

**THE PERCEPTIONS OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS ON THE IMPACT OF
RELOCATION ON THEIR ADJUSTMENT AT UNIVERSITY – A
RELOCATION STUDY.**

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DEDICATION

The thesis is dedicated to all the first year students, families of these students who are currently experiencing the challenges of relocation.

Included in this group are students who are progressing in their academics and may be witnessing or forgotten the challenges that they have gone through during their first year.

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- To my friends who supported me through the research.
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ABSTRACT

The research aims to establish the perceived impact of relocation on first year student's ability to cope with academic demands at University.

The research intends to answer the following questions: How do first year students perceive their adjustment at University? Has the relocation impacted on the students functioning on any level? For example: -Academically, Emotionally, Physically and Socially.

A large number of young adults relocate due to the need to pursue their chosen careers at the University. However, this happens at a time in their life when there is a lot of turmoil around social and individual identity and the pressures from society to achieve, including pressures to secure their future. This happens independently from parents and relevant social ties when students study away from home.

A qualitative methodology was used for the research. The sample consisted of 10 Black female post matric first year students at University. The age range of participants was between 17 and 20. Data was collected through the use of semi structured interviews. Gathered data was analyzed using thematic content analysis. This involves organizing the data into categories on the bases of the themes and concepts. The concepts were then linked up in the form of a sequence. Eight steps were then followed when analyzing the data, which forms part of the criteria for thematic content analysis.

Results obtained indicate that students find relocation to be a perturbing experience which pushes one out of their comfort zone into the unknown. This experience forces one to make numerous adjustments. The move taps into one's ability to deal with ambiguities, function independently and implement a task to deal with unanticipated challenges. Thus students are expected to take on the role of young adulthood. This brings with it the reality that they now have to be independent. As a result of this, most students get involved in what is called goal modification, namely focusing on what they would like instead of focusing on what their parents would want.

The process is challenging as one is going through a process of loss and, in other ways, gain. The loss of social capital is felt as having a negative impact on academic performance. This is because students lose their source of motivation, support and reliable company. They now have to source it within themselves, an attribute which has proven to be difficult. Relocation is viewed as a compounding variable to other challenging factors to students. Hence the students' relocation is perceived to be a variable which tends to have a negative affect on students' academic performance. This is due to the fact that relocation tends to create a sense of discontinuity from known academic structures, social support ties and familiar surroundings. The loss of the above mentioned factors tends to aggravate the process of academic adjustment.

KEY WORDS RECORDED

1. Relocation: The human phenomenon of moving from their original place of residence to another place and assume residency there.
2. Coping: A psychological strategy mobilized to decrease, modify, or diffuse the impact of stress-generated life events.
3. Adjustment:
4. First year students: these are students who are commencing with a university degree/diploma and are doing the first year of this degree/diploma.
5. Impact: effect that leads to the outcome

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CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH RATIONALE

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years the world has been a witness to drastic life changes due to industrialisation (Blum & Nelson- Mmari, 2004). Rural urban migration was a result of industrialization and people were left with no option but to adjust to unfamiliar living conditions (Blum & Nelson- Mmari, 2004). As a result of industrialisation, rural urban migration started, and over the years rural- urban migration has shifted to an occurrence of more people establishing permanent residency within the booming cities and mining towns which constantly promise a better life and pay (Winter & Sugar, 2002). Modernisation and urbanisation brought with it a challenge of reduced social cohesion within families and communities (Winter & Sugar, 2002). When considering the world's population, adolescents comprise 20% thereof. More than 85% of this adolescent population resides in the developing countries. Over the last twenty years one of the trends that has impacted the youth is the rising value of education, as this is also reinforced by government policies around the world (Blum & Nelson-Mmari, 2004).

Academic achievement has through out the world been advocated as the main avenue to ensure personal and social development. This has motivated individuals to aspire for academic qualifications and achievements. The developing world has also structured itself in a way that ensures people with acquired skills and recognized qualifications to have good jobs that promise better pay and growth. South Africa is considered to be a country with one of the fastest growing economies. It is also a country with an infrastructure that qualifies it to be a first world country and a backlog for development that qualifies it as a third world country too.

The literature review will focus on discussing already existing findings on relocation and how the transition impacts the students' academic performance in Universities, including their adjustment during their first year. The transition to University is contextualized within a developmental stage that is used to understand the age related challenges that the students face. An understanding of these challenges is imperative since relocation is contextualized as a profound stressor that impacts on individual functioning and adjustment. There is a paucity of literature specifically on the impact of relocation on academic performance. However related research will be referenced. This will highlight the background understanding of related aspects of the impact of relocation on academic performance during the first year of a student at university.

1.2 ADOLESCENT STAGE LEADING TO EARLY ADULTHOOD

Adolescence can be defined as a transition stage, which includes the termination of childhood at the one end and the beginning of adulthood at the other end (McKinney, Fitzgerald & Strommen, 1977). Chronological definitions of this term are arbitrary. Some people may choose to use the years from 13 to 21 because they believe that by 13 one is a teenager and by 21 one is in some social contexts considered to be at the beginning of adulthood (Lerner & Spanier, 1980). Others may consider adolescence to range between the ages 12 to 18 (Lerner & Spanier, 1980).

Psychoanalytic theories of development consider adolescence as a period that is phylogenetic (Muus, 1964). This implies that adolescence is a period which involves the development of a group of people over time. It is development which is understood to occur at a specific time in a person's life. What delineates this time from other developmental phases is the vast occurrence of a large number of individuals experiencing similar challenges and tasks. This may prove to be so with other groups, however this group is of main focus as it tends to raise questions about societies morals and direction. Focus was initially placed on Freud's conceptualization of development during the psychosexual stages and the function the libido plays during these stages (Lerner & Spanier, 1980). The resolution of the challenges and the libidinal energy in the stages was considered more essential than the achievement of a chronological age.

Complementary to Freud's theory which not only considers the psychosexual stages, but also considers the psychosocial aspects, Erickson's theory of psychosocial development points out to the period of adolescence as a period in which a dominant positive ego is to be established (Muus, 1964). For Erickson (1959) each of the five stages presents psychosocial problems for the developing individual. During the stage of identity versus role confusion, compared to other developmental stages, many social and personal challenges occur (Milne, 1977). According to Erickson [(Erickson, 1950) McKinney, Fitzgerald & Strommen, 1977] the conflict in adolescence can result in either achievement of ego identity or in identity diffusion, which is linked to the need to answer developmentally linked questions such as 'who am I? For an adolescent to achieve an identity, the role must be both individually and socially adaptive (Lerner & Spanier, 1980). The term identity refers the 'accumulated confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of ones meaning for others' (Erickson, 1950). Erickson's theory provides a continuation of the challenges that face individuals at respective ages/ stages in their life. There are chronological delineations, however not much emphasis is placed on these as the resolution and outcome of the challenges is more pertinent.

The high school and university years are to a large extent involved in preparing one for adult life (Lidgren, 1959). This stage is considered to be somewhat indistinct and formless because one is never sure of what exactly they are preparing for (Havinghurst, 1953). It is also argued that this period of development is characterized by high levels of anxiety due to the emphasis placed on preparing for the future without having explicit behavior patterns that one should adopt (Lidgren, 1959). Society and culture are imprecise and ambiguous in telling adolescents what roles and behavior patterns they should adopt, thus it becomes natural that they normally assume the behavioral manners of adults around them (Lidgren, 1959). Lerner and Steinberg (2004) argue that adolescents are viewed as a generational group which is expected to take on responsibilities of leadership in the family, community, society and with themselves. Relocation to university emphasizes these changes in roles, by introducing another

aspect of being independent emotionally and starting to see themselves as an individual (Lidgren, 1959).

During adolescence and adulthood, individuals become increasingly interested in future occupation, education and family (Nurmi, 1991). This change is aided by the considerable freedom from parental ties and the transformation of childhood experiences into personal interest, competencies and self beliefs. For most middle class individuals this would be a life changing moment which occurs between the ages of sixteen and twenty four (Lidgren, 1959).

The challenge of establishing independence, separation from the family and the choice of vocation are common challenges faced by adolescents (Milne, 1977). The process of establishing independence usually brings up emotional upheaval around attachment. Attachment is defined as being the emotional tone between the child and the caregiver. Hence this time is a challenge of hidden dynamics. These are dynamics which when inadequately attended to may result in a presentation of problems which add up to the above mentioned challenges (Lapsley, Rice & Fitzgerald, 1990). An example of such challenges are socially pressing problems of delinquency, drug abuse, unmarried parenthood, academic discipline and the exploration of youth (Milne, 1977). What is being postulated is that the type of attachment is predictive of the individual's adjustment profile during the establishment of individual qualities (Kenny & Donaldson, 1992).

Social learning theory explains the developmental behaviors of adolescents in a different way as compared to that of normal learning theories (McKinney, Fitzgerald & Strommen, 1977). Observation and imitation of behavior is emphasized as a way of learning, in the social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1963). The adolescent may observe an admired adults behavior and may inculcate those traits in their ways of behaving (Bandura & Walters, 1963). The reinforcing agent is most often a parent or someone else who is seen as having a certain status or power (McKinney, Fitzgerald & Strommen, 1977). Research has indicated that the alignment of parents and the student's goals increases the student's odds of wanting to pursue university studies. The latter is

considered to be a postulated attempt of the student to follow on the parent's wishes, dreams and having similar successes (Doo Hwan & Schneider, 2005). Social learning theory is considered to be a process which has been taking place since childhood especially when looking at the adolescents (Bandura & Walters, 1963). This theory provides room for behavioral changes that may abruptly change during development, or behavior which may change as a result of life stress within the family context since the family is the main socializing agents (Milne, 1977).

1.3 THE IMPACT OF A LIFE CHANGING EVENT ON FUNCTIONING

Life changing events are defined as "objective experiences that disrupt or threaten to disrupt an individual's usual activity, causing some significant readjustment in that individual's behavior" (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1969). These life events are events that commonly occur to most people in their natural life cycle (Thoits, 1983). In a research aimed at investigating whether life events always cause psychological change it was established that there are events that are strongly associated with various psychological outcomes and others which do not cause any impairment (Thoits, 1983). Psychological distress is defined as the general state of unpleasant arousal (Thoits, 1983). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argue that there are four dimensions of life stress that are most predictive of psychological distress: change versus undesirability, controllable versus uncontrollable events, expected versus unexpected events, and major versus minor events. One of these dimensions was studied by Husaini and Neff (1980). They were evaluating the occurrence of psychological distress due to desirable versus undesirable change. The results indicated that psychological disturbance correlates highly with the total undesirable change than the total amount of change. They also discovered that life events which are perceived as uncontrollable, cause more psychological distress than those that are perceived as under the person's control.

Adolescents may also face unexpected events or consequences of expected events which in turn become unexpected in their goal attainment; they then need to adjust some of their previous goals, cognitions or behaviours (Nurmi, 2004). This calls for a great need to create their own social and cultural networks within the larger college community in

order to cope with the isolation and the prevalent circumstances that need evaluation (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). An aspect which cannot be separated from this experience is the difference in the personality of every student who comes to university. Several researchers examining the transition to university have acknowledged the contribution of some of the five personality factors (namely extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness and openness to experience). Results indicated that conscientiousness is associated with academic achievement. Hence conscientiousness is a personality factor that proves to be beneficial in times when goal attainment becomes disrupted by unpleasant outcomes (Eysenck, 1992). On the other hand neuroticism was positively correlated with heightened stress during the transition and when unforeseen challenges arise (Endler, Rutherford & Denisoff, 1997). Extraversion was negatively correlated with stress. Over all it was found that personality was a fundamental predictor of adjustment at the university and capacity to handle challenges (Eysenck, 1992). In order to deal with the problems that are faced during goal attainment the adolescent adopts methods that will enable him/her to avoid the difficult situation or to avoid related information (Nurmi, 2004). These kinds of strategies/ methods have been described previously in terms of coping strategies (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley & Novacel, 1987).

Coping has been defined as a psychological strategy mobilized to decrease, modify, or diffuse the impact of stress-generating life events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Functional coping is conceptualised as efforts to manage a problem by actively seeking help, doing something concrete in order to solve the problem, or reflecting on possible solutions (Seiffge-Krenke, 1993). Dysfunctional coping is understood as being the withdrawal from or denying the existence of the problem, avoiding active seeking of solutions and attempting to regulate the emotions (Seiffge-Krenke, 1993). Effective coping in changeable situations consists of a greater use of problem-focused coping, whereas in an unchangeable situation effective coping involves a greater use of emotion focused coping (Compass, Banez, Malcarne & Worsham, 1991).

One way for an adolescent to adjust to the negative outcomes he or she is facing is to reconstruct personal goals (Nurmi, 2004). When people are faced with various life events

during their developmental curve, they are likely to modify their previous goals or to disengage from them and engage in new kinds of goals as a way of accommodating the challenge (Brandstädter & Renner, 1990). This helps the adolescent to stay motivated, stay on a realistic level and to maintain positive developmental perspectives when facing the next life event (Nurmi, 2004). Correlated to the coping mechanisms adopted are the attributions that the adolescent makes regarding the life event in relation to goal attainment (Nurmi, 2004). Weiner (1986) argues that after the event is interpreted as success or failure, the adolescent will begin to search for possible reasons for this event. In a study to ascertain the patterns of change due to university transition, the results indicated that students reported a greater number of negative events, heightened excitement, negativity, lower levels of support, lower levels of physical and mental well being on entry to university as compared to later times during the year (Gall, Evans & Bellerose, 2000). It is suggested from the above mentioned research that the resources of adjustment are: Size of student support network, satisfaction with support, and the use of active behavioral coping (Gall et al. 2000).

It has been found in previous research that there may be a difference in coping styles between the male and female students at university (Pritchard & Wilson, 2006). Women tend to use emotion focused styles during college and these styles are at a fairly consistent level through out. Men tend to increase their use of emotion focused styles during college (Pritchard & Wilson, 2006). Emotion focused styles of coping are considered to be an active way of coping that enhance an individual's ability to be able to take relevant decisions in relation to a problem (Pritchard & Wilson, 2006).

1.4 RELOCATION AS A STRESSOR

Although large numbers of young adults enter university each year, very few studies have investigated the impact of the transition on the general well-being of the students, especially first year students (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992). This transition to university marks a relevant transition from adolescence to young adulthood; and also marks the increase in responsibilities to the adolescent (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992). Looking at this transition from a psychological distress perspective, it is understood that adolescence has

traditionally been considered a time of substantial turmoil in the individual's life course (Raviv, Amiram, Giora Keinan, Yehuda Abazon & Raviv, 1990). This period is characterized by the youth struggling with establishing a self-image, finding appropriate and supportive peer groups, and beginning their psychological, emotional and in some cases physical separation from parents (Milne, 1977). Perhaps partly as a result of deteriorating relations with parents, peers and school, the transition has been characterized as a stressful life event for adolescents (Raviv, et al, 1990).

Entering university requires one to adjust to various life domains, namely living arrangements and social networks (Arthur & Herbert, 1996). In a study to investigate the change in adjustment in first year students' transition to university, results suggest that this transition represents a relatively acute stressor, evidencing the greatest strain for students and the largest impact on their well being on entry (Gall et al, 2000). There have been numerous studies that have tried to link change to negative outcomes. For instance, in the study by Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman and Mullan (1981) results suggest that humans are fundamentally intolerant to change. Change creates a state of disequilibrium, and the consequent struggle to restore equilibrium makes the organism vulnerable.

Not only are such links evident in studies of students adaptation, but they are also found in studies of transitions in the work place (Burke, 1988; Levi, 1994). Theory and past research suggest that work transitions can be a source of stress, this stress is associated with negative outcomes in terms of physical and psychological health (Levi, 1994). Even when changes are intended to be beneficial for employees, the transition period may still carry negative side-effects (Burke, 1988). For example Karasek (1990) found that Swedish workers who reported recent organizational restructuring experienced physical and psychological symptoms during the transition, even when the new work structures were superior to previous working conditions.

On analysis of the reactions of distress with individuals, it is noted that elevated distress levels tend to occur close to the time of the event, either as anticipation to the event or an immediate reaction to the event and then over time the reaction stabilizes (Gall et al.

2000)). Aspinwall and Taylor (1992) found that women reported a decrease in physical health and an increase in negative mood at three months into their first year of college. It became evident that women, despite having more resources may have a greater vulnerability to this transition (Nelson, 1990). This kind of finding suggests that unlike any other life events that involve change of any sort, the transition to university may be a source of acute stress and strain. Several life domains are impacted by a transition, an aspect which emphasizes the complexity of it hence demanding one to be flexible in order to sustain coping efforts (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992).

1.5 ACCULTURATION (AT THE UNIVERSITY)

An important construct to consider when looking at relocation is acculturation as emphasized in the behavioral sciences (Domino & Acosta, 1987). Acculturation refers to the changes in behaviors and values made by members of one culture as a result of contact with another culture (Burnam, Telles, Hough & Escobar, 1987). The process of acculturation can be understood in two ways, one is the process of an individual being actively assimilated into the host culture and the second one is the multicultural process where the individual chooses and selects various aspects from different cultures and integrates them into a culture which is suitable for him or herself (Burnam, Telles, Hough & Escobar, 1987). The multicultural process of acculturation was noticed in a study by Mitchell and Dell (1992) that focused on African Americans' process of adjustment at universities. Findings postulate that the adjustment and retention of the African American students depended upon the group with whom the individual student racially and culturally identifies and not just the social or ethnic group to which the individual belongs. Ward and Kennedy (1994) argue that there are two facets that need to be looked at in acculturation: social adjustment and psychological adjustment. Psychological adjustment is understood to be the “feelings of well-being and a positive self esteem in a new cultural setting, which leads on to the second adaptation challenge, namely adjustment to the in-group” (Berry & Sam,pg 2, 1997). Theoretical analysis indicates that psychological adjustment in the context of acculturation is based on the distinction between group attitudes and personal attitudes (Berry & Sam, 1997) and reflects deviations from in-group norms rather than adherence to them.

Changes in identities, attitudes, values and beliefs as well as physical, political and economic adjustments have been identified as characteristic of the acculturation process (Berry, 1984). This is a process which seems to occur in conjunction with the modification of previous goals (Brandstädter & Renner, 1990). Symptoms that may arise during the process, especially during the early stages range from physical, social and psychological consequences (Berry & Sam, 1997). Collectively these symptoms are called acculturation stress (Berry, 1984). This is defined as “an aversive state resulting from difficulties experienced by minority group members, difficulties that arise from contact with a majority culture that differs from their own” (Berry, 1984). Symptoms of acculturative stress include anxiety, depression, confusion, low self-esteem, and psychosomatic illness (Zheng & Berry, 1991). Berry and Kim (1988) argue that after relocation, stress builds up over a period of months until adaptation is reached.

In a study which investigated Mexican-American students’ academic success in relation to sociological and psychological acculturation, results indicated that the effects of acculturation seemed to produce two kinds of academic performance with students (Manaster, Chan, & Safady, 1992). The migrant students who had started their lives in the new environment on a more acculturated position, having more modern belief systems, successful aspirations and needing more stability than change and excitement, performed better academically as compared to migrant students who did not have the above characteristics (Manaster, Chan, & Safady, 1992). It was concluded from the research that the more acculturated the students were the better they will be able to perform academically. This difference may reflect the fact that transition to university is a complex process which has a multidimensional impact across several life domains and as such demands a more flexible and sustained coping effort (Gall, Evans & Bellerose, 2000). Consequently, the rule proposed by Berry (1990) that integration is the optimal attitude for cross-cultural adaptation, whereas separation is detrimental for this adaptation, is probably a general rule that applies to social adjustment but not necessarily to apply to psychological adjustment. A successful adjustment in one domain does not guarantee a successful one in another.

1.6 PROTECTIVE FACTORS AGAINST RELOCATION STRESS

It has been suggested that change is only associated with negative consequences under certain conditions. That is, the stress of transition can be buffered or moderated by personal and/or social resources (Callan, 1993). In a study done by Moyle, Penny, Parkes and Katherine (1999) to investigate the effects of transition stress, the results suggested that there are two buffers which help in reducing the level of stress of the individual who is relocating. These are social support and an internal locus of control with the ability to tolerate ambiguity. Social support has been defined as “the perceived or actual instrumental and or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks and confiding partners” (Lin,pg 18,1984). Based on the theory of life events stress, it is speculated that the relationship between mobility, adolescent self-concept and depression depends upon the amount of social support available to the adolescents (Hendershott, 1989).

Coleman (1988) views relocation as potentially problematic for children and adolescents, because the relocation disrupts the social relation that binds parents, children, teachers and other community members. The fact that the social relations are disrupted has proven to be one of the causal factors for adolescents’ participation in socially inappropriate behavior (Hoffman & Johnson, 1998).

Relationships with parents are often overlooked as variables of significance with respect to the university transition (Haynie & South, 2005) and are more often implicated in models predicting academic aspects of transitions to junior high and high school (Steinberg, Lambon, Dornbusch & Darling, 1992). In a study that evaluates parenting styles and University transition the results indicated that authoritative parents with their nurturing ability, high level of control and age appropriate expectations were beneficial in students’ perception of adjustment to university (Wintre & Sugar 2000). This relationship with parents, even when continued over the phone, did appear to be a buffer in terms of adjusting (Wintre & Sugar, 2000). Authoritative parenting emerged as being a positive predictor of females’ perceived academic adjustment. With males, having an authoritative mother indicated to be a positive predictor of academic adjustment (Wintre & Sugar 2000). However an authoritative father seems to be detrimental to adjustment for men

(Wintre & Sugar, 2000).

Studies focusing on the transition to college and the influence on adjustment, indicate that the level of attachment that students have with significant others, especially securely attached students, demonstrate a better adjustment profile (Kenny, 1990; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991 and 1992). It has been noticed amongst the students that during the initial phase of their transition to university, students might experience reduced availability of support followed by a pattern of increased support as they successfully integrate into university. This becomes part of them developing more relationships. The students' lower sense of well being on entry may relate to the fact that they were faced with a multiplicity of changes that demand within several areas of their life simultaneously at the time when regular sources of support were less available (Terry, 1989). In terms of adjustment, it is understood that "attachment behaviour is activated when an individual experiences anxiety" (Howe, Brandon, Hinings and Schofield, 1999, pg 31). Thus individuals who have not yet "understood and flexibly modelled feelings associated with insecure attachment experiences remain insecure and find difficulty in adjusting" (Howe, Brandon, Hinings & Schofield, 1999, pg 37).

Research that considers social support to be of pivotal value in adjustment has been criticized. Researchers have been dissatisfied with conceptualizations of the environment that simply looks at the presence or absence of specific features or objects. Asendorf and Valsiner (1992) criticize the latter as 'passive exposure' conceptions. The term Agentization is used to understand the relationship which exists between the individual and the environment. The influences that environments exert on individuals are assumed to feed back into the environment and to influence further environmental change. Vice versa, influences that individuals exert on their contexts are expected to feed back into the pathway of individual development (Asendorf & Valsiner, 1992). This changes the understanding that environments are independent variables and the outcomes are only seen with the individual (Asendorf & Valsiner, 1992). Changes can be observed in both the individual and with the environment. This is a form of feedback which is mostly determined by the initial response that the individual has to the conditions. As literature

has indicated above, initially the experience is negative but gradually it becomes better, emphasizing the understanding that the environment is what you make out of it. This brings us back to the fact that the number and type of life changes experienced (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) and the size and helpfulness of an individual's social support network also have an impact on the adjustment process (Nelson, 1990). Individuals who have a supportive network are believed to be buffered from the negative impact of chronic stressors because this buffering agent changes how individuals judge stressful events, thus predicting how they may relate to the environment.

1.7 RESEARCH RATIONALE

The challenges of relocation faced by students as they commence their careers at university will be looked at in the context of the developmental stage at which the majority of the first year students are. According to Erik Erickson (1959), first year students are at the identity versus role confusion stage. In the South African context, given the large population of the youth, increasing number of students entering university, and the diverse backgrounds from which the students come, this area of research has a significant paucity of information.

Previous research has focused on the negative changes that result from relocation, such as loss of social support, need to be independent and the emotional well being of the students which is compromised (Haynie & South, 2005). Positive changes due to relocation are not identified in the research. This may create an assumption that relocation brings with it only negative consequences. The perceived influence of relocation on academic performance is still an area of research which is being explored (Hendershott, 1989).

These general findings will be considered within this research. However, it would also be essential to keep in mind that positive aspects may emerge from the student's spontaneous account of the relocation. Further more, little emphasis has been placed on the student's perceptions of the impact of relocation on academic performance, which may also emerge during their narrative. An aspect to consider when looking at a study

such as this, are the respective gender experiences of students. Gender differences in academic achievement and in career preferences are not attributable to differences in ability, but rather to factors such as girls' and parents' attributions about the sources of girls' success. That is, girls and their parents are more likely than boys and their parents to attribute girls' success to external factors and effort rather than to ability (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2003). Thus girls may be limited in their eventual occupational attainment by how they and others see themselves during the university years (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). Thus adjustment for females in University is an area of research which needs further investigation and understanding. As a way of making the research homogenous and due to accessibility within the residences on campus, black female students will be used in this research.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

2.1 AIM

The research is aimed at establishing the perceptions of first year black female students on the impact of relocation on their adjustment at university with specific emphasis on academic performance. The underlying question is to establish whether there is an impact on academic performance as a result of relocating. This will be analyzed with acknowledgement of the fact that there maybe various changes in the student's life which may cause relocation to be viewed as a stressor.

Further, the aim of this research is to evaluate the coping mechanisms that the students adopt to deal with relocation challenges on entry at university.

Finally the aim is to pose a hypothetical argument around the need to establish Universities within all nine provinces in South Africa. This is to reduce the number of students relocating, thus reducing the incidents of first year failures or dropouts who experience relocation as anxiety provoking and challenging.

2.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative method was used in data gathering and data analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data. This method serves the purpose of reducing the data from copious information to manageable categories, which allows for identification of the pertinent themes within the study.

Bailey (1997) defines a qualitative study as a descriptive and naturalistic method that emphasizes lived experiences. Qualitative methodology is often conceptualized as being inclusive of various aspects of the individual, including the biological, psychological and social dimensions (Bailey 1997). Thus the aim is to understand these experiences of individuals subjectively. Babbie and Mouton (2004) argue that by adopting a qualitative methodology, the researcher will be able to study human experiences from the perspectives of the individuals, which in this research are the first year university

students.

2.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questionnaire (appendix E) was designed by the relocation study team and a panel of psychologists from the University of the Witwatersrand. The instrument had three sections. The first on demographics, with four items. The second on primary research question with one item. The third on probing question, with nine items. The questionnaire was designed to give data that would respond to the two research questions below.

1. Has the relocation impacted on the students functioning on any level? eg.
 - Academically
 - Emotionally
 - Physically
 - Socially
 - Coping strategy
2. What resources have the students drawn on during their adjustment

2.5 SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 10 first year students that have relocated from other provinces in South Africa to Gauteng, to attend at the University of the Witwatersrand for the first time. When using the term 'first year' students, it is used to refer to students who are entering university for the first time and have relocated for the first time to Johannesburg from other provinces in South Africa.. The age range of the participants was 17 years to 20 years.

The population within most residences on campuses around South Africa is predominantly black students. These are students who have relocated from other provinces and are a long distance from home. As a way of making the research homogenous and due to accessibility, black female students were interviewed in this research. All participants spoke English, and would intermittently say certain things in their mother tongue as a way of emphasizing their experiences. The sample was a

purposive and convenient sample obtained from Girton hall and Medhurst hall located at the University of the Witwatersrand College of Education. Participation was based on voluntary basis.

2.6 PROCEDURE

2.6.1 Permission

Approval to conduct the research was obtained from the ethics committee of the University of the Witwatersrand. Permission was also obtained from the coordinators of the female residences that are located at the Wits education campus to conduct interviews within the residences. Consent forms were signed by the participants; to indicate that their participation is voluntary (see appendix C and D).

2.6.2 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted guided by the interview structure in appendix E. The interview structure is to facilitate a discussion around the topic between the researcher and the volunteer, to capture as much as possible about the dimensions mentioned in the literature review as well as other phenomenon which would come up (Bruchey, 2000). Interviews were conducted at the Girton Hall and Medhurst hall which are located at the University of the Witwatersrand Education Campus with the consent of the students. Students confirmed time and availability two days prior to the interview date. These interviews were conducted during July 2007. Interviews were conducted in the rooms of the respective participants, as it was a confidential and convenient space for them.

The data collected during the interviews was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim with added field notes where applicable. The method allows for detailed information and different dynamics to be recorded.

2.6.3 Data analysis

The aim of data analysis in qualitative studies is to uncover patterns existing in the data, which would be used to create themes that integrate the data (Bruchey, 2000). Qualitative

research, requires types of analysis other than statistical analysis. In the analysis of the research data the researcher organized the data into categories on the bases of themes and concepts. The concepts were then linked up in a form of a sequence (Neuman, 1994).

Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the results. Thematic content analysis required eight steps to be followed. These steps include deciding on the level of analysis and on how many concepts to code. Coding includes deciding whether to code for the existence or frequency of a concept, deciding how to distinguish among concepts, developing rules for the coding of texts and on what to do with irrelevant information. Decisions on coding texts were done and analyzed (Babbie & Mouton, 1998). Key phrases and words were extracted from all the interview transcripts. Responses from the different respondents were compared (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). The responses were condensed into recurrent themes or concepts. Comments of the respondents were translated into English where applicable and reported verbatim to add richness and depth to the report. This method allowed for the establishment of consistent themes to the responses of the students, in terms of their reflections and present views of how relocation has impacted their academic performance.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 PROFILE OF SAMPLE

The sample was obtained from Girton hall and Medhurst hall at the Wits education campus. All participants are first year students who have relocated from other provinces in South Africa to Gauteng due to academic obligations, and currently residing in the residences mentioned above. Table one gives a summary of the age ranges of the students and other demographic information. These demographic details are taken into consideration as they may give us a brief understanding of where the students are coming from.

Table one: Profile of participants

	Age	Number of siblings	Parental occupations	Province originally from
Student number 1	17 years old	3 siblings. 2 older and one younger	Father- businessman, mother - teacher	Limpopo province
Student number 2	17 years old	2 siblings. Both older.	Mother (single parent) - teacher	Eastern Cape province
Student number 3	18 years old	2 siblings. Both older	Mother - unemployed	Limpopo province
Student number 4	19 years old	2 siblings. One older and one younger.	Father and mother both lecturers	North west province
Student number 5	18 years old	2 siblings. One younger one older	Father- lecturer mother - teacher	Limpopo province
Student number 6	19 years old	4 siblings. All younger.	Father- W.H.O mother - hair dresser.	North west province

Student number 7	17 years old	3 siblings. All older	Mother (single parent) - unemployed	North west province
Student number 8	17 years old	2 siblings. One older, one younger.	Father- department of agriculture Mother - teacher.	Mpumalanga province
Student number 9	19 years old	3 siblings. One older, two are younger.	Mother (single parent) - teacher.	Mpumalanga province
Student number 10	18 years old	2 siblings. All older.	Mother (single parent)- unemployed.	Limpopo province

Eight of the participants come from Provinces which have only one national University. Two of the participants come from Mpumalanga Province which does not have a University. There are available branches of the international and national Universities within all these Provinces. For example the University of South Africa and the University of Tshwane have established their branches in other provinces, such as Limpopo province. For all of these participants a choice of University within their province was not an option. This is due to the fact that their choice of vocation was only offered at the main universities of the branches mentioned above, as well as other universities that are not within their Province. Other reasons that came up was the need to be affiliated with an internationally renowned university as well as obtaining a degree from there. Relocating was the sacrifice that they had to make to be a step closer to what they would want out of their university of choice.

3.2 YOUNG ADULTHOOD

3.2.1 Developing independence

A frequent theme that came up was the fast transition one had to make to become independent and responsible. The participants indicated that initially their arrival to university was a reality check and a slight culture shock.

“It is hard you know, relocating, because your daddy and mummy use to do everything for you and now you are on your own in a foreign province and city and you know, you have to do everything for your self., It’s scary until you get used to it. But as my daddy says, you are growing up; you can’t always be under your parents wings.”

“The registration thing was a hectic start and I have to do it all on my own, so it was tough. Yeah independence, well you can do what ever you want but then whatever you do you are responsible because, because your parents have instilled that thing you know, you always do something and you are always having that thought ‘what would your parents say?’.”

There is an anticipated level of freedom when relocating to university. However, it became apparent from the data that students initially find it challenging to assume this responsible because. One can imagine that the intricacy in this is the lack of clarity around what one can decide on or not decide on, especially with the load of responsibilities on entry. As elicited in the initial quotation, it is expected from parents that one should grow up. However it is vague what exactly the person is expected to grow into.

“yah! You can talk about moral issues like they always tell me what to do and what not to do, what is right and what is wrong.”

“I am learning to be dependent on myself and not on my parents. It was difficult at the beginning.”

For some of the participants relocation was one of the best things that could have

happened to them.

“eh...personally for me I love, I love my independence. So for me to come here and just be away from home you know, for me I liked the idea and loved it...I mean when we have holiday during the year I don't go home.”

“I was happy to be relocating as I was going away from home, away from my family!”

3.2.2 Financial challenge

Five of the participants come from a single parent house hold. They all expressed a strong bond with their mother as well as having a great relationship. Out of the five participants, there are three participants who have mothers who are unemployed. Participants expressed sentiments of wanting to make their mothers proud. What became apparent during the interviews was that the students who only have a single parent considered themselves to be constantly financially constrained, thus limiting them on activities that they could get involved in. For the participants this limitation was not only a strain socially, but it was also a stress when it came to academic resources.

“And she gives you and then you decide. She is like eh...you get to dress, when you go to school you use the bus, so what do you want money for and you know every thing you do in Joburg is money. So she gives you monthly allowance like monthly allowance and it's not enough you know that's the bad thing because she told me.”

“The fact that there is eh...you know things are expensive, you have to, you know adjust and you must know how to spend your money and stuff. And being far from home you know you no longer can spend it all you know.”

“So yeah...I think yeah, I probably would have adjusted better in terms of if you are getting organized, in terms of having money to buy certain things to make my

life easier ah... like you know stationeries and books and stuff. You know these things are kind of expensive so you know without my parents being around to back me up and you know to eh...yeah eh...that kind of things.”

The new challenge of having to invest in stationery and other essentials was a strain for them. It was a reality check for them as they came to terms with the cost of goods and the cost of living. The fact that they are not at home, away from the regular financial support is a constant reminder that they need to be responsible with the pocket money.

It seems like one is expected to get these kinds of challenges and learn to find your feet within what one may feel to be pandemonium initially. What became apparent was the existence of an internalization of a parental figure. This was a form of guidance for the students. Within social learning theory, this can be understood as the students having observed and imitating parent's behavior in situations which call for mature decision making as a way of staying within the safe side.

3.2.3 Fear of the unknown

A common experience for all the participants was of them feeling that Johannesburg was a city which had a tendency of swallowing them up. One felt minute in these surroundings which had diversity and a huge sense of the need to survive. One challenge though was that of asserting them selves to make sure their ship does not sink.

“I got to experience Jozi at first hand. You know I was staying with my sister for a start and one night I got lost, I did not know which taxi to take. There was actually this taxi driver who actually helped me out. You know it was like getting dark and I was lost in Joburg and all you know it was....like back home there are these things they call Joburg, if it is late and you are in town you are gonna get killed. All these kinds of things and all those stories started running through my head initially. I thought, I thought if I can survive that, I can survive anything (laughter)”.

“There is a lot of insecurity around you know? You cant eh...being a female you eh...if you are female, it’s dangerous to be walking alone and stuff but here in Joburg its quite...eh, it is more dangerous than if I was at home.”

“Obviously I am from a small town and coming to a big city and there are other things. I really did not like the idea of relocating but now I am independent.”

“Coming here was hard! My mother is not here, ok! And because of the fact that my mother is not here, it’s been hard. I get to live with a bunch of people I have never met before.”

What was a common theme with the participants in relation to the new environment was the heart felt need to familiarize themselves with the new environment. This aspect was considered to be a barrier during the initial days of transition. As three students said:

“It has been ok you know, you have to, to adjust your life to, to like belong to a certain place.”

“At first I did not know which bus to take and where to go. Everything was confusing. The whole place was confusing.”

“I mean the first time I came I was wondering whether I was able, I would be able to know, know the campus well, or be able to remember ah...where is what, where the building was, what classes we are having. Where to go and stuff but eventually you adjust...and I’m still here.”

For three of the participants, the challenge was not only to have to learn to adjust to new environments as part of their new independence. Young adulthood introduced a dynamic of realizing that the world has different types of people.

“Yeah it’s bad because you don’t meet people who like you for who you are so you have to pretend.”

“I think one of the most stressing thing is, is the fact that eh, even as much as you try to fit in ah, at some point even though I try like eh...I think I have you know fitted in the new culture and society an what not eh...of course something would just simply come up and you know to remind that you know you are not, you are not, you are not yet part of them. In terms of everything you know like eh, money wise you know cars and can you believe it language and stuff. Its just you know, it’s a constant reminder that you know this is not home, this is not.”

Even though the above mentioned challenges were experienced by all the participants as part of transcending into young adulthood, that is amongst others, learning to be responsible for one self and taking critical decision, three of the participants did not find it as taxing. As two students mentioned:

“For me I like it and loved it. I didn’t have, I don’t think I have any problem as such. And I think I adjusted very well.”

“you know when you are at home you know, I must clean but then...you know, I must clean but you substitute cleaning by studying. So I was happy because I was moving away from them. I don’t have to clean, cook or even wash dishes!”

For these three participants the need to be alone was of much pivotal value than to be with family. Autonomy was what kept them motivated during the challenging moments. They might have had the advantage of coming into university with a positive mind set or drive. What was common amongst them though was the appreciation and acceptance of the need to intermittently have their parents present; an aspect which they all feel could have probably helped them adjust better. They also admitted to missing them.

For the participants, that is seven participants, who were not as enthusiastic, but were faced with the challenge of being alone, were able to mention that compared to their years in high school, there has been a relative sense of growing and maturing as the year goes.

“So it has really helped me, you know grow as a person but, you know, eh...like really grow. I think I am more mature and I think eh...I would not have been the same if I had just stayed in Limpopo. This is in terms of my views and perception of life and stuff and how I am today.”

3.3 MODIFYING PERSONAL GOALS

3.3.1 Establishing personal goals

The school system seems to be very structured and protected. There is a set route that one is expected to follow at school. For example you start at kinder garden, proceed to grade one and eventually you find your self in high school. For a majority of children in South Africa this is the path they are taking. After matric comes tertiary education. Much of us don't have a choice but to follow this prescribed route.

Commencing with university poses a different challenge compared to that in high school. There is the initial challenge of choosing a vocation. For some this would be considered to be one of the initial challenges of young adulthood. Seven of the participants expressed that starting with their respective studies became a reality check for them, as reflected by one student who managed to capture the nuances of the experience:

“ you need to like study for yourself and don't eh...most people like in school study for their parents and they should start eh...formulating goals to...its like your suddenly ripped apart”

Rather graphic, however she has managed to articulate the process of goal modification on entry to university. It is an anxiety provoking situation which seems to leave the individual rather perturbed as one realizes that the sources of encouragement and what you were studying for are not around, hence leaving yourself as the only person to set

goals for. Other participants expressed similar thoughts of coming to terms with the change of focus of success, which is initially equated with the reward system from the parents. What became apparent was that mothers were more influential in their channeling of the children's goal attainment:

"She would not want to see me failing then what ever she says I think, you must study, you must make sure that you pass, I don't want to be paying and then you are playing. She would push me to study like in words."

"Sometimes when you fall down, like when I feel like not studying, I know that if I was at home my mum will be like...she wouldn't allow me to do that. She would let me stay even though I don't want to. So yah! It's different because here in my room, if I don't want to study I will just chill, but if I was home, my mum will not be ready to do that."

3.3.2 Sources of distraction

Even though it was mid year, it was still evident that the participants were still struggling with structuring their goals. The initial goal of realizing that one is in the university for oneself and not for ones own parents. Another theme which was prominent with all participants was the sense of awareness of the exciting events that may come up during goal modification. These are normally extramural activities which are for social entertainment.

"Yeah I was saying that eh...you should remember what you came for most importantly and you stick to it because there are so many things that can derail you; honestly, the guide rail is right over there (pointing to a photo of her self). Oh! It's not so far. Eish! You can get mixed up with those kinds of things and there is just so much to do!"

"What one needs to be careful of the friends you choose because they build you or they break you. Eh, because if you have, if you hang out around with people that are, that are serious with their school work and

they know when to be serious and when to have fun, you will also adjust to that and you, you know, you will always be influenced by people around you.”

What was narrated above is the possible influence of the social setting on the individual's state of mind. These are events that are considered to be common within university. They are felt to be part of the university culture. However they are commonly perceived to be attractive distractions during the academic year.

3.3.3 Finding self motivation

As much as the environment had a great influence and posed a challenge for their character, the individual student's level of motivation proved to be a barrier during their resolution of goal modification.

“Yeah the fact that I don't have anything to push me and no one to push me I end up finishing a chapter in three day. It's too much, Yeah!”

“Having to tell myself that I need to do this and this and that I don't have...before my parents would be the ones to tell me what to do and when. My father would actually be the one to say: “hey! what's going on at school?. You have a test! Why aren't you studying and stuff?” Now no one is on my back you know!, and it's hectic for me, Yah!.”

All the participants are used to having either both of their parents or either their mother or father giving them a sense of motivation to meet their academic obligations. At university they are not within a readily accessible range for their parents to give them that motivation. They need to find it within themselves. For all the participants, this is a huge challenge during their goal modification. It has become a problem as it seems as though they lack the motivation to study, hence affecting their results.

“It is just that, you will find that I have a test but I am not really studying

so then when the time comes for the test, I'm gonna fail so I need to start getting my act together, but yah!"

"Sometimes when you, when you fall down, like when I feel like not studying, I know that if I was at home my mom will be like...she wouldn't allow me to do that. She would let me study even though I don't want to. So yeah, it's so different because here in my room, if I don't want to study I will just chill, but if I was at home, my mum will not be ready to do that."

"What makes it so difficult to get motivated is because you know you are going to cover what you have to cover like in that day. There is too much work, you wanna rest, you wanna sleep and I wanna write, that's when I do nothing."

Adding onto to the lack of motivation is the feeling of being overwhelmed with the demands that need an individual's attention. These demands include the challenges mentioned above.

3.4 STRESSORS

What we have been looking at above is goal modification on entry to university. What became apparent was that the major goal that had to be dealt with on entry was that of channeling the direction of success, from the parental goals to individual goals. Events that could derail them were also identified, for example the vast occurrence of distracting extramural activities and the lack of individual motivation. These aspects can add a lot of stress for the individual as they are impeding on the process of goal attaining. This second part focuses on unraveling the underlying stress inducing events. Themes that came up within the stress inducing events include: separation from parents, transition as being intolerable and the process of acculturation.

3.4.1 Separation from parents

Separation from parents as a stressor has been the most recurrent theme with all participants. This includes participants who also find relocation to have been ‘the best thing ever’.

“with the academics it has been difficult but its now ok, but I lack that support because my mom always supported me and she was always pushing me to go a bit further. On that aspect, its hard being away from her.”

“I think if she was here its that she would have to help me with the things that I am exposed to which are so overwhelming. And its so hard to get your mind around it and sometimes I feel its too much for me and I have to hand in an assignment tomorrow, have a test to write on the same day. ...So it’s very hard being like putting your mind over like, around this work and the amount of work. My mom would have been very calming for me if she was around.”

One of the participant’s expressed a deep sense of lack of continuity with her mother because her mother is not around.

“She is far...and that’s what makes it difficult. Her words do not ring in my head. They are there, but eish! They are not as effective as when she is around.”

Physical separation from the parents encourages one to see them selves as separate. An aspect which may create a void that one might need to work on to fill it up. Data indicated that the presence of the parents is considered to be a helpful aspect, as they not only provide motivation but they also provide a sense of security. As one student mentioned:

“It’s like you are suddenly ripped apart”

“Just loneliness mainly because I felt very lonely. In fact I was just feeling so alone and everything and then you get to learn who you are because like there are certain things you don’t do at home, because mom tells you not to.”

For some students, distance seems to play a role in the continuation of parental-child relationship and the extent to which it could still have an influence on the student’s decision making. Even though there is still contact with the parents over the phone, this does not seem to have much of an effect. For other students the frequency of phone calls is felt to make a difference:

“I think it would have really have helped in terms of encouragement when you just feel that you know you are not making it, you are not doing as much as you should be doing. So I think being there, being able to talk to them, at least on a more regular basis, would have really helped. Yeah!”

“It’s been hard living away from them. But, at least, I get to talk to them. Thanks to technology, I get to talk to them like three times in a week. I would like more, but yah!”

The need to have the telephone connection continued was well captured by a participant who said:

“You know, ah! Not having some one to turn to like eh...you know you live your parents there and obviously there is no one who can take care of you as much as your parents can so ah... it has to be...and not being able to you know cry out to another, I mean to another person you know.”

Participants seem to have made the correlation for themselves that to a certain degree the presence of their parents is critical in relation to their academic performance and adjustment to university. For seven of the participants the relocation was intolerable, a possible result of not having the relevant support around.

“I had anticipated a good start. You tell yourself I can do this, you know! But eish! When you get there, it’s not what you imagined! I underestimated it.”

“I eh!...ieh!, its eh! You know, this is varsity and its not as it used to be in high school and back home. Everything seems to get hard and harder and, yae!, whoo!Tough, yeah! Accidentally things get tough! And relocating does not make it any easy. Because you are there trying to study hard, but yoh! You missing all. You are missing friends, and you get depressed, and yeah! I know some one who gets depressed because they miss home. That affects your work, you know!”

3.4.2 Understanding the new environment

For seven participants the new environment called for a need to change things quickly:

“Like being, like having to change the things that I know, basically having to adjust to Jo’burg.”

“Just when you think you got it there is always a push, a push, you know! You cannot get comfortable.

“It is a challenge, you know! A good experience, but its challenging as well, because eh...I come from Limpopo. And there is a bit of a language barrier and sometimes especially in school its fine because most people speak English. But other places, it’s kind of difficult because someone, eh...just because I am black might think I can speak zulu and they come and just speak! When you reply in English they might think you are a South African who does not want to speak the language. This is still a challenge for me.”

These aspects mentioned above indicate that the change of environment comes with

numerous challenges. A majority of the participants had anticipated a good start, but on entry they noticed that things were actually quite challenging, creating a sense of being overwhelmed by how different things are and the way things are done differently. The big question is what is that way? This question takes us into the next theme under stressors. This is a theme which seems to form an umbrella covering over the above mentioned question.

3.4.3 Making a home away from home

“I think one of the most stressing thing is, is the fact that, eh, even as much as you try to fit in, ah, at some point even though I try like, eh...I think I have, you know, fitted in the new culture and society and what not, eh...Of course, something would just simply come up and, you know, to remind you that, you know, you are not, you are not, you are not yet part of them. In terms of everything you know, like, eh, money wise, you know cars and can you believe it language and stuff. Its just, you know, it's a constant reminder that you know this is not home, this is not.”

The university environment is not home, but it requires one to adjust as if it were home to ensure that one is able to reach their maximum ability to attend to their academic obligations. The above mentioned participant was saddened by this thought as she felt she was trying very hard to adopt to the new way of living. Another participant expressed her experience of culture shock:

“It has been a down fall since I came here. I remember fresher's, fresher's bash, the kinds of friends I met during O week. It was not the same like home. We did not click. Everyone was there, but I don't drink and then there was alcohol left and right and it wasn't nice. I did not like it. Since then it has been difficult trying to make friends. I think you work hard, but then eh...when you come back its, like, eish! I am still the person who did everything on my own.”

All participants felt that they were trying hard to inculcate the university ways of doing things. It proved to be a challenge and when interviewing them it became apparent that this culture was not only based on the social life but it also extended to the culture of studying. For the participants, this was a culture or a way of doing things, an aspect which they had not yet adopted or figured out.

“There is a difference you know, in the education system and the expectation”

“Yeah I am not performing good as I was in high school. I don’t know if it just the way work is done around here or if it’s me being lazy or something, but it is way different here.”

“I can say it is the way things are done here, like we used to be spoon fed at high school you know, giving us everything that we need to achieve.”

“Like, I do not comprehend the study methods here. What is going on? You work hard and the marks are still low! I am comparing the two, my results are lower but the effort I put in is much higher!”

The acculturation process seems to be a challenge for the participants. They have come with their own ways of doing things, only to find that their ways are not really adaptive. This does not only apply to the academic works but it also applies to the social ways of doing things. What appears to be different between the two is that academically one does need to adopt the new ways of studying in order to cope academically. However, socially one does not really have to adopt all the new ways. As read in the quote above, they only took what is comfortable for them. In order to deal with these challenges students have

adopted ways of coping with the new demands.

3.5 COPING STRATEGIES

From the foregoing, it seems evident that students find it reasonably perturbing commencing university. It is also apparent that relocating was stressful as this placed them in unfamiliar settings, away from their support system. The environment is experienced as one which either breaks you or builds you. Students have mobilized coping strategies to help them face their new environment.

3.5.1 Functional coping strategies

Themes that came up within coping is that students tended to use functional coping strategies. These are strategies which are considered to be effective and tend to focus mainly on solving the problem. This was a changeable situation in that they could either make their circumstances more favorable for themselves or they could drop out. The problem- focused strategy was adopted by eight of the participants.

“Yeah, for me, the work load. Sometimes it can be like, its like, I have those moments where, ok, now the work is just too much and I am about to break down and then I just snap back into it. Like now, let me just work it. Yeah!

“Yeah, well, things from last year...Ok, last year was really good and then in the beginning of this year I wasn't really doing so well. I wasn't really studying, but yeah, but then now I have improved. Like I have decided to like, I said now to study for myself so you know it's my future at stake. So it has improved. But initially, like, coming straight from home, yeah, my academic and the whole thing was an adjustment. And studying in a new place, like eh...but yeah eh...I used to study, like, in my room at home so yeah, so it like when you are with other people which you not used to study with it is like strange. Well I read, like, I know they say all the university is hard and stuff and I am, like, oh! don't worry about me, I will handle it. So, I just underestimate it. So I didn't study enough and I am still

adjusting. So I didn't really perform at my best and I now realize that if I want to study here and achieve the goals that I set for myself then I have to, I have to, I have to live a life of my own. Like, at home, like, I can be like no, I am this and this and you give me advice and I know what to do. Here it's, like, seriously there are these problems and I have to do it by myself so it's, like, for real."

All the participants have reported that their academic performance has taken a plunge. Four participants openly reported that they have noticed that their results have improved. Three did not mention anything about the results and two mentioned that the results are still low. They have realized however, that to deal with the situation one has to sit down and get the work done. This is a challenge in itself, however, participants are not faced with much of an option. There seems to be an interchanging adoption of the use of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Initially students will use emotion-focused coping to connect with the problem and after realizing that they are working within time constraints, they alternate to problem-focused coping. This is clearly depicted in the two quotations above.

3.5.2 Dysfunctional coping strategies

Amongst the eight participants who use problem focused coping, there were two participants who were using dysfunctional coping. For example avoiding active seeking of solutions.

"What make it so difficult to get motivated is because you know you are going to cover what you have to cover like in that day. There is too much work, you wanna rest, you wanna sleep and I wanna write, that's when I do nothing."

A sense of the student being overwhelmed. Which seems like it leads to avoidance of the situation to something more tolerable.

“I don’t know anyone and for my academics, yooh! It’s been difficult. Just thinking about sitting on that desk and opening my...I want to study, I want to do it but then it’s difficult to do it, so I just leave it.”

3.5.3 Dealing with the sense of being overwhelmed when trying to cope

In some cases the method of avoiding is slightly of a manic defense, that is an escape.

“I mean, you might not have imagined it. Eh, ah! I am just thinking about it now. Because I know sometimes when I study my mind turns to wonder occasionally. But it does affect, I think it does affect because you are feeling on certain days and certain times missing home badly.”

These students have noticed that their grades are low and there is a real chance they could fail. This was a challenge for them because even with this realization their motivation was still low, which also increases their sense of being overwhelmed.

What was commonly felt by the participants was the fact that with time and as they managed to find their feet their results would improve. The awareness gives them a positive reinforcement to continue using the kind of coping strategy they have adopted.

3.5.4 Possible buffers

Participants felt that besides the coping methods that they adopted, there were other possible aspects that could have protected them or made the relocation process more smooth for them. As implicated in most of the quotations above, it became apparent that students did feel that the presence of their parents could have been a buffer during the transition. They also felt that even though the year was half way through, the consistent telephonic motivation from the parents was appreciated and essential.

3.6 RELOCATION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

3.6.1 Relocation negatively affecting academic performance

Eight participants mentioned that they do feel that relocation has had some sort of a ripple effect on them and intrinsically negatively affected their academic performance.

“Yeah, I think I would, I would make a correlation. I would say hand on from what I have seen because eh...having relocated has it's, it's, 'it's advantages and disadvantages, and the advantages have helped me to adjust. But the disadvantages have, you know, like, put a strain in my, you know, in my academics in terms of you know because this eh...the issues that I mentioned earlier, I face everyday, so I can not, like, really eh...distinct like eh...separate them from my studies because they, you know, they get in between and stuff.”

As part of the adjustment to the new environment, as a result of relocation, participants have felt that a lot of adjustment has had to take place within the academic realm, a process which is felt to be still in progress.

“There is a huge gap between how I used to study last year and the years and basically I still have the tendency of going back to the fact that I have to adjust. I have tried, I have tried. I don't know how many methods I have tried...it did not work. So I continue, its like you try, you take what you learnt in high school. The way you come here and apply it and you see that it doesn't really work, but now you don't know any other way of studying. No one tells you how you should study or how you should go about studying the way that the university expects you too. So there is a bridging gap between how you studied last year and how you did your work last year and this year.”

3.6.2 Relocation having no effect on academic performance.

The other two participants felt that relocation and their academic performance had no form of correlation. For them this change in their academic performance can be explained by the unfamiliar procedure of things in university. They feel that there is a system which is used, or a method of study which is used which they just haven't figured out yet.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results obtained from the research are motivating. From a developmental perspective, the adjustment to university represents one example of a normal but stressful transition during the life span of many individuals. Some students manage the increasing demands imposed upon them and experience success in one or more realms of university life. Other students are less resilient and appear confused, lonely, disinterested, or depressed (Cutrona, 1982). What is it that makes the university experience positive for some and dreary for others? There are numerous aspects that could account for this difference. Participants of this research were able to give an account of their experiences in relation to relocation and possible impact on academic performance. This brings down the focus of the scope in answering the above question. Eight participants out of the ten felt that the transition to university was intolerable. For them the transition was a scheduled one and was anticipated to be pleasant. However on entry at university the participants felt that they had underestimated the demands of university. These are academic demands as well as social demands. One of the participants was able to exclaim at the fact that things seemed to be getting harder as one progresses in the adjustment. This was understood by one participant as a push force, a force which always seems to surface when it seems as if one is getting comfortable in the new acquainted spot. In order to capture the nuances of what they were expressing, participants would sometimes express themselves in their mother tongue. For them this allowed them to help the researcher understand and place emphasis on what they were saying.

Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan (1996) identified three main areas in which transition can become problematic. Although their study was aimed at looking at the move from primary to secondary school, their findings are relevant to other contexts including this research context. The three areas that were identified as problematic include:

1. Student anxiety about the relocation.

All the participants were relatively anxious about relocating. What made them feel anxious is the fact that they were relocating into an unknown environment or to a partially known environment based on descriptions by friends or having visited the place

before. What they brought with them to university was their past experiences, personality dynamics, previous educational attainments and new aspirations. Participants conceded that the awareness that they would be alone in this new place was anxiety provoking. They were leaving their bases of support, what is called social capital. Evidently this meant that they would be on their own. One of the participants was able to explain that the process of registration and the first few weeks were tough for her. There were numerous responsibilities and deadlines to be met during this time. This was not a common experience with all the participants. Two participants felt indifferent about the transition. The thought of being away from family was exciting. For these two participants, their independence was what they were looking forward too. A commonly felt experience among all participants was that parental support and presence would have been highly appreciated.

Responsibilities, duties and deadlines, were what made the participants feel that they had entered a time of more responsibilities. All participants felt that a constant reminder for them to be responsible was reemphasized by financial restraint. All participants felt that they were financially restricted to do most of the things that they would like to do. For nine of the participants, this restriction made their adjustment process difficult since they started to realize that most things done in Johannesburg needed cash. With this difficulty in mind, all participants would have preferred to have their parents around to help with the nitty gritty things.

2. The process of adjustment to the new context.

Students in transition must assert themselves to the new challenges, adapt to the new environment, and learn about many differences. They need to read the culture of the new setting, and seek out culturally appropriate ways of participating in relation to the peer group and/ or others. The problems arise not so much in the transition itself, but rather in the ways in which change occurs, as well as the ways in which such change is perceived. As Fullan (1982) states: "The crux of change is how individuals come to grips with it" (p. 24). For all the participants, relocation and moving into the unknown environment meant that they were also moving into a new culture. All participants felt that the intergration into a new culture was difficult. They all experienced the acculturation in unique ways.

All participants had adopted the multicultural process of acculturation, which involved inculcating certain aspects of the new cultures into their already existing culture. Hence modifying their own culture. Participants had noticed that the more they tried to adopt the university culture the more they were struggling. One participant was able to articulate this well by saying that just when she felt she was part of the system, something would always come up and remind her that she is not yet part of the system. One participant had come to the conclusion during orientation week that there are certain aspects of this new place which she will adopt and others that she will not. For all the participants, this was a strongly felt sentiment which was constantly emphasized especially when it came to academic work. All the participants felt that extracurricular activities that constituted university life were distractions that one can easily fall prey to. Hence each participant had to make her own choice regarding participation therein. This is a multicultural process of selecting which aspects of the diverse cultures to inculcate.

It was observed, during the interview of a few participants, that the process of acculturation was emotionally taxing. For some it seemed as though they felt that they were on their own in this process. One participant mentioned that everyone was drinking, and she was not, during orientation week. This indicates a difference in group attitudes and personal attitudes, which is part of the acculturation process and reflects deviations from the in-group norms rather than adhering to them. Inevitable transition brings a degree of loss, but also fresh opportunities. The way in which opportunities and losses are balanced, or the degree of tension between what has been left behind and what is central to the new context, is crucial to the individual experience of transition. For all the participants this transition brought with it their initiation into young adulthood and a general loss of social capital.

The theme that was prominent in relation to social capital was the difficulty around not having their parents present. Parents were generally felt to be very supportive in times of crisis. Not only were they supportive but they also happened to be a source of motivation during times when the students felt they were unable to find motivation within themselves. One participant reflected on the sense of loneliness and not having people that she knew around. Familiarity with people was important for the participants since

that constantly created a sense of exclusion for them within university. Another participant expressed her sense of slight bitterness with the people, since she felt she was not being accepted for who she was. (A feeling she had always harbored and, however was buffered by the presence of her parents and currently felt to be prominent since her parents are not present.)

As part of the adjustment process participants expressed that they are currently finding difficulty in adjusting academically. This was a common theme with all the participants. Participants felt that there were just some things that were different with the university academic system in comparison to the high school system. A participant expressed a sense of frustration, because she felt she was trying a lot of ways to study that proved to be unsuccessful so far. This academic system was felt to be a special dynamic of the university to which they had to adjust. It proved to be a culture which needed one to rapidly adjust because the academic year was only ten months and one had to perform well to pass. This dynamic would extensively be explored in the next point below as it is of pivotal value to the research.

3. The continuity (or discontinuity) with respect to the curriculum (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996, p. 35)

When participants were forewarned by predecessors in tertiary, they felt that they would not struggle and were going to manage well. As articulated by one student, “I underestimated it!” This was a common feeling with all participants since they came to realise that what they had anticipated in terms of university academic work was not what confronted them. Their study skills which were effective during high school were not effective at university. There was a heavier workload and evidently less time. The method of teaching was different to that of high school. The environment itself was also different enforcing the need for adjusting thereto. There was perceivably not much continuity with respect to curriculum on entry to university. Another theme that came up in the disruption of continuity was the lack of an immediate external source of motivation.

The participants were finding it tough to find their internal source of motivation. Eight of

the students felt that relocation has had a considerable effect on their ability to adjust academically. This was partly a consequence of the lack of an immediate external source of motivation. Social support can be viewed as the provision of coping assistance (Fleishman, Sherbourne, Cleary & Wu, 2003).

One participant was able to openly acknowledge that she was feeling overwhelmed. This was adversely affecting her academic performance. She had noticed that while she was at home her mother was a constant source of motivation. Ever since she has been in university she has been finding it relatively hard to access her mother's words to motivate her. This was a commonly felt experience by the other seven participants. Relocation had disrupted their source of external motivation and it was having a negative impact on their performance.

Seven participants felt that everything was intertwined. Not only lack of social capital was implicated for their low performance, but all variables/aspects that comprise the lack of continuity were seen as factors. They could not be seen as one participant expressed that even the social aspect and not fitting in had an impact.

For the two participants who felt that relocation had no impact, they felt that it was the university which had different expectations. These are expectations which they had not yet figured out how to tackle. For the one participant she felt that relocation would not affect the academic performance because it does not affect one's inherent potential. It is important to note that these are the participants who felt excited about relocation since guaranteed their independence.

Participants were generally struggling to adjust in both social and academic realms. What became apparent was that participants generally felt they were alone or were experiencing something slightly unique. From their point of view, everyone else seemed to be better off. It also became apparent that even though they were struggling they were unable to seek for help. They did not seek assistance from CCDU. Participants were focused on dealing with the challenges on their own. They had been able to prioritize based on the main reason why they come to university. This had enabled them to focus on trying out what they could do to help them succeed.

Eight participants have adopted the problem-focused method of coping. This method allows them to deal with the issue at hand, which is their poor academic performance. For most, this resulted in goal modification and decision making which involved just themselves. There were however two other participants who were using maladaptive coping strategies such as avoiding the work completely. This had a negative affect on the participants' results. They were aware that this was a problem, but were struggling to motivate themselves.

The results obtained indicate that with many students there is initially a sense of anxiety when they commence with university. For a majority they commence with preconceptions of how things would be. On entry these preconceptions are mostly shattered. Students become disillusioned by the reality that they no longer have the usual social capital. They also realize that the university has numerous cultures which require one to be able to adjust to them. Things were different and required one to adopt a different way of coping which would be beneficial for them in the long run. The majority of the participants felt that relocation does have an impact on their academic performance. This is due to the fact that it puts a strain on their relationships. These are relationships which were a source of support and motivation to do well. This discontinuity resulted in goal modification, where the majority of the participants felt that now they had to work for themselves and not for their parents.

Results also indicate that even though this goal modification had occurred, participants were finding it challenging to motivate themselves. This lack of availability of social capital as a result of relocation was perceived as a detriment as it would have been a buffer during the numerous challenges. For example providing a sense of direction during the time when they were confused about study skills. This also extends to support overall. Participants concur with the fact that relocating to the new place poses numerous challenges for them that emphasize the need to be young independent adults who are responsible.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.

Even though the participants were interviewed on a voluntary basis, some of their responses were monosyllabic. Some of the participants seemed not willing to share their experiences. The researcher had to probe in order to get a detailed response. What became apparent was that participants whom the researcher had met earlier to discuss and setting the appointment for the interview, were much more open and willing to give an account of their experiences. The other participants were not met prior to the interview due to time constraints. They were unable to schedule a time before the interview. It would be advisable for future research to ensure that a time is set aside to brief all

participants prior to interview/research time. Participants should be interviewed under the basis that they have been briefed about the research. This approach does have an impact on the depth of the responses. Results of the study might therefore fall short of the true reflection of the issues discussed.

Data collected was relatively informative. Seven of the participants were willing to talk. The researcher noticed during the interviews that for the participants who were having difficulty adjusting academically, the interview became a form of debriefing. The participants were expressing what they felt they would never be able to express to their colleagues. There was a sense of partial isolation in terms of experiences. Unfortunately all the participants were not willing to seek help from the Career, Counseling and Development Unit on campus. Students were insisting on trying out other avenues on their own. It became evident during the data gathering that even though three participants were taking part voluntarily, they were not very open about their experiences. It was also noticed that these were the participants who were undecided about their availability. They would give monosyllabic answers. This gave the data collected poverty of content. Without the field notes one would find it relatively difficult to get the depth of the interview.

The research was intended to be a small scale research consisting of ten participants. I was able to obtain this sample, however it was relatively difficult obtaining participants who were not time constrained. Majority of students were highly stressed and felt that they could not take part and they had to study. Some students were willing to help but were not meeting the required criteria. Future research should consider gathering data from a larger sample in order to improve the application of the results to a wider portion of the target group. A larger sample may also provide a bigger picture of the magnitude of issues.

Despite the small sample size, the results were very consistent. It can be safely claimed that the study provided valuable information. Themes were adequately explored within the small sample. However the method of data gathering that was used does pose

questions of consistency, because replication of the exact answers can never be achieved as change is inevitable.

Conclusion

In spite of the meager sample applied in this research, there are significant inferences that can be drawn from the results that may have a profound improvement on the plight of first year university.

1. The gap that was elucidated between the approach of matric and first year University studies can be mitigated by
 - a. Exposure of matriculants to a University setting for two days particularly during their grade eleven studies.
 - b. Group counseling of matriculants by university graduates on the pitfalls of relocation to University.
2. The social support by relevant others, to improve adjustment of first year students to the new environment can be improved by:
 - c. Regular contact, either physical or telephonic, between parents and students. Parents need to be made aware of the need to support their children when they are in first year at University. This could also be done by parents attending the school meetings to keep in touch with their children's progress at school
 - d. University social clubs based on faculties and classes need to address first year student matters too.
3. The efficacy of the CCDU has to be evaluated in relation to its intervention on issues concerning the impact of relocation. If it is ineffective, there has to be a CCDU component dedicated to relocation matters and it should be marketed vigorously among students.
4. The Department of Education has to establish main universities, at least two, in each of the nine provinces. This approach would reduce the perceived distance of

relocation and reduce the impact of acculturation among students.

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Appendix B

Information sheet for participants

Hello my name is Joy Nkuna; I am currently doing my masters in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the curriculum we have to do a research study focusing on any particular field of interest. My interest lies in understanding the impact that relocation has on adjustment at university for first year students. I am therefore interested in speaking to young women of 17-20 years of age, who are first time students and who have had to relocate from another province in order to study at Wits. If you fit this picture I would like to invite you to participate in this study as I am keen to understand how students describe this adjustment. Participation will involve being interviewed by me about how you have experienced the relocation and adjustment to university, for example how you think this has impacted on your studies, your friendships and your emotions. The interviews will take about an hour and will be arranged to take place at a time and venue that suits you.

I would like to make clear the fact that participation is entirely voluntary and that you are free to choose not to participate. You are also free to choose not to answer any questions put to you. If you decide to withdraw from the study at any time, you are free to do so. Confidentiality is guaranteed. At no point during the interview will you be expected to say your name, or to report any form of identifying information. All the information and possible tape recordings will be destroyed once the study is over. Although unlikely, it is possible that you may experience some psychological distress in talking about your relocation experiences. If this does happen we can discuss this and look at the option of contacting the Career and Counseling Development Unit to see a professional psychologist who will be able to help in the most appropriate manner. This is a free service for students.

I will be available and very happy to answer any questions you may have with regard to

the study and what it involves. My contact information is detailed at the end of this letter. Please feel free to contact me at any time. On request, I will be happy to give you a summary of the main findings of the study, which should be completed by the end of 2007. The research will be written up in a research report which will be kept in the library after examination .Should you be willing to take part in the research please sign in the space provided below.

Yours sincerely

Joy Nkuna

.....

.....

Participants signature (that's you)

Contact details: 0834899916

Appendix C

Consent form

I....., hereby consent to be a voluntary participant in the study of student's perceptions of the impact of relocation on adjustment to university. I grant permission for my interviews to be included as part of the research with the understanding that my rights as a subject will be adhered to. I understand that some of my words may be quoted directly in the final report but that no personally identifying information will be included which could link me to these statements.

Your right as a subject:

- Data or summarized results will not be released in any way that could identify you. Confidentiality will be maintained.
- If you want to withdraw from the study at any time, you may do so without any penalty or any consequences to your self. The information collected from you up to that point will be destroyed if you so desire.
- At the end of the session, you have the right to a complete explanation (debriefing) of what the study is about. If you have questions afterwards, you can ask the interviewer.

I have read the above information and willingly consent to participate in this research.

Signed:..... Date

For researcher

Signed date

Appendix D

Consent form for tape recording.

I, hereby consent to be a voluntary participant in the study of first students perception of the impact of relocation on adjustment to university. I grant permission for Joy Nkuna to include my interviews as part of the research with the understanding that my rights as a subject will be adhered to. I am fully aware that a tape recorder will be used to record the interview session.

Participants Rights:

- The tape recordings will be used purely for research purposes.
- The information gathered from the interview will be destroyed after three years.
- The information remains confidential and will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor.
- No data will be used that will identify me in the research.

I have read the above information and willingly consent to participate in this research.

Signed : date

For researcher

Signed : Date

APPENDIX E

Interview guide

Demographic Information

1. Which province have you relocated from?
2. How many brothers and sisters do you have?
3. Where do you fit in?
4. What do your parents do for a living?

Main Primary Research Question

1. Tell me what it has been like to relocate in as much detail as possible?

Probing Question

5. Have you noticed any positive or negative changes in yourself since you relocated?
6. What has it been like moving away from your family and friends?
7. Which aspect of their (relevant others) presence would you say would have helped you adjust better?
8. What do you like most about being away from home?
9. What do you dislike the most about being away from home?
10. What have been some of the most difficult things about relocating?
11. Has there been any change in your academic performance since coming to university?
12. What would you attribute the change to if there is any change?
13. If you were to advice a student like you coming to the university next year, what psychological and other advice would you give her?

