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Does Offering Social Work Services Via The McKinney-Vento Program to Homeless Youth Improve Academic Functioning?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the McKinney-Vento Program is to assist homeless and unaccompanied students with enrollment and ensure the protection of their rights. Students who are identified by the McKinney-Vento Program receive services such as transportation, food stamps, clothes, assistance in documentation and case-management. This study examines the effectiveness of the services provided by the McKinney-Vento Program to homeless students through grades and attendance over the time period of the first six weeks and the fourth six weeks in the 2020-2021 school year. McKinney-Vento identified students from two schools, Clack and Craig Middle Schools, within the Abilene Independent School District. These students from Clack and Craig Middle Schools were used to create the sample ($N = 53$). Findings demonstrate that there was not a statistically significant change in grades or attendance from the first six weeks to the fourth six weeks. Furthermore, Craig had a statistically significant higher grade average than Clack for both the first and fourth six weeks. In addition, remote students had a statistically significant decreased grade average for the fourth six weeks than non-remote students. Implications for practice, policy, and research are addressed in this study.

Does Offering Social Work Services Via The McKinney-Vento Program to Homeless Youth Improve Academic Functioning?

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This thesis is dedicated to my mom, Misty Gee, who has been a constant supporter in my life and has shown me what it means to overcome. I love you till numbers end.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The word *homeless* has many definitions. Many people may think the word *homeless* simply means being unsheltered or living on the streets. However, there are many ways one can be considered homeless, (i.e., living with friends or family, living in a hotel, or a domestic violence shelter). The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) is a federal legislation that established the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. This provides students resources to succeed in school. These resources include but are not limited to clothes, Medicaid, food stamps, school supplies, and financial aid. McKinney-Vento supports unaccompanied youth as well. An *unaccompanied youth* is an individual who is not residing with a legal guardian or parent and is homeless. Even though the McKinney-Vento Program is a contributor to these students' lives, there are limited findings as to whether the McKinney-Vento Program is beneficial to the students it serves. In addition, there is a lack of evidence on how McKinney-Vento services correlate with academic functioning. Understanding how attendance and grades are represented in homeless youth and its relation to the McKinney-Vento Program can positively impact students and the school district.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact of the McKinney-Vento Program's services available to middle school students in the Abilene Independent School District (AISD). It is evident that the McKinney-Vento Program's services cannot

solve all academic issues within itself, but they can be supportive in improving one's academic functioning. Receiving services such as school supplies and clothing may effect an increase in homework completion, being present in school, and being able to ask for help. This study hopes to address the McKinney-Vento Program's impact on academic success and add significant findings to the lack of literature presented regarding the McKinney-Vento Program.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Homelessness in the United States became a social problem to the public in 1640 during the colonial period, the Civil War, and the Great Depression. However, the event that caused society to see homelessness as a social issue was the Vietnam War, which caused many white male veterans to come back to the United States homeless. In the late 1980s, the homeless population in the United States was the topic of concern for those living in urban and rural areas. In the 1990s, researchers focused primarily on the impact on homeless youth in the United States. In the year 2010, "77% of the U.S homeless population was found in large cities, but by 2013 more than 40% of America's homeless population lived in small counties, small cities, and remote rural communities" (Abdul Rahman et al., 2017, p.283).Due to the increase of the homeless population, policies were made to combat that issue. Today, 27 federal agencies are explicitly assisting the homeless population in the United States to battle this social issue.

The word *homeless* is defined by federal law as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (Abdul Rahman et al., 2017, p.284). The McKinney-Vento Act follows this definition of homelessness and includes youth who are sharing housing with another household or persons or living in motels, trailer parks, tents, public spaces, and emergency shelters. In terms of age requirements, every federal agency has an individual age limit or range to be considered in specific homeless youth programs, varying from 0-17, 5-12, until the ages of 18 or 21, or age 24 and younger.

The Terminology of Homeless Youth

In any population, there will be sub-groups to help categorize differing experiences within that group. For homeless youth, five different sub-populations shape homeless youth as a whole. *Throwaways* are youth who have been forced by their parents to leave their residence; *runaways* are youth who leave their residence without informing their parents and reside on the streets for a prolonged period; *systems youth* are those who have either aged out or ran away from foster care or the juvenile system; *street youth* are individuals who are typically sleeping in public spaces such as under a bridge, tents, and abandoned buildings (Thompson et al., 2010). Lastly are those who are *double homeless.* In a *double homelessness* situation*,* the state authorities remove the youth from their homes and place them into agencies; however, the youth will run away from the agencies with which the state has placed them, causing the youth to be categorized as double homeless (Thompson et al., 2010). The McKinney-Vento Act has four categories that are used to identify homeless youth in school districts: shelters, doubled-up (i.e., living with friends or family), unsheltered (i.e., living in an RV, trailer, or car), and living in a motel or hotel.

What Causes Homelessness

Circumstances that can cause homelessness include family conflict, financial adversity, and external factors such as physical health. Daily stressors like having limited access to food and shelter can create constant tension within the family. Homeless youth are at a higher risk of having more significant depression levels through these specific stressors (Hodgson et al., 2013). It is difficult to live in an adequate residence while working a low-wage job that barely satisfies the rent. The uncertainty of knowing if one's

family can stay at their residence for another month can cause stress, and if the family becomes evicted, it is often not the parents' fault. Factors such as losing a family member who was the primary breadwinner, losing a job, or illness can cause being financially unstable. More extreme reasons for losing one's home include natural disasters or abuse from a family member or partner.

Race, Ethnicity, and Sex

Persons of color, specifically African Americans, make up 60% of the United States' homeless population (Abdul Rahman et al., 2017). Sexual minorities (LGBTQIA+) are another high percentage of homeless youth, making up 22.4 to 40% of the homeless population (Flentje et al., 2016). Sexual minorities are at higher risk of being exposed to physical, mental health, and substance issues than their heterosexual equivalents (Flentje et al., 2016). The majority of homeless families consist of a single parent who may have a substance addiction, mental health disorders, and/or physical illness and are at a disadvantage in receiving services (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). Single parents of homeless youth are less likely to have a high school diploma or adequate employment (Windsor & Thompson, 2008).

Most Common Housing

Most homeless families are *doubled-up,* which means the family resides with another household or persons due to hardship. Being doubled-up is the most accessible option because it may be more affordable for the family to pay a percentage of the rent. However, blending two different households may cause conflict. Each family may have differing expectations, cultural norms, and disciplinary styles. Space is mostly limited in a house where there are typically two to three bedrooms, and adding other bodies can

cause strain between the two families regarding privacy. With the limited capacity in the home during a recent pandemic (COVID-19), the spread of the virus will likely be heightened for those who are doubling up due to the shared space and additional people in the home (Benavides & Nukpezah, 2020).

McKinney-Vento Act: Services and Barriers

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (now known as the McKinney-Vento Act) was first introduced on December 28, 1987. The purpose of the act was to protect homeless students' rights and guarantee that they have the same levels of opportunity as their non-homeless peers to succeed in school (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). During the year 2001, the McKinney-Vento Act was reauthorized to be incorporated into the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and created a concrete definition of who is considered homeless. As of now, the McKinney-Vento Program has nine titles, including Title VII, that authorizes the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program. The EHCY was the first federal acknowledgment of homelessness. EHCY also prohibits schools from excluding homeless students simply because of their homeless status (Crook, 2015). The McKinney-Vento Act aims to enforce that schools will immediately enroll homeless students without any proof of address, school records, or vaccination records. The act also helps homeless students access educational services, such as those designed for gifted and talented students, classes for English language learners, and vocational programs (Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003).

Funding

McKinney-Vento Programs receive a minimum of $150,000 yearly (as of 2003) from the state and other finances through grants and donations (Jozefowicz-Simbeni &

Israel, 2006). States with an allotment of $150,000 are able to spend half of their funds for state-level activities and must give 75% of their allowance to the local education agencies (LEA) (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). However, funding is not always distributed evenly. Only individual school districts receive competitive funding or subgrants due to the number of schools within their radius. Every school district has to employ a homeless liaison. With the yearly increase of homeless youth, the state and federal government's funding is not enough to carry out all needed resources. In 2008, about $45.93 is spent per homeless student, and if there is not enough funding, it is unlikely that every student will have access to certain services (Crook, 2015).

McKinney-Vento Staff

Every McKinney-Vento Program requires an "Office of Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and a state coordinator whose job is to develop and carry out the state's McKinney-Vento plan and to collect information on the problems faced by homeless students" (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006, p. 41). Homeless liaisons are those responsible for helping with student registration and ensuring their rights. Liaisons' main priority is to advocate for homeless students and unaccompanied youth and their rights to receive equal opportunities in school and education, as well as collecting vital information from the schools they serve and implementing services through their funds.

McKinney-Vento Acts Services for Unaccompanied Youth

In addition to assisting homeless students, the McKinney-Vento Program assists unaccompanied students in allowing them to enroll without an adult caregiver or a legal guardian (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017). McKinney-Vento staff,

primarily local liaisons, ensure that unaccompanied and homeless students have discounted fee waivers for college applications. Many universities require the scores of the Scholastic Aptitude Test and/or American College Test in their application process. McKinney-Vento staff also assist students in applying for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) and in applying for need/merit scholarships that align with their status. To ensure that the student will stay at their school of origin (the school in which the student was last enrolled or the school attended when they were permanently housed), the students will have transportation to and from school regardless of their location.

Barriers

As homeless liaisons advocate for students through collaboration with school staff, poor service coordination and staff availability are often barriers that students face. School administrators will not always follow policy or have things ready in a timely manner. Within the McKinney-Vento Program, there can be difficulties such as identifying homeless students. Parents may provide little information on what their family needs or their living situation. Homeless liaisons may not be aware of the McKinney-Vento Act or the amount of responsibility their position holds (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). At times, school district transportation departments are underfunded and do not have enough secondary buses or vans for homeless students living outside the radius of where the regular school bus can pick them up (Canfield & Teasley, 2015). Due to this, the McKinney-Vento homeless liaison may have to complete a specific task regarding transportation by themselves without outside assistance.

Assumptions and Barriers for Homeless Youth

Homeless youth face many obstacles due to their current situation and have certain disadvantages. The lack of basic needs, documentation, and transportation can be an everyday struggle for homeless students (Windsor & Thompson, 2008). Homeless youth are twice as likely than their housed peers to have poorer physical health and three times as likely to have acute health issues, and they also have higher rates of educational difficulties (Abdul Rahman et al., 2017). As stated in Canfield's (2014) research, "The National Center of Family Homeless in 2009, reported that the estimated graduation rate for high school homeless students is less than 25% and that only 11.4% of high school students experiencing homelessness are proficient in math, and reading" (p.166). Limited access to personal hygiene, water, and shelter are a few examples of how physical health can be diminished. Homeless youth, at times, rely on fast foods or low-quality foods that are high in sugar, fat, and salt. Low-quality foods cause long-lasting effects to the body, such as heart disease, obesity, and diabetes (Abdul Rahman et al., 2017).

Homeless students are more likely to have depressive symptoms due to limited ways to cope with the unfortunate events in their lives (Thompson et al., 2010). Homeless youth are also at high risk for suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Thompson et al., 2010). Unfortunately, homeless youth do not seek mental health support due to the lack of trust and the fear of judgment between the student and the provider (Winiarski et al., 2020). Additionally, homeless youth are cautious that providers will not believe their symptoms or circumstances and thus will not receive the same care level as someone who is housed. Youth may also focus on necessary things, such as employment, housing, food, and clothing, instead of their mental health (Winiarski et al., 2020).

The fear of identifying oneself as homeless to people of higher authority can sometimes affect how often one will reach out for services (Winiarski et al., 2020). Homeless students fear that exposing themselves as someone who fits the category of being homeless can result in a report to Child Protective Services (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017). Discussing the circumstances that led the student's family to be homeless to service providers can put the student in a vulnerable position, and there may be fear of being treated differently by other students and school staff if others found out. School officials may not view the student as homeless due to the popular assumption that living on the street makes a person homeless. Homeless youth who see themselves as independent, fear stigmatization, and/or feel that survival is the only thing on which they should focus may not feel the need to receive mental health services (Hughes et al., 2010). Parents of homeless youth also fear that providers will not approve their homeless status. In addition, parents may deny services because they do not want to seem needy or be taken advantage of based on their status.

Mental Health

The World Health Organization describes mental health as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stressors of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to her or his community" (Stewart & Townley, 2019). Not knowing how to effectively cope with stressors can lead to depression and anxiety. Generally, youth with higher self-regulation have fewer signs of depression and anxiety, while those with lower self-regulation have more depression and anxiety symptoms. However, homeless youth are four times as likely to develop a mental disorder, and the rate for depression is 16% to 54% compared

to the general youth ages 18 to 24 (National HCH Council, 2015). The main cause for depression and anxiety within homeless youth is family dysfunction, such as family conflict, lack of parental supervision, and abuse (National HCH Council, 2015). Other factors include lack of social support, time spent homeless, and the fear of stigma. The most common mental disorders besides depression and anxiety within homeless youth are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Hodgson et al., 2013).

Youth Development

Living in shelters, on the streets, or at someone else's house are contributors to the onset of depression in a youth's development. The stressors of everyday life while being homeless can worsen their ability to manage stressful situations and may require a longer time for students to seek help. Generalized anxiety disorder in adolescents is common in this life cycle stage and is outgrown typically at age 24. During the puberty stage of development, especially within the female sex, depression has a greater prevalence (Rapee et al., 2019). Worrying about having their status exposed to others without their consent may increase negative associations with receiving services and prevent emotional processing. As the adolescent brain develops, there will likely be poor decision-making, thoughtless behaviors, and emotional outbursts of expression. "The first cognitive ability is the capacity to anticipate future events . . . the second cognitive ability is the capacity to go beyond what is directly observable and elaborate on catastrophic possibilities" (Ellis & Hudson, 2010, p.154). There is a lack of literature focusing on the cognitive ability of homeless youth; the literature represented in this study showcase that homeless youth have more barriers than their housed peers in brain development.

Homeless Youth and Poor Youth

Poor youths are different from homeless youth due to the accessibility of obtaining a home. Poor youth are more likely to be "house poor," which means their family make just enough to cover the rent. Homeless youth are at another disadvantage of having a higher probability of screening for a mental disorder, specifically an 80% increased chance compared to poor youth (Marcal, 2017). Living in unstable environments like homeless shelters interferes with family dynamics, routine and child development, and parental authority (Marcal, 2017). Once returned to stable housing, homeless youth still have difficulty with mental health due to the many previous encounters with different systems and services.

Suicide Ideation and Attempt

With high levels of depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts are likely to happen if the individuals are not supported. Homeless youth are in this category at a higher rate than their general housed peers. A literature review by Edidin et. al. (2012) reported that "between 40% and 80% of youth experiencing homelessness had suicidal ideation and between 23% and 67% had made at least one suicide attempt" (Perlman et al., 2014, p 363). Pre-existing family disputes and parental neglect contribute to suicidal ideation and attempt.

School Impact and Homeless Youth Academic Difficulties

Schools have a role in ensuring that homeless students receive the same educational opportunities as their housed peers. Schools are to implement different interventions within the campus and in response to student needs. Homeless students are not always aware of the services schools provide to help students succeed in school. In

2003, the federal government started to make states compile academic achievement data on homeless students to see if school services are improving students' overall performance (Hendricks & Barkley, 2012). Federal policy also requires schools to collaborate with and openly communicate with homeless families to provide them information about their rights and their services. Schools are meant to provide a safe and supporting climate for students. The McKinney-Vento Act is dependent on the school's climate to relieve social barriers for homeless students to have a trusting relationship with school staff (Moore et al., 2018). Unfortunately, some school districts are not as welcoming to homeless students and their families.

Academic Difficulties

Previous research has demonstrated that homeless youth experience higher drop-out rates, failed grades, and behavioral problems. Primary barriers such as lack of staff competency of homeless youth, homework completion within homeless students, and basic needs contribute to low academic performance and drop-out. Homeless students "have lower academic achievement above the effects of sex, ethnicity, and English Language Learner (ELL) status" (Low et al., 2017, p. 801). Students who are doubled up are more likely to have a lower grade point average and are less likely to graduate on time. The lack of adequate support and services makes it difficult for homeless youth to achieve academic success in schools due to factors such as behavioral problems that lead to suspension and expulsion. These disciplinary acts put homeless students more at risk for academic failure because they are not at school and may not have the tools at their disposal.

Attendance

The lack of having accessible transportation or having to use abnormal routes (i.e., taking multiple busses) to reach the school grounds can be a contributor to the number of times a homeless student is absent. These absences contribute to low academic performance within homeless students, mainly in reading and mathematics (Stone & Uretsky, 2016). The primary geographic areas where the most homeless youth have trouble with school mobility to achieve positive academic performance are within large urban school districts compared to the rural areas (Fantuzzo et al., 2012).

Californian Study of Homeless Youth Attendance

Dr. Susan Stone, an associate professor from the University of Berkeley in California, and Mathew Uretsky, a doctoral student at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, conducted a study of homeless youth attendance rates in urban California. The researchers used samples from elementary, middle, and high school students who were identified as homeless by the McKinney-Vento Act. A total of 2,618 students within the eleven schools in the urban Californian district were included in the study. McKinney-Vento provided de-identifiable secondary data of the homeless students from the school years 2007-2008 and 2010-2012. Student variables used were socioeconomic, previous school performance, and placement characteristics.

Outcomes and Results in the Californian Study of Homeless Youth Attendance

The initial outcome consisted of the days the students were absent, the number of times they were suspended, and if they were missing math and reading scores. The secondary outcome consisted of whether the students were eligible for their test to be

scored and to report to determine if they have achieved academic success (Stone & Uretsky, 2016).

The students included in the study in grades six to eight and nine to eleven were primarily those of Latinx and/or Asian Pacific Island or English Language Learners. Absenteeism and suspensions were associated with poorer outcomes with the exception of below-basic performance on English/language arts tests (Stone & Uretsky, 2016). The researchers noted that "student-level absenteeism did not play a significant role in the odds that a student would score below basic in English/language arts" (Stone & Uretsky, 2016, p. 623). It was also noted that individual differences in students that are based on their skill levels in a particular subject area are likely to require personalized interventions.

Summary

McKinney-Vento is influential when it comes to helping homeless students succeed, but there is little published information of how the act and program affect its student's academics by providing certain needs. There is also a lack of awareness at the local level and in the homeless population about the McKinney-Vento Act and program. Collaboration between homeless liaisons and school staff, primarily school social workers and school counselors, is needed to provide all-around services to the students and to identify homeless students better (Sulkowski & Michael, 2014). Mental health professionals, including school counselors, need to consider the many barriers to homeless students and the ways their circumstances affect their well-being. With all the services given, the most needed services are affordable housing, which will improve academic performance and decrease homeless youth numbers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study used a within-groups, repeated measures design to evaluate the effectiveness of McKinney-Vento services on grades and absences over a five-month period. This study was conducted within the Abilene Independent School District and included Clack and Craig Middle Schools during the 2020-2021 school year. The research question was: does offering social work services via McKinney-Vento to homeless youth improve academic functioning? Academic functioning was operationally defined as: 1) the average six-week grade for each student, and 2) the number of absences for each student for each six-week period.

The principal investigator used secondary data collected by the AISD McKinney-Vento social worker. Specifically, the social worker retrieved attendance and grades from the school record system. In addition to grades and attendance, grade level, campus, sex, remote status, and unaccompanied status were recorded. All paper documents were shredded after data were recorded electronically. After three years, the data documents will be permanently be deleted. All personal identifiers were removed from this data prior to delivery to the principal investigator. To differentiate records, an integer (e.g., 1,2,3,4, etc.) was used instead of a name or student ID. While additional demographic information was collected to enrich this research, the number of participants (i.e., $N > 50$) made impossible the task of re-identifying participants. All data were tabulated and reported in aggregate.

IRB Application

This research was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Abilene Christian University (see Appendix for the approval letter).

Sample

Abilene Independent School District has a total of 24 schools; however, only Clack and Craig Middle Schools participated in this study. Students who were identified as homeless or unaccompanied by the McKinney-Vento Program were eligible to be in the study. The total number of participants between both campuses was 53. The number of participants at Clack was 18, while Craig had 35.

Safety

Since the study did not require face-to-face interactions with students from Clack or Craig Middle Schools, there is minimal to no risk. The principal investigator had routine face-to-face meetings with the McKinney-Vento Social Worker since late August of 2020. The principal investigator and the social worker were required to use hand sanitizer before entering the McKinney-Vento office and wore a CDC-approved mask at all times due to COVID-19 regulations. Before the principal investigator entered AISD's offices, she was required to do a daily health check made by AISD that pertains to symptom screening. If either the social worker or the principal investigator tested positive for COVID-19 or had been in contact with an individual with COVID-19, they were required by AISD to be isolated. Neither the principal investigator nor the McKinney-Vento social worker tested positive for COVID-19 for the entirety of the study. To ensure safety during the study, both parties abided by the CDC requirements (i.e., staying six feet apart, wearing a mask at all times, and cleaning surface areas with disinfectant). Due

to the principal investigator's regular face-to-face meetings with McKinney-Vento staff and participants, having the study be conducted face-to-face did not impose more than the normal risk.

Confidentiality

The principal risk associated with this study is breach of confidentiality. To minimize that risk, data was collected and stored in a password-protected computer file (e.g., Google Sheets and Excel). All data are anonymous, and there is no way to re-identify participants if there is a data breach.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using IBM SPSS statistical software to determine whether student attendance and grades improved from the first six weeks to the fourth six weeks of the school year. This analysis allowed the principal investigator to determine whether the student's attendance and grades improved during the interval between the first six weeks and the fourth six weeks. Specifically, the SPSS tests whether a statistically significant change occurred between the first six weeks reporting period to the last day of measurements of the fourth six weeks.

Demographics

The specific demographics used in this study are remote students, unaccompanied students, sex, grade level, and school campus. Remote students are those who virtually attend class through Zoom or Google Classroom.

Variables

The independent variable was the time period of the first six weeks before the students received McKinney-Vento services and the fourth six weeks after they received

services. The Independent variable specifically was the interval between the grade reporting period. The dependent variable will be grades and attendance itself. Grades was presented in averages of all eight classes with a varying range from 0-100, with 69 and under being considered failing while 70 and above was considered passing. Attendance was represented by the student being absent an entire school day.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of study participants. The table shows that participants were equally distributed across grade levels. There were five more males in the study group than there were females. Approximately two-thirds of the study participants came from Craig Middle School.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Grade		
6	18	34.0
7	18	34.0
8	17	32.0
Total	53	100.0
Sex		
F	24	45.3
M	29	54.7
Total	53	100.0
Campus		
Clack	18	34
Craig	35	66
Total	53	100

Paired-samples *t*-tests were used to evaluate whether there was a statistically significant change between the first measurement (i.e., first six weeks) and the second measurement (i.e., second six weeks). As evident by Table 2, there was not a statistically significant difference in grades or attendance between the first and fourth six weeks. Overall grades decreased, while absences increased from the first six weeks report to the fourth six-week report. However, these results were not statistically significant. While

grade averages were very similar for the periods reported, the average number of absences increased by a little more than one day (i.e., from 1.74 to 2.94). Not shown in the table were six students who had fourth week averages below 70 and four participants with more than 10 absences in the fourth six weeks. Not presented in the table are the median values which were 86.8 for the first six weeks and 87.4 for the fourth six weeks. The medians for the for the absences for the first six weeks and fourth six weeks were 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 2

Paired Sample of Comparisons of Averages and Absences at First and Fourth Six Weeks

	Variable	Mean	N	SD	SE	*p*
Pair 1	Average for First Six Weeks	83.38	53.00	11.75	1.61	
	Averages for Fourth Six Weeks	83.07	53.00	11.80	1.62	.838
Pair 2	Absences for First Six Weeks	1.74	53.00	2.57	0.35	
	Absences for Fourth Six Weeks	2.94	53.00	5.05	0.69	.032*

*$p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 3 presents the means of grade averages and absences by grade. There seems to be a clear difference between the different grade levels in both middle schools; however, these differences were not statistically significant. Grade six's mean for grade averages were higher and absences were lower than grades seven and eight. Grade eight had the lowest first six weeks grades but had the biggest increase in grades. Grade seven had the least improved grades at the first six weeks compared to grade seven and eight. There was not much of a difference between the number of participants by each grade.

Table 3

Means of Grade Averages and Absences by Grade

		Average		Absences	
Grade		First	Fourth	First	Fourth
6	Mean	85.86	87.54	0.89	1.28
	n	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00
	Std. Deviation	8.22	4.75	1.37	1.13
7	Mean	85.06	80.03	2.61	4.11
	n	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00
	Std. Deviation	8.13	12.50	3.33	6.79
8	Mean	78.99	81.56	1.71	3.47
	n	17.00	17.00	17.00	17.00
	Std. Deviation	16.61	15.08	2.47	5.26
Total	Mean	83.38	83.07	1.74	2.94
	N	53.00	53.00	53.00	53.00
	Std. Deviation	11.75	11.80	2.57	5.05

As Table 4 shows, there was not a substantial difference between males and females on grades. Females had a slightly higher mean score at both the first and fourth measurement periods. Males showed a slight increase in absences than did females though both showed increases from the first to the fourth six weeks. However, these results were not statistically significant.

Table 5 presents means for grades and absences by school. As the table indicates, Craig Middle School had significantly higher ($p < .05$) grades overall than did Clack Middle School. This difference was true for both the first six weeks and the fourth weeks measurements. Craig Middle School showed a slight decline in average grades from the first six weeks to the fourth six weeks to what they were at the first six weeks. While absences increased, from first to fourth six weeks, for both schools, absences for Clack Middle School were higher, though not significantly, than they were for Craig.

Table 4

Means of Grade Averages and Absences by Sex

		Average		Absences	
Sex		First	Fourth	First	Fourth
F	Mean	84.63	83.76	1.63	3.04
	n	24.00	24.00	24.00	24.00
	Std. Deviation	12.43	11.66	2.53	5.35
M	Mean	82.36	82.50	1.83	2.86
	n	29.00	29.00	29.00	29.00
	Std. Deviation	11.27	12.10	2.65	4.88
Total	Mean	83.38	83.07	1.74	2.94
	N	53.00	53.00	53.00	53.00
	Std. Deviation	11.75	11.80	2.57	5.05

Table 5

Means of Grade Averages and Absences by Campus

		Average		Absences	
Campus		First	Fourth	First	Fourth
Clack	Mean	**77.45***	**77.67****	2.67	3.94
	n	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00
	Std. Deviation	11.31	13.11	3.13	6.00
Craig	Mean	**86.44***	**85.85****	1.26	2.43
	n	35.00	35.00	35.00	35.00
	Std. Deviation	10.91	10.18	2.13	4.50
Total	Mean	83.38	83.07	1.74	2.94
	N	53.00	53.00	53.00	53.00
	Std. Deviation	11.75	11.80	2.57	5.05

*Average for First Six Weeks by Campus, F 1,51 = 7.887, $p = .007$
**Average for Fourth Six Weeks by Campus, F 1,51 = 6.287, $p = .015$

As Table 6 indicates, there was a fairly large difference between the remote and non-remote students' average grades. In fact, there was more than a 10-point difference between these two groups at the fourth six weeks measurement. Though this difference was not hypothesized, the sharp, statistically significant difference in means between remote and non-remote students at the fourth six weeks measurement is worth noting.

However, the small number of remote students (n = 7) is also worth considering in interpretation of these results.

Table 6

Means of Grade Averages and Absences by Remote Status

		Average		Absences	
Remote		First	Fourth	First	Fourth
N	Mean	84.18	**85.76***	**1.43****	2.59
	n	46.00	46.00	46.00	46.00
	Std. Deviation	11.88	8.53	2.34	4.39
Y	Mean	78.18	**65.39***	**3.71****	5.29
	n	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
	Std. Deviation	10.06	15.54	3.30	8.34
Total	Mean	83.38	83.07	1.74	2.94
	N	53.00	53.00	53.00	53.00
	Std. Deviation	11.75	11.80	2.57	5.05

*F (1,51) = 27.22, p = .000; F (1, 51) = 5.15, p = .028

Table 7 presents average grades and average absences for unaccompanied and accompanied youth. Accompanied participants are labeled “N” and unaccompanied participants are labeled as “Y”. As Table 7 indicates, the average grade for unaccompanied youth increased by approximately three percentage points from the first six weeks to the fourth six weeks. Average absences rose for accompanied youth, but declined slightly for unaccompanied youth. However, these differences were not statistically significant and can be attributable to normal variation.

Table 7

Means of Grade Averages and Absences by Unaccompanied Status

		Average		Absences	
Unaccompanied		First	Fourth	First	Fourth
N	Mean	84.61	83.04	1.50	3.29
	n	38.00	38.00	38.00	38.00
	Std. Deviation	11.53	11.89	2.53	5.56
Y	Mean	80.28	83.14	2.33	2.07
	n	15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00
	Std. Deviation	12.12	12.00	2.66	3.45
Total	Mean	83.38	83.07	1.74	2.94
	N	53.00	53.00	53.00	53.00
	Std. Deviation	11.75	11.80	2.57	5.05

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine whether offering social work services via McKinney-Vento to homeless youth improves academic functioning. From the data presented, social work services such as case management do not improve academic functioning within homeless youth as hypothesized. There was not a significant increase in grades or decrease in attendance from the first six weeks to the fourth six weeks. However, there was not a significant decrease in grade averages either, indicating that grade averages for the two campuses remained stable. The averages were considered passing (≥ 70), and absences were fairly low.

One significant difference was observed was between the two campuses. Craig Middle School grade averages were approximately eight percentage points higher than Clack Middle School. This was true at both the first six weeks and at the fourth six weeks measurements. The reason for this difference between campuses is unknown. Clack had the fewest number of participants (n = 18 versus 35 at Craig) but had a greater overall grade and attendance average. Students at both schools had meetings with a social work intern once a month. Therefore, it is unlikely that the amount of McKinney-Vento services explains this difference.

Results of this study were similar to another research study conducted in a large Northwestern city by Tobin (2016), which focused on how attendance affects homeless elementary students' academic achievement. The sample of homeless students was taken

from two districts within the city and areas of the city that were not impoverished during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009school years. The researchers looked at homeless students who were homeless for the duration of both school years to see if there was a correlation between each school year. In the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years, attendance was shown to have little interference with academic achievement. There was a slight increase of absences between the 2007-2008 school year and the 2008-2009 school year, but the difference was not statistically significant. The results of this study show a similarity to the current study in the lack of statistical significance between absences in the first six weeks and the fourth six week.

Remote students did significantly worse than did not remote students on grade averages. Noticeably, the fourth six weeks average for remote students (i.e., 65.4) was failing. Though the number of absences observed for remote students seemed higher than did absences for non-remote students, this number was not statistically significant. The participants who were remote (n = 7) were not physically on campus but still received social work services via telephone. Therefore, it does not seem likely that differences in the quantity of hours of social work services can explain this difference. Likely, a number of variables associated with being remote (e.g., high potential for distraction, lack of monitoring, etc.) led to this group's lower grade averages.

Limitations

There were limitations in this study. Of the 87 students in the AISD McKinney-Vento Program, 34 of those were excluded from the total number of subjects used for this study (N = 53). Those 34 students were excluded from the sample due to the time frame in which they began receiving services. In order to participate in the study, students had

to be identified during the second six weeks to show their initial grades from the first six weeks before they received services. Students that were excluded started receiving services during the third, fourth, or fifth six weeks of school. This is a limitation, as the sample size did not include all students in enrolled in the McKinney-Vento Program. It should be noted that some of the participants may have received services during the previous school year (2019 – 2020) due to their homeless status. Students' interaction with the McKinney-Vento Program in previous school years was not accounted for in this study, which may have had an impact on the outcomes of grades and attendance.

The way in which attendance data were measured could possibly cause attendance data to be inaccurate. State reported absences were gathered for this study. State reported absences are only reported during second period and a continued absence from second to eighth period is considered as missing a full day of school. First period attendance is not shown by the state when the first period teacher reports that the student absent. On the account of the state not including first period, there is a possibility that a student could have been present during first period but got called out of school during second period and marked as absent.

The impact of COVID-19 presents another limitation to this study as this event has greatly affected grades and attendance. Abilene Independent School District requires students to quarantine for ten days, which can contribute to an increase number of absences and a decrease in grades.

Implications for Practice

The McKinney-Vento Program primarily focuses on enrollment, basic needs (i.e., clothing, food stamps, Medicaid, and school supplies), and resources for unaccompanied and homeless youth. Thus, the focus on academic achievement is not as prioritized compared to other services the McKinney-Vento Program offers.

Overall, the results showed that grades and attendance remain relatively stable throughout much of the school year (e.g., from the first six weeks through the fourth six weeks). Overall grade averages were in the low 80s, suggesting that most program participants were making satisfactory grades. Absenteeism remained relatively low with the average number of absences being 1.7 for the first six weeks and 2.9 for the fourth six weeks. Interestingly, grades were significantly higher at Craig Middle School for both the first and fourth six weeks. In sum, while there is room for improvement in averages, McKinney-Vento participants are not failing and are attending most of their classes.

These results support the continued use of school personnel, in-school organizations, and outside resources that focus on academics and attendance. Although grades and attendance were satisfactory, increasing the use of such resources and services can be a feasible way to increase the stability of grades and attendance. In addition, developing tutoring programs for program participants may help ensure that McKinney-Vento participants continue to pass courses.

Implications for Policy

Because the results of this study were mostly favorable, this study does not imply that wide-sweeping policy changes are necessary. However, program administrators can still look for ways to improve those services provided. As mentioned above, offering

tutoring services to program participants could be a mechanism for further improving grade averages and decreasing absences.

School districts can incorporate more social workers in schools and in the administration to better identify and service homeless students and other underserved students (Alvarez et al., 2013). Currently, there is not a policy in place that specifies a minimum number of hours of case-management. Due to the dearth of social workers employed by the McKinney-Vento Program in this school district, students only receive case-management services on a monthly basis. Logically, increasing the number of social workers employed to work in the McKinney-Vento Program will increase the number of case management hours social workers can provide. Having more social workers present will increase time for case-management. Increased case-management services may help to combat any barriers that the homeless students may encounter (Zlotnick et al., 2012).

Implications for Research

This study only evaluated two schools in a district with twenty-four campuses. In addition, the study only obtained and analyzed absences and grade averages for a part of the academic year. This research could be improved by obtaining a larger sample of program participants and using a longer time frame. Ideally, future research would collect data that represents an entire academic year or multiple academic years. Collecting data from numerous sites across multiple academic years would allow program administrators to gain a clearer picture of the program's efficacy across multiple campuses.

The study did not take into account certain demographic variables (e.g., such as whether the participants were in special education, have repeated a grade level, or were non-English speakers). Further research should collect and analyze the impact of such

demographic variables to help program administrators understand how such variables may vary in important ways.

A noticeable finding in the study was that participants at Craig Middle School had significantly higher grades for both the first and fourth six weeks. Further research on why Craig did significantly better than Clack should be explored. There may be important differences at Craig that could be useful in understanding how to better serve participants at Clack. One such difference could be socio-economic status.

Further research that could strengthen the study may include an examination of the impact of COVID-19 and its effect on attendance and grades. COVID-19 likely affected the participants of this study in numerous ways. Perhaps variables linked to COVID-19 could explain the observed difference between the grade averages of Clack and Craig Middle Schools.

An additional measure that would strengthen this study is comparing a sample of homeless students who have not been serviced with a sample of homeless students who have received services. The addition of having a control group of homeless students who do not receive services will comprehensively address the question on how the use of social work services contribute to homeless students' academic functioning. Unfortunately, conducting such a study will have unethical considerations due to the act of denying services to a vulnerable population.

Although unaccompanied youth were not the primary focus of this study, further research is recommended based on the results of this study. Though the number of unaccompanied participants was small, they had an overall higher average for grades and a lower average of absences compared to their accompanied peers. Future research could

help determine whether these findings are unique to this sample, or if there is something about unaccompanied youth that predisposes them to perform better academically than accompanied youth.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, parents and students were offered the opportunity to participate in school using internet technology instead of being physically present. How variables associated with the COVID-19 pandemic affected these students is unknown. Possibly, being a remote student caused a higher level of distraction than was experienced by those who physically attended classes. Such distractions could have caused remote learners to forget to log into class on time. These variables and others can possibly explain why remote students did poorly compared to their physically present peers.

Conclusion

Homeless youth have multiple barriers facing them such as not having necessary transportation, school materials, or the support from school staff needed to thrive academically. The McKinney-Vento Program provides support to homeless youth by assisting with enrollment, waving fees for needed documentation, and providing case management services. “The McKinney-Vento program is designed to address the problems that homeless children and youth have faced in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 2). This study examined the McKinney-Vento Program’s impact on homeless students’ grades and attendance based on the time frame they received services.

Students identified as homeless at Clack and Craig Middle Schools, as a group, had passing grades and stable attendance. Clack had a lower grade average than Craig but

had a larger increase in grades. Although remote students were not the main focus of this study, remote students were found to have statistically significant lower grade averages and more absences than students who attend in-person classes. This study showed that participants in the McKinney-Vento Program, in the two schools studied, are attending school and are maintaining passing grades.

Looking forward, school administration can continue to incorporate services from in-school and outside organizations, such as tutoring to be a continued support for homeless students. Services that focus primarily on grades can continue the elongation of maintaining passing grades in school. School districts can increase funding for more social workers, specifically in the McKinney-Vento Program, to increase the level of case-management given to the student to receive additional services. Having the support of school administrators, school districts, and the McKinney-Vento Program will help homeless students to succeed in schools.

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APPENDIX

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

January 22, 2021

Ari Gee
Department of Social Work
ACU P.O. Box 27866
Abilene Christian University

Dear Ari,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled
"Does offering Social Work Service via Mckinney-Vento To Homeless Youth Improve Academic Functioning",

(IRB# 21-009)is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects as:
☐ Non-research, and
☑ Non-human research
Based on:
The research does not involve interaction or intervention with living individuals, and the information being collected is not individually identifiable [45 CFR 46.102(f)(2)]

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs