



THE SOCIAL COST OF MOVING: ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION, MOVES AND RELATED SCHOOL CHANGES, AND MILITARY ADOLESCENT FRIENDSHIPS



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BACKGROUND

- Permanent change of station (PCS) moves, and related school changes, are common occurrences in military families
 - Military families experience, on average, a PCS move every 2–4 years (Huebner et al., doi:10.1542/peds.2018-3258)
- Frequent moves may negatively disrupt social relationships, which play a critical role in adolescence (Cotton,doi:10.1111/jcap.12161; Langenkamp et al., doi:10.1177/0044118X1351750; South and Haynie, doi:10.1333/sof.2004.0128)
- Despite military-connected adolescents having greater residential and school mobility than civilian peers, scant quantitative research has examined the impact of these moves
 - Prior qualitative research has identified making and maintaining friendships within new social environments as a challenge and source of stress (Bradshaw et al., doi:10.1080/02796015.2010.12087792; Thomas et al., doi:10.1007/s12310-022-09511-8)
- Further, there is a paucity of research examining the effects of multiple relocations and school changes—not only are military-connected adolescents more likely to experience relocation, but they are also more likely to experience *more frequent* relocations compared with their civilian counterparts (Ruff et al., Professional Counselor, 2014)

METHODS

Longitudinal data from the Millennium Cohort Study of Adolescent Resilience

- Baseline in 2022–23 (T1)
- Follow-up in 2024–25 (T2)
- N=3328 military-connected adolescents



Measures

PCS moves and PCS-related school changes

- Total lifetime frequency (0–20+) were self-reported by SM parents
- Recent moves and school changes between T1 and T2 were self-reported by adolescents

Table 1. Social Resources of Military Connected Adolescents

Peer relationships	Endorsing a best friend, peer relationship quality, having peers in the military, being bullied or being a bully
Romantic relationships	Currently dating, romantic relationship quality
School dynamics	School belonging, teacher quality
Overall self-reported impact of military	Negative impact of military on friendships, school belonging, and relationships with teachers

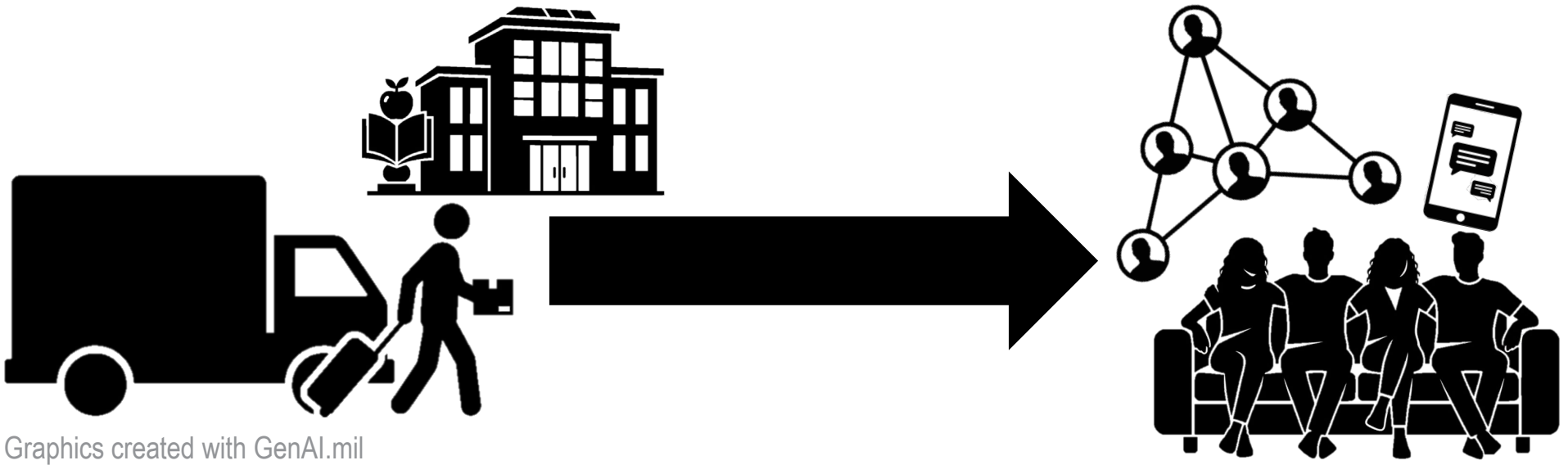
Covariates

- Adolescent sex, age, school type (private/public), Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) status, adverse childhood experiences, parental deployment history, service branch, service component, paygrade
- Recent move analyses further adjusted for the prior number of PCS moves and/or school changes

Analytic Strategy

- A series of multivariable linear or logistic regression analyses were conducted, dependent on the outcome variable, adjusting for all covariates

MAIN FINDINGS



Permanent Change of Station moves, and specifically the accompanying school changes, are highly disruptive to military adolescents' social ecosystem.

RESULTS

- On average, parents reported adolescents experienced **2.22 PCS moves** (SD=2.08) and **1.56 PCS-related school changes** (SD=1.82) at T1
- Approximately **36%** of adolescents from military families reported experiencing a recent PCS move or school change between T1 and T2

Table 2. Lifetime Frequency of PCS Moves and PCS-related School Changes and Adolescent Social Resources

	No. PCS moves			No. school changes	
	Categorical outcomes				
	N	OR	95% CIs	OR	95% CIs
Best friend endorsed	3313	.89	(.82, .97)	.87	(.79, .95)
Romantic relationship endorsed	3313	1.00	(.94, 1.07)	.98	(.92, 1.05)
Been a bully	3314	1.04	(.98, 1.11)	.96	(.90, 1.03)
Been bullied	3314	1.00	(.96, 1.05)	1.01	(.97, 1.06)
Any military peers	3312	1.10	(1.05, 1.15)	1.07	(1.02, 1.13)
	Continuous outcomes				
	N	b	p-value	b	p-value
Friendship quality	3127	-.07	<.001	-.05	.020
Romantic relationship quality	454	-.01	.793	-.04	.462
Teacher quality	3312	-.01	.667	-.04	.046
School belonging	3312	-.03	.235	-.05	.010
Military experiences score	3311	.33	<.001	.34	<.001

Note. Each effect size reported is from a separate model. All significant effects are bolded. All models adjusted for adolescent age, adolescent sex, MCS parent service branch, MCS service status, MCS parent pay grade, adolescent school type, EFMP status, MCS parent deployment history, and adverse childhood experiences.

Table 3. Recent PCS Moves and PCS-Related School Changes and Adolescent Social Resources

	Recent PCS move			Recent school change	
	Categorical outcomes				
	N	OR	95% CIs	OR	95% CIs
Best friend endorsed	1096	1.02	(.57, 1.83)	1.12	(.62, 2.05)
Romantic relationship endorsed	1094	1.04	(.74, 1.48)	.96	(.67, 1.37)
Been a bully	1090	.81	(.53, 1.26)	1.36	(.87, 2.10)
Been bullied	1090	.93	(.69, 1.26)	1.07	(.79, 1.44)
Any military peers	1100	1.03	(.75, 1.40)	1.13	(.82, 1.55)
	Continuous outcomes				
	N	b	p-value	b	p-value
Friendship quality	1030	-.06	.067	-.07	.030
Romantic relationship quality	221	.01	.910	-.01	.917
School belonging	1104	-.05	.144	-.08	.012

Note. Each effect size reported is from a separate model. All significant effects are bolded. All models adjusted for adolescent age, adolescent sex, MCS parent service branch, MCS service status, MCS parent pay grade, adolescent school type, EFMP status, MCS parent deployment history, adverse childhood experiences, total number of prior PCS moves/school changes.

DISCUSSION

- PCS-related school transitions—particularly their cumulative frequency and recency—impact peer relationships, school belonging, and teacher quality more than PCS moves alone
- Total frequency of moves had a greater impact than recent moves, which may be due to the resilience of military families to integrate into new social environments and rely on their communities for any individual move
 - The accumulation of risk from many moves may create more challenges
 - Alternative explanations could include the associated increased use of information and communication technologies (e.g., social media) or the need for more granular timing of survey assessments (e.g., more immediate effects)
- Social relationships outside of the family setting predominantly take place in school (e.g., classrooms, clubs, sports teams)
 - Changing schools may substantially disrupt these relationship processes for adolescents
- Friendships in adolescence typically develop over time through a combination of proximity (e.g., shared environment), similarity (e.g., interests), and individual characteristics (e.g., personality)

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Future policy and intervention may benefit from tailoring unique resources and interventions to support military-connected adolescents who have experienced multiple relocations and subsequent school changes in their lifetimes
- Living in military communities may help to provide an avenue for building new relationships for adolescents still adjusting to their changing environment after a PCS move
- Promoting programs (e.g., Purple Schools, Military Kids Connect) may help by providing avenues for adolescents to meet and engage with others who share similar experiences

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