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Homeless Children's Self-Report of Experiences and the Role of Age, History of Homelessness, and Current Residence in Academic Performance
(Under the Direction of LAYLI PHILLIPS, Ph.D.)

Children comprise the most rapidly increasing population of homeless people in the United States, and homeless students perform more poorly in school than others. This study used quantitative ($N = 40$) and qualitative ($N = 5$) analyses to examine data from a sample of African American (65%), Caucasian (25%) and biracial (10%) 5- to 16-year-old homeless students in a midsize city in the Southeast U.S. There were 25 boys and 15 girls. Using two concurrent outcome measures—grade-point average (GPA) and Teacher Report Form ratings (TRF)—results from regression analyses showed three findings. (No gender or ethnic differences emerged.) First, after controlling for current residence and history of homelessness, younger homeless students showed better academic performance than older homeless students; this was true for GPA but not TRF. Second, after controlling for child age, lifetime history of homelessness in total months negatively predicted performance as measured by GPA and TRF; lifetime history in total number of episodes predicted TRF but not GPA. Third, after controlling for age, students staying in shelters showed better academic performance as measured by GPA (but not TRF) than students staying in doubled-up arrangements (i.e., temporarily staying with family or friends). Lifetime experience staying doubled up also negatively predicted GPA and TRF, whereas lifetime experience staying in shelters did not significantly predict performance. Qualitative data were derived from one-on-one interviews with a subsample (ages 10-14 years; 2 boys, 3 girls; 2 African American, 3 Caucasian) of the larger sample. Results indicated that homeless children have strong needs for both

physical and emotional security, as well as a sense of control in their lives. Practical implications and directions for future research are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Homeless children, Academic performance, Living arrangements, Current residence, Developmental stage, Erikson, Qualitative research

HOMELESS CHILDREN'S SELF-REPORT OF EXPERIENCES AND THE ROLE OF
AGE, HISTORY OF HOMELESSNESS, AND CURRENT RESIDENCE IN
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

by

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B.A., Pomona College, 1994

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2001

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December 2001

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the children who have and will become homeless as a result of the tragedies in the United States on September 11, 2001. May there be an abundance of research and resources to alleviate their hardships.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the children and parents who participated in this study. I particularly thank the five children who participated in interviews for sharing their stories with me. In addition, this study would not have been possible without the expertise and dedicated work of the social workers who collected data; I extend much appreciation to Dawn Meyers, MSW, and Anne Perryman, MSW. I also wish to thank the Clarke County School District for allowing me work in their schools. Finally, I am grateful to Thomas Mick Coleman, Ph.D., Rex Forehand, Ph.D., Janet Frick, Ph.D., Lily McNair, Ph.D., and Lynda Walters, Ph.D., for their support for and guidance on this project. In particular, I thank my advisor Layli Phillips, Ph.D., for her continued wisdom and respect for students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Children are the poorest group of Americans. In 1996, children living in poverty numbered 14.5 million [Children's Defense Fund (CDF), 1998]. More than one in five children grows up poor and more than 1 in 11 grows up extremely poor, meaning they live at less than half the poverty level (\$8,018 for a family of four; CDF, 1998). The younger in age, the higher the level of destitution children suffer: 21% of children under 18 years live in poverty, 25% of children under 6 live in poverty, and 27% of children under 3 live in poverty (CDF, 1996). While children account for 27% of the population of the United States, they account for 40% of those living in poverty (Polakow, 1998). UNICEF reported that the rate of child poverty in the U.S. is currently higher than in 18 other industrialized nations (Smith, 2000).

Among the poorest of the poor are the homeless. There is extensive overlap between the problems related to poverty and those related to homelessness. However, homelessness relates to problems above and beyond those of poverty. In other words, when income is held constant, homeless children exhibit significantly more problems than do poor children who live in permanent housing (Kiesler, 1991). As Molnar, Rath, and Klein (1990) wrote, "Largely relegated to substandard, overcrowded living conditions, exposed daily to filth, violence, and random destruction, and bereft of age-appropriate activities, homeless children exhibit

developmental difficulties far greater than the population at large—greater even when compared to poor but housed children” (p. 113).

Although definitional and counting problems preclude an accurate count of homeless people, a 1996 estimate projected that 760,000 individuals in the U.S. are homeless on any given night, and 1.2 to 2 million people experience homelessness during a one-year period (Bruder, 1997). According to federal law as stated by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, a homeless person is an individual who:

Lacks a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence; and a person who has a primary nighttime residence that is (1) a publicly or privately operated shelter for temporary accommodation (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill), (2) an institution providing temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or (3) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings [United States Code Congressional and Administrative News (USCCAN), 1988, p. 442].

This definition includes people who stay in such diverse places as a shelter, an abandoned building, temporary accommodations with friends or relatives, an all-night theater, a car, a tent, outdoors, or other spaces not intended as permanent living situations.

The face of homelessness has changed in recent years. Historically, the majority of homeless people were male, white, unmarried, and middle-aged, with an average age of 50

(Kiesler, 1991). These men often were alcoholic, mentally ill, or both, and were thought of in an earlier era as the “skid row down-and-out” (Gulati, 1992). These men were homeless in the sense that they did not have a permanent residence, but they rarely went without shelter; generally, they stayed in “flophouses,” cheap hotels, or in missions (Kiesler, 1991).

In recent decades, however, families comprised of women and children account for the largest segment of America’s homeless (approximately 40%; Institute for Children and Families, 1999; Somerindyke, 2000). In particular, children comprise the most rapidly increasing population of homeless people in America (Bruder, 1997; Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999; Schmitz, Wagner, & Menke, 1995; Wright, 1993). According to the Institute for Children and Poverty (1999), over one million children per night in the U.S. lack a place to call home. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimated that in 1995, 2.7 million households with children experienced “worst-case” problems of overcrowding, deteriorated housing conditions, or heavy rent burdens (i.e., spending more than half their income on rent and utilities; CDF, 1998).

The particular subgroups of children hardest hit by homelessness are those in single-mother and minority families (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; Bassuk & Weinreb, 1994; Daniels, 1995; Zima, Wells, & Freeman, 1994). African American and Hispanic groups, the populations increasing most rapidly in the U.S., represent disproportionate segments of homeless, poor, and near-poor populations (Kiesler, 1991). The typical homeless family in an urban environment consists of a single mother in her late 20s and two to three children (Schmitz et al., 1995). Common causes of homelessness in these families include: educational disadvantage,

unemployment, low wages, decreased availability of subsidized housing, the general increase in housing costs, decreases in government aid, and discrimination in housing (Schmitz et al., 1995).

Heterogeneity within Homelessness

As the data indicate, there are thousands of homeless children in the United States on any given night, and this number continues to rise. Therefore, it is critical that psychologists, researchers, educators, and policymakers examine the ramifications of homelessness to understand its impact on children and on the nation. Unlike their skid-row predecessors, the current homeless population is heterogeneous (Gulati, 1992). Homeless families come from a variety of backgrounds regarding economic stability, support systems, and beliefs; there is no one experience of homelessness shared by all who find themselves without permanent shelter at some point in time (Bruder, 1997). Therefore, it is critical that research address this heterogeneity of experience within homeless populations.

However, researchers have approached homeless populations as a homogenous group. A decade ago, Molnar et al. (1990) called for attention to the process variables that operate within homeless families' worlds. They wrote, "Existing research studies treat homelessness as a single dichotomous variable (homeless vs. nonhomeless) without exploring what specific features lead to the list of rotten outcomes" for children (p. 118). Yet since that time and that call for research, only one study, by Danseco and Holden (1998), has emerged which addresses heterogeneity of experience within homeless families.

Danseco and Holden (1998) conducted cluster analysis using data from 180 families and 348 children participating in a comprehensive health care program for children in homeless

families. Factor analysis revealed three empirically derived groups of homeless families, labeled “getting by,” “at risk,” and “resilient.” These clusters were differentiated primarily on previous history of homelessness, parenting stress, and major life stressors. Families in the “at risk” cluster (20%) had the most number of moves within the past year, the highest parenting stress and life stress scores, older and more children, the most single-mother families, and the highest proportion of parents with physical and mental health problems. Families in the “getting by” cluster had the lowest percentage of parents with a history of previous homelessness, had low scores on the life-stress scale, and had parenting-stress scores which fell between those of the other two groups. Families in the “resilient” cluster had parents with the lowest parenting-stress scores, low life-stress scores, the lowest proportion of parents receiving welfare benefits, and the highest proportion of two-parent families. There were no significant differences between the three clusters on parental education, employment, and ethnicity.

Like Molnar et al. (1990), Danseco and Holden (1998) called for further investigation into the impact of variations within the context of homelessness. With the exception of their study, research has not addressed differential effects of variability within homeless families. In particular, there is a paucity of research examining child outcome in relation to different experiences of homelessness. This study aims to address the issue of heterogeneity by examining three aspects of homelessness that represent a range of experiences: child age, history of homelessness, and current residence. It is hypothesized that variations within each of these variables will differentially predict child outcome. Child outcome in this study will be measured by academic performance.

Homelessness and Academic Performance

Why Examine Academic Performance?

It is important to understand how homelessness relates to academic performance for several reasons. First, the academic arena is important because it represents a crossroads at which multi-tiered intervention for homeless students might be possible. For instance, teachers, tutors, and education specialists may be able to improve the behavioral and academic performance of homeless children if they have information on the unique experience and needs of homeless children. As one group of researchers wrote, “It is in the school where educators can affect students: by recognizing their dreams, acknowledging their very real attempt to make sense of the immediate world in which they live, and then teaching them accordingly” (Grant & Sleeter, 1988, p. 40). On another level, psychologists, counselors, and social workers can address psychosocial needs. Furthermore, school administrators and policymakers are able to impact lives by changing both informal and formal policies to protect homeless children and their families.

Second, schools have the potential to serve as a stable, predictable environment in what is possibly an otherwise chaotic world for homeless children. In fact, it may be the only source of stability in the life of a homeless child (Ely, 1987). Rafferty (1995) noted that continuity of schooling is especially important for homeless students because it provides the “stability, skills, and supports they so desperately need” (p. 40). When a child’s home life is defined by uncertainty, school life can serve as a sanctuary of regularity and safety.

Third, school is important because homeless children want to go to school and do well in school. For example, when asked, “How important is school and education for you?” the

majority (92%) of 159 homeless students answered, “Very important” (Masten, 1990, cited in Rafferty, 1995). In one study, significantly more homeless and low-income students than other students rated scholastic competence and behavior as important compared to athletic, social, or physical appearance areas—this pattern was especially true for the homeless students (Ziesemer, Marcoux, & Marwell, 1994). Investigators wrote, “Schools might capitalize on such interest in scholastic competence by communicating high expectations and by providing appropriate instruction to achieve those expectations” (p. 666). In other words, the education system may take advantage of this desire to achieve in school to help break cycles of poverty and homelessness.

Fourth, the costs of poor academic performance are high. There are both human and economic costs. Poor performance is related to grade repetition, and grade repetition is related to dropping out of school (Rafferty, 1995; Snyder, 1992). To comprehend the human costs, one need only consider that school-age children rate grade repetition as most stressful after only blindness and death of a parent (Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986). In addition, individuals who drop out of school often experience alienation (e.g., rootlessness, hopelessness, estrangement) from home, neighborhood, and society (Tidwell, 1988).

For society, economic costs multiply. For example, most of the people who are incarcerated, on welfare, and unemployed are dropouts (Frymier, 1996). A major factor that influences whether a family will be poor, thereby increasing economic dependence on society, is the family's level of education. For example, the median income of those with a high school degree (\$17,500) is almost twice that of those who do not complete high school (\$9,984; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1997). Students who leave school are more likely to be illiterate

and to lack job skills, deficiencies which prohibit them from entering the work force (Thornburg, Hoffman, & Remeika, 1991). Students who fail to complete high school are also more likely to suffer from alcohol and drug abuse and to commit crimes that result in incarceration (Thornburg et al., 1991). Because they are unable to support themselves financially, they cannot afford medical insurance, housing, rehabilitation services, or institutionalization.

According to the Children's Defense Fund (1998), 14.5 million children currently live in poverty; America's labor force will lose as much as \$130 billion in future productive capacity for every year 14.5 million children continue to live in poverty. Their report notes that these costs will spill over to employers and consumers, schools, hospitals, taxpayers, and the criminal justice system. Poor children held back in school require special education and tutoring, experience continuous medical problems and heightened reliance on social services, and fail to earn and contribute as much as others in taxes (CDF, 1998). Based on these data, it is clear that students who do poorly in school and discontinue school prematurely suffer financially and socially, and they share the weight of these burdens with society at large.

To reiterate, the academic arena is important because: it provides a platform for intervention on many levels; it is a stable environment in an otherwise unstable world; homeless students want to do well in school; and poor performance yields high human and economic costs. For all of these reasons, this study focuses on child outcome as measured by academic performance. There is abundant evidence that homeless children do not do well in school.

Evidence of Poor Performance

Research repeatedly documents poor academic performance by homeless children, who consistently fail or perform at below-average levels. For example, Vostanis, Grattan,

Cumella, and Winchester (1997) reported that the homeless children in their study received significantly lower scores than other children on the Teacher Report Form of the TRF for school adaptive functioning and for academic performance. Timberlake (1994), using data from 200 homeless 6- to 12-year-olds, found that 34.5% were failing and over half (55.5%) were exhibiting problems in classroom adjustment, according to teachers.

Homeless children have deficits in fundamental areas such as vocabulary, reading, and mathematics. For example, Zima et al. (1994) found that 47% of their homeless sample scored at or below the 10th percentile in receptive vocabulary. In addition, 39% of this sample demonstrated reading skills at or below the lowest decile, performance worthy of an F letter grade. Rafferty and Rollins (1989) analyzed data from thousands of homeless children in New York City. Whereas 68% of third- through tenth-graders in the city scored at or above grade level on the Degrees of Reading Power test, only 42% of homeless children scored at or above grade level ($N = 3,805$). Similarly, whereas 57% of all second- through eighth-graders scored at or above grade level on the Metropolitan Achievement Test in mathematics, only 28% of homeless children scored at or above grade level ($N = 4,203$). More recent data from New York City public schools replicate these findings (Rafferty, 1995). For example, in 1993, 13% of homeless sixth-graders ($N = 157$) scored at or above grade level in reading ability, compared to 37% of all students. Similar findings emerged for fourth-graders (24% vs. 49%). In mathematics, 28% of homeless third-graders ($N = 286$) scored at or above grade level, compared to 51% of all third-graders.

Predictably, poor grades relate to grade repetition. For example, in a study of third and fifth graders, academic performance was a primary factor in determining which students were

held back in their grade (Snyder, 1992). Several studies from sites across the nation show that homeless children are more likely to have repeated a grade than are other children.

Investigators found rates of grade repetition for homeless versus nonhomeless students, respectively, as follows: 38% versus 24% (Masten, 1990, cited in Bassuk & Weinreb, 1994); 30% versus 18% (Wood, Valdez, Hayashi, & Shen, 1990); 35% versus 32% (Rescorla, Parker, & Stolley, 1991); and 40% versus 32% (Bassuk & Rosenberg, 1990). Furthermore, Rafferty and Rollins (1989) found that 15% of homeless children were currently repeating a grade at the time of their study, compared to 7% of all New York City students. They noted that children in kindergarten through second grade were most at risk, with 20% versus 6.3% respectively currently repeating a grade. Rafferty (1995) cites other studies without comparison groups that found similarly high proportions of homeless samples (32% - 57%) experiencing grade repetition (Board of Cooperative Educational Services, 1992; Dumpson & Dinkins, 1987; Fox, Barnett, Davies, & Bird, 1990).

Poor performance in school is a pointed indicator of which students are held back a grade, and grade repetition is strongly related to dropping out of school (Rafferty, 1995). In fact, students who are likely to drop out of school may be identified as early as third grade on the basis of academic performance (Hicks, 1991). Moreover, dropouts themselves generally cite poor academic performance as a reason for leaving school (Rumberger, 1987). It has been shown that a student who repeats a grade once is 40% more likely than average to drop out of school; if retained twice, that likelihood increases by 90% (Mann, 1986).

Although the dropout phenomenon adversely affects the nation as a whole, it is essentially a minority and low socioeconomic status (SES) problem. The percentage of minority

students who discontinue school is substantially higher than that of white students (Dierkhising, 1996; Thornburg et al., 1991, Tidwell, 1988). Intertwined with high minority dropout rates is the problem of poverty; students from low-SES backgrounds are more likely to drop out of school than students from high-SES backgrounds (Tidwell, 1988).

In summary, homeless students demonstrate poor academic performance, high rates of grade repetition, and high dropout rates. Below is a discussion of three variables—age, history of homelessness, and current residence—which may partially explain how homelessness impacts academic performance.

Age: Developmental Trajectories to Poor Academic Performance

The poor academic performance related to homelessness is cyclical; poor performance leaves children at a disadvantage compared to other members of society, yet homeless children experience disadvantages prior to poor performance which contribute to it. At each stage of a homeless child's life, dangers present themselves, often leaving the individual less than ideally prepared for the next stage of development. This is not to say that homelessness necessarily leaves developmental damage in its wake, for some homeless children show resiliency (Douglass, 1996). However, homelessness has serious negative repercussions for academic performance for most children. Homelessness influences child development both concurrently (i.e., as it occurs) and longitudinally (i.e., impact compounds over time). Below is a discussion of how homelessness attenuates likelihood of academic success both concurrently and longitudinally. Erik Erikson's (1980) theory of developmental stages is particularly helpful in

framing the experience of homelessness for children in the school-age years (i.e., middle childhood and adolescence), which is the population under investigation in this study.

Pregnancy and Infancy

Even before they are born, infants in homeless families face challenges that subvert optimal development. For example, homeless women often experience malnutrition, making them more susceptible to infections; maternal infections increase the risk of premature delivery and mental retardation in infants (Whitman, Accardo, & Sprankel, 1992). In addition, homeless mothers suffer from drug addiction and alcohol abuse at higher rates than the general population, which can have teratogenic effects on fetuses. One such effect is fetal alcohol syndrome, whose symptoms include mental retardation and developmental disabilities. Another effect is “crack addiction” in infants. High incidence of rape and other sexual abuse leave homeless women vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, including human immunodeficiency virus and herpes virus. The transmission of these microorganisms to fetuses can cause spontaneous abortion, stillbirth, prematurity, growth retardation, lethargy, poor feeding, microcephaly, mental retardation, hearing loss, visual impairment, and heart disease (Whitman et al., 1992). Whitman et al. note that infants stressed during pregnancy, labor, or delivery are especially vulnerable to suboptimal neonatal environments; a combination of central nervous damage and poor environments after birth yields poor developmental outcomes.

During infancy, homeless babies are subject to a host of problems. Some infants in homeless families do not survive infancy; poverty is a well-known risk factor for morbidity and mortality in the early years of life (Molnar et al., 1990). In particular, homeless women, who are likely to be pregnant twice as often as other women, tend to have high perinatal and infant

mortality rates (Whitman et al., 1992). In addition, homeless women have low birth weight babies more frequently than do other woman (16% vs. 7%), including public housing residents (11%). When paired with a poor living environment, low birth weight is associated with hearing and visual impairment, mental retardation, and behavior and learning problems (Molnar et al., 1990). Homeless infants are likely to be physiologically immature, particularly if they were born prematurely or at low birth weight. They may have trouble with thermoregulation, yet they are likely to experience extreme temperatures if they live outdoors, in shelters, or in welfare hotels. Poor nutrition and caloric restriction are common deterrents to normal growth in homeless infants. In particular, iron deficiency is associated with lower Bailey Mental Development indices, attention deficit disorder, and increased fretfulness. In addition, deprivation in infancy (and childhood) significantly increases the risk of language delay and language disorders (Whitman et al., 1992).

Whitman et al. (1992) state that certain conditions occur with increased frequency as a result of homelessness, particularly failure to thrive and abuse. Failure to thrive results because of poor medical care, inadequate shelter, insufficient immunization, malnutrition, and increased exposure to infectious agents. Its characteristics include poor physical growth, developmental delays, and behavioral peculiarities. The incidence of abuse also increases with homelessness. According to Whitman et al. (1992), biological and environmental stresses during pregnancy increase the likelihood of producing neurologically impaired infants, who, in turn, “later contribute by their limitations to the family’s problem of adapting” to difficult situations (p. 119). In other words, a bi-directional interaction pattern ensues, in which the increased stress of a delayed or impaired infant may significantly increase the incidence of abuse toward the child.

Indeed, rates of child abuse and neglect as recorded in emergency room records are higher for homeless children (8.8 per 1000) than for low-income housed children (2.3 per 1000; Molnar et al., 1990).

Healthy emotional attachment also may suffer from prolonged deprivation, in that infants may fail to develop an attitude of basic trust. Erikson (1980) postulated that the “first component of a healthy personality” is basic trust, which derives from one’s experiences in the first year of life (p. 57). Parents trying to cope with the overwhelming difficulties related to poverty may be unable to respond adequately to infants’ needs. They may, for example, fail to minimize exposure to excessive stimuli; soothe and comfort the infant when distressed; change, feed, or bathe the infant as necessary; treat wounds and protect the infant from danger; and express warmth rather than hostility (Newman & Newman, 1995). Therefore, homeless infants are at risk for failing to develop basic trust in others and their environment, hence not achieving a primary developmental task.

Toddlerhood and Early Childhood

Early childhood describes the period when children become ambulatory, verbal, and more independent. As such, homeless toddlers are at risk for environmental hazards, environmentally induced illness, and delays and deviations in development of cognition, language, socialization, and emotions.

As developing toddlers begin to explore their environments, they increase their chances of injury because homeless families take refuge in condemned buildings or unsafe welfare hotels or shelters which expose children to rodent bites, rodent-borne infections, lead poisoning from

peeling paint, lack of banisters on stairs and screens on windows, unprotected wiring, and so forth (Whitman et al., 1992). Furthermore, parents may be unable to offer close supervision, increasing opportunities for injury. Some parents opt to cope with dangerous environments and lack of resources for close supervision by excessively constraining their toddlers, which precludes normal exploration opportunities, muscle development, and motor skillfulness. In turn, rates of accidents and coordination difficulties accelerate (Whitman et al., 1992). These consequences are particularly problematic in the context of Erikson's (1980) theory of development because "the over-all significance of this stage lies in the maturation of the muscle system....and the enormous value with which the still highly dependent child begins to endow his autonomous will" (p. 68).

Deprivational environments also result in language and cognitive delays, which affect later academic performance. For example, language delays are the largest predictor of later learning disabilities and school problems. Furthermore, receptive and expressive language difficulties exhibited during the preschool years cultivate reading difficulties in later years (Whitman et al., 1992). Developmental delays during this period may be offset by attendance at preschool programs such as Head Start. Unfortunately, however, potential gains diminish in the face of sporadic attendance, inconsistency in teaching strategies and content, and performance stress. Therefore, toddlers must negotiate the preschool years either without the benefit of early intervention programs or with obstacles to thriving in those programs.

It is also during the preschool years that parents and toddlers begin establishing patterns of interaction. Unfortunately, poverty positively correlates with negative parenting practices, such as power assertion, physical punishment, and harsh discipline. In addition, poor parents

are less likely than other parents to use reasoning, praise, and encouragement in their parenting (Newman & Newman, 1995). Negative, coercive styles of parenting model and reinforce negative behaviors in children, resulting in a spiral of deleterious and ever-widening interactions which eventually include teachers and peers (Forehand & Long, 1996). Research shows that mothers' negative control relates to disruptive behavior by their children (Spieker, Larson, Lewis, Keller, & Gilchrist, 1999). For example, verbal tactics such as yelling, insulting, and threatening children result in externalizing symptoms for children across developmental stages. Children subjected to both verbal and physical assaults demonstrate the highest rates of adjustment problems (Spieker et al., 1999). In fact, evidence indicates that poor behavior management skills mediate the effects of maternal depression on child disruptive behavior, particularly for families with preschoolers and for families from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994; Miller, Cowan, Cowan, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1993). Because disruptive behaviors elicit negative feedback from others, coercive parenting further impedes homeless children's chances of successfully navigating the childhood years.

Middle Childhood

During middle childhood, mastery of academic skills is of particular importance to the developing child's sense of self. According to Erikson (1980), school-age children (approximately 6 to 12 years of age) are in a period of industry versus inferiority, in which they must master important social and academic skills. This stage can be characterized by the conviction, "I am what I learn" (p. 87). During this period, children ideally develop a sense of industry and learn to win recognition by producing things. They strive to make things well and

develop “the pleasure of work completion by steady attention and persevering diligence” (p. 91). Erikson describes industrious children in this stage as eager and absorbed in the tasks of a productive situation.

Across cultures, school is the fundamental arena for the development of this sense of industry. In preliterate societies, learning relates to the basic skills of technology as a child prepares to handle the utensils, tools, and weapons used by adults. In literate societies, children are given the widest possible basic education in order to prepare them for a number of different careers. Regardless of culture, Erikson (1980) emphasized the importance of schooling at this stage by stating, “School seems to be a world all by itself, with its own goals and limitations, its achievements and disappointments” (p. 88).

Integral to healthy development at this stage is a sense of mastery and pride in one’s developing knowledge and skills. Therefore, it is particularly crucial that children perceive themselves as competent at their academic tasks at this stage of development. This perception is especially true for homeless children because school environments allow for mastery of small, day-to-day tasks, events, and challenges; whereas living environments are beyond a child’s ability to master or control. As Timberlake (1994) wrote, “Indeed, it is almost impossible for 6-11 year olds to demonstrate competence and achieve mastery of the myriad tasks involved in obtaining food, clothing, and shelter” (p. 273).

Not only is a child’s focus at this stage pinpointed on mastery of skills, but it is relatively unfettered by social status and self-consciousness, according to Erikson (1980). He stated that children in the elementary grades “seem remarkably free of prejudice and apprehension, preoccupied as they still are with growing and learning and with the new pleasures of association

outside their families” (p. 96). In the framework of Erikson’s theory, elementary-school-aged children enjoy learning, are motivated to do well in school, and target their attention more upon tasks at hand than upon their role in the social milieu. Therefore, academic success is critically important to children’s well-being at this stage of development.

Unfortunately, there are many barriers on the path between homeless children and academic success. These children may already carry deficits from their in utero, infant, and toddler periods. In addition, current homelessness incurs further problems, widening the gap between homeless children’s and other children’s performance. Most notably, homeless children attending school generally do not have their basic needs met. Based on the theory of Abraham Maslow (1968), this failure to meet basic needs will impact academic performance because children delay the pursuit of “higher level” needs such as self-esteem and intellectual growth until “lower level” needs such as physiological and safety needs are met. Homeless children often lack fulfillment of lower level needs. For example, homeless children typically experience hunger and poor nutrition (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999). When young children’s nutritional needs are not met, physical and mental health decline, behavioral problems emerge, the ability to concentrate is impaired, and academic performance deteriorates (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991). In addition, homeless children experience a lack of adequate clothing, disrupted sleep, and a sense of personal insecurity, all of which impair performance in the classroom (Daniels, 1992).

Homeless children also have high rates of physical illness (Vostanis et al., 1997; Wright, 1990; Wood et al., 1990). Many factors contribute to poor physical health among homeless children, including poor nutrition, lack of immunization, elevated lead levels, exposure to

infectious diseases, and lack of access to adequate health care (Molnar et al., 1990).

Nationwide, 26% of all children become ill more often than normal during episodes of homelessness (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999). Compared to nonhomeless children, homeless children suffer three times as many stomach problems, five times as many diarrheal infections, 50% more ear infections, and twice as many hospitalizations (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999). Moreover, many homeless children are uninsured and fail to receive necessary medical care (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999). As a consequence of illness, homeless children, relative to other children, are less able to learn effectively in school and more frequently absent from school (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1997).

They also show higher than average levels of psychosocial difficulties (Fox et al., 1990; Masten, Miliotis, Graham-Bermann, Ramirez, & Neemann, 1993; Robertson, 1992; Sherman, 1992). They exhibit both internalizing and externalizing problems. Of internalizing problems, depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem, and withdrawal are especially prevalent (Bassuk, 1987; Bassuk & Rubin; 1987; Hughes & Barad, 1983; Waxman & Reyes, 1987; Timberlake, 1994). In fact, approximately half of school-aged children experience depression or anxiety after becoming homeless, and suicidal ideation is common among homeless children over five years (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999). Of externalizing problems, short attention spans, weak impulse control, aggression, immaturity, and delinquent behavior are especially prevalent (Delang, 1986; Whitman, Accardo, Boyert, & Kendagor, 1990; Masten et al., 1993; Solarz, 1992; Wood et al., 1990; Zima et al., 1994).

Not only do homeless children experience elevated rates of psychosocial problems, but also these problems generally remain untreated. Of children requiring psychiatric evaluation for

depression in one study, only 23% had ever received counseling or treatment in their lifetime; even fewer (19%) attended special education classes or received special academic help during the past 12 months (Zima et al., 1994). Furthermore, teachers may incorrectly attribute behavior difficulties, learning problems, and emotional reactivity to the situation of homelessness rather than to underlying, treatable learning disabilities or other psychological or neurological problems (Whitman et al., 1992). These untreated psychosocial problems interfere with the concentration that is necessary for adequate academic performance.

Residential environments and poor parent-teacher communication also deter academic success. Students staying in a shelter, hotel, or overcrowded house may not have the physical space (e.g., a desk), a reasonably quiet environment, or adequate lighting to focus on homework (Walsh & Buckley, 1994). Moreover, they are not likely to receive assistance from parents in completing their homework, particularly as their parents are likely to be illiterate or undereducated (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999). In addition, these parents may shy away from interactions with teachers out of embarrassment, lack of familiarity with school standards, and lack of time and resources. Due to poor parent-teacher communication, parents may be unaware of their children's difficulties in the classroom and may be ineffective in speaking on behalf of their children who have special needs

Absence from school, whether it is due to illness or family transience, is a major impediment to academic success. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, 57% of school-age homeless children do not attend school on a regular basis (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991). Enrollment in school does not protect homeless students from absences. For example, one study showed that although 88% of the homeless children in the sample were registered in

school, 16% had missed more than three weeks of school in the past three months (Zima et al., 1994). Another study showed that homeless students were more likely than poor housed children to have missed more than one week of school, 42% versus 22% respectively (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991).

A primary contributor to school absence is mobility; homeless children change schools at a higher frequency than do other children (Masten et al., 1993). Frequent school mobility associates with low achievement and grade repetition. A General Accounting Office (1994) study found that, of children who had frequently changed schools, 41% were low achievers (i.e., below grade level) in reading, versus 26% of the never-changed-schools group. Similarly, children who had changed schools frequently were more often low achievers in math (33%) compared to children who had never changed schools (17%). In addition, investigators found that third-graders who had changed schools frequently were two-and-a-half times as likely to repeat a grade (20%) than those who had never changed schools (8%). Regardless of the reason, missed school translates as missed opportunities for academic success.

Adolescence

Adolescent homeless students face the same struggles as do younger homeless students: hunger and poor nutrition, sleep deprivation, unsafe environments, untreated physical and mental illness, lack of school-related resources, and absence from school. In addition, they face two developmentally based obstacles to academic success: First, their developmental goals no longer center on academic mastery but rather on social identity; and second, they incorporate low expectations for success into their academic and occupational identities.

The first obstacle pertains to a new set of developmental needs: Whereas children in middle childhood take pleasure in learning and school-related tasks, adolescents focus intently on social roles. The developmental goal of adolescence, according to Erikson (1980), is to build a sense of “ego identity” in which individuals develop a defined personality within their social reality; in other words, they consolidate their social roles. Because energy, interest, and focus pivot on social realities, academics receive lower priority. Therefore, normative developmental theory suggests that adolescents simply are not as interested in school work as they are in social relationships.

Although positive social relationships are of central importance, homeless adolescents are not always successful in developing them. Evidence suggests that homelessness interferes with the development of relationships with both peers and parents, which may indirectly affect academic performance (Horowitz, Boardman, & Redlener, 1994). Considering first peer relations, homeless adolescents encounter both longitudinal and concurrent obstacles to developing positive relationships. From a longitudinal perspective, the sense of group membership and connection with peers that is central to development in adolescence is an extension of attachment relationships formed in infancy (Erikson, 1980; Newman & Newman, 1995). Mistrustful infants may become mistrustful adolescents who do not establish satisfying social connections with their peers and, as a result, feel alienated.

From a concurrent perspective, conformity is important in adolescence, and homeless teens are often unable to conform to social norms. Whereas in middle childhood, children are relatively free of prejudices and take pleasure in associations outside their families, adolescents are intolerant of and cruel to those who are different from the mainstream in background, color,

and dress (Erikson, 1980). Indeed, classmates frequently reject homeless youth because of their status and lack of clothing and other personal possessions (Horowitz et al., 1994). This rejection may lead to aggressive and hostile reactions on the part of the homeless student, incurring a cycle of further rejection. Furthermore, chronic mobility may preclude opportunities to build friendships. In other words, homeless youth may have difficulty developing peer relationships which build self-esteem.

Considering adolescent-parent relations, there is evidence that homeless teens have atypical relationships with their parents. Ideally, adolescents experience parental support and monitoring, which promotes development of self and social competence; however, homeless adolescents often lack this support. In turn, they are less likely than other adolescents to engage in typical teenage behavior that appears threatening, such as conflict with their parents. As a result, this atypical pattern of parent-child relations undermines the process of developing autonomy in adolescence (Horowitz et al., 1994). Because identity development should strengthen self-esteem, and because homelessness disrupts this process, homelessness has a negative impact on self-esteem (Daniels, 1992; Walsh & Buckley, 1994). In turn, low self-esteem may impede achievement motivation (Daniels, 1992).

Perhaps the most important social identity adolescents strive to determine is occupational identity, which leads to the second obstacle to academic success for adolescents: low expectations for success. Erikson (1980) wrote, "In general it is primarily the inability to settle on an occupational identity which disturbs young people" in the adolescent stage (p. 97). Poverty and homelessness, which tend to persist throughout childhood, are associated with poor academic performance; therefore, homeless adolescents are likely to have a history of

poor academic performance. The feedback they have received from grades and teachers is likely to say that they have little academic ability; consequently, they consolidate an academic identity that incorporates low expectations. In turn, they exhibit low effort, which perpetuates a cycle of poor outcome. An academic identity with low expectations has long-term repercussions: Students who do poorly in school and who leave school prematurely tend to lack job skills and the technological knowledge which will aid them in securing occupational opportunities (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1997).

In summary, developmental theory suggests that homelessness might deter academic success in adolescence through two main routes. First, the primary developmental task of adolescence is identity development, which negatively affects academic performance because: (a) adolescents focus more on social relationships than on academics; and (b) suboptimal social relationships decrease global self-esteem, which may further interfere with academic success. Second, homelessness engenders poor academic performance and low expectations for success, which individuals incorporate into their identity.

Homeless students of all ages experience numerous obstacles to academic success. However, developmental theory suggests that stage-based goals may enhance and detract from success differentially for homeless youth in middle childhood and adolescence, respectively. That is, younger homeless students should have better academic performance than adolescent homeless students. As yet, there are no empirical analyses testing this hypothesis. However, there is tentative support for the proposed hypothesis in a measure of *self-reported* academic performance. Masten et al. (1993) found that among homeless children, self-worth and perceived academic competence declined with age and were lowest among adolescents ($p <$

.05). The investigators call for further investigation in this area using objective measures of academic performance: “Tests of academic achievement and intellectual functioning would add an important domain of functioning that was unavailable” in their study (p. 342). This study will test age as a predictor variable for grade point average (GPA) and teacher report of academic performance.

History of Homelessness

The second predictor variable under investigation is history of homelessness. Danseco and Holden (1998) found in their typology of homeless families that history of homelessness at least partially differentiates the experience of homelessness. The term “history of homelessness” might include causes of homelessness, number of episodes of homelessness, duration and location of those episodes, resources and social support available during those times, psychiatric problems, history of abuse, foster care, and so on. All of these variables are important in deconstructing the experience of homelessness; however, for the purposes of the current paper, history of homelessness refers to number and duration of episodes of homelessness.

Some homeless families cycle in and out of homelessness; families which display this pattern are referred to as “episodically homeless” or “chronically mobile” (Bruder, 1997). Data show that more than one-quarter of homeless children (27%) have been homeless at least once prior to their current episode of homelessness (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999). Other families experience only one episode of homelessness. The duration of homeless episodes may range from a few nights to months and years, and families vary widely in the length of time they are homeless (Bruder, 1997). A study conducted in over 20 cities in the U.S. found that on average, children are homeless 10 months at a time--the length of an entire school year (Institute

for Children and Poverty, 1999). Researchers have rarely examined how different histories of homelessness across children's lifespan affect academic performance.

Typically, researchers have assessed recent rather than lifetime history of homelessness. Some researchers collected data on history of homelessness within the past year for demographic purposes, but did not use this information as a predictor variable. For example, Vostanis et al. (1997) collected data only on history of housing during the previous year but did not specifically examine the relationship between this history and academic performance. Similarly, Masten et al. (1993) reported on duration of current episode of homelessness and percentage of families who were homeless one year earlier (9%); however, they did not analyze this data in relation to academic competence. Both of these studies provided evidence that homeless children fare poorly in academics compared to their housed peers.

Other studies examining recent history of homelessness have not shown a direct correlation between history and academic performance. For example, Zima et al. (1994) collected data regarding the amount of time homeless and the number of residences over the past 12 months and found no correlation to child depression or behavioral problems. Also, Schmitz et al. (1995) measured "domicile stability" (i.e., number of times homeless and number of times moved) for the previous 2 1/2 years and found that it did not directly impact children's GPA. However, domicile stability indirectly impacted GPA through the effects of locus of control, anxiety, problem behavior, and social competence.

Although recent history of homelessness does not appear to correlate directly with academic performance in the two studies mentioned, lifetime history of homelessness may show a different pattern. One piece of empirical data supports this hypothesis. Danseco and Holden

(1998) measured history of homelessness by a single item asking whether families had ever been homeless prior to the current episode. They found that 58% of families in the “at risk” cluster had experienced at least one episode of homelessness prior to the current episode. Children in this cluster, compared to children in the “resilient” and “getting by” clusters, had lower scores (a nonsignificant trend) on tests of cognitive development and academic achievement.

More information on the relation between lifetime history of homelessness and academic performance is needed. Episodes of homelessness are associated with poorer academic performance, and academic skills typically build upon each other in an increasingly complex fashion. Therefore, it is hypothesized that greater lifetime history of homelessness—as measured by more and longer episodes of homelessness across the lifespan—will predict poorer academic performance. This study will examine the variable as percentage of lifetime homeless; an index of homelessness history will be calculated for each child based on the percentage of his or her lifetime that was spent homeless.

Current Residence

The third predictor variable under investigation is current residence, or where children stay while homeless. Families stay in a variety of places: shelters, welfare hotels, transitional housing, abandoned buildings, with friends or relatives, in parks, cars, under bridges, or on the streets. Statistics from a national study by the Institute on Children and Poverty (1999) document this range of residences: Prior to their current residence, homeless families stayed with friends or relatives (33%), in a shelter (20%), and in welfare hotels or motels (5%). Each situation has unique difficulties and stressors. For example, shelter environments generally have

cramped quarters and little to no privacy, physically and emotionally, whereas hotel living often leads to isolation from other families, a lack of transportation, and an absence of support services, such as laundry facilities, telephones, and meals (Bassuk & Weinreb, 1994).

The experience and consequences of homelessness are quite different for a child staying in one of these places versus another. Researchers have not considered how different residences during homelessness might differentially predict academic performance. Research typically employs one of two methods to analyze data from homeless populations, neither of which compares subgroups of homelessness (i.e., addresses the issue of heterogeneity). These two methods are to (a) collapse across subgroups, or (b) examine only one subgroup of the population.

A study that collapses across subgroups fails to differentiate between subgroups; in other words, it assumes that homelessness is a homogenous experience, such that living in a shelter impacts children similarly to staying with friends or in a car. Because obtaining large homeless samples can be very difficult, this is an approach used by many researchers. For example, Schmitz et al. (1995) recruited participants living in a shelter, transitional housing, a residence with an actual or intended stay of less than 45 days, a cheap motel, a car, or on the street. Data from all homeless participants were analyzed together and compared to data from housed families. As another example, Timberlake (1994) created a sample of children living with their mothers in shelters, in cars, in parks, and on the streets for 30 days or longer. Walsh and Buckley (1994) examined school experiences for children living in shelters and motels. None of these studies analyzed data separately by subgroup of current residence.

A second approach to research with homeless populations is to recruit a single subgroup of homeless children. The most common subgroup to comprise samples is children staying in shelters. Researchers using data from this subgroup include: Masten et al. (1993), Whitman et al. (1990), Wood et al. (1990), and Zima et al. (1994). Less frequently, researchers form samples comprised only of homeless children living outside. (These studies are rare because participants in this subgroup are difficult to locate, recruit, and track.) For example, one study utilized participants from tents and cars either in a city park or on public beaches (Daniels, 1995). Although single-subgroup studies have greater internal validity than collapsed-subgroup studies, they also fail to address the issue of heterogeneity within homeless populations.

There may be several reasons for the exclusion of doubled-up families in research. For example, in order to examine the effects of a child's current living arrangement, a child would need to have experienced that arrangement for at least some minimum amount of time that would allow for detection of effects (what constitutes this minimum amount of time has not been determined). Because homeless children by definition lead transitory lives, it is difficult to obtain samples of homeless children remaining in a single residence long enough to capture meaningful data about their experiences in that residence. In addition, living arrangements for some families are fluid rather than static (this is true for all families, given enough time), and it is often difficult to obtain accurate records on actual current residents of a given household. It has, in fact, been noted that more precise indicators of living arrangements would be helpful in studying household structure (Brandon & Bumpass, 2001). It is also difficult to access the doubled-up population because: (a) they may not define themselves as homeless; (b) they may not be receiving the

services offered to homeless families, and service-providers often serve as a link between homeless study participants and researchers; and (c) there are families who live with relatives or friends by choice and for whom it is not a temporary situation.

Ethnic differences can be a significant factor in determining whether doubling up occurs by choice or by default. Ethnic differences are associated with the prevalence, type, and approval of extended-family households, and this association is independent of economics (Hunter, Pearson, Ialongo, & Kellam, 1998; Kamo, 2000; Ruiz & Carlton-LaNey, 1999; Singh, Williams, & Singh, 1998). Latino families, for example, often choose to live with relatives (Choi, 1999; Kamo, 2000).

As Solarz (1992) noted, “Virtually nothing is known about homeless families who survive by living...temporarily doubled up with friends or relatives” (p. 277). Because there is little discussion in the literature about the parameters that define doubled-up arrangements, it is difficult to hypothesize how they might relate to children’s performance in school. There are some studies examining data from families that co-reside, although these studies fail to indicate whether families are temporarily doubled up (i.e., homeless) or permanently and voluntarily co-residing. Nonetheless, because there is some research on low-income families who co-reside and very little on families who temporarily double up, it is useful to look to the co-residency literature for clues about possible significant relations.

No studies examining household-structure variables for co-residing families and children’s academic performance specifically were found. Studies examining other child outcomes are available, however. For instance, Dorsey, Chance, Forehand, and Morse (1999) found that in low-income, African American families with HIV-infected mothers, more adults

per child in the household was positively related to child psychosocial adjustment. Ackerman, D'Eramo, Umylny, Schultz, and Izard (2001) found that both past and present stability of family structure was negatively related to externalizing behaviors for children in disadvantaged families. In another study, Kalil, Spencer, Spieker, and Gilchrist (1998) found no main effects for co-residence of grandmothers on adolescents' display of depressive symptoms.

Results examining links between living arrangements and other populations (i.e., non-child populations) and outcomes is mixed (e.g., Howell-Carter, 1998; Metsch et al., 1998; Nelson, Hall, & Walsh-Bowers, 1998). Howell-Carter (1998) reviewed the literature on family co-residence and concluded that co-residing with a single supportive person appears to be more beneficial than co-residing with multiple support providers. The author wrote, "It may be that multiple support providers in the household contribute more to the overall burden of the family than the amount of the burden they are able to alleviate" (p. 2485). Authors on another study stated that "household crowding should be considered a biological, as well as a psychological, risk factor" in developing psychological disorders (Torrey & Yolken, 1998, p. 321). These conclusions indicate that household crowding has detrimental effects, even if support is present. Overall, then, the results appear to be mixed, and data on children in temporary, doubled-up accommodations are needed.

Children's living environment while homeless is likely to affect their academic performance. The theoretical framework of this study posits that children of different ages have different developmental needs, and these needs may be better met in different environments. Participants in the current sample reside primarily in shelters or doubled-up situations while homeless; therefore, only these two subgroups will be considered in this study. Specifically, it is

hypothesized that there will be an interaction between age and current residence such that younger children living in shelters will show better performance than younger children doubled up, whereas older children (i.e., adolescents) living in doubled up situations will show better performance than older children living in shelters.

Children in middle childhood are eager to conquer the skills of school (Erikson, 1980). It may be that shelter environments allow these children to experience more success in school than doubled-up environments. Typically, shelters have relatively strict rules by which residents must abide in order to remain in the shelter. For example, all residents must be home by a certain time at night and children must be in bed by a certain time. In addition, showers, meals, and laundry services may be available (Bassuk, Rubin, & Lauriat, 1986). Furthermore, children staying in shelters should receive services provided under the McKinney Act, such as transportation to school, whereas children doubled up often do not receive these services. The rules imposed by shelters, as well as the services they provide, may protect younger children. As Bassuk and Rosenberg (1990) wrote, “In fact, for some children, their stays in a neighborhood-based family shelter have been the most stable and predictable experiences of their young lives” (p. 261). Doubled-up situations will vary tremendously regarding imposition of rules and predictability; however, it is likely that these situations on average will be more inconsistent than shelter life, hence more detrimental to academic success.

On the other hand, developing positive peer relationships is particularly important during adolescence (Erikson, 1980). Shelter environments are generally detrimental to this process because they prohibit opportunities to build friendships in typical teenage fashion. For instance, shelter residents may not be allowed to (nor want to) bring friends “home” after school, watch

popular television shows which peers are discussing at school, and talk on the telephone (Daniels, 1992). In addition, the stigma of being homeless is tremendous; for most homeless youth, living in a shelter is a secret which they carefully guard, not only from peers but also from teachers (Walsh & Buckley, 1994). There is a great deal of shame and embarrassment about being homeless, which decreases self-esteem (Walsh & Buckley, 1994). It is thought that the condition of homelessness may be more easily disguised when adolescents stay doubled up with friends or relatives, which might protect self-esteem.

In addition, shelter life generally includes considerable noise and a lack of privacy and space, which adolescents cannot escape due to aforementioned rules. Even when students want to focus on homework, they may not be able to. For example, one girl explained her situation as follows:

“I used to be really good in school, and I still could be if I wanted to, I just don’t try as much because it’s hard to study here in the room because people are constantly asking you questions, ‘Where’s this? Where’s that?’ Everybody’s bugging you when you do your homework. It’s hard studying in one room” (Walsh & Buckley, 1994, pp. 8-9).

In addition, they may be deterred from homework because they are asked to supervise younger children or do chores required by the shelter. Although doubled-up environments also are overcrowded, they are less strict than shelters; teenagers, who have more autonomy than younger children, may be able to find opportunities to do homework if they want to. The

combination in shelters of strictness and space limitations, compounded by the painful stigma of shelter living, leads to the hypothesis that adolescents staying doubled up will have better academic performance than those staying in shelters.

Purposes and Hypotheses of the Proposed Study

Research to date on homeless children fails to distinguish how different experiences of homelessness differentially affect academic performance. This study attempted to isolate some of the processes by which homelessness affects academic performance by examining three predictor variables: child age, history of homelessness, and current residence. It was hypothesized that younger children would show better performance than older children; that lesser history of homelessness over the lifespan would predict better performance than greater history; and that there would be an age-by-current-residence interaction, wherein younger children in shelters would show better performance than those who were doubled up, and adolescents who were doubled up would show better performance than those in shelters.

There was also a secondary purpose of this study: to find out how homeless children view themselves, others, school, and their environment. The literature rarely offers child-driven information about how homeless children view themselves and their lives. Therefore, child-generated data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Knowledge gained by this approach could inform service providers, clinicians, teachers, and policymakers of ways to help homeless children in their academic endeavors. In addition, it could stimulate further research on mechanisms by which homelessness affects academic performance.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

Data for this study were collected between January 2000 and June 2001 (excluding summer months) in a midsize Southeastern city. Forty children from currently or recently homeless families participated. To be eligible for participation, participants had to be under the care of a parent or other primary caregiver; participants who were not under parental or guardian care were excluded from this study. Latino children also were excluded from the study.

To be eligible to participate, children had to attend a school that allowed participation. The school district in which the study took place has 19 schools, 12 of which had principals who agreed to allow their students to participate in this study. All children who were enrolled in one of these 12 schools and who received services from the district's Homeless Education Program were eligible for participation. The Homeless Education Program provided and coordinated supportive services for children who were presently homeless or had been homeless during the current school year. This program defines homelessness according to the McKinney Act. Therefore, children were eligible for participation if they stayed in any of the following locations: at a shelter for the homeless; in the home of a friend or relative because they lacked a fixed, regular, and adequate residence; or in a car, tent, abandoned building, or other place not ordinarily used as a sleeping accommodation for human beings.

One child per family was eligible for participation. When families included more than one child, theoretical sampling based on child age determined which children were invited for participation.

Of the 40 participants, ages ranged from 5 to 16 years ($M = 9.37$, $SD = 2.71$). The sample included 25 boys (62.5%) and 15 girls (37.5%). Its ethnic make-up was 65% African American, 25% Caucasian, and 10% biracial. The 5 interviewed participants were ages 10, 11 (2 participants), 13 and 14 years. There were 2 were African American and 3 Caucasian participants, and 2 male and 3 female participants. Regarding residency, 1 child lived doubled up in a public housing authority apartment, 1 was staying at a shelter for battered women and children, and the remaining 3 were staying at a shelter for homeless families.

Measures

Demographic information and current residence

Social workers from the Homeless Education Program reported demographic information (e.g., children's age, gender) from their case records. Social workers also provided information on participants' current residence(s) over the 6-week duration of the study, noting any changes in living arrangements that occurred. Participating families primarily stayed in shelters or doubled up with friends or relatives.

History of homelessness

Parent report of children's history of homelessness was used to measure the number and duration of episodes of homelessness that each child had experienced in his or her lifetime. Social workers collected and recorded this information.

Interview questions

Semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A) were used to elicit information from five participants aged 10 – 16 years regarding: (a) places of residence (e.g., where was the best place child ever stayed and why); (b) school (e.g., attitude about school, favorite classes and teachers); (c) peers (e.g., does child have friends at school); (d) after-school hours (e.g., what does child do after school, what would child like to do after school); and (e) success and self-esteem (e.g., how does child define success, what does child like and dislike about self).

Academic performance

Two measures of academic performance were collected, grades and teacher assessment. Grade-point averages (GPAs) were calculated using grades from academic subject areas (e.g., history, mathematics, social studies, language arts). Grades for performance in nonacademic areas such as physical education, art, and music were not included in GPAs. Grades in social development and work habits also were excluded. Across ages, GPAs were calculated by averaging all grades from academic courses taken in the current grading period. For students in 4th through 12th grades, grades of A (90% or more) received a score of 4, B (80% or more) received a score of 3, C (70% or more) received a score of 2, and D or F (less than 70%) received a score of 1. Because students in kindergarten through 3rd grade had a different grading scale, their scores were converted to conform to a 4-point system. Grades of “Excellent” received a score of 4, “Good” received a score of 3, “Satisfactory” received a score of 2, and “Needs Improvement” or “Unsatisfactory” received a score of 1. Thus, the possible range of scores for each GPA was from 1.0 (*unsatisfactory or failing*) to 4.0 (*excellent*).

Teacher assessments of academic performance were determined by scores on the Teacher's Report Form (TRF; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986). The TRF (see Appendix B), created for children between 5 and 18 years, includes ratings of academic performance and an adaptive functioning scale. (The TRF also has a problem behavior index, which was not used in this study.) Teachers' ratings of current academic performance were scored according to a 5-point Likert-type scale, and children were rated relative to expected performance for their grade level (1 = *far below grade level*; 5 = *far above grade level*). The adaptive functioning scale was used to determine ratings of a child's effort, appropriateness of behavior, learning rate, and happiness. A 7-point scale was used, ranging from 1 (*much less than typical students of same age*) to 7 (*much more than typical pupils of same age*). Adequate reliability and validity have been shown (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986).

Procedure

Participants were invited to participate in the study by a school social worker or a social work intern who coordinated services for homeless families through the Homeless Education Program. During the course of regular case-management activities, social workers explained the study to each parent (or primary caregiver) on their caseload whose child was eligible for the study. If the parent agreed to participation, children were then asked if they agreed to participate. For all dyads that agreed to participate in the study, data on history of homelessness was collected during a one-time face-to-face interview between the parent/primary caregiver and a social worker, who recorded the information in writing.

Data pertaining to participants' current living arrangement (i.e., current residence) was recorded by social workers in the course of normal case-management activities for 6 weeks.

Six weeks was selected as the duration of each child's participation in the study because it was the length of the shortest grading period in the school district in which the study took place. Some participants did not remain in the school district for a 6-week duration; children who left before 3 weeks were excluded from analyses.

During the first 6 months of data collection, children 10 years and older also were invited to participate in an interview. Five children and their parents agreed. A psychology doctoral student conducted semi-structured interviews with these participants within the 6-week duration of their participation. Interviews occurred at children's schools in a private, one-on-one environment (e.g., a counselor's office). Interviews, lasting approximately 30 – 40 minutes, were conducted verbally and answers were recorded manually by the interviewer. Each participant was allowed to choose a small gift in appreciation for answering interview questions. Gifts included items such as books, backpacks, notebooks, pencils and pens.

At the end of the 6-week data-collection period, data on academic performance was collected from teachers (TRF) and school records (GPA). At the conclusion of a child's participation in the study, the Teacher Report Form (TRF) was sent to teachers. In the case of elementary school students, the form was sent to the students' primary teacher. In the case of middle and high school students, forms were sent to language arts and math teachers. These teachers often contacted other teachers to report on students' performance in subjects other than the one they taught. Four participants received TRFs from more than one teacher, but it is unknown for all participants how many teachers offered input on the ratings of academic performance.

Homeless Education Program social workers collected copies of students' report cards, which provided students' GPA. Report cards from the grading period during which the student participated in the study served as the source of GPAs. Generally, the report card that came out subsequent to a child's termination from the study was used. In a few cases, however, report cards came out just prior to a child's termination from the study; in these cases, grades from this report card were used. In all cases, data on children's living arrangements overlapped substantially with the performance on which they received grades.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Descriptive Statistics

History of Homelessness. History of homelessness was captured in multiple ways. Table 1 presents means and standard deviations for these variables. Variables examined included number of lifetime episodes of homelessness ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.35$), months of homelessness across the child's lifetime ($M = 7.93$, $SD = 7.17$), difficulty of homelessness (averaged across episodes) for the parent ($M = 3.27$, $SD = .67$); and parent-reported perceived difficulty of homelessness (averaged across episodes) for the child ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .90$). Parents reported experiencing an average of $M = .95$ episodes of homelessness in a shelter ($SD = .78$), $M = 1.13$ episodes doubled up ($SD = 1.14$), $M = .18$ episodes in a hotel or motel ($SD = .45$), and $M = .08$ episodes in a rehabilitation or recovery residence ($SD = .27$). Measured another way, families on average had spent 44% of their time homeless in shelters, 48% doubled up, 6% in hotels or motels, and 2% in rehabilitation or recovery residences. Children had, on average, spent 8% of their lives homeless.

Parents cited several reasons that their family had become homeless and sometimes named multiple causes of a single episode of homelessness. Table 2 lists

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations Regarding History of Homelessness (N = 40)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Number of lifetime episodes of homelessness	2.33	1.35
Months of homelessness over lifetime	7.93	7.17
Difficulty of homelessness (across episodes) ^a		
For parent	3.27	0.67
For child	3.04	0.90
Lifetime episodes in a shelter	0.95	0.78
Lifetime episodes doubled up	1.13	1.14
Lifetime episodes in a hotel/motel	0.18	0.45
Lifetime episodes in a rehabilitation residence	0.08	0.27

^a On a scale from 1 (*easy*) to 4 (*extremely difficult*)

Table 2

Parent-reported Causes of Homelessness Across the Lifetime (N = 40)

	Percent of parents that cited cause for at least one episode	Percent of all causes cited
Domestic problems	52.2	42.0
Financial difficulties	47.8	34.0
Unsafe/inadequate housing	10.9	5.0
Physical damage to residence	8.7	5.0
Logistical problems	8.7	7.0
Breaking rules	6.5	3.0
Nonspecific	4.3	2.0
Disliked living in shelter	2.2	1.0

these causes of displacement and the percentage of families that cited each cause as a reason that the family became homeless for at least one episode. (These data include information on the family's current episode of homelessness.) The two causes cited most frequently as a factor in homelessness were domestic issues and financial difficulties. Domestic issues (cited by 52.2% of parents as a factor in at least one homeless episode and accounting for 42% of all reasons cited) included not only "problems getting along," but also domestic violence and substance addiction problems. (Twenty percent of parents cited domestic violence specifically.) Financial difficulties that resulted in inability to pay rent (cited by 47.8% of parents as a factor in at least one homeless episode and accounting for 34% of all reasons cited) stemmed from a variety of situations, including: incarceration of a parent, medical expenses, loss of job or inability to find a job, rent increase, death of a family member, and collections on past-due bills.

There were other factors contributing to homelessness cited as well. Unsafe or inadequate housing (cited by 10.9% of parents as a factor in at least one homeless episode and accounting for 5% of all reasons cited), included problems such as no heating, gas leaks, children having to sleep on the floor, and place of residence (e.g., apartment, hotel) being condemned. Physical damage to housing (cited by 8.7% of parents as a factor in at least one episode of homelessness and accounting for 5% of all reasons cited) was the result of disasters such as a fire, flood, or ice storm. Logistical problems that led to homelessness (cited by 8.7% of parents as a factor in at least one homeless episode and accounting for 7% of all reasons cited) included moving to a new area, being unable to find housing, or both, as well as child care problems and living too far from work. Evictions occasionally occurred because a parent had broken some kind of rule (cited by 6.5% of parents as a factor in at least one episode of

homelessness and accounting for 3% of all reasons cited), such as failing to report new income to a housing authority and failing to be on the lease in doubled-up situations. One parent said that dislike of living in a shelter was a factor in a homeless episode (cited by 2.2% of parents as a factor in at least one homeless episode and accounting for 1% of all reasons cited). In some instances, parents failed to name a specific cause of a homeless episode, saying only that they had moved out of a shelter or had lost their housing (cited by 4.3% of parents as a factor in at least one homeless episode and accounting for 2% of all reasons cited).

Current episode of homelessness. Descriptive analyses pertaining to families' current episode of homelessness also were conducted (see Table 3). Coding current residence for each family was determined by where the family spent the majority of the time during its participation in the study. The code a family received for its primary current residence does not necessarily indicate that the family stayed in only one residence, merely that the type of arrangement named constituted the primary type of residence for that family. For example, one family moved back and forth between the child's grandmother's and aunt's residences during the study. This family's primary residence was coded as doubled up. Shelters served as the primary current residence for 45% of the families included in analyses examining current residence, and doubled-up situations served as the primary residence for the remaining 55% of the families in these analyses.

During the 6-week duration of families' participation in the study, families had an average of 1.75 residences ($SD = .71$). More specifically, 37.5% of families stayed in one place, 52.5% of families stayed in two places, 7.5% of families stayed in three places, and 2.5% of families stayed in four places.

Table 3

Descriptors of Current Homelessness in Percentages Based on Social Worker and Parent

Report ($N = 40$)

	Percent
<u>Primary residence during study</u>	
Shelter	35.0
Doubled up	42.5
Private residence	22.5
<u>Number of residences during study</u>	
One	37.5
Two	52.5
Three	7.5
Four	2.5
<u>Cause of current episode</u>	
Domestic problems	41.0
Financial difficulties	35.9
Physical damage to residence	5.1
Breaking rules	2.6
Unsafe/inadequate housing	7.7
Logistical problems	2.6
Nonspecific	2.6
Disliked living in shelter	2.6

According to parent report, difficulty of the current episode of homelessness, using a 4-point scale, was $M = 3.05$ ($SD = 1.10$) for parents and $M = 2.90$ ($SD = 1.00$) for children. Causes of the current episode of homelessness were: domestic problems (41.0%), financial difficulties (35.9%), unsafe or inadequate housing (7.7%), physical damage to housing (5.1%), breaking rules (2.6%), logistical problems (2.6%), dislike of living in shelter (2.6%), and nonspecific causes (2.6%).

Academic performance and other child outcomes. Means and standard deviations for children's performance in school, as well as for other school-related items, are displayed in Table 4. Mean grade-point average for academic subjects, on a scale of 1 to 4, was $M = 2.36$ ($SD = .87$). Mean teacher-rated academic performance, using the 5-point scale from the TRF, was $M = 2.17$ ($SD = .71$). Students also were graded on non-academic activities, such as physical education, art and music. Mean grade for non-academic activities, using a scale from 1 to 3, was $M = 2.69$ ($SD = .58$). Some schools graded children on social development and work habits. Mean grade for social development on a scale from 1 to 3 was $M = 2.33$ ($SD = .65$). Mean grade for work habits, also derived from a scale of 1 to 3, was $M = 2.17$ ($SD = .58$).

Teachers also provided scores on other measures, rating each study child in comparison to typical pupils of the same age. On a scale from 1 to 7, teachers rated study children's level of effort ($M = 2.95$; $SD = 1.62$), appropriateness of behavior ($M = 3.34$; $SD = 1.95$), degree of learning ($M = 2.87$; $SD = 1.39$), and how happy they seemed ($M = 3.04$; $SD = 1.27$).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Academic Performance Based on Grades and
Teacher Report

	<u>N</u>	Mean	Standard
		Deviation	
How long teacher knew child (months)	4.88	3.84	38
How well teacher knew child ^a	1.99	0.59	40
Hours per week in teacher's class	19.11	11.36	37
Grade-point average ^b	2.36	0.87	39
Teacher-rated academic performance ^c	2.17	0.71	39
Grades in nonacademic activities ^d	2.69	0.58	36
Grades in social development ^d	2.33	0.65	29
Work habits ^d	2.17	0.58	16
How hard child is working ^e	2.95	1.62	40
How appropriately child behaves ^e	3.34	1.95	40
How much child is learning ^e	2.87	1.39	40
How happy child is ^e	3.04	1.27	40

^a On a scale from 1 (*not well*) to 3 (*very well*)

^b On a scale from 1 (*poor or failing*) to 4 (*excellent*)

^c On a scale from 1 (*far below grade level*) to 5 (*far above grade level*)

^d On a scale from 1 (*unsatisfactory*) to 3 (*meets or exceeds expectations*)

^e On a scale from 1 (*much less than peers*) to 7 (*much more than peers*)

Associations between Predictor Variables and Child Outcomes

Academic performance. Correlations were run to determine associations between predictor and other descriptive variables and child outcome, including academic performance. Results are displayed in Table 5. GPA was found to be significantly correlated with the following variables regarding homelessness: total months of homelessness over the child's lifetime ($r = -.39$; $p < .05$); number of episodes spent in doubled-up situations ($r = -.34$; $p < .05$); difficulty of homelessness across episodes for parent ($r = -.46$; $p < .01$) and child ($r = -.51$; $p < .01$); financial difficulties cited as a cause of at least one episode of homelessness ($r = -.34$; $p < .05$); and difficulty of current episode of homelessness for parent ($r = -.39$; $p < .05$) and child ($r = -.44$; $p < .01$). Academic performance as rated by teachers using the TRF was significantly correlated with: number of episodes of homelessness across children's lifetime ($r = -.38$; $p < .05$); number of episodes spent in doubled-up situations ($r = -.41$; $p < .01$); difficulty of homelessness across episodes for the child ($r = -.32$; $p < .05$); and logistical problems and nonspecific reasons cited as a cause of at least one episode of homelessness (respectively, $r = -.35$ and $-.39$; $p < .05$).

Academic performance also showed significant associations with several other child-outcome measures. Report-card grades pertaining to nonacademic activities was significantly correlated to GPA ($r = .51$; $p < .01$); social development was also correlated to GPA ($r = .60$; $p < .01$); and work habits were correlated with both GPA ($r = .59$; $p < .05$) and teacher-rated academic performance ($r = .55$; $p < .05$). In addition, teacher-rated scores on other classroom behaviors and characteristics showed associations to academic performance. How hard

Table 5

Correlations with Grade-Point Average and Ratings on the Teacher Report Form ($N = 40$)

	GPA	TRF
Lifetime homelessness (months)	-.39*	
Lifetime homelessness (episodes)		-.38*
Lifetime episodes doubled up	-.34*	-.41**
Lifetime difficulty of episodes		
For parent	-.46**	
For child	-.51**	-.32*
Difficulty of current episode		
For parent	-.39*	
For child	-.44**	
Financial difficulties as cause	-.34*	
Logistical difficulties as cause		-.35*
Nonspecific cause		-.39*
Nonacademic grades	.51**	
Social-development grades	.60**	
Work-habit grades	.59*	.55*
Level of effort	.55**	.57**
Appropriate behavior	.40*	.41**
Level of learning	.62**	.83**
Happiness		.37**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

children were working (i.e., level of effort) was significantly correlated with both GPA ($r = .55$; $p < .01$) and teacher-rated academic performance ($r = .57$; $p < .01$). How appropriately children were behaving was also significantly correlated with both GPA ($r = .40$; $p < .05$) and teacher-rated academic performance ($r = .41$; $p < .01$). How much children were learning likewise was correlated with GPA ($r = .62$; $p < .01$) and teacher-rated academic performance ($r = .83$; $p < .01$). Finally, teacher ratings of how happy children seemed was correlated with teacher-rated academic performance ($r = .37$; $p < .01$).

Regression Analyses

A series of regression analyses were run examining first GPA and then TRF-rated academic performance as dependent variables. Variables examined as possible control variables included research assistant collecting the data and child gender and ethnicity. None of these variables was significantly correlated with either measure of academic performance. Thus, there were no demographic control variables included in regression analyses. Predictor variables were correlated as follows: child age and current residence (dummy coded as 0 = doubled up, 1 = sheltered) were significantly correlated ($r = .44$; $p < .05$); child age and history of homelessness (total months) were not significantly correlated ($r = -.23$; n.s.); and history of homelessness and current residence were not significantly correlated ($r = -.13$; n.s.).

Child age. In accordance with the hypotheses of the paper, age, current residence, and history of homelessness were tested for their ability to predict academic performance. Results are presented in Table 6. Child age alone did not significantly predict academic performance as measured by either GPA or TRF ratings. However, isolating the effects of age per se revealed significant results. Previous history of homelessness (i.e., proportion of lifetime by total months)

and current residence were entered into the regression equation as controls. In this model, child age significantly predicted GPA ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$), but not TRF ratings.

History of homelessness. Children's experience with homelessness over their lifetime was examined next. Regressions were run separately for two predictor variables: (a) total months of homelessness, and (b) total episodes of homelessness. Each analysis included child's age in order to control for it. Experience with homelessness as measured by total months significantly predicted both GPA ($\beta = -.43; p < .01$) and TRF ratings ($\beta = -.33; p < .05$). Number of episodes of homelessness, after controlling for age, did not significantly predict GPA, but it did predict TRF ratings ($\beta = -.36; p < .05$).

Current residence. No interaction effect between children's age and their current residence effect emerged—that is, the interaction proved to be insignificant. However, visual inspection of the relations in graphic format suggested that main effects for current residence might be present. Therefore, regression analyses examining current-residence effects while controlling for child age were run. Current residence was dummy coded using 0 (*doubled up*) and 1 (*in shelter*). Results showed significant effects for GPA, indicating that students living in shelters were performing better than were students living in doubled-up arrangements ($\beta = .46, p < .05$). Significant effects did not emerge for TRF ratings.

In order to determine whether past experience with different types of residences predicted performance, number of lifetime episodes of staying in shelters and number of lifetime episodes of staying doubled up were entered into separate regression analyses. Greater experience staying in shelters did not significantly predict performance, but greater experience staying doubled up did predict performance as measured both by GPA ($\beta = -.36; p < .05$) and

by TRF ratings ($\beta = -.44$; $p < .01$). (Current-residence doubled up and lifetime-experience doubled up were not significantly correlated.)

Qualitative Results

Plan of Analysis

Qualitative data were examined for thematic content using a systematic process referred to as grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory results from open, axial, and selective coding of interview data. During the open coding phase, participants' responses are examined for salient categories of information. An attempt to saturate the categories is made, such that all information falls into a category. In the next step, called axial coding, core categories are identified as the primary phenomena of interest. Selective coding occurs next, wherein the researcher builds a "story" that connects the categories. During this phase, a theory is generated to help explain causal conditions that influence the central phenomenon, strategies for addressing the phenomenon, and the context and consequences of undertaking the strategies. Open and axial coding based on participants' interview responses follow. Selective coding and discussion of the phenomena of interest are presented in the Discussion section.

Places of Residence

The first set of questions pertained to places of residence. In answering questions about favorite and worst places they had stayed, participants identified many characteristics of "good" versus "bad" places. Four categories emerged as participants named factors associated with favorite and least-favorite residences: physical safety, quality of the physical environment and

Table 6

Regression Analyses Examining Predictor Variables and Homeless Students' Academic Performance

Predictor variables	<u>Grade-point average</u>		<u>Teacher Report Form</u>	
	β	R^2	β	R^2
Child age ^a	-.19*	.35		
History of homelessness (months) ^b	-.43**	.19	-.33*	.13
History of homelessness (episodes) ^b			-.36*	.15
Current residence ^b	.46*	.16		
Total episodes doubled up ^b	-.36*	.14	-.44**	.22
Total episodes in shelters ^b				

Note: Current residence coded as: 0 = doubled up, 1 = shelter.

^a Controlling for history of homelessness (months) and current residence.

^b Controlling for child age.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

availability of material goods, positive relationships, and fun activities. These categories and contributing factors follow.

Physical safety. Safety, or rather lack of safety, was a primary factor in describing the worst places children had stayed. Restrictions on freedom to be outdoors—whether determined by adults (e.g., parent, shelter staff) or by a child’s own sense of safety—seemed to negatively influence children’s perceptions of a place. Although adults imposed restrictions on outdoor activity in some instances, many times children themselves determined that they could not go outside because the environment was unsafe. Experiences of being “beaten up” or feeling that “everyone wants to fight me” often led children to refrain from going outdoors, a pattern that characterized least-favorite places to stay. One participant said that other children “wouldn’t let me ride my bicycle,” and another said that children in the neighborhood warped the tires on his bicycle so that he could no longer ride it. These types of hostile experiences were significant factors in children’s degree of dislike for a given residence.

In contrast, several children described favorite residences as those at which they could safely explore and play in the environment around them. For example, one child said, “Staying at the trailer was the best because I could go outside.” Two of the five participants said that they chose certain residences as favorites because they could go outside and “nobody was messing with me” or “nobody bothered me.” Participants stated that playing, walking a dog, and going to a store were outside activities that they liked to do when they could go outside.

Other factors describing worst places to stay also stemmed from safety issues. For example, one child, a 13-year-old male, was required by shelter rules to stay in the men’s quarters rather than with his mother and siblings. Without detailing his experience, the child

reported, “It wasn’t good staying with all those men.” Another child explained that at the worst place she had ever stayed, the shelter owner prohibited residents from being at the shelter between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m., in spite of extreme cold temperatures outdoors. The child’s family, having nowhere else to stay during daytime hours, stayed outdoors during that time. As a result, the child and her infant sister became sick; no allowances or changes in rules were made to accommodate these illnesses.

Lastly, another factor cited by two children as characteristic of least favorite places was drug use. One child said that, although his mother said that she did not want the children to see such things, she used and sold drugs in front of the children. (According to the child’s school social worker, this child was also used to sell drugs on behalf of adults in his community.) Another participant explained that her father spent the sum of the family’s money (\$735) on drugs, and that he and his friends consistently abused drugs and alcohol in the presence of the child. In some instances, the child found hidden drugs that her father had claimed to throw away. For this participant, 10 years of age, domestic violence was also a serious problem. The child reported scenes of verbal and physical assaults amongst her father and his friends, for example. More directly, the child’s father screamed at, threatened, and physically abused the child and her mother. She said, “One time he held me down and hit me 17 times. But he had threatened to hit me 24 times.” Not surprisingly, she reported being scared of him at all times. For these children, the worst places to stay were characterized not only by unsafe environments outside the home, but also within the home.

Quality of physical environment and material goods. In addition to safety issues, comfort issues and enjoyment of the physical environment played a role in perceptions of

places. Children did not like living in cramped quarters, and several of them cited that overcrowding in describing least-favorite places. For example, they made comments about having “no space” or trying to live in a very small room with a parent and sibling. In contrast, positively regarded places were described as “nice and big” and “spacious.” One child seemed especially pleased that the shelter at which his family stayed was “fixing it up and giving us a bathroom.” They also cited the presence of material goods (e.g., games, basketball court, Play Station, TV, VCR, clothes) as reasons for liking certain residences.

Positive relationships. The presence of supportive and positive social relationships characterized places at which children liked to stay. Nonspecific comments such as, “The people there were nice,” were typical when participants began explaining why they liked a certain place. Having friends, a lot of friends, or a best friend at a place was frequently cited when participants talked about favorite places. Positive family relationships were also important. For example, one teenage girl selected a favorite residence by the presence of her older sister who “protected” her and lent her clothes. Yet another cited the support her mother received as a reason for liking a shelter in which she had stayed. The participant explained that children were not allowed in the kitchen at this shelter, allowing mothers to have some time to themselves or with other adults in the absence of children. The participant said she liked the presence of this support for her mother.

Positive relationships often seemed to be manifest through activities. For example, in explaining why staying at her cousin’s place was her favorite place to stay, a participant said that everyone (i.e., child’s cousin, mother, younger sister, cousin’s boyfriend) got down on the floor to play games such as cards or Yatzee. Also, the group went skating together on Friday and

Saturday nights. Another participant in describing one of his favorite places to stay—his grandmother’s—explained that he could play football with his cousin when he stayed there. He also liked a shelter at which he had stayed because it organized camping and field trips for residents.

Two children cited the opportunity to show trustworthiness and helpfulness as reasons to like a given residence. One boy liked staying at his grandmothers because he “got to” walk the dog and was sent on errands to the store. Another child also liked staying with her grandmother because she worked in the kitchen at her grandmother’s café. She explained in detail how she washed her hands, wore gloves and a hair net, and served food. “I was really helpful to my grandma,” she said. For these two children at least, good places to stay were associated with being trusted by adults and having the chance to be helpful and responsible.

In contrast, lack of kindness and betrayal of trust contributed to children’s negative perceptions of certain places. For instance, several of the children cited hostility from other children either within the residence or in the neighborhood as characteristic of the worst places they had stayed. One participant staying a shelter felt that several other children wanted to fight her, and these children intentionally broke a treasured necklace. She expressed having a very difficult time there. Moreover, a bus driver (who stayed at the same shelter) told other students that the child lived at the shelter, when she did not want anyone to know that she stayed there. Negativity among adults was a theme in least-favorite places. For instance, participants cited generally negative environments, such as places where “everyone uses a lot of bad names,” as least favorites. Of course, violence either between adults or from adult to child characterized some of the worst environments children experienced.

Fun activities. In addition to the social component of participating in fun activities, the fun activities themselves were compelling to children and were associated with favorite environments. Activities participants were able to engage in at positively viewed residences included baseball, football, basketball, Play Stations, board games, card games, camping, going on field trips, skating, watching TV shows and movies, and coloring. Children seemed to like having opportunities to learn and practice new skills, be they physical, cognitive, or both.

Axial code: Security. The central phenomenon connecting participants' responses about various places of residence seems to be a desire for security. A lack of security—physical and emotional—characterized the worst places, whereas having a sense of safety and belonging characterized favorite places. Participants expressed fear, frustration, and a sense of rejection at staying in unsafe places. On the other hand, at safe places, they reveled in the freedom to go outdoors, the absence of aggression from peers and adults, and the presence of warm and supportive relationships. Within these relationships, participants were able to share experiences and fun activities with others and develop a sense of trust—of themselves (e.g., having responsibilities) and others. In summary, security seems to be the common thread tying together the comments participants made about places they have stayed; they wanted physical and emotional safety.

School and Peers

Participants had many more positive comments than negative ones regarding school. The most salient theme pertained to relationships with others, and perceptions of interactions with both adults and peers colored views on school overall. Although children could offer examples of negative experiences with others in the school setting, comments generally were

positive. Participants also talked about their capacity to master academic challenges as a factor in their like or dislike for school, although this appeared to be secondary to social matters.

Physical discomfort was a third and less salient theme.

Interactions with adults. The dominant theme in participants' responses to questions about school revolved around positive interactions with adults. Participants uniformly talked about kindness from adults in various positions at the school and how welcomed and accepted that kindness made them feel. Although comments focused on interactions with teachers, participants commented equally on warm relationships with and kindnesses received from lunchroom staff, bus drivers, counselors, and office staff or administrators.

Each of the participants described most of their teachers as "nice" or "not mean." Asked for examples or characteristics of nice teachers, participants talked about a range of things, from concrete actions such as bringing in candy, to more general statements such as, "She helps us out." One student said he liked teachers who "help you—help you not get in trouble," whereas another said she liked teachers who "are nice, who understand when I don't have my homework, just understand about things." In addition to appreciating understanding and helpful qualities, participants appreciated teachers who made them feel comfortable. For example, one participant explained about school, "I love it. People [the grown ups] are nice. They're sweet to me and make me feel real comfortable, even though they know where I live." Other qualities valued by participants included fairness and humor.

Being perceived as likable and good emerged as a sub-theme in participants' positive relationships with teachers (and other staff). Two participants, for instance, explained that they liked certain teachers because those teachers seemed to like them: "Mr. C is my favorite

teacher because he likes me,” said one participant. The other said that she liked a certain teacher because “he thinks I’m funny,” and because he teased the student. In contrast, another participant accounted for a poor relationship with a math teacher in the fact that the teacher “thinks I have an attitude.” Another student stated that he looked forward to going to school because he could do his work and mind the teachers. This participant also enjoyed working with a staff member to clean up the hallways.

Relationships with other school staff seemed to be as important in participants’ experiences with school as relationships with teachers. For example, one student talked about how much it meant to her that “the lunchroom lady is real sweet and goes out of her way to say hi to me.” Having the trust and attention of a secretary was important to another participant, who explained, “The woman in the main office saw me doing my homework in there and turned the light on for me. She trusts me—she lets me sit in the office by myself—but she doesn’t trust the other kids.” This office assistant showed both kindness and trust to the participant. A third example of positive relationships with school-related adults emerged in a story about a bus driver. The participant reported that upon arriving at the child’s drop-off point after school one day, her mother was not there to pick her up. Instead of letting the child depart from the bus and walk the short distance to the shelter on her own, the bus driver made the child return to the school with the driver and wait there until the child’s mother could be contacted. Rather than being annoyed by this inconvenience, the child said the decision made her feel “safe.” She added that she looks forward to going to school each morning because she gets to see the bus driver. Overall, comments about interactions with adults at school were strongly positive, and these interactions in large part determined the positive regard in which participants held school.

Relating to peers. A second critical theme in participants' experiences at school involved peer relationships. Quality of friendships, romantic interactions and perceptions of "fitting in" comprised this category. Participants expressed satisfaction with peer relationships in which a common ground of interest was evident. For female participants, named topics of discussion with friends included boys, hair color, ice cream, plans for the next day, other students, and so forth—or, as one participant put it, "just basic things." For male participants, football was named as a topic of common discussion, and being able to play together, particularly sports, seemed to equate to feelings of acceptance. Participants said that they liked school because "Kids are nice," "I feel like I'm popular here," and "We can all relate."

In general, participants had many more positive comments than negative ones about interactions with other students. Two participants, however, also talked about difficulties they had had with peers. They described peers that they did not like as being "mean" and "always wanting to fight." One of the girls felt that "mean" students took advantage of her because she was nice, and she said she thought they did not like her because she "talked too fast." They also taped a sign on her back that said, "You are ugly." For these two participants, reactions to others' behaviors toward them included crying and "being mad."

None of the participants shared information about their current residence while homeless with peers. Participants reported that although some adults at school knew where they stayed, other students did not. "It's a secret," as one participant said.

Success and lack of success in academic work. Participants' perceptions of their competence in schoolwork also related to their attitudes about school, although only two students cited performance in academic work as a reason for liking or disliking school. One

participant said she did not look forward to school because she needed help in math, whereas another said he did look forward to school because “it’s fun—I like math and art (I get to paint bugs) and P.E.” This student remarked on his competence in math several times throughout the interview, particularly in discussions of success. After probing, other participants named aspects of schoolwork that they enjoyed, including science, doing puzzles, “doing times tables,” and playing on the computer. Similarly, participants also were able to name classes that did not like because the classes were boring or difficult.

Physical discomfort. Participants’ physical well-being and comfort, or rather lack of it, also played a role in their experiences at school. Two students reported that sleepiness interfered with enjoyment of school. As one participant put it, she looked forward to school if she was not tired. Another said she experienced dizzy spells and did not feel well. Being cold at school (“They always keep the fan on”) was a problem for another participant, and not having appropriate clothing was also a problem for one participant, whose clothes had been stolen. Another participant, when asked what could make school a better place for him, said “Hurry up and finish all this construction!” None of the participants spoke at length about these obstacles to their enjoyment of school, but physical well-being was a theme across participants nonetheless.

Axial code: Prosocial relationships. The primary draw to school for these students was found in their positive and supportive relationships. Participants looked forward to the company of their peers, whom they felt they could relate to and who understood them, and to the kind attention of adults. It appeared that participants felt likable, trusted, cared for, adept and accepted by those around them at school. Doing well in various subjects contributed to these

feelings of being adept and accepted, although doing poorly in a certain subject was not viewed as a threat to prosocial relationships. In total, participants viewed school as a place to interact and build relationships. For the most part, these interactions were positive experiences, leading to a positive view of school.

After-school Activities

When asked what they did after school, the five participants responded as follows (paraphrased):

1. “Mom and her friends don’t pick me up ‘til 4:15. I stay outside on the bleachers by myself until then. I can’t call my friend so I write her notes. I’m trying to get into a program for teenagers at Cobb House. There you can talk about people in your family that are on drugs. I’d like to go back to church on Wednesdays.”
2. “I go to the Boys & Girls Club. I go to sleep when I get there because I’m tired. Sometimes I play, sometimes I don’t. I hide in the office to sleep. I wish I could go home and go to sleep.”
3. “I go home or go to the library. I wish I could go to work, get a job at Steinmart. I’ve got an application but I won’t probably get a job because of my age. Or I’d like a job at the mall.”
4. “We go to Magic Years of Learning [daycare], then our mother picks us up. We eat snacks and do homework and go outside. I like it. Sometimes we go to our grandmother’s. I hope we keep going to Magic Years of Learning.”
5. “I go to daycare. Sometimes it’s noisy. The kids are nice, but it’s noisy. I get headaches and have to take whole Tylenol. Afterwards I hurry to the bus, go to City

Hall, wait for the bus #7, go home, eat, watch TV or go outside, and go to bed. It's a pretty busy day for me. I would love to go swimming—I love water, but I'm not allowed to take baths where I stay.”

Only one child talked positively about his after-school activities, whereas the others reported either loneliness or an inability to enjoy arranged activities. In general, responses suggest four categories of important themes in children's activities in the after-school hours: social support versus loneliness, physical health, fun activities, and having responsibility.

Social support versus loneliness. Participants professed a longing to be in the company of others after school rather than being alone. The participant whose response is listed first in the above list was most candid about her loneliness. She was bereft of adult or child company and occupied herself by sitting on the bleachers and writing letters to a girlfriend. She also wished to have the support of peers in a structured program for adolescents dealing with drug abuse, as well as the social support of church activities. Instead, she was able to participate in no structured activities. The participant whose response is listed third above also admitted to feelings of loneliness in going “home” or to the library by herself.

The other three participants were involved in structured after-school activities, allowing for social interaction and support. Two of the participants, however, experienced physical barriers to enjoying the activities. The other, whose response is listed fourth above, was able to benefit from his experience at daycare and seemed to truly enjoy his time after school. He spoke positively about going to daycare with his brother and being picked up from there by his mother. He also went to his grandmothers' house after school on some occasions, another

positive experience for him. In general, there seemed to be a theme in which those who were alone after school were less satisfied than those who were with others, unless physical health interrupted social experiences.

Physical health. Two participants spoke of physical ailments that affected participation in after-school activities. One reported overwhelming fatigue or being tired most of the time, and the other suffered from headaches. Thus, although these children had the opportunity to develop friendships with same-age peers and to participate in structured games and activities, health ramifications possibly related to their homeless lifestyle impeded enjoyment of and growth in these settings.

Fun activities. The actual activities offered in structured after-school programs were a boon for participants, although they seemed to be secondary to the opportunities to be in the company of others. Going to church and going swimming are examples of activities that participants said that they would like to do but were not able to do. Again, the child attending Magic Years of Learning daycare was enthusiastic about his after-school activities, which included eating snacks, doing homework, and playing outside. It seems that the activities themselves—their appropriateness and ability to meet children's needs—were important to participants' ability to benefit from programs.

Having responsibility. The 14-year-old participant wished to have a job after school, which would have allowed her not only to make friends and be around others, but also to make money and have a position of responsibility. For this participant, a job would have helped her to make the developmentally necessary transition from child status to greater adult status, to increase her autonomy, and to provide a means of developing self-esteem and assertiveness

skills. Having responsibility was also mentioned by other students in relation to school as important to their self-view. For example, janitorial duties at school were a source of purpose and pride for a younger participant.

Axial code: Ability to meet developmental needs. Appraisals of time spent in after-school care seemed to depend largely on programs' ability to meet the needs of participants. Needs included physical health and social needs, as well as opportunities to engage in age-appropriate activities. Some students went to structured programs after school, but health problems, including lack of sleep, precluded beneficial participation. Therefore, for some students, physical problems needed to be addressed before social and psychological growth could occur. For other participants, social needs were not met; that is, they spent their after-school hours in isolation, thus, failing to develop those social bonds with peers or adults that are necessary across developmental stages. These participants also lacked opportunities to engage in enjoyable and challenging activities that enhance development. The participant who benefited from and looked forward to his time after school had his physical needs met (e.g., received snacks, was not tired or ill), his social needs met (e.g., was in the company of his brother, peers, grandmother), and his mastery-of-skills needs met (e.g., doing homework, playing outdoors). For another participant, developmental goals—specifically, practicing autonomy and having responsibility—were thwarted by her inability to get a job. Ideally, after-school hours presented students with opportunities to foster their social and psychological growth, a process that is dependent on adequate physical health. Programs that met a range of developmental needs would have been most beneficial for participants.

Success

Several categories emerged from participants' responses to questions about what it means to be successful. Categories included having aptitude and competence, strength of character, social approval, financial well-being, an education and a career, and a family.

Aptitude and competence. Participants often spoke of success in terms of their ability to do something well, be it schoolwork, playing sports, or specific skills. Overall, doing well in school and having a good report card were the most consistent markers of success, based on participants' comments. One child, for example, defined success almost entirely in his ability to do well in math class. Non-academic skills were also means of showing aptitude, nonetheless. Sports were important, for example; a participant spoke of her aptitude in basketball and particularly her ability to make goals. She said she believed she was the best player on the team and this made her feel like a success. Yet another felt success was being able to do mechanical things, such as change tires on a car. In contrast to these feelings of success, one participant felt frustrated by a lack of opportunities to achieve and show competence. She said she wished she could be her older sister "because she's doing stuff with her life. I'm not doing anything with my life, I'm just boring."

As a corollary, social approval based on aptitude in certain areas was viewed as evidence of success. For example, when "my mom shows everyone my report card and tells me I'm doing good," a participant feels successful. Similarly, the participant who likes math noted that being a success in math is apparent because "people will tell you you're good." Diametrically, another participant said that she planned to become a model and actress in later life because "then kids wouldn't pick on me anymore." In sum, success, which was related to

participants' aptitude and resources for a given task, engendered both feelings of competence and approval from others.

Strength of character. In addition to mastery of tasks and specific skills, participants included hard work and moral strength as measures of success. For example, phrases such as "doing a good job" and "doing your best mostly," were used to describe success. For one participant, "coming through" was a common phrase in talking about what it means to be successful. This participant had survived years of abuse from her father and, when asked what makes her feel like a success, she said, "I came through the domestic violence. I went through it for ten years, and I held up and came through. I thought I was going to run away, but I didn't. It's safe now. If he finds us, we'll go back to the shelter and still pay rent so we can go back." Thus, in part, success was defined by the ability to devise and implement a concrete plan in collaboration with her mother, if their abuser should return. Later she added, "And I was a good person," meaning that in spite of the terror of violence, she remained a cheerful, kind and optimistic person. In another part, then, success was an abstract and fairly sophisticated notion of moral strength.

Achievement and financial security. In addition to ideas of aptitude and moral strength, participants described educational and career accomplishments as signs of later success, with financial security an important consequence. When asked what kind of success they hoped for in their future, each of the five participants named a career aspiration. Occupational goals included becoming a doctor, model, actress, teacher, fireman, policeman, auto mechanic, and lawyer. In conjunction, many of the participants expected to go to college. While some participants seemed to have realistic expectations about educational and career goals, others did

not. For example, one participant explained that she planned to become a model and then an actress, but she wanted to go to college so that she could “fall back on being a doctor.” Some participants mentioned enjoyment of their work as a sign of success, but more often financial or material gain was cited as an indicator of success. “Being something to make us a lot of money” was a typical phrase in describing the kind of success participants’ hoped for in the future.

Having a family. One participant cited family aspirations. She said that, in conjunction with educational, career, and financial successes, she would consider it a success if she had “a good husband [and] good children that mind.”

Axial code: Self-efficacy. The common theme across categories of responses about the meaning of success was self-efficacy. Participants’ perceptions of their ability to do well in an area of their life seemed to predict their feelings of success associated with it. Areas in which they wanted to achieve success varied across participants, from schoolwork to skills to education and career to family. Yet the overriding message from participants was that it is one’s ability to do well and make things happen—being able to reach a place of competence—that defines success. In turn, this sense of self-efficacy related to self-esteem.

Self-Esteem

Participants for the most part had brief responses when asked whether they felt good or bad about themselves. Four categories crystallized in the area of self-esteem: being “good” versus being “in trouble,” physical appearance, relationships, and strength of character.

Being good. According to participants’ responses, self-esteem seemed most often to depend on perceptions of their “goodness” as opposed to “being bad.” They expressed dismay over being in trouble or subject to the disapproval of adults. One participant who presented a

persona of toughness and indifference said he felt worst about himself when he got called to the main office one time for throwing paper on the school bus. In contrast, another participant said, “I feel good about myself when I’m behaving. When I do work in my classroom, do puzzles.” In addition to good behavior, good performance on schoolwork (i.e., achievement) contributed to positive self-appraisals for other participants as well.

Physical appearance. Two of the participants, when asked if they ever felt good or bad about themselves, responded in terms of physical appearance. One participant responded solely in these terms: She said she felt good about herself because she liked her face and bad about herself because “My nose, legs—they’re ugly.” The other participant who responded in the context of physical attributes used other indices of measuring self-esteem as well (e.g., relationships). She spoke positively about her appearance at first: “I like everything about myself—my hair, my shoes, my body.” She later noted that she did sometimes feel bad about herself and cited an example. “I felt bad because they called me ‘Fatty.’ But then I wasn’t really used to it. Sometimes I take things too seriously.” For these two girls, physical appearance and specific body parts were important measures of self-worth. Relatedly, how they believed others viewed their appearance colored their feelings about themselves.

Relationships. Having positive and harmonious relationships was important in how participants felt about themselves. For example, having personality characteristics that others appreciated contributed to positive feelings. One participant said, for instance, “I’m a funny person, I like to cheer people up. Everybody likes me, so it must be true!” Another said that she felt badly about herself during those times that she and her mother disagreed about something. Although not all participants discussed relationships in responding to self-esteem

questions, those that did expressed feelings of self-worth when relationships highlighted their character strengths and minimized conflict.

In general, the degree of warmth and harmony within a relationship was important to participants' views of themselves. In particular, social approval shaped self-perceptions. Whether it related to behavior, physical attributes, or personality and relationships, participants felt good about themselves when they received feedback from others that reflected their goodness or their good qualities.

Strength of character. Despite the general reliance on others for positive regard, one participant said that she felt good about herself because she was able to avoid internalizing negative comments from others. "I have good self-esteem because I don't let names get to me," she said. Other comments that she made, however, belied this statement, as she was one of those using both physical characteristics and relationships to determine self-worth.

Axial code: Approval. Throughout responses about feeling good and bad about oneself ran a vein of social mirroring; participants felt good about themselves when others reflected their goodness or worthiness, whereas they felt bad about themselves when others reflected or pointed out supposed flaws in participants. The messages imparted to them via the actions and comments of those around them seemed to shape their own views about themselves. This process was apparent in areas of relationship quality and physical appearance. It was even directly noted by participants in their comments about being good versus bad: They explained that minding adults and behaving as expected elicited messages of praise from others, in turn eliciting feelings of self-worth within themselves; and, in contrast, being punished or reprimanded for bad behavior had a deleterious effect on self-esteem. Evidence of the power of social

approval may be seen in the participant's remark regarding her ability to avoid internalizing negative feedback. This remark indicated a level of insight and maturity on the part of that child, and underscores the hold that approval typically has for these children. Her efforts to create a self-determined foundation for self-esteem, sporadic as they may have been, were empowering. Again, her remark in the context of the remaining comments about self-esteem are enlightening about the effects of social approval on homeless children's self-perceptions.

Others

Participants were asked "What do you like most about the people around you?" and "If you could change the people around you, what would you change?" Responses to these questions revealed two categories of information about participants' appraisals of others. First, participants liked most to be accepted and sought out by others. Second, participants appreciated positive qualities in others.

Being accepted and sought out. Participants felt warmly towards those who liked and respected them, whereas they felt least positive about people who were unkind, condescending or rude—in short, people who rejected them. Typically, participants spoke of peers rather than adults in describing those they liked. One participant specifically said that he liked people around him who were his age. Other answers when asked what they most liked about those around them included "Kids who play with you," and "They ask me to do fun things, like swimming, going to the park, coloring." Conversely, people who are mean, say mean things, or don't "act equal to you" were viewed as unpleasant to be around. Overall, participants liked being around people who liked them and wanted to play with them, and wished they could eradicate messages of rejection expressed towards them.

Positive qualities in others. Participants named several characteristics during their responses that were viewed as especially likable. These included kindness or being nice (e.g., making one feel comfortable, being giving), having humor, having the ability to have fun, and being respectful, honest (e.g., “Can tell me stuff to my face”), good, and predictable. Participants cited many positive qualities that they valued in those around them, but they did not offer many examples of things they would change if they could. However, one participant did say she would change—stop—her father’s drug use and violent behavior. Otherwise, comments were positive.

Axial code: Acceptance. Participants looked for both direct indications that others accepted them and characteristics that suggested that others would accept them. Thus, similar to the theme of approval pertaining to self-esteem, a theme of acceptance emerged in participants’ thoughts about others in the world around them. These children focused on how they fit into others’ lives and perceptions. Their main concern was whether a person gave them, directly or indirectly, messages that they were or would be received favorably.

Participants’ Lives

Participants were asked what they liked best about their lives and what they would change about their lives if they could change things. Answers fell into five categories: other people, self, material security, fun activities, and independence.

Other people. When asked what they liked best about their life, participants most frequently talked about other people. For one child, it was friends in his classroom that he could play with, and for others it was family for whom they were most glad. One participant liked the fact that she could now see both her mother and her father (she added, however, that

she preferred that they were not separated), and the fact that her brothers and sisters were there to support her. Another talked about her relationship with her mother: “[The best thing about my life is] my mom. She’s real cheerful. We have fun together. She likes to laugh like I do—since she stopped using drugs. She’s the best part of my life.” Only one child made a negative comment about others in his life, saying he would become “angry when my brother messes with me.” Most comments about others were highly positive.

Self. In addition to liking the people around them, participants also said that they liked themselves. Two participants said this directly: (a) The participant who liked her mother also added, almost as an afterthought, that she also liked herself best about her life, and (b) another participant said she liked best about her life that “I’m a good person.” Another indication of the importance of the self to participants’ life view was revealed by the child who became angry with his brother. His philosophy about conflict with his brother was that he needed to change his own attitude—rather than his brother’s behavior. Participants seemed to place emphasis on their ability to be a good and morally strong person.

Fun activities. In addition to the social interactions involved in doing fun things, participants seemed to value activities themselves. Playing in a classroom or at home, going on trips to amusement parks, riding a go-cart, and participating in activities at summer camp are examples of activities participants said that they liked doing and were part of what they liked best about their lives. One participant said that the day he went to a water park was the best day of his life. Age-appropriate and fun activities that required mastering new skills and exploring new facets of life appeared to stimulate participants in a way that increased enjoyment of life.

Material security. Two participants talked about financial or material wealth when asked what they would like to change about their lives, and both specifically mentioned having new clothes. One participant said, “[What I would change is] for us to be rich. To have a lot of money and have a nice house. I would give money to people in shelters. I wouldn’t wear clothes people gave me to wear, only new clothes.” The other said, “I want to be about 19 with my own car, job, house. I want to buy my own things, like clothes. Good clothes, new, not used. If I had kids, I would buy them new clothes. I would take my husband out to dinner as a surprise.” For these participants, material security was the primary issue in their life requiring remediation.

Independence. Participants wanted to be older and more independent than they were at present. Several participants noted with pride an accomplishment that they had achieved on their own, such as not only riding but being the driver of a go-cart. Two participants, one 10 years old, the other 14, specifically mentioned age as something they would change about their life if they could. Many of them looked towards their future as a time when they would be able to create a life of self-sufficiency and independence—when they would be in control and would be able to take care of themselves and their loved ones. This desire was apparent not only in their comments about wanting to be older and liking to be the one, literally and figuratively, in the driver’s seat, but also in their desires for jobs and material wealth.

Axial code: Control. The yen for independence and self-sufficiency tied together the various comments made about participants’ lives and revealed an overall need to have some control. That is, what these children wanted most was to have control in the status of their emotional and physical well-being. They wanted positive and supportive relationships, and

within those relationships, they wanted to be in control of their emotions, attitudes and behavior. They wanted a say in how their time was spent and in which activities they participated. Most notably, they wanted control of resources, for example, being able to buy clothes, give to others, and have nice living accommodations. Remarks about age suggest that participants hoped that maturity would lead to independence and self-sufficiency. In summary, having control in their life was a significant underlying quest.

What Participants Want the World to Know

Participants were asked, “If you could tell me or the world anything about yourself that you wanted us to know, what would it be?” Paraphrased responses from each participant are as follows:

1. “That I’m really funny. And I wish everybody would be my friend and not be mean to me.”
2. “That I can do work—anything I have to work on.”
3. “That I’m smart but I don’t use it. Everyone thinks I’m slow. I wish I was popular.”
4. “That going to Whitewater was the most fun time I ever had.”
5. “About what I went through [domestic violence] and that I came through—after ten years. And I was a good person. What you do to other people comes back to you.”

Two categories seemed to emerge from these responses. The first is, “I am a good, able and special person.” The second is that kindness and acceptance from others are important.

I am a good, able and special person. Participants wanted others to know that they have admirable and unique qualities. Qualities that they wanted others to know that they possess included being funny, hardworking and competent, smart, strong in spirit, and good.

Kindness and acceptance from others are important. The following phrases lead one to understand the importance of kindness and acceptance to these children: “I wish everybody would be my friend and not be mean to me,” “I wish I was popular,” “[G]oing to Whitewater was the most fun time I ever had,” and “What you do to other people comes back to you.” These comments reveal that participants cherish approval from others and seek evidence that they are valued and liked. Moreover, the concept of a just world—one in which individuals that do good receive good things (and vice versa)—is apparent in the last comment in the above list, which suggests that intentions toward others are linked to one’s own experiences. In total, participants seemed to view the world as a place in which kindness is reciprocated, and because they generally viewed themselves as kind to others, they hoped to be treated kindly in return.

Axial code: Being worthy of love. The message participants asked to share with the world was that each of them was worthy of love. The way in which they phrased this message varied but the underlying message was the same: “I am a lovable person.” Some children pointed out their virtuous qualities, such as being funny, hardworking and competent. One basically asked for a repeat of an experience in which he felt loved; the child who said going to a water park with his loved ones was the best day of his life was expressing a need for social cohesion and love in his life. Regardless of the specific words each participant used, they generally wanted others to recognize their special qualities and their worthiness to be loved.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

What the Statistics Say: Age, History of Homelessness and Current Residence

Researchers have for several decades evaluated homelessness as though it were a homogeneous experience, comparing homeless to non-homeless populations. The results of the present analyses indicate that homelessness is, in fact, experienced in a number of ways, and these experiences affect children differentially when it comes to performance in school. Two of three hypotheses tested with quantitative methods were supported. First, children's age, which reflects developmental stage, predicted achievement: Younger homeless students were doing better than older homeless students. Second, the greater proportion of children's lives spent homeless, the worse they were doing in school.

Children's age appears to become a risk factor as children grow older. The data revealed that child age significantly predicted how well a child was doing in school, with younger homeless children demonstrating better performance than older homeless children. It is important to note that child age did not show significant predictive power until experience with homelessness and current residence were entered into the regression equation, or controlled for. That is, the effects of age per se became apparent once the effects of other factors were removed and the age-performance relation was isolated. The findings show, therefore, that it is not simply that older children have had more exposure to homelessness and thus show poorer

performance than younger children do. Rather, there is something about age itself, regardless of how much experience with homelessness a child has had or where the child is currently staying, that is associated with homeless children's achievement in school.

As Erikson (1980) theorized, mastery of tasks, particularly academic tasks, is an important developmental goal during the middle-childhood years, whereas other goals, for example, social goals, take precedence during the teenage years. This study appears to offer a piece of empirical evidence to support Erikson's theory. Younger homeless children, even though performing less well than their non-homeless peers, are still performing better than their older counterparts. In other words, mastering academic challenges appears to satisfy a developmental need for younger children (i.e., children in Erikson's industry-versus-inferiority stage of development). According to the data, the same is not true for older students, who have different developmental needs and are showing less mastery of academic challenges. Thus, there may be something about the processes involved in doing schoolwork that is reinforcing to younger students that is absent for older students.

There may be several mechanisms at work that lead to the decline in performance over time. One such mechanism may be the compounding nature of schoolwork—the fact that skills and knowledge build upon each other in a step-wise fashion. Children who lose academic ground at one level will lack the necessary knowledge base at the next level to learn more sophisticated information about a subject. Relatedly, students doing poorly receive negative feedback about their performance, which may then reduce motivation to exert effort in school, ensuring that they will continue to do poorly. Low motivation and self-esteem are also possible avenues to poor performance in the later years. The literature indicates that homeless

adolescents experience greater peer rejection than non-homeless students, as well as less opportunity to practice autonomy in relationships with their parents (Horowitz et al., 1994). It is possible that greater success in social roles might be an avenue to higher global self-esteem and, consequently, to improved academic success. Another factor that might indirectly be contributing to low achievement in school is alcohol abuse; relative to non-homeless teens, homeless adolescents show exhibit more alcohol abuse and dependence (McCaskill, Toro, & Wolfe, 1998).

Families' history of homelessness, as measured by total months of homelessness over the lifetime, also predicted academic performance. As expected, the more time children had spent homeless during their lives, regardless of age, the worse their performance in school. This finding is consistent with other research about the damaging effects of persistent poverty on child outcome. For instance, research on family income shows that measurements of family income taken over many years are stronger predictors of child outcome than measurements of concurrent income (Blau, 1999; Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995). It is a troublesome finding, because at least one quarter of recognized homeless children have a history of previous homelessness (Institute for Children & Poverty, 1999).

One possible interpretation of the link between proportion of lifetime homelessness and academic performance is that consequences of homelessness “snowball” over time, becoming increasingly insurmountable over time. For example, the compounding nature of schoolwork previously discussed again emerges as a problem with repeated homelessness; the more often a child faces obstacles to success in school, the more often that child is likely to experience failure and fall behind peers.

Similarly, health problems can compound. It is known that homelessness is related to greater incidence of hunger, sleep deprivation, many kinds of illness, anxiety, depression, aggression, attention problems and other difficulties (Institute for Children & Poverty, 1999; Masten et al. 1993; Molnar et al., 1990; Robertson, 1992; Zima et al., 1994). Furthermore, homeless children often do not receive necessary medical and psychological care (Institute for Children & Poverty, 1999; Zima et al., 1994). As their health deteriorates, homeless children will have to work harder to function at the most basic levels, leaving few resources to tackle cognitive challenges. They will also be absent from school more often. In other words, chronically homeless students are likely to experience a cumulative depletion of the resources (e.g., energy, concentration, knowledge base) that are necessary for success in school.

Although two of the study's three hypotheses received support, it was not found that current residence interacted with age. Instead, a main effect for current residence emerged, demonstrating that children staying doubled up performed more poorly in school than children staying in shelters. This was an unexpected and noteworthy finding. Children in this study had stayed in their current residence (or that type of residence) for no more than six weeks, and often for less time. Yet, the effect of even this relatively short stay revealed itself in significant links to achievement. This finding was underscored by the finding that lifetime experience with being doubled up predicted academic performance, whereas lifetime experience staying in shelters did not predict performance. This finding expands on previous research, which made clear that homeless students do worse in school than non-homeless students, by showing that doubled-up homeless students do worse than sheltered homeless students. This is important

information, since there is evidence that one-third of homeless families stay in doubled-up or tripled-up situations with relatives or friends (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999).

The nature of the analyses used in this study precludes a causal interpretation of the association between doubling up and performance in school; however, the theoretical framework of this study dictates that direction of effect flows from environment to child outcome. Given this framework, two interpretations seem plausible. The first possibility is that there are characteristics or processes involved in doubling up per se that prohibit students from doing well in school. For example, doubling up may leave students with too little space, quiet, and adult attention to focus on homework, which would negatively impact performance in school. Alternatively, children who live doubled up may be exposed to pressing social demands and distractions that interfere with schoolwork or academic focus. A second possibility is that there may be characteristics or processes inherent in families who choose to live doubled up that are related to poorer academic performance. For example, parents in these families may provide less monitoring for their children (or, they may provide more monitoring, but it is less academic in nature), have less adept social skills, or be less willing to comply with shelter rules.

Across quantitative analyses, teacher-rated academic performance (i.e., TRF) showed fewer significant relations to predictor variables than did GPA. It is possible that a measurement problem is at fault. The TRF, which was typically completed by a single teacher, is likely to be a less stable measure than GPAs, which are the result of input from multiple teachers. In other words, it is likely that the GPA is a more accurate index of students' performance than the TRF.

What the Children Say: Grounded Theory

In addition to the quantitative results, this study also provided interesting qualitative results. Five homeless children from the larger sample answered questions about a range of issues, including living arrangements, school, after-school activities, success and self-esteem. Two themes emerged as salient across responses from the various categories of questions: security and control.

The first theme, security, pertained to both physical and emotional needs. Physical security was a particularly salient theme in discussing places of residence. Neighborhoods or communities in which participants stayed were often not safe, according to participants. Their responses to questions about where they would like to stay revealed a desire for physical security. They wanted to live in places where they could play outside and be free from physical violence, illness and physical discomfort (e.g., extreme temperatures, overcrowding). School was another environment where physical safety and comfort was an issue; participants wanted rooms that were not too cold, for example, or free from construction work.

Emotional security seemed to be a more powerful theme even than physical safety; it emerged as a theme in virtually every category of questions. The desire for emotional safety was reflected in a yearning for kindness and acceptance from those around them. Participants seemed to want supportive and loving relationships that fostered acceptance, trust, liking and social cohesion, and this was true for peers and adults.

The results indicated that discrete evidence of approval was important to participants as a means of determining emotional security. They depended on peoples' words and actions to tell them how to feel about themselves. Cruel words, such as "You are ugly," taped to one

girl's back, or being called "Fatty," were clearly painful and seemed to be internalized to at least some degree (in spite of one participant's denial that words affected her). In contrast, positive messages, such as being told one was funny, enhanced self-esteem. Actions also were highly meaningful messages to participants about their self-worth. Examples cited by participants included being invited to play with another child, being trusted with resources or responsibilities (e.g., dog walking, cleaning school halls, working in a grandmother's café), and having one's mother show off a report card. These types of actions indicated to participants that they were good and likable individuals, worthy of praise and trust, and accepted and understood by the people around them.

As one might expect of youth in their adolescent and pre-adolescent years, peer acceptance was vital to positive self-regard. Interviewees indicated that having friends or a best friend was often a primary factor in their well-being. Opportunities for friendships seemed most available in school, although "home" communities also at times offered opportunities for peer relationships to develop. They wanted to be able to relate to peers on issues common to all children of their ages, such as romantic interests, sports, daily activities, hair color, ice cream, and so forth. Perhaps to an even greater degree, they wanted peers to relate to them, to understand them, and to accept them as "one of the crowd." The kindness and acceptance they perceived from other youth was one of the most direct avenues to positive feelings revealed in interviews.

As high as the importance of peer acceptance was for these children, approval from adults seemed to be equally high in importance. They repeatedly indicated how much they valued signs of approval from parents and school staff. Seemingly small indices of approval,

such as a lunchroom worker's greetings or being trusted to run an errand to the grocery store, seemed to carry a big weight. Bigger signs of approval or disapproval—such as being helped with schoolwork, being reprimanded by the principal, and being trusted with responsibilities—also carried a big weight. Overall, prosocial relationships, including both peer and adult relationships, shaped much of participants' positive feelings about themselves and their environment.

In addition to the overriding need for acceptance and love, participants expressed a need to be independent or in control. The ability to be effective in reaching goals, social and otherwise, was an indicator of participants' measure of control in their own lives. They seemed to want control over their own actions and attitudes, their appearance, the quality of their environment, and, most importantly, the quality of their relationships. Some of the participants expressed a wish to be older, which they believed would allow them to have more control in their lives. In thinking about the future, they uniformly hoped to have jobs that would sustain them and their loved ones—they wanted to be in control of their financial well-being. The ability to be self-sufficient, they suggested, would allow them to have control over big matters, such as where they would live, to smaller, more intimate matters such as what clothes they would wear. Self-sufficiency, not possible at this point in their lives, was a goal they hoped to attain in the future.

General Discussion

The results bring to mind several practical implications. Regarding age differences, young students might especially benefit from scaffolding, both academic and social, to increase

opportunities for success at new challenges. For older students, who may not understand how success in school will influence career options and may not believe that they can succeed in school, career counseling, which includes testing to discern students' skills and interests, might heighten homeless students' sense of self-efficacy, expectations and motivation. When appropriate, treatment for alcohol dependency may indirectly lead to improved performance in school. Tutoring in specific academic areas and teaching study skills are also likely candidates for improving grades; there is evidence that economically disadvantaged adolescents benefit from academically focused treatment programs (Schinke, Cole, & Poulin, 2000).

Responses to interviews also suggest practical implications. Improving a sense of acceptance (i.e., security) would be possible through many avenues, among them: increased quality and quantity of parent-child interaction (e.g., eating meals together, coloring, playing card or board games, taking walks); education of school staff including teachers, cafeteria staff, janitors, bus drivers, counselors, administrators and support staff, on the importance of their actions (e.g., saying hello by name, showing trust and concern for a child's safety, keeping information confidential); peer mentoring programs; and enrolling homeless students in organized, social daycare or after-school care. Offering homeless children means of having control in their lives would be beneficial as well, by, for example, offering choices to children about what they have for dinner, what clothes they wear, whether they do homework before or after snacks, whether to write with a pen or pencil, what book to look at, and so forth. Although likely to be more difficult in a classroom setting, a child-based approach to decision making might also be employed by teachers, if resources allow.

This study has added to the literature on homelessness by identifying three variables (i.e., age, history of homelessness, current residence) that partially explain the negative effects of homelessness on student outcome. The findings have helped to tease apart some of the factors that differentiate one homeless student's performance from another's. That significant results were found supports the overall hypothesis that homelessness is comprised of various experiences and various outcomes. It also adds to the literature by providing new variables to evaluate—children's sense of security and control over their lives—which stem from the children themselves.

This paper also offers support for the use of parent report as a useful means of capturing data on family history of homelessness. The finding that history predicts child outcome, although not surprising, is important for two reasons. First, it documents empirically an intuitive notion. Previous research has tended to include only recent homelessness, usually homelessness within the past year, as a demographic or predictive variable. This is the first study to provide data-based evidence that experience with homelessness over a child's lifetime has pernicious effects on achievement. Other researchers may have opted not to include lifetime homelessness as a test variable because there is virtually no way to access this information objectively, and self-report measures may be fraught with error from bias, inaccurate memory, and omissions. This supposition, however, leads to the second benefit of this finding, which is that parent report regarding duration of experiences with homelessness is accurate enough to find meaningful relations to other variables.

There are limitations to this study, the primary one being small sample size. It is a challenge to recruit and collect data on a characteristically transient population, especially in a

non-metropolitan area where there is a smaller-than-average homeless population from which to sample. That significant findings emerged in quantitative analyses from a sample of this size is impressive, suggesting that they must be fairly robust. However, more research is needed with larger samples to determine whether the results replicate, which will increase confidence in the findings presented here. Also, the number of participants in the qualitative portion of the study was small as well. Although data from five participants allows tentative conclusions, it is not enough to draw firm conclusions; larger qualitative samples are necessary. In larger studies, data from more ethnically diverse samples that include Latino and Asian homeless families also would be helpful. Finally, studies sampling from rural and urban areas and from across different regions of the country would further authenticate the results from this relatively small study.

A second limitation of the study is its cross-sectional design. This design is less than ideal because a primary hypothesis under examination pertained to past events. Although this study usefully confirmed that parent recollection of history of homelessness is associated with child outcome, objective data collected longitudinally would allow for more precise analysis of the question at hand. It would be ideal to track homeless families as they follow a chronically mobile path or become rooted in private housing, creating en route a database of objective measures of transitions. Unfortunately, such a database or access to objective measurements was not available for this study. Longitudinal studies will allow researchers to resolve many questions about the processes and impact of homelessness on children and families.

The results of this study lead to several suggestions for future research in this area. First, researchers might try to pinpoint why older homeless students are performing less well in school relative to their younger counterparts. In research on younger students, it will be helpful

to determine the relative contributions of reinforcement from learning and task mastery as compared to social reinforcement from teachers and other adults. Variables that might moderate adolescents' performance include peer rejection, atypical parent-child relationships, self-esteem, alcohol dependence, expectations of success, motivation, self-efficacy, and exposure to tutoring, alcohol treatment, and counseling.

Second, it is strongly recommended that future research integrates and expands on the effects of living in doubled-up arrangements. It seems that there is no clear understanding yet of several pertinent issues: the risks, benefits, or both of co-residing; whether there is a threshold for negative outcome by number of household residents; how ethnic differences moderate effects; and what processes within households are at work to influence outcome. Specifically, the relations between these factors and child outcome in general and academic performance in specific need to be examined.

In designing studies in this area, it will be important to differentiate between families voluntarily co-residing and families who are involuntarily doubled up, and to discern whether these two groups predict outcome differentially. Recommended areas of exploration include: parental monitoring of children, stress on host families in doubled-up arrangements and how that stress affects children, parental behaviors and characteristics of those who stay in shelters versus doubled up (e.g., social skills, anger management, compliance, monitoring of children), and social support from other adults within and outside of the household or shelter.

Lastly, theories generated from the qualitative analyses should be tested using quantitative methods. The qualitative results suggested that two needs—security and control—are particularly salient for homeless youth. Although all youth need a sense of safety and a

sense of control in their lives, future quantitative research might verify whether fulfillment of these needs relates more strongly to outcome for homeless youth than others. In addition, it is recommended that researchers pursue the putative effects of these variables using homeless-only populations.

In conclusion, this study introduces a new approach to studying homelessness by considering it as a diverse set of experiences that is experienced differently by individuals depending on their developmental stage and their background. By definition, of course, all who are homeless are living at least temporarily without an adequate and permanent residence. Nonetheless, homelessness is not necessarily a similar experience for the many who endure it (Bruder, 1997). This study provides support for the existence of heterogeneity both in antecedents and consequences of homelessness, at least as it relates to child academic performance. This study only examined a few basic variables—age, history of homelessness, and current residence—and these variables represent only the “tip of the iceberg” of the myriad processes and factors touching homeless children. There are, at this point, countless more variables to examine. The children themselves suggested at least two for researchers to consider: security, or the need to feel safe and loved, and control, or the need to have some power in one’s own life. Hopefully, researchers and others will hear their suggestions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Participant # _____

PLACES OF RESIDENCE

1. Where do you stay right now?
Who else stays there with you?
What's it like staying there?)
2. Tell me about some of the places you have stayed in the past. (*Where did you stay before now?*)
Can you remember any other places?)
3. What was your favorite place that you stayed? (*Why was that your favorite place?*)
4. What was the worst place you stayed? (*Why was that the worst?*)

SCHOOL AND PEERS

1. How do you like school? (*Tell me some of the things you like about school. Tell me some of the things you don't like about school.*)
2. Do you look forward to going to school in the morning? (*Why or why not?*)
3. Do you have friends at school? (*Tell me about your friends.*)
What kinds of things do you tell your friends?
Do you tell your friends where you stay?
4. Are there any kids at school who you don't like? (*Tell me about those kids.*)
5. What is your favorite subject (or class) at school? (*Why do you like that class?*)

6. Do you have a favorite teacher at school? *(Tell me about that teacher.)*
7. Are there any classes you don't like in school? *(Why don't you like that (those) class(es)?)*
8. Are there any teachers you don't like? *(Tell me about those teachers.)*
9. Are there any other grown-ups at school who you really like or dislike? *(Tell me about them.)*
10. Can you think of anything that would make school a better place for you?
11. What do you do after school? *(Tell me about it.)*
12. What do you wish you did after school?

SUCCESS AND SELF-ESTEEM

1. Do you know what "success" means? *(Tell me what success means to you.)*
2. When you think about your life right now, what makes you feel like a success?
3. When you think about your life in the future, what kind of success do you hope for?
(What do you picture for your life to be like when you are a grown-up?)
4. Do you feel good about yourself? *(Tell me some things that make you feel good about yourself. What do you like best about yourself?)*
5. Do you ever feel bad about yourself? *(Tell me some things that make you feel bad about yourself. If you could change anything about yourself, what would it be?)*
6. What do you like most about the people around you?
7. If you could change anything about the people around you, what would it be?

8. What do you like best about your life?
9. If you could change anything about your life, what would it be?
10. If you could tell me or the world anything about yourself that you wanted us to know, what would it be?

Appendix B

TEACHER'S REPORT FORM FOR AGES 5-18

Please print.

Your answers will be used to compare the pupil with other pupils whose teachers have completed similar forms. Please answer as well as you can, even if you lack full information. The information from this form will remain confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

PUPIL'S FULL NAME: _____

PUPIL'S SEX: 1 male 2 female PUPIL'S AGE: _____ years

ETHNIC GROUP OR RACE: _____

TODAY'S DATE: _____ GRADE IN SCHOOL: _____

NAME AND CITY OF SCHOOL:

I. How long have you known this pupil?

II. How well do you know him/her? 1 not well 2 moderately well 3 very well

III. How much time does he/she spend in your class per week?

IV. What kind of class or service is it? (Please be specific, e.g., regular 5th grade, 7th grade math, learning disabled, counseling, etc.)

V. Has he/she ever been referred for special class placement, services, or tutoring?

0 don't know 1 no 2 yes

VI. Has he/she repeated any grades?

0 don't know 1 no 2 yes - grades and reasons?

VII. Current school performance - list academic subjects and circle number that indicates pupil's performance for each subject:

<u>Academic subject</u>	<u>far below grade</u>	<u>somewhat below grade</u>	<u>at grade level</u>	<u>somewhat above grade</u>	<u>far above grade</u>
1. _____	1	2	3	4	5
2. _____	1	2	3	4	5
3. _____	1	2	3	4	5
4. _____	1	2	3	4	5
5. _____	1	2	3	4	5
6. _____	1	2	3	4	5

VIII. Compared to typical pupils of the same age:

	<u>much less</u>	<u>somewhat less</u>	<u>slightly less</u>	<u>about average</u>	<u>slightly more</u>	<u>somewhat more</u>	<u>much more</u>
1. how hard is he/she working?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. how appropriately is he/she behaving?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. how much is he/she learning?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. how happy is he/she?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7