate their position within the family, while maintaining a warm and supportive relationship with their parents. An important factor determining successful resolution of this task is the quality of adolescent attachment to parents. It is within this frame of reference, geographic relocation is viewed as a potentially stressful situation the adolescent must face. The following examines the significance of agency and attachment in dealing with this major transition.

Buist et al. (2004) notes that the influence of affectional bonds seems to be particularly salient during times of stress and life change. Because of many possibly stressful changes during adolescence, attachment relationships are therefore especially relevant during this period. This is especially significant during times of transitions such as moving.

> Youngsters who enter adolescence beset by a disabling sense of inefficacy transport their vulnerability to stress and dysfunction to new environmental demands, they are less able to enlist familial guidance and support, and they are more likely to be exposed to peer pressures conducive to various hazardous and transgressive activities). In contrast, adolescents who have a high sense of self-regulatory efficacy are better equipped to cope with the transitional stressors of adolescence, to pursue activities that build competencies, to voice effectively their opinions and aspirations with parents and adults, and to resist peer pressures to engage in risky or antisocial conducts (Caprara et al. 1998, 126).

Social cognitive theory specifies a number of factors that determine the extent of involvement in high-risk activities and how to get out of those activities. Regulatory self-efficacy (the capacity to resist environmental pressures while participating in deviant actions) and emotional self-efficacy (the capacity to cope with and regulate their own emotional reactions) seem to play a crucial role in the choices adolescent make. They particularly seem to influence the relationship with parents, whose primary function is to guide and protect their children (Bandura et al. 1999, 2001).

There is a notable pattern of gender differences in self-appraisals of efficacy. Compared with adolescent males, females manifest a stronger sense of efficacy to manage academic activities, to rebuff peer pressure for transgressive behaviour, to experience empathy for another's feelings, and to express positive affect in their interpersonal relationships. Females are also more pro-social in their behaviour, less prone to delinquent conduct, and more prone to depression. Males tend to be more extensively involved in antisocial activities

and substance abuse. These differential patterns of perceived self-efficacy are accompanied by different styles of adaptation (Caprara et al. 1998)

Familial relationships based on mutual reciprocity, trust, dependency and open communication, enables adolescents to deal with transitional stressors in a variety of ways (Beyers et al. 2003). Mutually supportive relationships not only buffer the adverse effect of transitional stressors, but also serve an enabling function (Bandura 1997b).

Parental influences

Several studies have shown that adolescents who have warm, loving, intimate relationships with their parents are less likely to exhibit problem behaviour (Leadbeater, Kuperminc, Blatt & Hertzog 1999). Conversely, a low quality of attachment has been associated with higher incidences of problem behaviour (Mathijssen, Koot & Verhulst 1998); (Lyddon, Bradford & Nelson 1993).

Muris et al.'s study (2004) found that higher levels of negative parental rearing practices were associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression, which at the same time were related to lower levels of perceived control. Anxiety symptoms were connected to anxious rearing, overprotection, and rejection (Muris and Merckelbach 1998), whereas depression symptoms were associated with rejection and lack of emotional warmth.

The above discussion correlates with the findings of Patterson, Dishion, and Bank (1984), underscoring the growing importance of parental guidance and monitoring as adolescents' social life extends increasingly into the larger community. However, as the above discussion also points out, problem behaviour is affected by parenting style and low quality of attachment. Within the relationship with parents, which is characterized by closeness and trust, adolescents are likely to develop a positive self-image and confidence in their ability to cope successfully with the developmental challenges of adolescence (Caprara et al. 1998).

Where proponents of Social Control Theory argue that "attached" young people are hesitant to engage in problem behaviour because such activities risk invoking a negative response from significant others whose opinions are valued. I prefer the application of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory to explain what regulates adolescent behaviour in facing crisis such as encountered during moves.

Contrary to Social Control Theory, Bandura's theory supports the notion that adolescent autonomy is usually preferred because it emphasizes what is striven for, rather than what is abandoned, i.e. attachment is not forced by external social constraints, but strived for through mutual communication and respect

between parents and their children. Where Social Control Theory restricts the youth by holding him/her in check with social control mechanism, thereby negating free will and self-regulatory efficacy. Agency reflects the possibility of self-directed behavior, involving attitudinal, emotional, as well as functional aspects, and is associated with high self-reliance in the adolescent.

It is partly on the basis of these beliefs that people choose what challenges to undertake, how much effort to expend, how long to keep going in the face of obstacles and failures, and whether failures are demoralizing or motivating.

Bandura's theory validates the adolescent with self-regulating efficacy, trust, and hope, to make correct choices in their lives.

Reactions to moving frequently and across cultures

On a more personal note, after having to relocate more than I care to recall, due to employment opportunities (or lack thereof), my kids express the pros and cons of moving around too much, and across cultures in this way:

Child #1 (age 12)

- Coming to Canada, experiencing more new things, such as wildlife, camping.
- Travelled across Canada, saw the many different regions and ways of life.
- Get to meet lots of different people and learned a different language.
- Having to move so much, having to leave the place that you grew up, and your friends is very hard.
- Difficult to make friends, and then when you do, having to leave them.
- Settling into a new school with its routines and teachers is easy; the hard part is fitting in with other kids.
- When asked were she belonged, after some time answered: Denmark, it's my childhood. Miss some of the traditions that we had in Denmark.

Child #2 (age 14)

- Positive to be experiencing new situations, learning a new language and culture as well as seeing new places, nature, and wildlife.
- Missing a place that you can call home.
- Wishes for parents` job security and settling down.
- Having to start several new schools, difficult making and leaving friends.
- Fears and attachment issues. Afraid to get too involved with people.
- Going back to Denmark will be better overall, but probably a bit boring after living in Canada, with its mountains and wildlife.

- It has been hard, not being able to "unpack" to settle in, to make friends and develop relationships. But overall no regrets.

Child #3 (age 16)

- Moving is like coming out of a relationship, you are afraid to get involved again, for fear of being hurt.
- Emotionally draining, "it becomes a part of you, you become restless".
- Push/pull mechanism. Always wanting to move and yet need to stay.
- Opportunity to start afresh, meet new people, see the world, in some ways it gives you a second chance.
- Gives you a wider perspective, see things differently (positive and negative).
- Gives strength, moving is like any emotional experience/situation. It can only make you stronger; it forces you to be more outgoing. Great skills to be able to settle in and to adapt.

These observations concur very well with the above-indicated research on adjustment issues during transition facing children and adolescents.

As adults, we experienced the following:

- Heightened stress due to starting "afresh" (school, work, community, activities)
- Insecurities regarding: employment and job security as well as onset of old age
- Feeling vulnerable, esp. due to lack of network, but also being outside formal support systems.
- Feelings of being tired, stressed, lost, concerned, being on the periphery, "looking in", but unable to join in.
- Attachment issues, blaming and sense of helplessness
- Lack of emotional and practical commitment. "What difference does it make"?
- Feelings of excitement and joy of living out our dreams!!

As a family, for the past six years, we have been living for the moment, always contingent upon "where will we live next year"? Our situation can best be described by the following conditions:

- Excitement at discovering new culture, ways of life and spectacular sites.
- Quickly adapting to a new environment/situation, able to settle in to new houses, as well as communities.
- Fairly quickly meet new acquaintances and friends.

- Strengthen analytical skills by continual comparing/contrasting previous experiences.
- We were never totally unpacked (physically as well as emotionally).
- Additional expenses caused by uprooting; packing and moving.
- Kids unable to join sports teams and ongoing recreational activities, hence further alienated from peers and healthy life style.
- At times, we all felt physically as well as emotionally worn down.
- Afraid of making "more mistakes", should we move back, or stay here?
- How many times can we keep starting over, continually putting "living" on hold!
- Due to late immigration, difficult to save for children's post secondary education, retirement and old age.
- When you have no continuous income, no home, nor support system, suddenly the adventure turns into a nightmare. What is the solution??
- We have often felt like we have one leg in Denmark, and one in Canada. Where do we belong, and where do we want to invest our as well as our children's future?

In the discussion of post-modern development, existential homelessness has an air of trendiness about it, though in a tangible search for greater meaning, and sometimes psychical surviving, it becomes of the utmost importance.

Concluding discussion

To briefly summarize the most relevant issues pertaining to the effects of frequent moving on adolescents the following, often conflicting, findings should be noted.

A number of investigations using prospective data have concluded that moving does not lead to child behavioural problems or significant delays in growth and development. Instead, the best predictor of post-move adjustment appeared to be the level of adjustment before the move. It appears that after a move, well-adjusted children remain well adjusted and troubled children remain troubled.

Importantly, findings suggest that aspects of the family environment and maternal adjustment, as well as the length of time the child has lived in their current residence, may be more important than the rate of geographic mobility for predicting the psychosocial adjustment and behaviour of children and youths. Previous studies have confirmed the protective influence of family social supports in mitigating certain negative effects of moving on adolescent mental health (Hendershot 1989).

Evidence also points to the fact that adolescents are very vulnerable to the effects of moving because it often dissolves or weakens close friendships and

relationships with opposite sex partners. This severing of ties with peers resulting from a move may lead to a sense of lost identity and insecurity.

Up until recently most research has focused on the negative aspects associated with frequent relocation, however, a major shift has become evident with the inclusion of recent focus on positive outcomes. It is the author's hope that this article will shed light on some of the complexities involved.

In looking at my own children's trials and tribulations, I realize that there are no easy answers, and what may theoretically appear sound, does not necessarily reflect reality. My three girls have had to deal not only with moving across cultures, but also hyper-mobility, which as adolescents has been especially difficult. As a family we have tried to compensate for the continual uncertainty and (probably) chronic state of stress, by using many of the coping mechanisms discussed in this article.

Because frequent moves may be a marker or risk factor for other serious family problems, revisions to mental and physical health screening should include questions on family relocation history in conjunction with other family variables highly correlated with moving.

Evidence furthermore indicates that the health needs of many relocated children/youths may go undetected by healthcare service providers. Fowler et al. (1993) found that mobile American families were significantly less likely than non-movers to have a regular site for preventive and sick care and less likely to use emergency departments when their children became ill. Fortunately, schools can play an important role in identifying relocated youth and in providing the necessary referrals to outside helping agencies. Schools can also provide assistance by actively engaging relocated youth in student affairs and extra-curricular programs, involving parents in after-school activities, and offering onsite counselling services (Matter & Matter 1988). In the United States, school programs for relocated youth have been proven effective in improving academic achievement, enhancing self-esteem, reducing psychological problems such as depression and anxiety, and reducing delinquent behaviour (Fowler et al. 1993).

Treatment and prevention programs are also required which focus on helping children/youths and parents from relocated families adjust to their new surroundings. It would make sense that the most effective programs for relocated children/youths are those, which focus on the stress and conflicts the whole family encounters, and by helping family members to maintain open lines of communication as well as strengthening family bonds.

The realities of massive modern-day migration and the effect of relocation on child/youth well-being should hopefully alert policy makers, educators, social

scientists etc., to plan accordingly. By identifying the mechanisms through which relocation may influence childhood behaviour and the circumstances under which harmful effects occur, hopefully facilitating development of effective school and community programming for relocated youth.

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