

2019

## Resilience Experiences of Navy Wives during Midyear School Transitions of a Child

Alicia Brengman  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Alicia Brengman

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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2019

Abstract

Resilience Experiences of Navy Wives during Midyear School Transitions of a Child

by

Alicia Brengman

MS, Walden University, 2016

BA, Washington State University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services

Walden University

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## Abstract

The social problem of school dropout is a well-researched issue that impacts students, schools, and the nation. The research problem of this study was how U.S. Navy wives experience resiliency during school transitions of their child(ren) midyear to a new school. The theoretical framework utilized for this study was resilience theory, as described by Rutter. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to gain insight into how U.S. Navy wives experience resilience when transitioning their students to a new school once the school year has begun. Semi structured interviews were conducted over the phone with 9 current wives of active duty members of the U.S. Navy. These interviews were transcribed and coded, with themes emerging that expressed not only the challenges these women endured, but the instances of personal resilience each woman experienced. Challenges included struggles with the new school, paperwork issues, and the need to support the unique needs of each of their children. Resilience experiences included conducting research on the new school, focusing attention on their children over themselves, and utilizing available resources for support. Implications for positive social change include the potential to address concerns regarding the dissemination of information and using the study findings to develop training to facilitate more effective paperwork processes along with increased awareness of available support for military families. Such changes could reduce stress for military families and create a smoother transition for the schools and students.

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## Dedication

This is dedicated to my beautiful children, with an ocean of love. Thank you for challenging and inspiring me every single day.

Thank you to my mother. You showed me by example the power of a woman who does not let others define her and taught me the values of hard work and perseverance. I love you!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

In regard to highly mobile populations, military families are a group that experiences a disproportionate number of moves in comparison to the average American family (Department of Defense [DOD] Education Activity, 2015). According to Russo and Fallon (2015), there is not enough existing research on the impact of the military lifestyle, and these authors specifically highlighted a need for understanding the experience of changing schools. It is arguable that the benefits of supporting mobile families are significant and, therefore, should not only be examined more thoroughly but expanded upon as well (Anderson, Leventhal, Newman, & Dupéré, 2014).

The results of this study filled a gap in the existing research by providing information regarding how U.S. Navy wives experienced resilience in relation to transferring a child or children to a new school once the school year had already begun. Understanding these experiences allows for more appropriate interventions and supportive efforts to be developed and implemented to assist these families during a difficult and stressful event with the ultimate goal of reducing school dropout. Other populations who experience high levels of mobility may display similarities to military and Navy families, easily allowing for adaptations of the interventions and support developed towards Navy families (Russo & Fallon, 2015). As more highly mobile families are offered effective support during these transitions, the rate of dropouts may diminish, demonstrating an impact on the students, their communities, and ultimately the country as more young people successfully achieve high school graduation.

A brief overview of the study is provided in this chapter. I provide background information including the relevance of this research. The nature of the study, the specific problem being examined, and the identified purpose of the study are presented. This leads to the explicit statement of the research question as well as the description of the theoretical framework. From there the methodology and significance of this study are offered. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a summary of the various sections presented.

### **Background**

Children who move frequently are more likely to lack healthy behaviors and exhibit poor emotional development, which may impact their school accomplishments (Fowler et al., 2015). Failure to graduate has also been repeatedly associated with mobility (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017; Fowler et al., 2015). Relocation in general can have a negative impact, and multiple moves may be particularly detrimental to children and adolescents in regard to academic achievement and behavioral issues (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017). Frequent mobility of students occurs more often in certain populations, such as children in the foster care system; those who are experiencing homelessness (Clemens, Lalonde, & Sheesley, 2016); and military families, such as those in the U.S. Navy (Siegel et al., 2018).

As the U.S. military system has transitioned from a force of mostly single men to one comprised of a broader variety of participants, the shift has included a significant rise in the number of military-associated families with children (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003). Clever and Segal (2013) noted that individuals in the military tend to marry and start families at a younger age than their civilian counterparts, stating that now military dependents (i.e., spouses and children) outnumber military personnel. Navy

spouses are 91% female in heterosexual marriages (DOD, 2016). In a 2019 study, Navy wives were found to experience moderate-to-severe anxiety and/or depression at higher rates than both Marine Corps wives and civilian wives (Senecal, 2019).

Active duty members of the Navy have a 38.2% marriage rate and 61.4% of members of the Navy have children (DOD, 2016). Navy families have over 222,000 children with at least one active duty parent (DOD, 2016). These numbers have created areas of concern in regard to the welfare of these children because military families experience unique stressors as well as relocate at a higher frequency than the average American family (Drummet et al., 2004).

Military families suffer increased levels of stress compared to civilian families due to the experiences of deployments and the strain it places upon the family (Russo & Fallon, 2015). Members of the U.S. Navy are continuously deployed during times of conflict, as well as peacetime, around the globe (Johnson, 1997). In fact, two fleets of Navy ships are considered to be on *permanent forward deployment*, meaning sailors assigned to any of the ships in this group are constantly deployed to the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific (Schwartz, 2017). Along with this, Navy families experience little advance notice regarding permanent change of station relocations, typically as short of a notification as 2 months or less to plan and execute a move (Chief of Naval Public Affairs, 2017).

Moving to a new school is a common experience for U.S. students, with 66.1% of students making at least one move not related to promotion by fifth grade (Princiotta, Flanagan, & Huasken, 2006). The likelihood of school mobility triples for military-connected students, such as those associated with the Navy (DOD Education Activity,



2015). This means the average student in a military family will attend three to nine schools prior to completing high school (DOD Education Activity, 2015). One previous phenomenological study indicated that both parents and their children identified military-related relocations as a source of increased tension within the family unit as well as describing them as stressful and disruptive to their lives overall (Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari, & Blum, 2010).

Teachers have identified difficulties at home becoming apparent in the classroom through student behavior, such as inappropriate actions or the student becoming withdrawn (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Siegel et al. (2018) noted the need for the gaining school to target engagement efforts toward military families in order to support the shift from one school to another. Efforts made to interact with the transitioning family by the receiving school can have an impact on the overall experience in either a positive or negative manner (Siegel et al., 2018).

Lleras and McKillip (2017) claimed that changing schools had the negative consequence of severing the relationship between the parent and their child's school and/or teacher. When parents are engaged by the school, the outcomes may include academic improvement and reduced dropout rates (Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000). Additionally, the relationship between parent and child may be exposed to stress related to residential mobility (Anderson et al., 2014), which in turn may impact the quality of their relationship. Palmer (2008) noted that gaining insight into military parents' experiences in regard to moving is an essential step in understanding the impact of a relocation for the family, children, and academic considerations.

### **Problem Statement**

The gap I addressed in this research study was that of how Navy wives experienced resilience during school transitions of their child midyear. Navy families continue to relocate at higher rates than civilian counterparts (Siegal et al., 2018) and make up a significant portion of the education system, with military families being found in every school district within the United States (De Pedro et al., 2018). More than 2 million children are connected to the military through one or more active duty parent (DOD Education Activity, 2015). Mobile students may experience challenges that their peers do not, including difficulties maintaining academic levels (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017). Burkam, Lee, and Dwyer (2009) noted students who relocate more frequently are considered to experience a negative impact academically, possibly finding themselves months behind their peers in vital areas such as reading. Along with these educational challenges, it takes time for a student to develop a relationship with his or her teacher and peers, which may impact the student's classroom experience as well as personal mental health (Anderson et al., 2014). Bradshaw et al. (2010) stated that frequent relocations often negatively impacts an individual's ability to develop and maintain healthy peer relationships.

Although the aforementioned research regarding school mobility has illuminated important findings, I found no research that has examined resilience in parents of military-associated students who experienced midyear transitions to new schools. Given such, further research was warranted that could examine what makes highly mobile military parents resilient during midyear transitions of their child(ren) to a new school.

This has been done in an effort to address the documented issue that mobility negatively impacts a student's likelihood to graduate (see Burkam et al., 2009; Fowler et al., 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how wives experienced resilience when transitioning Navy-connected child(ren) once the school year had begun. In order to address this gap, I employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the mothers' experiences, specifically focusing on resiliency in regard to the phenomenon identified. Mothers were the targeted population for this study due to the noted value of parental involvement in a student's school experience as a measure to combat school dropout (see Jimerson et al., 2000). The role parents play in the development of students is a vital one (Schueler et al., 2014). Gaining insight into how mothers experience moving their child to a new school may be helpful in bolstering support for transitioning families (Siegal et al., 2018) as well as to diminish instances of school dropout. Navy-associated children may be comparable to other highly mobile child populations, such as children in the foster care system (Masten, 2013). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to consider that the interventions developed for Navy-connected children may be adaptable to other vulnerable groups as well.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Research Question: How do Navy wives experience resiliency during school transitions of their child(ren) midyear to a new school?

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

The framework for this research was based in resilience theory. Resilience has been defined in a variety of manners, including a process, a personality trait, or an

outcome that can be applied to individuals or families (Masten, 2018). Successful resilience may be measured when a challenge presents itself and is met with healthy adjustment in response (Masten, 2018). Family resiliency results when a family copes with a difficult situation, such as a separation or natural disaster (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996).

Resilience impacts how well a family is able to handle a stressful situation (Masten, 2018). By understanding the resilience of Navy wives in regard to relocations and subsequent school changes, insight was provided into areas of concern as well as those in which the family succeeds (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996). Relocation is an often-endured stressful experience for military families (Drummet et al., 2004). Through various studies, researchers have noted the correlation between high levels of mobility and increased instances of school dropout (Gasper, DeLuca & Estacion, 2012). In this study, I examined Navy wife experiences of resilience during midyear school transitions of their child(ren).

### **Nature of the Study**

The purpose of this research study was to gain insight into how Navy wives experience resilience when transitioning child(ren) who have a Navy connection mid-school year in order to positively impact student dropout rates. In this study, I sought to understand the human experience; therefore, the utilization of a qualitative approach was a suitable choice because it allowed for the participants to express themselves. A qualitative method was appropriate for this study because it provided a platform for learning about the experiences of those who have encountered the phenomenon as explained by each of the individual's own words. Due to the desire to understand the

experience of Navy wives, loosely structured interviewing was conducted to gain insight into this specific phenomenon.

I used a hermeneutic phenomenological design in this study because it allowed for gaining an understanding of the experiences of the participants (see Higgs, Patterson, & Kinsella, 2012). Phenomenological research encourages the respondents to describe personal experiences as a means of learning about particular phenomena (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). A qualitative phenomenological design allowed for a unique stand in a subject matter area that is overwhelmed with quantitative data (see Bowers, Sprott, & Taff, 2013) by offering information gathered from lived experiences of individuals rather than statistics or figures. Through developing interview questions that were administered via the phone, I was able to explore personal experiences from the data collected (see Higgs et al., 2012), such as that of a parent transitioning their child to a new school midyear, as expressed by the participant's lived experience in a frank and in-depth manner.

### **Definitions**

Many of the following definitions have been taken from the *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, which was created by the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (OCJCS) and published in November of 2018. This dictionary set the standard for terminology used by the U.S. Armed Forces in order to effectively communicate between the various divisions of the military.

*Dependent:* The military member's spouse as well as any children who are under the age of 21 years and unmarried, or who is incapable of independent care at any age (OCJCS, 2018).

*Deployment:* The movement of servicemembers (OCJCS, 2018) and may occur for a significant period of time.

*Family readiness:* The ability of the servicemember's family to be able to handle the stress and challenges that accompanies the military lifestyle, including obstacles related to deployment and mobility (OCJCS, 2018).

*Midyear:* This term refers to the school year as opposed to the annual year. A midyear transitions refers to a change in school prior to the start of the school year based on the school-specific start date (Siegal et al., 2018).

*Military-connected child:* A child who is affiliated with the military through one or both parent(s) actively serving in the armed forces (De Pedro et al., 2018).

*Mobile student:* A youth who is attending school and relocates due to a military-sanctioned relocation thus resulting in a school transition (De Pedro et al., 2018).

*Ombudsman:* A spouse of an active duty member of the military who serves in the voluntary role of providing communication between a commanding officer and the families of those within the command, providing referrals, information, communication, and support for families (America's Navy, n.d.).

*Permanent change of station (PCS):* A military-sanctioned relocation to a new duty station for a minimum of 20 weeks and may be related to training or employment (OCJCS, 2018). PCSs may include moves within or outside of the United States and can occur throughout the year or multiple times per year.

### **Assumptions**

The main assumption I made for this research study was that Navy wives are indeed impacted by the relocation and transition of their child(ren) to a new school during

the school year. As this was a qualitative study, I had to assume that the responses of the participants were honest and accurate per each unique experience. Due to the nature of a self-report, such as this study, participants were open to share as little or as rich of detail regarding their experiences as they preferred, which undoubtedly influenced the data collected. These assumptions were necessary for the research study because interviews were the data source.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

In this study, I solicited participation from Navy wives who have transitioned a student midyear to a new school. This was done via purposive sampling as well as snowballing efforts. Fusch and Ness (2015) noted a potential delimitation in that failure to achieve saturation may negatively impact research and shared that enough data must be collected so that a study is able to be replicated with similar findings. Fusch and Ness described saturation as being attained once the researcher is no longer able to effectively code the collected information and has a rich set of data available to utilize. Saturation was obtained in this study.

I made every effort to collect individual interviews from a wide range of participants. This was completed via reaching out to Navy wives through social media channels with a recruitment post. The use of social media and snowballing improved the likelihood of a wide range of participants from various geographic regions as well. Navy families may be stationed across the globe, and due to the frequency of relocations, connections between servicemembers and their families develop nationally and internationally as well.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of phenomenological studies include the researcher being able to recognize and express their personal role within the context of the research as well as analyzing the data collected with acknowledgement of biases (Patton, 2015). As a researcher, I was unable to interview each individual member of the desired population; therefore, I had to use a purposive sample of members of this group to represent these specific women as well as a whole population. While this small sample of a population was certainly useful, it is important to note that the representatives may not be generalizable to the entire group and, therefore, the data collected as well as the themes noted through coding and analysis may not apply to the entire population.

Gertler, Czogiel, Stark, and Wilking (2017) explained that when significant time had passed between the experience of the phenomenon and when the data collection interview occurred, the more difficult it may be for the respondent to accurately describe his or her past experience. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted that one of the limitations of qualitative research is that participants may withhold information or fail to be completely honest during the data collection process. This could occur for a plethora of reasons, including feelings of embarrassment, failure to accurately recall the information, or even misunderstanding the question (Ravitch & Carl). Along with this, the use of phone interviews further compounds the issue by not allowing the researcher to observe the body language of the respondents; consequently, the researcher is in a position in which it is necessary to accept the participant comments as presented without the possibility of gaining insight based on physical cues (Novick, 2008).



I used open-ended interview questions to collect rich, in-depth data from the participants. In order to be mindful of biases and avoid influencing the data gathered, I participated in writing memos, which were free-flowing notes that allowed me to explore my personal thoughts and feelings as they related to the research subject matter (see Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008). Along with this technique, I engaged in peer debriefing, meaning I connected with a peer to discuss objectivity and gain insights from an outside party. I was mindful of how the research subject matter related to my own personal experiences and beliefs in order to avoid inadvertently thrusting my ideas onto the participants.

### **Significance**

The results of this study filled a gap in the literature by examining midyear school transitions (Pears, Kim, Buchanan, & Fisher, 2015), specifically among Navy families and focusing on resilience experiences of Navy wives. My goal was to understand how the population experienced the phenomenon, so it would allow for adjustments to be created and implemented for easing the transitions of highly mobile students in the future. Masten (2013) noted military families as representative of other mobile populations, implying that policy developments designed to assist military families may be applied successfully to other populations as well. Over 1 million children have been reported as either homeless or highly mobile, not including those who transition due to the military (Masten et al., 2014).

If students' families are engaged with the school, students may have improved academic experiences (Siegal et al., 2018). This may assist in decreasing school dropout rates (Jimerson et al., 2000). Understanding how resilience impacts midyear transitions

may help improve the process of parental involvement. Parents who feel welcome by the receiving school have reported being more involved with the school and integrated into the community (Siegal et al., 2018). This increase in parental involvement has the potential to benefit schools, mobile students, and even make an impact on the state and national levels as more students graduate and become less likely to rely on social services (McKee & Caldarella, 2016).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into resilience in wives of active duty members of the Navy who transitioned child(ren) to a new school midyear. While research exists examining the impact of mobility on military families (Masten, 2013) as well as exploring how school changes influences students, teachers, and schools (Seigel et al., 2018), there was a gap in the literature that I addressed with this study. In this qualitative study, I used resilience theory as the theoretical framework with which to view the in-depth information gathered from Navy wives who have experienced the phenomenon of a midyear transition. There are many potential benefits for gaining insight into the resilience of Navy wives, including development of interventions to ease the transition, which could further be adjusted to meet the needs of similar populations as well.

The following chapter contains an extensive examination of the extant literature regarding topics associated with this subject matter. In this literature review, I provide a foundation of knowledge regarding the history of student mobility and implications of mobility as well as the military family. The theoretical framework of this study is discussed more thoroughly as well.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

I developed this qualitative study to gain deeper insight into how Navy wives experienced resilience during school transitions of their child(ren) midyear. The results of this study could be useful to a wide array of stakeholders. For instance, elementary, middle, and high schools could all potentially benefit from this research. Policy makers, school counselors, members of the armed forces and their families, and school administrative personnel may also benefit from the findings of this research as well.

By adapting practices to help students who change schools midyear based on needs that become known, not only is the transitioning student better supported, but the parents and the family as a unit may benefit. Along with this, if Navy families were to become aware of the potential stressors and the best practices for successfully managing a midyear school transition, it may result in a smoother overall process, reducing stress for parents and students alike. Similar populations may be positively impacted by this research because the Navy, as a division of the military, may be comparable to other branches of the military as well as mobile civilian populations, such as children in the foster care system (see Masten, 2013).

Policy makers could use the findings of this study to become better versed in the challenges frequently encountered by Navy families and create an improved process through appropriate intervention application as well as improved education and training. The results of this study may offer an opportunity to develop new practices that may improve the lives of those who serve and their families as well as potentially decrease instances of school dropout within similar populations. School mobility is considered

detrimental for those who must experience this phenomenon (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017); it is also widely agreed upon by researchers that there is still much to learn about the overall impact of mobility (Garboden, Leventhal, & Newman, 2017).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Prior to procuring the many peer-reviewed articles utilized in this literature review, I completed an extensive search and review of similar dissertations present in ProQuest Central. Search terms included *Navy*, *school dropout*, and *resilience*, with the search time frame limited to sources published in 2013 and more recently and open to all universities. I also conducted multiple database searches of Education Resources Information Center, SAGE, and EBSCO to locate sources.

I used the Walden Library, Google Scholar, and on rare occasion, Google to power my searches for pertinent information. I accessed military information through official government websites, namely the DOD websites and MilitaryOneSource. The literature review for this research was focused on peer-reviewed articles that were published within the previous 5-year period; however, there are articles referenced in this chapter that are outside of this time frame in order to add a layer of depth to the theoretical and historical information provided. Creating this literature review was an iterative process, so I continually updated the review as existing literature was updated.

I used the following keywords to procure pertinent literature for review and application into this study: *school dropout*, *school completion*, *high school dropout*, *failure to graduate*, *resilience*, *resiliency*, *relocation*, *military*, *military family*, *military child*, *military-affiliated*, *military family syndrome*, *U.S. Navy*, *sailors*, *midyear transition*, *school transition*, *ecology of dropping out of school*, *military students*, *moving*,

*transition, changing schools, switching schools, resilience theory, ecological theory, neighborhood effects theory, social capital theory, military resilience, school mobility, military education, hypermobility, residential mobility, switching schools, school enrollment, department of defense, American military statistics, absenteeism, behavior issues, grade retention, coping with stress, parent-child relationship, social capital theory, resilience theory, and dropout.*

My search for relevant articles included the use of Boolean terms “and” as well as “or” to link phrases. Search terms included subject areas of military families, resilience, midyear school transitions, changing schools, school and residential mobility, education and military families, and school dropout factors. For instance, using the Walden Library search, I had input the date range to include only peer-reviewed articles from the previous 3 years and searched for subject matter articles with the terms, *military family* and *resilience*, which would result in a certain number of articles. Perusing the abstract would determine if the article should be saved in my Zotero account and be read in-depth. Once an article had been identified as useful, the title and author would be entered into Google Scholar and a search for articles that referenced the initial article was conducted, along with a similar article search. This way I was able to build a collection of literature comprised of previously conducted research that related the research I conducted in various manners.

During the initial searches, the time frame for articles was open to all publication dates. This was later narrowed to include only articles published within the previous 5 years (i.e., 2013 and newer) as a means of ensuring the most relevant and recent information was being examined. I used the Google Scholar search engine to expand the

search for peer-reviewed articles based on similar topic studies as well as articles that referenced those I had deemed as valuable for this research. This allowed for finding other articles that had referenced articles I utilized in my own literature review and served to round out the information being collected to ensure a wide variety of information was being obtained while still remaining relevant to my research ideas.

The following literature review includes a synthesis of the peer-reviewed articles that inspired and supported the construction of my research as well as influenced the design and methodology. A description of the theoretical framework of this study, namely resilience theory, is presented in-depth to lay the foundation for the research study itself. This is followed by an examination of the historical importance of mobility and a cohesive description of the military. Finally, I provide an analysis of the extant literature regarding this subject matter to offer a base of understanding and support the need for my research. A significant focus of the literature was the ecology of leaving school prior to graduation. In this chapter, I demonstrate the relevance and necessity of this study as well as how the results of this study enhance the extant body of literature.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

A variety of theories have been used by researchers to add a level of depth and understanding to the phenomenon of school mobility (Tønnessen, Telle, & Syse, 2016). Amongst the various theoretical frameworks that have been utilized are social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986), general migration theory (Grigg, 2012), neighborhood effects theory (Goldsmith, Britton, Reese, & Velez, 2017), ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) and resilience theory (Rutter, 1987). The following subsections are a brief overview of these theoretical foundations.

### **Social Capital Theory**

Social capital theory was developed by Bourdieu (1986) and posited that the resources individuals collect may be used as a form of capital through their relationships, which then supports and enhances personal experience. Similar to monetary exchanges, social capital may be utilized in order to accomplish meeting needs and/or personal gain (Bourdieu, 1986). For instance, social capital theory suggests that relocations have a detrimental impact due to both the disruption of connections within the family as a unit as well as the loss of the support within the community (Coleman, 1988). Coleman (1988) noted that the disrupted connections apply not only to the students who relocated but to their parents as well. Parents experienced damaged connections to other parents in their community as well as school personnel, such as teachers and pertinent supportive staff, including school social workers, coaches, academic advisors, counselors, or school psychologists (Lleras & McKillip, 2017).

### **General Migration Theory**

General migration theory posits that relocation ought to be considered a beneficial experience because the potential for betterment may be a direct result of the relocation (Tønnessen et al., 2016). The thought process being that the relocation may be upward in nature and, therefore, may often be related to positive life events, such as a parent advocating for their child to be placed into a better school system (Grigg, 2012). This may include other such examples as an employment promotion resulting in better financial security or the transition to a better neighborhood (Goldsmith et al., 2017).

### **Neighborhood-Effects Theory**

Neighborhood-effects theory segregates moving into two categories: mobility, which was defined as relocations that occurred at the same socioeconomic level, and migration, which was defined as an upwards relocation typically aligned with increased income (Goldsmith et al., 2017). Mollborn, Lawrence, and Root (2018) discussed that moves from a higher socioeconomic setting to an area that was considered a lower socioeconomic status were shown to be detrimental to young students, noting that higher levels of mobility were linked to the students experiencing academic difficulties as well and demonstrating the negative impact mobility may cause. Through various research studies, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that both mobility and migration were found to increase the likelihood of the student dropping out of school (Goldsmith et al., 2017). Interestingly, both categories of relocation resulted in the same negative impact for the students involved in the research study, despite the potential positive factors that may exist in an upward move (Goldsmith et al., 2017).

### **Ecological Theory**

Ecological theory posits that dropping out of school is not a single act, but rather an experience that is influenced by the many personal and social elements of an individual's life, along with the societal and systemic considerations that exist (Wood, Kiperman, Esch, Leroux, & Truscott, 2017). Bronfenbrenner (1994) developed ecological theory to apply the notion that patterns of interaction impact an individual's experiences, perceptions, and behaviors. Along with this, Bronfenbrenner explained that an individual's systems and environments revolve around the interpretation of that individual, eliciting varying degrees of influence based on proximity and assigned value.



Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory suggests that the many aspects of an individual's life influence development (Coley & Kull, 2016). This may include aspects such as school, home, peer relationships, an individual's community, and more (Coley & Kull, 2016). The environment in which a student lives may impact the choices they make; this applies particularly to the environment of a student's school as well as his or her home (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2010).

### **Resilience Theory**

I chose resilience theory as the theoretical framework for this study. Resilience relates to an individual's response to risk (Masten, Fiat, Labella, & Strack, 2015). Rutter (1987) noted that not all individuals are able to manage stress successfully. Along with this, Rutter also posited that simply because an individual is able to cope with stress in certain situations, this does not mean that the same individual would always be able to cope in an effective manner for every stressful situation which may arise in the future.

Windle (2011) noted the difficulties that permeate the application of a simple definition to the concept of resilience. Crafting a strong understanding of the term resilience leads to the appropriate use of resilience theory in research application (Windle, 2011). In regard to this study, resilience refers to the quality or trait that impacts an individual or family's ability to cope with adversity (see Masten, 2018; Windel, 2011). Rutter (1987) posited that resilience varies throughout an individual's lifetime and is experienced differently for each person. Palmer (2008) described the relationship between a parent and child as a fundamental aspect of resiliency within a family, highlighting the value of a healthy relationship in being able to effectively cope with difficulties that may challenge the family as a unit or individuals within it. Rutter noted

that a healthy child-parent relationship was linked to lower outcomes of maladaptive coping and psychological issues within families that experienced difficulties and stress, though shared that this was an area of research that warranted further examination.

Resilience may be considered a process in which the individual or family survives difficult occurrences (Masten, 2018). Challenging experiences may occur in a variety of manners, such as changing schools midyear, surviving a natural disaster, or enduring a parental separation. Understanding the correlation between protective factors and navigating stress inducing situations is essential to gaining insight into resilience (Rutter, 1987). Rutter (1987) identified six indicators of resilience: stressors, external environmental context, person-environment interactional process, internal self-characteristics, resilience processes, and positive outcomes.

Stressors are the disruption which upsets the current state (Rutter, 1987). In this study, the stressor equates to the midyear transition to a new school. The external environmental context are the supports which assist the coping process (Rutter, 1987). In relation to the present research this would be the relationship within the family or with the child's parents.

The person-environment interactional process is the process of creating security within the changes which have sparked the need for resilience (Rutter, 1987). Rutter (1987) described internal self-characteristics as thoughts, actions, culture, and emotional strengths that may support effective coping strategies. Resilience processes are essential in understanding how effective coping has been achieved (Masten, et al., 2015). Finally, positive outcomes represent previously attained successful coping of traumatic situations,

with the notion that these experiences support healthier coping abilities in the future (Masten, 2018).

### **Military Families**

In regard to military families, resilience is an oft found theme in research pertaining to this population. Researchers have examined resilience in military members (Rice & Liu, 2016), as well as in Navy spouses, and military-affiliated children (Russo & Fallon, 2014). Active duty members of the military, as well as veterans, have been the subjects of research relating to resilience as well (Rice & Liu, 2016). Deployment and reintegration are themes readily found in research regarding the resilience of military families (Pinna, Hanson, Zhang, & Gewirtz, 2017), as well as the challenges of military life in general, including lengthy separations, the needs of the military always taking priority, and frequent mobility (Rice & Liu, 2016).

Resilience theory draws attention to the necessity of protective factors according to Saleebey (1996) and highlights an individual's ability to recover from misfortune (Masten, 2018). Davidson (2000) explained that an individual experiences biological adaptation subsequent to adverse events in relation to personal perception of the stressful situation. Since all people have different affective styles, meaning methods of regulating one's emotion, stressful situations will influence an individual to a varying degree (Davidson, 2000) and thus influence the development and use of resilience. Essentially, as one experiences repeated stressors, the individual adjusts personal behaviors to meet these challenges in various degrees of effective or maladaptive manners (Weber & Weber, 2005).

In this research, resilience theory shall be paired with the question of how resilience is incorporated by Navy wives who experience the phenomenon of transitioning a child(ren) to a new school midyear. Resilience theory revolves around the effective coping practices as well as the adaptations of individuals or groups when faced with trauma, tragedy, or adversity (Masten, 2018). Trauma is based on personal understanding and may vary widely across individuals, cultures, and groups (Masten et al., 2015). Therefore, by examining the resilience encountered during midyear school changes, which may certainly be perceived as a stressful or even traumatic experience, it is logical to reflect upon resilience theory, as it is naturally captured within the question itself. This allows for an examination and comparison of the various responses from the research participants, interpreting the data in the context of degrees of personal and familial resilience.

## **Literature Review**

### **U.S. Armed Forces**

The U.S. Armed Forces is comprised of five separate factions including: Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Air Force (DOD, 2019). Each of these groups serves a unique purpose, and each contributes to the safety of the country and of the people with the United States. The Marine Corps is a subset of the Navy, both managing amphibious security, however the Marine Corps operates on a contingency basis and is able to provide air, sea, and ground support (DOD, 2019). The Navy is primarily utilized as a deterrent to conflict and deploys ships, boats, aircraft, and submarines (DOD, 2019).

The U.S. military force has experienced a significant shift in the service member population, moving away from the era of young, single men as the primary participant of

this voluntary force (Drummet et al., 2003). Military-affiliated family members now outnumber service members (Clever & Segal, 2013). The Navy has a marriage rate of 38.2% along with 61.4% of members of the Navy having children, equating to nearly a quarter of a million children affiliated with the Navy (DOD, 2016). The DOD (2016) reported that there are over 1.7 million children in active duty military families and 69.4% of these children are age 11 or younger.

### **Military Family Syndrome**

Military families face challenges that their nonmilitary counterparts may never even conceive, such as lengthy separations, concerns for a partner's safety, and frequent relocations (Aronson & Perkins, 2013). Due to these increased experiences with stressors, the so-called "military family syndrome" was developed in the 1970s, positing that children in military families are more likely to experience significant mental health issues and behavior problems in general (Clever & Segal, 2013). The military family syndrome speculates that military families consist of a father who serves the role of dictator, unruly children, and a mother who is ineffective and depressed (LaGrone, 1978). Coleman et al. (2016) noted a significant lack of evidence to support the concept of the military family syndrome. Jensen, Xenakis, Wolf, and Bain (1991) conducted research which served to discredit the notion of the military family syndrome, finding that while military families experienced higher levels of stress than civilians, there was no evidence of greater instances of psychopathology found in children within military families. However, stigmatization exists for children affiliated with the military and this can influence mental health providers, teachers, and other service providers who engage with this population (Clever & Segal, 2013).

### **Military-Affiliated Children**

Children who belong to military families have been a subject of research for decades. According to Sherman and Glen (2011) military families are often subjected to an inefficient process of school systems sharing records. Along with this, each school district has varying requirements, course descriptions, and protocols for graduation which can result in students being forced to repeat coursework, suddenly finding themselves behind in school, or even being unable to graduate as intended (Bradshaw et al., 2010). These struggles with the new school can leave parents with increased stress levels as they must navigate a new school system, which may require a significant input of time and energy in order to ensure the student is able to be academically on track in their new school (Ruff & Keim, 2014).

Multiple researchers in the 1990s pressed the notion that frequent relocation is a significant source of stress for children in general, let alone highly mobile military families (Ruff & Keim, 2014; Weber & Weber, 2005). Due to these findings which indicated that multiple moves were detrimental to the mental wellbeing of children, the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) was developed (Ruff & Keim, 2014). The MCEC is a program which serves to support military families during the many necessary transitions of military-affiliated children, as well as during various stressors such as deployment and being stationed abroad (MCEC, 2019). This nonprofit organization provides informational seminars, trainings, and works one-on-one with military families to facilitate smoother transitions between schools (MCEC, 2019).

### **Historical Significance**

Rumberger (1995) noted that early research into school dropout was focused primarily only on the experience of high school dropout, with little to no attention paid to those individuals who left school prior to the high school years. Rumberger (1995) also shared that this earlier research generally was directed solely in regard to the institutional point of view, or that of the individual student experience. Without examining the commonalities, connections, and variances of the viewpoints of the institution along with those who have experienced leaving school prior to graduation, information may be missing or misinterpreted. As time progressed, the depth and breadth of research regarding school dropout has expanded to encompass a much wider assortment of viewpoints and understanding, inclusion of theoretical foundations, and populations impacted by the phenomenon of dropout.

### **Gender/Race**

Current statistics demonstrate that female and male students experience dropout at about the same rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). This, however, has not always been the case. Historically, male students have been more likely to leave school prior to graduation than their female peers (NCES, 2018). Franklin and Trouard (2016) noted that gender was not a predictor of school dropout, despite the frequency it is utilized as a predictor.

Race and gender have been noted to be connected to different reasons a student may leave school (Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996). One example of this could be pregnancy, as a female student is far more likely to leave school as a result of becoming pregnant than the father of the child, and specific groups, such as Hispanics, are more

likely to become pregnant during their school years (Berg & Nelsons, 2016). Historically, female students were pushed out or even required to drop out of school as a result of a pregnancy, a practice common even during the 1970s and later (Upchurch & McCarthy, 1990).

Race is another factor which has become highlighted more recently in research studies as various minority groups are taken into consideration. For instance, George (2015) noted that African American students have always been subjected to harsher disciplinary actions in the school system yet were not a frequent subject of research for several decades. Historically as well as presently, Latino students have had the highest rates of dropout, followed by African American/Black students, and finally White students (NCES, 2018). While dropout rates as a whole have diminished over the years, there is still a significant number of students who leave school each year prior to graduation (NCES, 2018).

## **Research**

Both qualitative and quantitative research have been conducted in this area of interest (Rumberger, 1995). Much of the quantitative research has utilized existing data and explored correlations (Porter & Vogel, 2014) or examined effectiveness of various interventions or programs (Wilson, Tanner-Smith, Lipsey, Steinka-Fry, & Morrison, 2011). Qualitative research has provided a rich context to support the numerical findings of the quantitative research, and together these two types of research have crafted a base of knowledge in the experience of school dropout.

School dropout is a concern which has been examined to a great extent for several decades. The breadth of research regarding school dropout is massive and includes



protective factors which are those elements supporting a student achieving graduation (Wood et al., 2017), along with factors which equate to a student being higher risk for dropout (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Genao, 2015), and breakdowns of dropout for many different populations (Berg & Nelson, 2016). Research examining the school dropout phenomenon has been conducted in regard to Latino/a populations (Peguero, Bondy, & Shekarkhar, 2017; Vera, Polanin, Polanin, & Carr, 2018), African Americans/Black students (George, 2015), and gender considerations (Berg & Nelson, 2016). Further research has been completed in order to explore other specific populations such as the experience of immigrant students (Allard, 2016), children experiencing homelessness (Cutuli et al., 2013), and even that of the children of migrant workers (Free, Križ, & Konecnik, 2014; Romanowski, 2003).

In regard to mobility and the connection it demonstrates with school dropout, a wide array of research may also be found. Information pertaining to the impact of the neighborhood to which a student moves is available (Goldsmith et al., 2017). Along with this, studies reflecting the impact of mobility on the school and those students who are not mobile (Whitesell, Stiefel, & Schwartz, 2016) is readily available. Some researchers have even argued the benefits of mobility (Plucker, 1999; Weber & Weber, 2005), as opposed to the much more commonly held belief by researchers that relocations are indeed detrimental to those students and families who must experience this phenomenon (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017).

The amount of research available on the subject matter of school dropout is quite expansive and encompassing and yet there is still a need for further research. One area of such need is that which will support an in-depth understanding of resilience in military-

connected parents of child(ren), in particular those students who must experience the phenomenon of transferring to a new school midyear (Welsh, 2018). Therefore, the following is a comprehensive overview of some of the literature which may be readily found in the subject areas of student mobility, midyear transitions, military families, and school dropout.

### **Mobility**

Mobility is considered by many researchers to be a more accurate predictor of school dropout and academic accomplishment than many other factors including socioeconomic status or family dynamic concerns (Herbers et al., 2013; Pribesh & Downy, 1999). Mobility may occur for a wide array of reasons and at various points during a student's academic career. Amongst these reasons are changes in family structure, which may include marriage, divorce, or separation (Mollborn et al., 2018). Along with this is the potential for financial upset or improvement such as a loss of employment or promotion (Goldsmith, et al., 2017).

Due to the variety of influences which surround mobility, the research which exists on the impact of mobility is vast and encompasses a great deal of differing concepts and implications. Researchers have examined mobility in regard to many factors, including school transitions (Welsh, 2017), frequency of mobility (Vogel et al., 2017), and relocation as a positive experience (Plucker, 1999). Socioeconomic factors (Wood et al., 2017), and the influence of mobility and life stages (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017) have been examined as well.

### **School Mobility**

Mobility, in regard to school transition, occurs generally in two manners which are identified as structural mobility and nonpromotional (or nonstructural) mobility (Welsh, 2017). Structural mobility refers to those transitions which are anticipated and are based on the system of the school (Welsh, 2017). An example of this would be a student completing his or her experience in an elementary school and thus transitioning to a middle school, often at Grade 6 or Grade 7.

Nonpromotional mobility also known as nonstructural moves, occur when a student relocates outside of the boundaries of the school or opts to attend another school (Schwartz, Stiefel, & Cordes, 2016). For instance, a child who is selected for and subsequently decides to enroll in a magnet school would be considered to experience non-promotional mobility. Schwartz et al. (2016) noted that while structural moves occur over the summer as a student transitions from one school or system to the next, nonstructural moves may take place at any time of the school year and thus include another level of stress and potential issues, such as relationship and academic disruption as the student adapts to his or her new environment.

When considering the mobility of Americans, specific groups stand out as more frequently mobile than others. This includes those experiencing poverty (Clemens et al., 2016), children within the foster care system (Pears et al., 2015), as well as members of the military (Seigel, 2018). Families associated with the military relocate considerably more often than their civilian counterparts (DODEA, 2015). Compared to an average civilian family, military families relocate approximately 3 times more often, generally every 1 year to every 4 years, and thus the typical child in a military family will attend up to nine schools during his or her academic career (Ruff & Keim, 2014).

Many challenges arise when transitioning from one school to another. The transfer of records and pertinent school data can be a time consuming, and all too often slow, process (Ruff & Keim, 2014). Students may be exposed to coursework which was previously completed (such as rereading texts, or repeatedly learning multiplication and division) or conversely, miss learning important information as a result of varying curricula between school districts (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Students may find it difficult to integrate into the culture of the school or engage in established extracurricular activities (Ruff & Keim, 2014). Disrupted relationships may also lead to diminished support or result in difficulties engaging in healthy peer interactions (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017).

### **Midyear Transitions**

There is little research regarding midyear school transition, although a need to understand this particular phenomenon certainly exists (Welsh, 2018). As noted by Bradshaw et al. (2010), midyear transitions between schools pose a unique, difficult experience for families. Students and parents are required to assimilate into an existing classroom and school culture when a midyear transition occurs and may encounter the stress associated with these experiences (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Mothers may find themselves on the outskirts with the school community of families who have a common history, as well as struggle with connecting to a new teacher and fellow parents (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017).

Whitesell, Stiefel, and Schwartz (2016) described the detriments of students joining a new school once the academic year has already begun, noting that school personnel including administrative as well as teachers along with established students

may also endure negative consequences of midyear student transitions. Consideration should be given for the location from which the student transfers in regard to the level of disruption the transition may create, with individuals moving from other school districts creating more disruption than those who merely switch schools within a single school district (Whitesell et al., 2016). Navy families are often required to relocate to a new state and are more likely to experience a cross country move than one within a school district as a result of a military mandated relocation. There was a need for further research which specifically examined Navy families, along with other highly mobile populations, in order to develop effective interventions targeted to these groups which are at a higher risk of experiencing multiple transitions at a higher rate than other groups (Garner & Moots, 2018).

### **Relocation as a Positive Experience**

While researchers have generally agreed upon relocation and school transfers as detrimental (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017), there have been some researchers who have argued that changing school as a result of relocation may indeed not be considered disadvantageous for children (Plucker, 1999). Bradshaw et al. (2010) shared that in regard to the specific group of military-affiliated students in their adolescent years, the research results have been varied. Schwartz et al. (2016) suggested that nonstructural mobility is less damaging than those school transitions which are expected. Examining the short- and medium-term impact on both structural and nonstructural moves lead to the conclusion that for middle school and elementary school students within the New York City public school system, those students who experienced nonstructural mobility

demonstrated either no impact or positive impact was present in the medium term (Schwartz, 2016).

Research touting that relocations may not actually be detrimental was presented by Plucker (1999). This research study consisted of five families, each with the military personnel in an officer rank, and only considered families with students already identified as gifted children (Plucker, 1999). While no long-term effects were found in this research study, the researcher acknowledged that the students did experience academic as well as social difficulties in the short term, as a result of military-related transitions to new schools (Plucker, 1999).

Along with this, Weber and Weber (2005) claimed that frequent mobility increased positively in regard to parental perception of adolescent children's behavior. Generally speaking, the more moves a family had undergone, the more positively the military affiliated parents had rated the behaviors of their teenagers (Weber & Weber, 2005). Similarly, Marchant and Medway (1987) believed that school transition and relocation provided an opportunity for a child to become more engaged in a new school and display improved behavior with the result of improved academic achievement than their previous school.

A study conducted by the DOD and was published in 2018 noted findings that are believed by researchers to demonstrate that decreased mobility had a positive impact on the Navy population being examined (Poe & Galvao, 2018). The researchers recommended a decrease in PCS experiences noting that the benefits for the Navy families were significant (Poe & Galvao, 2018). Along with this, Poe and Galvao (2018)

claimed that the quality of family life for those which experienced decreased mobility had a positive impact on the service member as well as the family as a unit.

Researchers within the last 10 years have overwhelmingly agreed that school and residential relocations are generally considered a source of significant stress, particularly for military-connected families, such as those in the Navy, who not only move more frequently, but typically have less control over the relocation itself (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Drummet et al., 2004; Russo & Fallon, 2014). Navy families often do not have much time to arrange and complete a move, with orders and moves being authorized only a matter of a few weeks prior to occurring (Poe & Galvao, 2018). Along with this, researchers have explained that not only does life span timing impact the effects of a move (Anderson, et al., 2014), the number of relocations may also play a significant role in the ability to recover from this stress inducing life event (Vogel, Porter, & McCuddy, 2017).

### **Hypermobility**

Hypermobility is the act of relocating several times within a relatively shorter period of time (Vogel et al., 2017). Princiotta et al., (2006) noted that over 66% of American students will transition to a new school due to a reason other than grade promotion at least once prior to middle school, thus making school transitions an exceptionally common experience for students and their families. As mentioned before, military families move much more frequently than the average civilian family, leading to the concern of the negative implications of hypermobility.

Children who move more frequently struggle with ineffective development of healthy coping behaviors and may experience poor emotional development which may

lead to significant struggles in academic achievement (Fowler et al., 2015). Vogel et al., (2017) noted that hypermobility has been linked to lower income rates in adulthood and higher rates of early parenthood, increased instances of behavior issues, as well as greater overall instances of students dropping out of school. Anderson et al. (2014) noted that in regard to the number of peer relationships developed, there was a steady decline of friendships with each subsequent relocation.

### **Socioeconomics**

Socioeconomic status may be considered an influential aspect of not only residential and school mobility, but school dropout as well (Wood et al., 2017). Barth, Cebula, and Shen (2015) noted that dropout rates were intimately connected to poverty level, with families living below or at poverty consistently also having the highest instances of school dropout. Students who experienced lower socioeconomic status have been shown to be low academic achievers, generally entering school with abilities below those of children from more affluent backgrounds, then failing to make up the academic differences over time (Herbers et al., 2012).

Researchers noted that while school dropout is not experienced only by individuals of certain socioeconomic background, it is considered more likely to occur within those who find themselves within the lowest socioeconomic status (Wood et al., 2017). Peguero and Shaffer (2015) noted that socioeconomic status and dropout rates are connected within male populations of adolescent students. Families that move to new neighborhoods with a different socioeconomic status are less likely to be engaged in the community and experience more difficulty overall (Anderson et al., 2014).



## **Life Stages and Transition**

Researchers have argued that mobility may have a negative impact on a child at any point during his or her development, as well as posited that the potential for damage is linked to specific developmental periods, such as infancy or the high school years (Coley & Kull, 2016). Rather than apply an overarching viewpoint that mobility is detrimental at all stages, it is necessary to examine specific aspects of development, such as cognitive abilities, at various developmental stages to understand the influence of mobility (Anderson et al., 2015). Along with this, gaining insight into how the number of moves which occur is another element which impacts a child and should be considered when exploring transitions and life stages (Coley & Kull, 2016). Coley and Kull (2016) also argued that the length of time the effects of mobility last are an important factor to consider, noting that in some cases, the impact was short term.

According to Fowler et al. (2015), children are more likely to experience negative outcomes associated with mobility depending on the developmental timing of when the mobility occurs. The consequences of mobility in young children are plentiful and include negative impact on health as well as an increase in stress levels (Anderson et al., 2015). Children who were exposed to mobility in their early years were found to experience behavior issues (Coley & Kull, 2016) and multiple moves during a child's early years were shown through multiple research studies to be predictors of socioemotional behavior outcomes as well (Mollborn et al., 2018). Lleras and McKillip (2017) reported that students who experienced mobility during their early childhood were more likely to develop behavior concerns, less likely to be engaged in the classroom

setting and increase the probability of academic difficulties in the essential area of reading development.

Schachter (2004) noted that it is more likely for a child to experience residential and/or school mobility during or before his or her elementary school years. Herbers et al. (2013) noted that instances of school mobility decrease over the years, with middle schoolers generally not switching schools as frequently as those students in high school, and high school students changing schools much less frequently than students in younger grades. Mobility during the middle school years may also be particularly detrimental for students, with research demonstrating diminished grade point averages and test scores for those students who experienced mobility during that time (Anderson, 2017). Indeed, students who had experienced mobility during the middle school years were found to display significant degrees of impairment and based on the frequency of mobility were considered to be accurate predictors of school dropout as well as symptoms of depression (Herbers et al., 2013).

Adolescence is widely considered to be a difficult time in one's life as puberty blooms and developmental changes abound (Anderson et al., 2014). During the years of adolescence individuals are more likely to participate in risk-taking behavior, which when coupled with less attentive parents can lead to an increase in poor decision-making practices (Vogel et al. 2017). Mobility concerns during adolescence may shift to the concern of potentially accumulated stress from multiple moves, noting that the higher rates of mobility a child is exposed to, the higher instances of adverse life impact (Anderson et al., 2014). This includes such events as increased rates of single parent families along with employment and financial instability (Anderson et al., 2014).

### **School Dropout**

School dropout occurs when a student no longer attends school and fails to complete his or her education, and therefore does not graduate from high school (McDermott, Anderson, & Zaff, 2018). There is no single factor or influence which can accurately determine if a student will complete his or her high school education, therefore understanding the multitude of risk factors which can play a role in this life changing decision to graduate or dropout is essential (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). When a student is unable to complete his or her high school education, the individual may be ill prepared to experience successes in life, and rather face hardships including higher levels of incarceration, difficulty participating in the workforce, and even diminished health (Wilkins & Bost, 2016).

Some researchers have associated school dropout with increased instances of symptoms of depression as well (Herbers et al., 2013). A solid educational base may be considered a significant factor in the development of adulthood (Peguero & Shaffer, 2015). Indeed, graduating from high school may be required for many employment opportunities, being accepted into institutions of higher education, as well as being able to lift oneself above the poverty level (Robison et al., 2017). When a student fails to graduate, his or her transition into that of a healthy, functioning adult may become disrupted (Peguero & Shaffer, 2015).

Therefore, an individual who drops out of school may also be limited in contributing to his or her community's economy in terms of taxes and/or employment as well as being able to spend money (Zaff et al., 2017). There are many factors which have been associated with school dropout, including degree of parental involvement, social

support, and school mobility (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017). Socioeconomic status, personal beliefs and culture, along with community and family culture are all factors which may influence a student's decision to remain in school or leave prior to graduation as well (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). According to McDermott et al. (2018) factors which may influence school drop include both push out and pull out from an academic setting.

### **Push Out**

So called "push out" references school related difficulties. For instance, push out may occur due to reasons such as poor grades, failure to connect with teachers, or school disciplinary actions (George, 2015). Push out is likely to transpire in schools which over utilize punitive measures or those schools with a no-tolerance policy, as students in these settings may not be afforded flexibility in punishment options (George, 2015). According to Ritchotte, Rubenstein, and Murry (2015), those students who do not have strong study habits, and are therefore considered more susceptible to becoming overwhelmed by coursework, are more likely to be pushed out prior to graduation due to difficulties meeting academic standards. Schools which suffer from higher instances of discrimination and prejudice, including gender, racial, or sexual preference, may also be more prone to issues with push out as students are made to feel unwelcomed or viewed negatively by school personnel (George, 2015).

### **Pull Out**

While push out is typically the result of an influential aspect of the school environment or structure, "pull out" is generally due to factors directly relating to the student's life according to McDermott et al. (2018). Pull out references outside influencers which lead to a student leaving school prior to graduation (Bradley &

Renzulli, 2011). Pull out influencers may include needing to provide care for his or her children or having to work to support his or her family (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). Pulling out of school may be influenced by culture and socioeconomic standing as well (McDermott et al., 2018).

### **Typologies and Risk Factors**

McDermott et al. (2018) noted that individuals who leave school without graduating do not fit into a single mold, nor do they rationalize the decision in the same manner. Rather, these individuals hail from a wide array of backgrounds, religions, cultures, geographic locations, and ages (Janosz, Le Blanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 2000). Each individual may attribute dropping out to a variety of influencers and factors and each student may attribute a unique reason for his or her choice to discontinue his or her formal education (Janosz et al., 2000).

Rumberger (1983) determined two groupings of school dropout risk factors. These include status risk factors and alterable risk factors. Freeman and Simonsen (2015) noted that while no single risk factor is a guarantee that a student will drop out of school, these researchers also explained that students who experience multiple risk factors, especially from both categories, may have an increased chance of leaving school prior to graduation.

Status risk factors are those aspects of a student's life which are more challenging to change (Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004). Included in this category are socioeconomic status, parental involvement, mobility, and geographic region (Lehr et al., 2004). Also found in this category are factors which may be considered impossible

for the student to adjust, including ethnicity, age, gender, family structure, disability, native language, and parental education levels (Rumberger, 1983).

Alterable risk factors are considered risk factors which may be adjusted (Lehr et al., 2004). Rumberger (1983) noted that alterable risk factors include retention, absenteeism/attendance, behavior issues and academic achievement/grades. Lehr et al. (2004) expanded upon Rumberger's concept to include stressful life events, educational support at home, parenting, attitude towards school, school climate and policies, and a student's sense of belonging. Over time researchers have expanded these two main categories into four subclasses of typologies which group students into categories based on shared characteristics (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015).

### **Dropout Subgroups**

Bowers and Sprott (2012) provided a discussion on the various typologies of dropout, noting that while there have been many studies conducted in this area, there is still a need for furthering the existing body of literature and deepening the understanding of those who dropout. Amongst these typologies created by researchers over the decades, themes emerge. The following describes the categories which emerged as the general typologies of students who are considered to have a higher likelihood of leaving school prior to graduation. The four main categories include: quiet, chronically struggling, disruptive, and bored (Bowers & Sprott, 2012).

**Quiets.** The largest group, according to Bowers and Sprott (2012) is that of the so called "quiets." These are students who become overwhelmed and may quickly spiral out of control (Bowers & Sprott, 2012). Students in the quiet category are often surprised by being unable to graduate (Menzer & Hampel, 2009). Students who have issues with

credit hours, such as military families who transfer and may lose credits based on differing school systems (Bradshaw et al., 2010), may fall into this category of those who learn late in the game that they are ineligible for graduation (Ruff & Keim, 2014).

Menzer and Hampel (2009) also include pull out students in this group. The term push out refers to those who leave school prior to graduation due to an obligation or interruption outside of the academic setting, such as needing to support his or her family (Menzer & Hampel, 2009). McDermott et al. (2018) defined quiet dropouts as students who are often engaged in the school and display few outwardly concerning risk factors for dropping out.

**Chronically struggling.** Those students who struggle academically are generally considered low achievers and may have difficulties maintaining the academic level required by the school to graduate (Bowers & Sprott, 2012). Students who chronically struggle to maintain grades may leave prior to graduation as they are faced with grade retention and/or overall poor achievement resulting in despair and frustration (Jimerson, Anderson & Whipple, 2002). Students who struggle with academics may begin the process of dropping out at an early age, and by the time they arrive in high school find themselves ill equipped to handle expectations and workload (Balfanz, Hornig Fox, Bridgeland, & McNaught, 2009). Some researchers noted that the chronic strugglers may experience disciplinary issues along with poor grades and trouble managing behaviors in the classroom resulting in an early departure from school (Janosz et al., 2000).

**Disruptive.** Jimerson et al. (2000) expressed that repeated instances of behavior issues were consistently associated with school dropout, noting that this may be considered a strong indicator for leaving school prior to graduation. Students who belong

to the disruptive group may also experience punitive measures issued by the school and may have a higher likelihood of expulsion (Janosz et al., 2000). McDermott et al. (2018) defined disruptive dropouts as “maladjusted” and often coincided with poor academic achievement. Disruptive students may be considered push out students and often experience higher levels of suspensions and absenteeism (Balfanz et al., 2009).

**Bored.** Bored students are those who fade out of school, and generally have decent grades but may experience higher degrees of frustration with school (Balfanz et al., 2009). Bowers and Spratt (2012) identified this type of dropout as disengaged from their education process and disconnected from the school. Individuals who are considered bored may have appropriate levels of absenteeism (Balfanz et al., 2009) and yet not enjoy school or the educational process and leave prematurely (Bowers & Spratt, 2012).

Researchers have noted that students who are engaged in the following areas: cognitively (academic curiosity), behaviorally (attendance), and/or emotionally (connect with the school environment), are more likely to remain in school and complete the graduation process (Zaff et al., 2017).

### **Dropout Factors**

Researchers have identified a plethora of risk factors, predictors, and protective factors, all of which may persuade a student’s decision to continue to graduation or leave school prematurely (Wood et al., 2017). Many elements are associated with an increased likelihood of school dropout. An accumulation of circumstances may influence the decision to leave school without graduating; therefore, it is valuable to examine the various contexts of school dropout, including school, family, individual considerations (Fortin, Lessard, & Marcotte, 2010). McKee and Caldarella (2016) noted that students



who experience difficulties in both social and academic areas may be in a position for increased risk of dropout, as the accumulation of trouble builds into an overwhelming situation. A student may be influenced by his or her past experiences, current circumstances, as well as the dynamic relationships in his or her life (such as between parents, siblings, teachers, community and peers) all of which may play a role in deciding if the student will remain in school until graduation (Zaff et al., 2017). The following section explores considerations which may influence a student dropping out in either a protective or negative manner.

**Academic performance and retention.** As noted previously, academic performance may play a role in the decision for a student to leave school early. Students who do not maintain the grades needed for graduation may be required to repeat courses in an attempt to improve their grades (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). Herbers, Reynolds, and Chen (2013) noted that retention has been repeatedly associated with school mobility, particularly during the elementary years of a student's academic career. Poor academic performance is at times linked to grade retention, the act of being held back a year to repeat the same grade (Bowers, et al., 2013). Researchers have stressed that retention has been strongly linked to increased instances of school dropout as well as drawing a connection between declining student motivation and retention (Bowers et al., 2013; Jimerson et al., 2002). Interestingly, students who experienced a grade retention were shown to have a higher rate of completing school if parental engagement was high (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007).

**Absenteeism.** Absenteeism is a common issue experienced by students across all grade levels and has been associated with highly negative consequences for students

(Welsh, 2018). Absenteeism occurs when a student does not attend school in a frequent or chronic manner based on the decision of the student and/or the family/caregiver of the student (Robison et al., 2017). Chronic absenteeism has been frequently associated with decreased parental involvement, poor academic accomplishment, and school dropout (Robison et al., 2017).

It is important to understand the distinction between absenteeism and mobility, as well as the connections which exist between the two (Welsh, 2018). There are many circumstances which influence absenteeism as well as mobility, with an overlap existing in many cases, such as changes in family living arrangements, school discipline (suspension/expulsion) and participation in the foster care system (Welsh, 2018). Early examination of so called “forced absenteeism” which occurs as a disciplinary action by the school was shown to lead to higher rates of school dropout, with students noting these experiences as influential in their decision to leave school prior to graduation (Peng & Takai, 1983). Students who experienced absenteeism as a disciplinary action were shown to exhibit behavior issues in school as well as within their communities and at home (Robison et al., 2017). Forced absenteeism was the also the strongest of the indicators of school outcome in the research study conducted by Robison et al. (2017).

**Behavior issues.** Changing schools generally requires a change in peer support and friends, which may not always be an improvement, particularly if a parent becomes disengaged and is unable or unwilling to meet the friends of his or her child and provide guidance and monitoring in this area (Vogel et al. 2017). Mobility has been tied to behavior problems by many researchers, linking the two to higher rates of school dropout as well (Anderson et al., 2014; Herbers et al., 2013). Indeed, Porter and Vogel (2014)

stated bluntly that delinquent behaviors have been strongly associated with individuals who have experienced higher rates of mobility.

Behavior issues are not only detrimental for the development of the youth engaging in the delinquent activities, it is clear these behaviors have a negative impact on a student's likelihood to graduate (Porter & Vogel, 2014). Behavior issues have at times been considered by researchers too be one of the most significant considerations in failure to graduate (Fortin et al., 2010). Behavior problems during the elementary years have been affiliated with dropout later in a student's academic career and indeed are considered to be a strong predictor of dropout risk (Jimerson et al., 2000).

**Housing instability.** Housing instability has become a significant concern for students who are experiencing hypermobility, as this experience has been associated with increased risk of detrimental outcomes including homelessness and school dropout (Cutuli et al., 2013). Students who experience homelessness along with those who encounter hypermobility are considered high risk for academic struggles (Herbers et al., 2012). Low socioeconomic status is affiliated with homelessness and often with hypermobility as well (Herbers et al., 2012).

**Mobility.** According to information collected during a federally funded study in 2010 which tracked a cohort of students for a 10 year period, 18% of the students changed schools three times, while 34% of the students were known to have switched schools twice (Welsh, 2017). This demonstrates that mobility is a common experience for American families. It is also a known phenomenon which occurs at a significantly more frequent rate for military populations (Ruff & Keim, 2014). According to one research study which examined and then compared the impact of school only mobility and

residential only mobility, to simultaneous school and residential mobility, it was determined by the researchers that those students who experienced both a residential and school transition were more negatively impacted in terms of academic outcomes and social relationships (Pribesh & Downey, 1999).

Anderson and Leventhal (2016) noted the increase in criminal behavior, as well as increased rates of mental health issues, and overall behavior concerns associated with frequent mobility. Fowler et al. (2015) shared that concerns with student mental health are linked to mobility, and shared that unstable housing is tied to various adverse outcomes. Students who experience poverty and disrupted housing stability were more likely to display delays and cognitive concerns than those who had not been exposed to housing instability (Fowler et al., 2015). Poor academic achievement and increased rates of retention are associated with mobility, as well as being linked to higher risk of school dropout (Cutuli et al., 2013).

### **Protective Factors**

Students who were able identify at least one useful or helpful element of school were shown to be significantly less likely to even consider dropping out, compared to those who did not apply value to their educational experience or time in school (Parr & Bonitz, 2015). It is essential to understand what keeps students in school in order to improve graduation rates (Vera et al., 2018). Rutter (1987) noted so-called “protective factors” may be an influence in an individual’s ability to successfully cope with a traumatic circumstance.

Protective factors for maintaining a presence in school include influencers such as close parent-child relationships and strong cognitive abilities of a student (Masten et al.,

2015). Protective experiences can influence a child to remain in school and successfully graduate (Masten et al., 2014). Other protective factors include parental involvement and school climate (Siegal et al., 2018), as well as caregiver expectation, and after school activities (McDermott et al., 2018).

### **Extracurricular Activities**

Engagement in extracurricular activities has been tied to influencing graduation rates and claimed to be a protective factor for students (Bowers et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2018). Neely and Vaquera (2017) noted that student engagement levels are a factor utilized to not only determine dropout risk but to diminish the risk as well positing that involvement in extracurricular activities is one way of examining student engagement. Indeed, extracurricular activities have been shown through research to positively influence student grades, mental health, developmental outcomes, and graduation rates as well (Neely & Vaquera, 2017).

Military-affiliated students, such as those associated with the Navy, may experience difficulties in participating in extracurricular activities, as relocation disrupts engagement (Ruff & Keim, 2014). For instance, a student who moves midyear may be unable to join certain extracurricular activities which require and have held tryouts. Another example is that of student government where elections occur, as well as the possibility that certain clubs will not exist at the new school. Along with this, Navy-affiliated students who transfer to a new school may disrupt an established team or organizational leadership, resulting in peer relationship struggles or even diminished engagement in the activity (Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2010).

### **School Climate**

Mckee and Caldarella (2016) posited that the school system itself may be a contributor to dropout. Cohen, McCabe, Michelli and Pickeral (2009) defined school climate as the values, the goals, perception of norms, and the character of a school as understood through those who participate within the school system as well as by the school practices. This includes the perceptions of the teachers, parents, students, and various school personnel (Cohen et al., 2009). School climate may refer to the feelings associated with the school environment, such as the degree to which a student or parent feels welcome and engaged by the school according to Siegal et al. (2018) and may impact the level of involvement by not only students, but their parents and school personnel as well (Cohen et al., 2009). The school climate may be defined in terms of four areas: teaching and learning, school safety, relationships within the school community, and overall environment (Siegal et al., 2018)

Vera et al. (2018) conjectured that transitioning between schools may create disruption in the sense of belonging a student feels within his or her school environment. When parents and students feel disconnected from the school it can create a source of stress and decrease feelings of belonging, thus diminishing parental engagement with the school (Vera et al., 2018). Parents who do not feel welcomed and attached to the school may pass these feelings on to their children (Cohen et al., 2009). It has been established that parents have influence over the perception of being welcome and overall attitude a student has toward his or her school (Schueler et al., 2014).

While school climate may impact some groups more than other, such as being rated of higher importance to Latinx students, it nevertheless has been associated with increased student graduation across the board (Vera et al., 2018). Indeed, Siegal et al.

(2018) explained that the school can play a supportive role for the entire family in terms of transitions. This may be considered a protective factor to encourage a student and his or her parents to remain engaged until graduation occurs (Siegal et al.).

### **Parental Involvement**

According to Siegal et al. (2018), school climate may be a deciding factor in the degree of parental involvement in his or her child's education. Parents are a significant source of influence in the lives of their children, and consequently, play a deciding role in the success of their child in terms to education, as well as shape the outlook and attitude a student has regarding school (Schueler et al., 2014). Along with this, parents play an integral role in deciding where a student may attend school. Particularly with students who encounter mobility during the early years of their educational experience, the decision of where the student will attend school may be the sole discretion of the parents with little to no input from the student (Schueler et al., 2014). Parents who become less involved in the academic experiences of their children may find that this results in an increase in troublesome behaviors (Vogel et al., 2017).

Jimerson et al. (2000) noted that parental involvement was a key protective factor in students who graduated versus those who did not in a longitudinal study completed in Minnesota. El Nokali, Bachman, and Votruba-Drzal (2010) noted that parents who are involved with their student's education experience impact the presence of behavioral issues and have been linked to students having stronger social skills. According to Wilkins and Bost (2016), parents who are engaged within the schools their children attend are considered more likely to have children who will graduate. Students who have involved parents are also more likely to accomplish goals for higher education (El Nokali

et al., 2010). Indeed, it has been demonstrated that decreased parental engagement is associated with behavior concerns, poor choices in peer relationships, and lower levels of academic achievement (Anderson et al., 2014).

### **Parent-Child Relationships**

Financial stability, mental health, access to resources, and supportive services/relationships can all impact parent-child relationships and ultimately academic outcome as well (Gasper et al., 2010). Changes in family circumstance, such as parental separation/death or loss of employment can result in changes to the parent-child relationship as financial worries and diminished parental support may have an adverse impact (McDermott et al., 2018; Mollborn et al., 2018). Children who experience abuse and neglect have also been shown to demonstrate lower degrees of academic success (McDermott et al., 2018).

Short-term or even permanent damage may occur to the parent-child relationship as a result of the stress mobility incurs (Anderson et al., 2014). It has been noted that when a member of the family experiences an increase in feelings of stress, it potentially can have ramifications for the entire family unit (Masten, 2013). Thus, when a student transitions to a new school midyear and therefore must adapt to the new school and social settings an increase in stress is highly likely and may permeate to the whole family.

The loss of the support network for both children and their parents is another factor which may negatively impact resilience as well as potentially create tension within the parent-child relationship (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017). McDermott et al. (2018) stated that one of the predictors of school dropout is the relationship between a parent and child and noted that involved parents tend to actively engage their children in discussions



regarding their academic careers, making this a subject matter of value in the lives of the students. Gasper et al. (2010) noted that children who experience mobility, especially frequent or chronic mobility, generally do not have families which strongly resemble families who move less often.

Parents, notably mothers, and the support they may provide are an essential element in the process of a student completing high school (Zaff et al., 2017). This support may come in the shape of assisting in school projects, setting expectations for graduation or grade attainment, homework help (Zaff et al., 2017), and engaging with teachers and school personnel through personal interactions and/or volunteering in the classroom (Seigel, et al., 2018). Parents who establish and maintain boundaries regarding grades as well as create a priority for schoolwork have been associated with continued enrollment of a student as well as high school completion (Rumberger, 1995).

### **Family Type**

Kleven, Weinberg, and Middleton (2016) noted that when examining the impact of the parent-child relationship, typically two aspects are considered. These are the size of the family along with whether the child has a single or two parent family (Kleven et al., 2016). Researchers have argued that children who live in families consisting of a single parent may be negatively impacted the area of educational outcome, with an increased likelihood for dropout due to decreased parental engagement and support (De Lange, Dronkers, & Wolbers, 2014). When a single parent must manage a household, provide income, and care for children, the parental resources may become limited and therefore considered to not be as effective as those families with two parents (De Lange, et al., 2014).

This means the children in a single parent household are often exposed to lower socioeconomic status, as well as diminished quality of the relationship between child and parent, and an overall reduction in familial support (Kleven et al., 2016). Larger family size has also been linked to increased incidences of school dropout, with the postulation that family resources and availability of the parent is reduced as the number of children present in a family unit increases (Steelman, Powell, Werum, & Carter, 2002). Thus, the impact of the parent-child relationship is diminished for each of the children and this in turn results in poorer educational outcomes and potentially even increased rates of dropout (Steelman et al., 2002).

### **Rationale**

According to the NCES (2018) nearly 6% of students fail to complete high school by age 24 years. Failure to complete the necessary prerequisites for high school graduation is a serious issue that impacts the entire nation (NCES, 2018). Students who do not complete high school do not contribute financially to their communities to the same degree as those who have obtained a diploma (Zaff et al., 2017). These individuals who dropout are prone to poorer health, financial instability, reliance of welfare programs, and lower levels of community engagement, such as voting (McDermott et al., 2018).

Completing high school is generally necessary for entering higher education programs and significantly limits the ability to secure employment (Zaff et al., 2017). Overall U.S. unemployment rates as of August 2018 were 5.7% for individuals who had not completed high school, compared to 2.1% for those who had graduated from college (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). It is clear that this is a societal concern that warrants

further research to garner a more in-depth understanding in order to craft effective support to diminish the number of students who do not graduate high school or fail to obtain a GED.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Researchers have explored the subject matters of military families such those in the Navy, resilience, and school dropout to a high degree. As demonstrated in this chapter, the literature is full of rich information from a wide array of sources. Along with this, an array of theoretical foundations have been utilized to deepen an appreciation of the implications of school dropout. For this research, resilience theory is the foundation applied, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how resilience is experienced by Navy wives as they engage in the identified phenomenon.

The details regarding school dropout have been presented, including the ecology of school dropout in terms of who is considered at risk, which protective factors have been determined, and how leaving school prior to graduation may occur in the life of a student. Along with this, the impact of disrupted education has been presented. Indeed, the subject of school dropout has been examined a great deal by previous researchers, however, the examination of how Navy wives experience resiliency during transitions of their child to a new school midyear has yet to be explored.

In Chapter 3 an explanation, as well as a justification, regarding the methodology that was used is presented. Significant detail is provided to allow for possible replication of the research should it be desired by other researchers. Methodology information including the procedure and analysis plan are offered. Discussion regarding the selection, solicitation, and procurement of the sample population may be found in Chapter 3. Along

with this, an outline of the specific steps undergone to complete this research study are provided. Information surrounding the role of the researcher is offered. The specifics regarding the population which is to be examined, along with the sample size and how it was obtained is offered in the following chapter. Instrumentation is discussed, as well as issues surrounding trustworthiness. Finally, ethical considerations are explored.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to gain insight into experiences of resilience of Navy wives who have transitioned their child or children to a new school midyear. Transitioning students from one school to another may be a stressful experience and is a particularly prevalent occurrence for Navy families (Seigel, 2018). The results of this study enhanced the already existing body of research by providing information to support a deeper understanding of how parental resilience factors may influence school dropout.

In the following chapter, I describe the research methodology employed in this study. The chapter also includes a presentation of the research question, followed by a discussion of the overall study design and rationale, and an explanation of the role of the researcher including how biases were managed. An identification of the sampling strategy, along with the sample size, data collection procedures, instrumentation, and data analysis plan is provided as well. Finally, concerns regarding trustworthiness are addressed along with those concerns relating to ethical considerations.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

I developed the following research question to guide this study: How do Navy wives experience resiliency during school transitions of their child(ren) midyear? This question was focused on the central theme of resilience and the phenomenon of Navy-affiliated children being relocated to a new school once the school year had commenced. In order to develop an educated understanding of this phenomenon as it related to the

central concept of resilience, I conducted a qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological study.

Moustakas (1994) explained that by examining the personal, subjective experiences of the individuals participating in the research, patterns and themes would emerge. This allows for information to be compared and the lived experiences of the population to reveal trends and interplays that may otherwise remain unnoticed (Kafle, 2011). Kafle (2011) noted that in hermeneutic research, assumptions are presented bluntly, and it is understood that experiences and perspectives are unique.

Hermeneutic research posits that by examining the lived experience, the richest data may be developed as new information and its significance learned (Heidegger, 1977). The use of the hermeneutic phenomenological research approach was appropriate in this study because it facilitated the collecting, sorting, and disseminating of information gathered in a qualitative manner in order to understand a phenomenon rather than make an attempt to provide an explanation (see Higgs et al., 2012). Hermeneutic research provides the researcher with a bit of flexibility, allowing for interpretation of the data collected in a way that creates a rich, detailed examination (Kafle, 2011). This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the phenomenon to be developed and then presented in a clear manner.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, it was essential that I be forthcoming about myself as the instrument that filtered all of the data that were collected (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). As an emic researcher, all participation within the group that experienced the phenomenon that was researched should be shared openly. It was my

overarching goal as a researcher to develop an engaging study that evoked thoughtful responses from each of the interview participants resulting in rich, in-depth data collected and analyzed carefully and presented in a meaningful manner.

As a wife of an active duty member of the U.S. Navy, I have become familiar with the difficulties and experiences of resilience that may occur due to frequent relocations. While my children have yet to begin school, I am aware of the possibility that I shall find myself in a situation where relocation is necessary during the school year for my own children. I was mindful and acknowledged my presumptions and biases as they became known. I also enlisted the support of peers to participate in debriefing to manage my biases. Along with this, journaling was completed throughout the data collection process as a means of assisting me in understanding personal perceptions and biases. I also submitted the transcriptions of the interviews to the respondents and offered an opportunity for them to make additional comments.

Throughout this process, it was essential to be aware of my personal biases and the limitations of the research study. This supported objectivity as well as assisted me in retaining focus on the research and not myself as the researcher. As a counselor, I was ethically bound to inform all participants that I am a mandatory reporter and any information provided to me that requires reporting would result in a report being made to the proper authority. This information was shared with the participants while I provided them with information regarding privacy, prior to the start of each interview. All IRB guidelines were adhered to, including maintaining confidentiality of all of the respondents, providing each participant with informed consent prior to the interview, minimizing the potential for psychological harm, and causing no physical harm to the

participants. Participants were informed that they were able to discontinue their involvement in the study at any time without consequence.

## **Methodology**

### **Population**

In this study, I solicited participation from Navy wives who have transitioned one or more student(s) midyear to a new school. All Navy wives aged 18 years old and older of active duty service members who met the criteria of having relocated their child(ren) to a new school midyear were considered for participation in the research interview. Participants had to be able to read and speak English well enough to provide consent for the interview and to complete the interview. Both mothers and stepmothers who had transitioned a child to a new school midyear were eligible if they were currently married or had previously been married to an active duty member of the U.S. Navy at the time of the transition. In order to participate, research candidates must have been willing to complete a recorded phone interview and answer questions regarding their unique experiences of enrolling their child in a different school once the school year had begun as well as the resilience, or lack therefore of, that may be associated with this experience.

### **Sampling**

Once I identified an individual as interested in participation, I provided them with an informed consent document via email or Facebook Messenger. Next, the participant agreed to participate via returning a comment of “I consent” and an interview was then scheduled. Minimal demographic information was collected during the interview with the intention that this helped to ensure the participant met the qualifications for participation. Information sought in the interview included rank of the service member, age of the



interviewee, age of the child or children who experienced the move both at the time of the transition, and the current grade of the child or children at the time of transition.

I recruited this purposive sample via social media campaigning and snowballing efforts (i.e., participants were able to refer others and allowed to provide my personal contact information to one another). A sample of eight to 10 participants was sought or as many was necessary in order to achieve data saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) described saturation as being attained once the researcher is no longer able to effectively code the collected information and has an in-depth, rich set of data available to utilize. I interviewed nine participants in this study and data saturation was achieved.

### **Sample Size**

Mason (2010) noted previous expert opinions for research studies with a phenomenological approach must have at a minimum six participants upwards to 25. Along with this, it is important to consider the overall size of the population of those who have experienced the phenomenon, how diverse the group may be, and finally, accessibility (Mason, 2010). Baker, Edwards, and Doidge (2012) stated that studies that use a phenomenological approach involve rigorous analysis and have a notably smaller sample size.

Once the participant consented, I scheduled an interview and completed it as soon as was possible. Nine participants were enlisted in semistructured interviews conducted over the phone. Phone interviews are a means of connecting with a population that is spread widely and can support a researcher in gathering more data from a broader population. Davis and Finke (2015) conducted a study concerning military parents of children with autism in regard to relocation and associated stresses.

## **Procedure**

I identified participants via their responses to a recruitment flier posted to Facebook as well as my contact information, including Walden University e-mail address and phone number, being passed via social media between individuals who met the criteria for participation. The solicitation itself included the criteria for participation in the interviews (the specifics of which are listed above) along with IRB approval information and was posted in groups specifically targeted towards Navy spouses as well as military families. I requested participants to comment on a solicitation thread, then sent them a private message to arrange a time for the phone interview. My personal phone number and Walden University e-mail address were provided as contact options on the recruitment flier. Once the time and date had been established for the interview, I sent one reminder message the day prior to the interview. I conducted each of the phone calls and also managed all recordings of the interviews. Each recording was and will be kept secure and password protected for a minimum of 5 years. All personal information has been kept confidential within this research itself. Names and geographic information have been coded.

Interviews occurred in the form of telephone encounters with voluntary participants who were screened to ensure they met participation qualifications. Every call was recorded then transcribed in order to undergo phenomenological coding processes, following Roulston's (2014) design to remove repeated information that was not pertinent to the study as a means of condensing the information. I provided participants the option of reviewing the transcription once completed. The data were analyzed in regard to recurrent themes.

All phone interviews were conducted in a quiet space and recorded for clarity purposes. Along with this, I advised each participant as to the length and purpose of the interview and informed them that they may choose to leave the interview at any time without consequence. All participants were women with whom I did not have a personal connection with beyond co-participation in the Facebook groups used for solicitation in order to avoid undue influence. Finally, I followed up with each participant who was willing in the form of a Facebook Messenger message with the transcribed version of the conversation and the opportunity for the participant to add additional comments as desired, which helped support the research credibility.

### **Analysis**

For data analysis, I used the van Kaam method. The van Kaam (1966) method strives to capture the experiences of the interviewees through the researcher's interpretation of the subjects' experiences with the noted phenomenon. This particular method of analyzing phenomenological data includes data reduction, which occurs when information that is determined to be repetitive or vague is removed as a means of cleaning up the data and reducing overlap (Moustakas, 1994). Data were removed if they were unable to be sorted and categorized or did not apply to the research question being examined (see Moustakas, 1994). The data that remained, termed the invariant horizons, were then be divided into themes (see Moustakas, 1994). These themes were brought together to form a rich understanding of the experiences of the research sample who have encountered the phenomenon of transitioning their Navy-affiliated child(ren) to a new school midyear.

I conducted constant comparison analysis as a means of understanding the data collected and identifying themes that emerged. Constant comparison analysis occurred throughout the research process as data were collected, transcribed, sorted into groupings, and identified with a code (see Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Once similar codes were identified, they were grouped together and deemed as themes (see Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). I then determined relevant themes that emerged as coding took place (see Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Constant comparison analysis was an appropriate choice of analysis procedure for this research study because it aligned with hermeneutic research style in that the information collected was continually assessed and compared in order to understand the information being obtained from the participants in regard to their unique lived experiences (see Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

Discrepant cases were noted as such, with information regarding discrepant cases identified in the final research. In order to truly gain insight in the phenomenon, it was important to examine all aspects, including those which did not align with the typical responses (Morrow, 2005). Instances which disconfirm the data collected are valuable additions to any research as it allows for broader insights to be gained (Morrow, 2005). Providing comparisons increased understanding of the true depths and intricacies of the experiences of those who encountered the phenomenon.

### **Instrumentation**

I developed the interview questions as well as conducted the interviews, and thus served as an instrument in the research study itself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). As such, I was mindful and engaged in ethical practices to minimize and divulge biases throughout the research process. This included me actively journaling and participating in ongoing

peer debriefing. I researched previous qualitative studies similar in nature to this study in order to gain insight into the research questions which have already been explored and asked. Interview questions were developed, reviewed and approved by the university's IRB prior to being revealed to participants. Please see Appendix A for a complete list of interview questions.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The following addresses issues pertaining to trustworthiness. In order for a research study to be trustworthy, it should meet certain expectations, as noted below. Each the various areas should be openly addressed, and criteria successfully met to ensure the research study is one that is worth the investment on the part of the researcher, participants and audience.

#### **Credibility**

In this study, credibility was provided in the development of the interview questions based on previous research studies which have conducted similar types of research. The processing of the data was described in detail including how the data was arranged and transformed (Lincoln & Gruba, 1985). Along with this, the research study itself was approved by Walden University's IRB in order to ensure that ethical practices were being observed and the welfare of all research participants was protected.

#### **Transferability**

In order to ensure the research study would be able to be attain similar findings despite a change of setting, the research study was carefully explained to each participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Along with this, each of the interviews was then transcribed, and all participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcription. This allowed

for the participants to provide additional information, as well as ensured accuracy on the part of myself as the researcher. Information regarding the format of the study was provided with enough detail that this research study could be replicated by another researcher.

### **Dependability**

A dependable study should have data collected which applies to the research questions being posed for study, demonstrating alignment as well as being consistently stable should replication occur (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As a means of ensuring dependability, a recording device was used during all interviews. All participants were given directions and information which supported relevant information being collected. The data collected answered the research question being posed.

### **Confirmability**

A research study which achieves confirmability should involve the researcher making an effort to remain objective, along with openly addressing personal biases. This supports the notion that the data and presented results of the research study are resultant of the information collected rather than the perception of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also noted that a clear explanation as to how the collected data is transformed lends to confirmability. I engaged in peer debriefing, was mindful of remaining objective, and participated in journaling to address my personal biases.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In this study, ethical procedures were monitored in the form of peer debriefing, and journaling by the researcher. All participants were made aware of the voluntary

nature of the research study and were afforded the opportunity to discontinue the interview at any time. Prior to the collection of any data or contact with potential participants, Walden University's IRB had approved this research study as well as the interview questions. All identifying information from the participants has been kept confidential and names were omitted within the research itself. All individuals who participated were treated in a respectful manner and their donation of time and effort were verbally recognized and I expressed appreciation as well. All data collected has been and will be maintained on a password protected computer for a minimum of five years.

All applicable documents were submitted to Walden University's IRB for approval. The IRB approval number for this study, #07-12-19-0324120, was identified and provided in my solicitation information for all participants. Walden University's IRB approved this study on July 12, 2019.

### **Summary**

Presented here was a detailed outline of the research design and methodology of this study. Information regarding the research design was presented along with support for the use of a hermeneutic phenomenological research design. The role of the researcher and potential biases were noted. Along with this, information regarding the methodology was offered. A careful examination of the issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations was completed.

Chapter 4 provides details of the setting along with information regarding the recruitment and selection of participants. Following this is a presentation of the participant demographic information. Data collection methods along with details of how

the data were organized, and an explanation of trustworthiness are given. Results which developed during the data analysis are presented and supported.



## Chapter 4: Findings

### **Introduction**

The objective of this hermeneutic, qualitative research study was to examine how wives of active duty members of the U.S. Navy experience resilience when transitioning their child or children to a new school once the school year had already started. By using loosely structured interviews, I was able to attain my goal of understanding each respondent's definition of resilience. Along with this, a deeper understanding of how each respondent identified her personal experience of resilience during a mid-school year transition was developed.

In this chapter, I present information regarding the setting of this research study as well as how participants were recruited. Demographic information for the participants is provided. The specific data collection method and the manner in which the data were organized are explained in detail. Evidence of trustworthiness is provided, including transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability. The results are then offered based on the themes that emerged during data analysis and supported by quotes from the interview transcripts and informative tables. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a summary.

### **Setting**

I received approval from Walden University IRB to begin conducting this research study on July 12, 2019 (IRB Approval #07-12-19-0324120). Participants for this study were recruited via Facebook. All participants provided informed consent and noted no concerns or questions regarding participation. All participants agreed to being recorded and noted an understanding that the interview was indeed voluntary. Semi

structured interviews were selected as the data collection method for this study.

Interviews with participants were audio recorded over the phone, in which I asked 12 interview questions along with some questions seeking expansion or clarification to answers provided.

### **Data Analysis**

I transferred all recordings of interviews to a secure, password-protected laptop, then transcribed them. The program NVivo was enlisted for coding and the development of themes. Word clouds were created via NVivo and words and phrases that were used frequently were pinpointed. Once this initial round of coding occurred, I completed a second round to further refine codes and more closely explore the themes that emerged. All transcripts of the interviews were reviewed yet again to ensure data were coded accurately.

### **Data Collection**

There were a total of nine participants who completed the interview process. Each phone interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and included a loosely structured interview style allowing for participants to share their thoughts openly. One participant completed the interview from her vehicle, while all other participants identified being at home during the phone interview. All participants expressed appreciation for being included in the research study and were verbally thanked for their involvement.

I selected participants for this study based on the following inclusion criteria: being over the age of 18 years, a wife of a currently active duty member of the U.S. Navy, and having moved at least one child from one school to another once the school year had already commenced. Each participant responded to a solicitation on Facebook to

be interviewed regarding her experience in a recorded phone call. I placed the recruitment advertisements in Facebook groups with large numbers of Navy wives and/or spouses as well as two groups providing networking and support for military spouses. All participants completed informed consent and noted no concerns or questions regarding participation. Each participant agreed to being recorded during the phone interview. Semi structured interviews were conducted to gain the insight into the lived experiences of these women. I encouraged each of the interviewees to respond openly and honestly.

### **Credibility**

Farrelly (2012) explained that qualitative research may be considered lacking due to the potential for the researcher's personal opinions and interactions with the research participants to muddle the results of the data. In order to avoid this deficit, I discussed the data and themes with a peer during the analysis portion. Along with this, all respondents were unknown individuals to me. I did not have a personal connection with any of the participants prior to this research study. Finally, all participants were provided with the transcript of their interview and afforded the opportunity to provide further information or adjust their comments. None of the participants offered additional information.

### **Transferability**

Farrelly (2012) noted that the use of a small sample of respondents serves the purpose of providing information rather than being illustrative of a larger population. Therefore, it was not my intent to illuminate the experience of an entire population but rather to highlight and understand the experiences of a small group of women who provided an in-depth, rich accounting of their own life events. I provided participants with an opportunity to add additional thoughts once the interview transcripts were

completed as well as clarify any comments made during the interview. The details of how this research was conducted are provided herein to allow for another researcher to replicate the study and attain similar results, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to create transferability.

### **Dependability**

In order to ensure dependability, the interview questions were approved by the Walden University IRB and were relevant to the research being conducted. I recorded the participants during the interviews as a means of accurately recalling the information they provided rather than my perception of their comments. Cube ACR was the recording device used in the interviews; it records phone calls and is able to transfer the recording to a computer.

### **Confirmability**

By utilizing an effective data analysis system, NVivo, I was able to bolster confirmability. Initially all transcription was completed through an automated system. Following this, I reviewed the transcription while listening to the interview recording and made adjustments as needed to ensure accuracy. Each transcription was reviewed twice along with listening the interview audio. All transcripts were coded using Nvivo, initially looking for common terms such as *research* or *resilience*, then I hand coded all transcriptions to divide the data into two main categories: challenges and resilience. Once the two categories were established, further coding was completed to determine the themes that emerged in each category.

### **Demographic Information**

Demographic information is provided in Table 1. There were nine participants interviewed for this research study. All participants met the criteria for the research study. Each participant self-identified as a mother, and each was a current wife to an active duty member of the U.S. Navy. These women ranged in age from 31 to 50 years old. Their families consisted of one to six children, with four of the women interviewed reporting two children. Four of the respondents shared information from a mid-school year transition occurring in 2018, two women had experienced a mid-school year move in 2016, and three women discussed a transition that had occurred during 2015. These women lived in and had moved from a wide variety of locations, including Hawaii, Guam, Connecticut, Georgia, New York, Connecticut, Texas, Montana, Virginia, and Illinois.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Number of children	Age	Gender	Spouse of active duty Navy?	Relationship to child transitioned	Year of school transition
(18) 1	1	35	Female	Yes	Mother	2018
(37) 2	6	50	Female	Yes	Mother	2018
(21.3) 3	3	39	Female	Yes	Mother	2015
(12) 4	2	42	Female	Yes	Mother	2015
(21) 5	3	31	Female	Yes	Mother	2018
(15) 6	2	43	Female	Yes	Mother	2016

(28) 7	2	34	Female	Yes	Mother	2018
(25) 8	3	36	Female	Yes	Mother	2016
(26) 9	2	43	Female	Yes	Mother	2015

### Resilience

In regard to this study, resilience refers to the quality or trait that impacts the ability of an individual or family to cope with adversity (see Masten, 2018; Windel, 2011). Each participant was asked to define resilience during her interview. None of the wives struggled to define resilience, and each provided a response that related to the definition used in this study. Table 2 indicates each of the individual interviewees' response.

Table 2

#### *Definitions of Resilience*

Participant	Definition of resilience
1	That's a kid that can really tough it out, can be put through anything but still can bounce right back.
2	The ability to bounce back. Bounceability. As opposed to splat.
3	It means that you can deal with an issue and keep moving forward in a positive manner.
4	I guess like the ability to bounce back after going through something... When [husband] goes out to sea and me and the kids are able to handle everything and go through it and be strong when he's gone
5	I think to me it means more of the ability to cope to the best of your ability. Sometimes it's not perfect or how other people would react or whatever but just dealing with it to the best of your ability without completely falling apart. Maybe a little bit falling apart, everyone's not completely falling apart.

6	Have the ability to overcome adversity.
7	It means being able to I guess survive the changes that you know that come by and that are kind of like you can't some things you just can't change. You just have to like you know deal with it and get by and kind of survive it
8	It means that you are able to bounce back at whatever is thrown your way.
9	To me, resilience means keeping going no matter what

### **Analysis**

There were two overarching categories that emerged during the analysis: the aspects that supported personal resilience and the challenges that the mothers encountered. Each of these can be broke down further into themes. Personal resilience incorporated the coping strategies of doing research on the schools/area, focusing on their children, and using support systems. Challenges that the wives experienced included variations in the schools themselves, such as available programs; paperwork issues; and the noticeable differences in the experiences of each of their individual children. Along with this, participants noted the struggle of the specific midyear transition, which was notably different from those transitions that occur at the start of the school year. The following is the identified themes broken in the two main categories of challenges and personal resilience.

#### **Midyear Transitions**

The process of the midyear transition is a challenging experience as noted by several of the interviewees. Due to the distinctiveness of these transitions, considerations that may not exist at the start of the school year become concerns. One mother shared,

The mid transition is so unique because kids coming at the start of the year, everybody sort of has that blank slate. Whether they knew each other before or not, everybody's sort of starting at once. When you come midyear. It's a whole different set of challenges.

Another mother noted her child was the "last new kid," a sentiment which other participants expressed in different ways as a unique challenge their children faced. One interviewee shared that her child was not welcomed into the school due to being the last new student to enter the classroom and expressed that she wished there had been a system in place for children who entered midyear. Another mother stated,

When you come at the beginning of the year, teachers are more likely to ask, "Anybody new?" When you come midyear...nobody's really paying attention to that because it's not new for anybody else other than the new kid. It was different because prior to that, when we had moved at the beginning of the school year [it was] a totally different experience.

## **Challenges**

**Incoming schools.** One of the significant challenges each of the participants identified was that of the school into which she was transitioning her children. One participant shared struggling to find an appropriate athletics program. She stated concern over her child's attitude regarding the midyear school transition. This mother stated in regard to the struggles of her child,

"I'm not going back to school. I'll get my GED." You know as a parent you want to be supportive but at the same time you know that the only reason why those things are being said is because she's sad. You know it's not a "I'm getting



bullied at school and I don't want to attend school." It's basically, "my life is over because I moved away from my friends and my team."

Two participants noted concerns over the lack of gifted programming for their children. One mother noted,

That was another frustrating thing I guess for myself dealing with her is that here they don't have a gifted education program where in [previous location] they did. I think as a parent that was frustrating that we couldn't meet her needs that she wanted.

Two participants discussed requiring special support for their child's academic success. While one noted that after she made numerous phone calls and sent multiple e-mails she received support from the school, the other participant expressed frustration and anger that her child's needs and requests for additional support in the classroom were ultimately not met. This participant stated, "I'm telling [the school] as a parent that my child needs extra help and that's my biggest concern well, why aren't you helping me find the extra help for her?"

Common Core, a program heavily adopted throughout schools in the U.S. along with all DOD schools, is used as a standard to measure student progress (Common Core, 2019). This was a subject matter which was discussed by two mothers in this research study. One of the mothers noted disliking common core. Another shared that it was a noticeable distinction, stating, "I think it was just the difference in school philosophy. I'm not sure, I think that the school that we moved into uses Common Core and I think the old school didn't."

Several of the women expressed difficulties with engaging the intake school. The women noted the schools' failure to return phone calls stating, "I tried to make contact with the school, I never even heard back from the school." Another participant described phone calls received at inappropriate hours citing the school's failure to recognize the significant time change between locations. A third mother shared,

That was frustrating. I really enjoyed their school in [previous location]. We participated in a lot of stuff. I was very involved in their classroom I would just show up anytime. There was a lot more offers and a lot more advertised. And it was a little frustrating here because they didn't advertise each school as much.

Another concern which emerged as a result of the midyear transition was the concern of their children having to return to the previous grade or repeat the current grade based on the variances of coursework and school requirements. Six participants noted difficulties in ensuring that her children were prepared to meet the academic standards of the school into which her children were joining. One participant shared,

Just due to the curriculum for what my daughter was currently used to and dealing with versus what we were going into. It seemed like she was going to be behind. So just the teachers talking to the new school district and us talking to the new school district and trying to make sure she was on the level that she was supposed to be so she didn't have to. She almost had to repeat the grade because [previous location] was a bit behind. So, we had to do a lot of work during the summer to make sure that she didn't have to repeat a grade even though her teachers were amazing at her old school.

Three participants experienced difficulties with their young children, with two participants being required to have their child repeat kindergarten due to variations in the age/time frame requirements of the districts into which their children transitioned. One participant noted “my 5-year-old actually went from kindergarten here to preschool [there]... she was a little bit annoyed at the beginning that she had the same teacher again and was doing the same things again.” The other mother shared, “she went right from a half a year of preschool to the second half of the year in kindergarten.” Another participant stated,

We had a little bit of trouble with the preschooler because the standards on preschool were different where we moved from and to. Where we moved from preschool was part of the school district...it was more difficult to move the preschooler than it was for the second grader in terms of checking all the boxes and getting registered.

This participant shared that she was unable to have her child in preschool as desired and instead her child was placed in daycare without a learning curriculum. She considered this a step back for her child.

A recurrent theme which was expressed by the women was that of the overall academic differences between schools. A participant reported arranging for a new school transfer despite not being required to relocate. Another participant shared that her child would be leaving her current school and instead entering a local magnet school. One mother opted to remove her children from public education completely and instead homeschool, noting,

We went from being in some of the best schools in the nation to moving to an area with some of the worst rated schools in the nation. So, the senior, because I had set it up beforehand, knowing that we were going to be moving in the middle of the school year, they were able to put him in school online and he was able to graduate with his class from his school in [previous location]. So, he went from being in school the first semester to being online school the last part of the school year and then we went back and he graduated with his class. The other two went from being in these fabulous schools to being very angry at me that they were being homeschooled because I refused to put them in those crappy schools here.

**Paperwork.** Paperwork struggles was mentioned by five of the participants. A participant noted that she struggled with establishing an Independent Education Plan (IEP) for her child in the new school. This mother noted that it was a “legal battle” to ensure that the IEP from the previous school synced with the requirements and specific language for the new school district.

One participant explained that her children were unable to start school on time due to the new school requiring her children have physicals completed prior to attending. She stated “I think it was just a matter of a whole bunch of paperwork we needed to fill out physicals immunizations. It was just about getting organized and finding all the information.” This mother shared that due to the midyear timing of her relocation, the base medical office was closed over the winter holidays and she experienced difficulties getting the required documents for her children. Yet another mother was also unable to have her children restart school on time due to challenges obtaining the required transfer

documents. She stated, “they ended up starting school late, a couple of weeks late because the paperwork and stuff just was not completely ready.”

Another participant discussed confusion over the required documents, sharing that the new school was near an Army base and the school was confused on the required documents. She shared,

[The school was] not grasping what I was telling them. ‘We need this form’, well he’s a Navy person. He doesn’t have that form, he has this form. They were not getting it. They were not getting [it was] the exact same thing but it’s called something different.

Two mothers discussed school secretaries not cooperating with managing the required transfer paperwork in a timely manner. One participant noted “Everything took forever. Things got misplaced. Things got lost...They weren’t faxing up and sending up the papers to [location] in a timely manner like they were supposed to.” One participant shared she had to engage the school principal in order to receive the documents she needed to transition her child.

**Differences in children.** One theme which was conveyed in some manner by each of the participants with more than one child (all participants except one) was the idea that the midyear school transition was easier for some children and harder for others. Variation in the needs of their children was expressed by eight of the participants. Participants shared more information regarding their children that needed additional support, those who struggled with adjusting to the midyear transition. Many of the participants noted that their children leaving friends behind and the prospect of making new friends was a source of stress in the midyear transition for her child. The participant

with only one child shared, “She didn’t want to leave this house. She didn’t really want to make friends. It took her a really long time to warm up to people.”

The following are quotes from eight of the nine respondents, all those who reported to have multiple children, regarding the differences in midyear school transition experiences based on each of their children:

For my younger one, it was seamless. She was fine. For the one in high school it was fairly difficult. Socially, academically not so much... she had a difficult time making friends and being in a new environment and she didn't know anyone. So, it was a little bit of a culture shock even though we were originally from this area, she had been going to school in the south and in a more military oriented town so when new kids come, they're a little more welcomed. There will be other students who are more used to seeing an influx of kids coming in and out. Whereas here, it's so big that yes, certain areas are more concentrated with military, but others aren't.

“There was a big difference when you're a girl and you go from eight to almost 12 in one place to you hit a lot of those like hormonal milestones.”

Well one child particularly, my younger one, was just very go with the flow. She had multiple caregivers when she was little so, I think it didn't affect her as much. I mean she was sad leaving her friends. But my older daughter had not been in daycare and in preschool and stuff [and struggled].

“My 12-year-old wants to go to Harvard. She has anxiety. So, I want to make sure she is in a school that's going to meet her needs and challenge her...My son he wasn't as friendly, he wasn't as social as my daughter...I mean, it depends on the child.”

When they were younger it was not as difficult, but this last move with the oldest being in the middle of her 10th grade year, it was extremely devastating to her. She would refuse to go to school and not wake up. She cried and cried and cried for days on end to the point where I thought there was going to be a moment and she would have to really go inpatient somewhere. She ended up going into therapy twice a week...and then the little one she has basically been in it her whole entire life and just kind of rolled with it. I really have found that the older they get the more difficult it is to make that change.

“She's super, super shy so I think it's always tough for her to get adjusted and stuff...They were both pretty nervous at first...my oldest one has a lot of anxiety so it took her a little bit longer to get used to it.”

My daughter was easy, my daughter is extremely laid back. She's 'go with the flow.' My son is autistic, and he was a lot harder to move. We started talking about the move about six months before it actually went into effect. Simply because he does not do change at all.

“Moving from [location] schools to the [location] area schools was hard on my junior because school was a challenge for her. It was a wonderful fit for my other three...So many varied experiences based by the child.”

Each of the participants with multiple children understood that the needs of their children would not be identical and modified the support applied to meet the needs of her children. Age seemed to play a role in the experiences of the children. Children in high school as well as those in kindergarten experienced the most difficulty according to the reports from these mothers. The participants noted that children who struggled with

mental health concerns or disabilities, and those considered “gifted” had a more difficult overall midyear transition experience.

Table 3

*Challenges Highlights*

Incoming Schools	Paperwork	Differences in Children
Eight participants identified	Five participants identified	Eight participants identified
No gifted course/athletic program lacking	Confusion of paperwork requirements	Leaving friends/trouble making friends
Varied academic standards	Conflicts with school staff	Unique issues per child
Difficulty engaging school	Restart the IEP process	Midyear challenges
Lack of special supports	Resulted in a delayed start	Mental health concerns
Required to repeat a grade	Unable to obtain physicals	Child’s age matters

**Personal Resilience**

There were themes which emerged displaying the personal resilience of these women. Several of the participants demonstrated difficulty in separating family resilience from personal resilience. Nearly all of the women sought clarification as to whether the research question, How did you experience resiliency during the school transition of this child midyear? was seeking information regarding herself or her family. When prompted to share about her own experience, the main themes which emerged were conducting research on the new school, focusing on the needs and wellbeing of her children, and utilizing support systems.



**Research.** Participants noted conducting personal research of the new school when faced with a change of school midyear. This use of resilience was completed by several of the women. One participant conveyed her lack of researching the schools in the area she was moving as a major regret she experienced in her first PCS move. She noted “I feel guilty not doing my research because had I known how the education system is here in [location] I would have left my daughter in [location] to finish up the school year.” She later stated, “I was very angry with myself be very honest with you, because I didn’t do my research” and noted not making the same mistake for an upcoming move. “I’m like, do your research. That’s like biggest thing. Please do your research.”

Another participant shared, “It’s hard to judge the school. I tend to do a lot of research on it. What rating systems do you trust for the schools? There’s more than one and they don’t all tend to be very accurate.” Three of the women shared that returning to a previous duty station was helpful but also noted that figuring out the school boundaries and where to live was a challenge. One participant stated,

So that was helpful as the parents going back to a familiar duty station because then I can say ‘I want this school give me a house in this school area.’ So that was helpful. Going back to the same duty station versus going to different duty stations then I'd have been really frustrated.

Another of the women stated, “now we actually have to take into consideration not only just the school district but the schools themselves. So that that definitely took a lot of research” in regard to moving her children midyear.

**Focusing on their children.** All of the participants noted in some manner, that she focused on providing support for her family/children through the midyear transition

as a means of experiencing resilience during the situation. Two participants shared about advocating for their children's needs. This included making numerous phone calls and sending emails to both the old and new schools. One listed involving her children in projects around their new home. Several discussed creating a sense of "normalcy" as a means of helping their children through the transition. One participant stated, "Life can't stop. It's basically trying to keep some level of normal, some routine, and keep disruption to a minimum." The participants voiced:

Moves are always super hard on me and one of the things about having to be on my kids about going to school and having to take care of their needs during a transition is that it really makes me have to focus on taking care of them which in turn is good because I don't have to focus on how hard it is for me. It's hard...having the kids' stuff to focus on during that transition has been helpful to me, to help me not focus on my hard part of it, my depression, anxiety about the move, financial stress, everything that goes with moving.

"I can't sit there and just let this...it's going to have an effect on her. So, it's like I had to sit there and really just keep my calm and cool".

When we got there my husband immediately deployed...I couldn't spend my time being sad that my husband was gone because I still had the children to take care of. And I had to make sure that they got settled and that I wasn't wallowing in the depression of him leaving and basically dropping me off in a new place that I've never been before.

But just having a positive attitude I guess that would be how [she experienced resilience]. I guess you don't have much of a choice but to have a positive attitude

and just as much as it sucks to do certain things you kind of have to. Even if you're upset about it you, kind of got to be positive around your kids if not they'll know that it's not a good experience. I think most kids are like my children where they feed off of whatever their parents are feeling. And so their parents are feeling upset and shy and pulling, pushing that out and showing that, then they're going to pick up on that and feel those feelings. Where you feel more positive even if it seems almost like putting on a happy face, helps them be more resilient, more into the process. And then once you're settled its better.

“My 2-year-old and 4-year-old didn't really care about it but just kind of keeping them on a schedule and keeping them busy as much as possible really helped them cope with just not only just the time difference but...a big culture shock”.

I kind of rolled with it over the years minus my biggest thing is transitioning the children you know. That seems to be the biggest challenge. For myself, I've gotten used to finding jobs and things like that. So that. Really, I'm pretty easy-going person. So that's not difficult for me but it's the transitioning piece for the children that's more challenging.

**Utilizing support systems.** Four participants identified utilization of supportive services. One shared about a military run counseling services which operated within the school itself as a supportive program for her children. She stated,

The local school does offer a military life and family counselor who did a lot of work with my daughter's class this year which I think was helpful because it was it was like an adult that came into the class that she liked and trusted more than her own teacher. And then and she and this person was able to pull the military

kids out of class. And work with them individually and in a group with just the military kids to work on like I don't know different skills. And she was able to pull my daughter out and take her down to the kindergarten classroom and do stuff with her sister too...highly recommended.

Another listed her ombudsman as a source of support and described the value of the school liaison. She shared,

My ombudsman had reached out to me via email and have given me information about getting [child] transferred to school up here. And she's like, 'this is the person you speak to. She will walk you through everything. She's amazing. She's great.' And sure enough, she definitely was absolutely amazing.

Two of the mothers also noted that the school liaisons were a valuable source of support during their transitions. A woman claimed, "I have to say, the school liaisons are absolutely amazing and they're very helpful." She further explained that the school liaison assisted her in identifying which school would be the best fit for her child's needs.

Two of the women discussed utilizing counseling services on base to provide additional support to their children. One of these mothers noted,

She went on base and we were very happy with the woman that we saw there. She was great for her. She was kind and caring but also basically had to tell her to put her big girl panties on and grow up a little bit. And hearing it from somebody else that wasn't me was very good. It worked well. It really did.

Finally, one mother reported significant support from the school district, citing that the special education program manager had been in contact with her to support her child's transition. This mother revealed that her child was allowed to visit the school and

meet staff prior to being able to start school due to a lapse in paperwork transfers. She explained,

While we were waiting for his physical, we were literally at the school with him and we had one of the aides was walking us around, showing it around introducing him to people. Introducing him to the lady who does physical therapy and speech therapy and occupational. So that when he actually did start, he would have at least one or two faces that he would recognize.

Table 4

*Personal Resilience Highlights*

Research	Focusing on Children	Utilizing Support Systems
Regret of not conducting research	All the women reported focusing on their children	Military Life and Family Counselor
Which reviews to trust	Advocating for child's needs	Ombudsman
Hard to judge schools	Creating a sense of normalcy	School Liaison
Return to a duty station	Taking focus off themselves	Counseling services
Decide on school district	Setting the tone	School/district staff

**Summary of Findings**

This research study was intended to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of wives of active duty members of the Navy who transition their children from one school to another midyear. This was done within the context of personal resilience, and the research questions were derived from resilience theory. A qualitative research approach was applied in order to develop a rich understanding of the individual experiences shared by the nine participants. Based on the information collected from

these participants it was learned that there are several unique challenges which these women encounter, namely difficulties with the intake school, paperwork issues, and the concerns regarding the experiences of each child. This research study also revealed the manners in which these women cope with the stressful situation of moving their children to a new school midyear and experiences resilience. The women shared that they choose to conduct research on the new school, focus on their children, and use available resources.

In Chapter 5 there is a discussion regarding the relationship of this research study to the existing literature. The limitations of this research study are explored. Implications for potential stakeholders are provided as well. The recommendations for possible future research are presented. Finally, a discussion of the possibilities for future positive social change have been offered.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

In this research study, I conducted an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of wives of active duty Navy service members who have transitioned their child(ren) to a new school once the school year has begun. Rooted in the theoretical framework of resilience theory, the following research question was the directional guide of this study: How do Navy wives experience resiliency during school transitions of their child(ren) midyear? A hermeneutic qualitative study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of this identified phenomenon of midyear school transitions. Loosely structured interviews were conducted with nine wives of members of the Navy to obtain a rich, detailed insight into the experiences of each wife.

The participants identified challenges including struggles with the intake school, paperwork issues, and meeting the unique needs of each child. The wives also shared that they chose to conduct research on the new school, focus on their children, and enlist the support of available resources as ways in which they experienced resilience during midyear school transitions. In this chapter, I offer an interpretation of the findings presented in the previous chapter. Following this, the limitations of the study are provided. Recommendations for future research are then presented and social implications are provided as well.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

I used resilience theory as the theoretical framework for the interpretation of the information collected in this research study. Masten (2018) defined resilience as the process in which a family or individual survives stressors and/or difficult experiences.

Rutter (1987) defined stressors as disruptions or interruptions from the typical experience, much like a midyear school transition. Not all individuals are able to cope successfully with challenges, and previous instances of resilience do not ensure future ability to cope (Rutter, 1987). This is an important consideration when examining families such as those associated with the military who typically endure multiple school transitions.

The findings from this research study expand upon the current knowledge and literature that is available. As noted in Chapter 2, there are a plethora of influences in the decision to leave school prior to graduation. One of the factors considered by researchers as a strong indicator of school dropout is that of school mobility (Herbers et al., 2013). The women interviewed in this study experience mobility at a higher frequency than their civilian counterparts due to their connection to the U.S. military as wives of active duty members of the Navy. Previous researchers have posited that hypermobility has many negative implications, including difficulties in utilizing and developing effective coping strategies as well as emotion development concerns (Fowler et al., 2015), behavior issues (Vogel et al., 2017), difficulties in maintaining friendships (Anderson et al., 2014), and increased likelihood of school dropout (Herbers et al., 2013).

In order to understand what impacts the decision to drop out of school, it is useful to learn about the actual lived experiences of those who must endure multiple school transitions in a comprehensive manner. One manner to accomplish this may be to use qualitative research. While the members of the military and their families have been the subjects of multiple research studies involving resilience (e.g., Rice & Liu, 2016; Russo



& Fallon, 2014), an in-depth understanding of the experiences of Navy wives who transition their child(ren) to a new school midyear had not been conducted until this time.

Recognizing and learning about which factors influence students to leave school prior to graduation as well as gaining insight into the protective factors that support children reaching graduation is another important piece of combating school dropout. Vera et al. (2018) posited that understanding what keeps children in school assists in maintaining students in school and increases overall levels of graduation. One factor believed by researchers to improve the likelihood of school completion is that of parental involvement (Schueler et al., 2018). Each of the women interviewed noted being involved in the lives of their children and focusing efforts on ensuring their child(ren) received the support each child needed. One mother stated, “I want to make sure she is in a school that’s going to meet her needs and challenge her.” This is just one example of how the women focused their efforts into ensuring that their children succeeded in school as a means of coping with the midyear transition.

The findings in this research study provided a deeper understanding of the experiences of resilience that wives of active duty members of the Navy who transitioned their child(ren) to a new school midyear encountered. Several challenges these women overcame were identified, including struggles with the new school, difficulties with managing the required paperwork effectively, and meeting the unique needs of their individual children. Along with this, instances of resilience these women experienced were identified, including completing research on the new schools; focusing on the care of their child(ren) as a distraction from stress regarding the transition; and accessing the supportive measures available, such as counseling services.

## Challenges

None of the participants noted that her child(ren) had dropped out of school; however, there were two women who had children who remained behind to continue their education at the same school rather than relocate with the family. One participant noted, “the kid that refused to move with us was a senior [in high school].” Both of these women had children in high school. Other participants noted choosing not to move again in order to allow their children to graduate high school in the same school. One participant shared,

We told them when they started high school, we would not move them. Simply because we heard nightmares about people who had moved in the middle of their high school years...but we can't move in the middle of high school because neither one of my kids would graduate on time [in new location].

Fowler (2015) noted that the life stage of a child when she or he experiences a transition can be associated with the outcome of the transition. This concept was repeatedly expressed by the wives interviewed. Several of the women noted that their older children struggled with the midyear transition more than their elementary school aged children. Along with this, both women who transitioned kindergartners noted an increase in difficulty of the transition versus their elementary school-aged children. Anderson (2015) shared that young children may experience an increase in negative consequences due to mobility.

Siegel (2018) explained that the school climate may play a decisive role in the level of engagement the families of students choose. One participant noted that she was regularly engaged at her children's previous school and expressed frustration that the new

school did not facilitate parental engagement. She shared, “I was very involved in their classroom...it was a little frustrating here because they didn’t advertise [activities at] each school as much.” According to Jimerson et al. (2000), children with actively engaged parents were less likely to dropout. Several other participants shared that the culture of the new school was a challenge they faced, with one woman stating, “it was a little bit of a culture shock” and another noted a “difference in school philosophy” as a challenge of her children’s transition.

Extracurricular activities have been identified as protective factors that support students graduating (Wood et al., 2018). School transitions disrupt students involved in athletics and other extracurricular activities (Ruff & Keim, 2014). One participant shared that her child participated in track year-round at the previous school and was distressed when she had to leave her teammates and training to enter a new school midyear that did not even have a track.

### **Resilience**

Each of the women interviewed provided a definition of the term resilience that was close to the following definition I used in this research study: The quality or trait that impacts the ability that an individual or family has to cope with adversity (Masten, 2018; Windel, 2011). The descriptions of resilience each of the participants experienced included the notion of focusing on her children. This finding aligns with previous research noting the value of involved parents in the likelihood of a student attaining graduation (see Jimerson et al., 2000).

Gaspar (2010) stated that parent-child relationships have an impact on a child reaching graduation. Stress in the family as well as changes, such as a relocation, may

impact the dynamics of the family, specifically parent-child relationships (Masten, 2013; McDermott et al., 2018). This finding from the literature aligns with each of the participants having expressed a need for increased support for her children during the midyear school transitions.

One woman shared that her family was utilizing a newer support program the Navy recently implemented and stated,

If you have a child within 2 years of graduation you can ask that command to keep you in your same duty station so that they can continue. You can request orders to stay at your current location so that your child can graduate without having to move... Because we moved up here with a year left at sea duty, we knew that there was that possibility that we were going to have to do it all over again and that was terrible... it was honestly like a breath of fresh air to know that once that came through [permission to stay] it was like “Thank goodness I don’t have to do that again.” So that was wonderful. It really was.

Anderson and Leventhal (2017) discussed the impact a loss of support may have on a family when they experience a transition and noted the potential for tension to build within the parent-child relationship. The women in this study collectively shared that they had used various support systems. Two women noted engaging counseling services for their children, several noted the support of the school liaison officers, and two mentioned support from the school itself. A participant shared, “we had a lot of back and forth [with the school district] so that we knew when [child] came he was going to have the support he needed.” Other participants noted a desire for additional support networks to assist in

the experience. One participant shared, “it would have been nice to have a welcoming person for my daughter, especially coming in midyear.”

### **Limitations**

There were notable limitations to this study. One such limitation was that I recognized my personal role as researcher as well as my personal biases, which may have appeared during the process of analyzing the data collected (see Patton, 2015). This limitation was mitigated by not using participants with whom I had a personal relationship. Along with this, peer debriefing was conducted to diminish personal biases interfering with the analysis of data.

When a significant period of time has elapsed since the event that is being recalled, in this scenario the midyear school transition, there is a potential for the individual recalling the event to forget details or accurately describe the experience (see Gertler et al., 2017). This limitation was recognized, and all participants had experienced a midyear school transition with the last 4 years. I afforded each participant ample time to prepare for the interview and provided them with an appropriate amount of time to respond to each interview question. Participants were encouraged to respond openly and honestly to reduce the risk of withholding information, following the suggestion of Ravitch and Carl (2016). I prefaced the interview questions with an explanation of the purpose of the research and prompted the participants to take their time to provide thoughtful answers.

Another limitation of this research study was that only wives of active duty members of the Navy who had access to the Internet and specifically Facebook were utilized as participants. Participants were only considered for inclusion if they spoke

English and were over the age of 18 years old as well. Only women were allowed to participate in this study, excluding male spouses. Finally, only wives of active duty members of the Navy were invited to participate. This meant wives of retired or former Navy service members were not included despite the likelihood that these women also could have experienced midyear school transitions while their spouse had been active duty.

### **Recommendations**

I developed this research study based on a gap of information discovered in a review of the current literature. Zaff (2017) shared that in order to best support a student graduating from high school, there is a need to understand family-related factors. By providing an in-depth, rich understanding of how Navy wives experience resilience during the transitioning of her child(ren) to a new school once the school year has already begun, a clearer recognition of how phenomenon may relate to school dropout was gained. Learning about the lived experiences of these nine women supported recognition of the struggles each faced; the instances of resilience they managed; and the similarities in occurrences, stressors, and coping strategies that existed between these women.

Understanding these experiences will allow for more appropriate interventions and supportive efforts to be developed and implemented, thus assisting these families during a difficult and stressful event with the ultimate goal of reducing school dropout. A noted need for further research exploring the experience of school mobility exists (Anderson & Leventhal, 2017) and is further warranted by the research study presented here as well. In regard to potential future research studies, the following recommendations aim to expand upon the findings presented herein.

Ideas for future research emerged during this research study from the participants themselves. Two of the participants noted a strong need for future studies and suggested examining the differences in transitions from military affiliated schools versus public and even private schools. Another participant suggested exploring the differing experiences of submariner spouses compared to those wives of members of the Navy who do not serve on a submarine. This participant noted the extreme differences in lifestyles and challenges unique to submariner families. Each of these ideas for extended research may foster the development of positive support programs at a federal level, along with the development of a richer basis of knowledge of the experiences of Navy families.

It would be beneficial to conduct further research into the awareness of available support programs Navy wives may access. Many of the participants readily identified supportive programs and sources of which they had used to ease the stress from the midyear school transition. While several of the wives noted utilizing on-base counseling services and the school liaison, other participants endorsed being unaware of such options. Gaining an understanding of how these supportive services are advertised as well as what challenges Navy wives may encounter in accessing these services could be helpful in increasing the likelihood that these support networks are used effectively. If individuals are simply unaware of the support systems in place, adjusting how these services are made known within a community could create a shift in how many and which individuals access these programs.

This is a federal level adjustment which could be created to improve support for military families. An awareness may need to be made about available supports which are currently in place prior to the development of additional programs. As noted, some of the

women who were interviewed did not know about the offerings of school liaisons or other supportive services such as counseling opportunities. If families do not know what is available for them use to ease their struggles, it is difficult if not impossible to take advantage of such services.

This research study did not stipulate how many midyear school transitions a participant must have experienced in order to be interviewed. Women interviewed noted a wide range of midyear transitions, with some recounting multiple experiences and others sharing about a single event. Future research may be useful in determining the long-term impact of multiple school transitions. Not only does this support deepening the understanding of the previous literature's concerns regarding hypermobility as a factor of school dropout, it highlights the unique experience of highly mobile Navy families. This is a population which may be similar to other mobile groups, such as children in foster care (Pears et al., 2015), or individuals experiencing homelessness and/or poverty (Clemens et al., 2016).

It would be valuable to learn if there is a threshold in the number of instances of school mobility when these transitions become either less impactful overall or increasingly detrimental. Poe and Galvao (2018) published a study indicating that fewer PCS moves were beneficial for the families of the service member, as well as the active duty member. Based on the findings in my research it would be advisable to expand upon the existing research to examine the impact of the number of transitions would have on other service areas of the Navy in terms of the impact fewer transitions may have on school dropout. Poe and Galvao limited their research to include only members of the Navy Supply Corps. If a limit of sorts were to be identified, it could support changes in



policy and procedure for military families of a wider array of service areas, as well as help in identifying a better model for schools to help other mobile populations in order to increase the likelihood of school graduation attainment.

### **Implications**

Prior research into school dropout has typically clumped students who transition between schools into larger groups. A result of this is that exploring specific experiences of one of the more vulnerable populations, such as Navy families, are often neglected. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 showed that Navy wives have an increased likelihood to experience moderate-to-severe struggles with mental health concerns including anxiety and depression when compared to civilians (Senecal, 2019).

Since it has been posited by researchers that the family dynamic plays a significant role in the overall outcome of a student choosing to leave school prior to graduation (Wilkins & Bost, 2016), it is essential to understand how the midyear school transition is experienced by these Navy wives, a population who are subjected to this phenomenon at a higher frequency than their civilian counterparts (DODEA, 2015). In order to develop the proper policy reforms and make effective adjustments in school systems it is helpful to have a well-rounded understanding of how those exposed to the phenomenon experience it, the challenges they face and the successes which they identify.

This research study has several implications for positive social change. Gaining a deeper insight into how Navy wives experience midyear transitions of their children to a new school midyear, allows for better policies as well as supportive services, to be developed as a means of meeting the needs of this group. Along with this, it supports the

potential for a decrease in school dropout as a result of smoother midyear school transitions. This research provides the initial discussion of the lived experiences of this distinctive population. Based on the findings in this study, it is apparent that these women faced several challenges during the mid-school year transitions they encountered. Each of these challenging experiences themes shall be discussed more in-depth here.

### **Schools**

Schools are designed to be a supportive space for students to gather and learn. In order for the schools to make adjustments regarding the concerns of families and students, an awareness must be present. School administrators and members of the board of education, along with policy makers need to be informed of the challenges vulnerable populations such as Navy families endure when transitioning midyear to a new school. Once the recognition of the situation occurs, adjustments may occur. Policy makers and school officials have the opportunity to improve the experiences of the highly mobile student population, once a degree of understanding exists in regard to the lived experiences of this unique group.

It would be beneficial for adequate services and time frames to be available to ensure students do not miss school due to difficulties obtaining the proper documents and necessary physicals/records needed to start classes. As this may be an issue which the U.S. Navy would need to address, such as the shortage of appointments for physical, limited vaccines, and the time needed to transfer military medical records, the schools may need to adopt policies allowing for students to begin school without the required records on a temporary basis at least. This would allow for students to miss a minimal number of days and maximize time spent in school. Ideally schools would incorporate

school-based health options which could allow for students to attain physicals and immunizations on campus and reduce the stress of families needing to arrange medical appointments in a new location immediately upon arrival.

An important consideration is that of students being required to repeat a grade or coursework due to variances in schools and policies on course/grade requirements. These concerns begin at the preschool level and impact young students as demonstrated by one family who was required to remove their child from kindergarten and instead enroll their child into preschool. Other mothers noted concerns about their older children graduating on time due to differing curriculum and school requirements. This leads to the need for improvement in education standards and consistent policies. The intention of Common Core to create a standard to which to measure students has merit in theory. However, when schools choose not to participate, the intended system no longer serves its purpose. This creates difficulties in determining individual education level as well as meeting the needs of individual students.

### **Paperwork**

Standardized transfer documents would be helpful as this could serve to expediate the paperwork process between schools. If all schools had a common document designed for any student who must transition the need for lengthy course description papers and multiple separate transcripts could potentially be eliminated. Along with this, it is necessary to educate the pertinent staff members in the specifics of the process of school transitions both in and out of the school. Those who assist in the process of school transitions, including school secretaries, principals, and other administrators would need

to be trained and guided in crafting effective policies to support the timely management of the required paperwork.

In order to reduce the stress encountered with this process, paperwork systems should be streamlined and standardized. Schools should develop practices to support families who must transition. Through the use of effective communication and well-rehearsed procedures, the concerns of inaccurate paperwork and slow processing times may be improved greatly. Students would miss less school should the turnaround time for accurate processing be improved. This in turn would diminish the concerns of the caregiver and students who must transition midyear.

### **Differences in Children**

One mother noted, “So many varied experiences based by the child.” Ideally, better support programs for students will exist within schools themselves. The data collected from these participants revealed that children may experience a culture shock when transitioning into a new school. Having a program within all schools to facilitate introductions and provide information on the culture of the school, staff, and programming would help students assimilate into their new environment and could reduce stress for the incoming student as well as the accepting class. Services in place to meet the needs and assist in a smooth transition could potentially turn a difficult experience into an easier one. Schools and policy makers could develop a universal welcoming practice for new students, ensuring that this type of program is the expectation not the abnormal.

Children have individual needs which should be met in order to experience success in school. Policies at a state and federal levels ought to be crafted to support

transitioning families in attaining the supportive services needed to help mobile children reach graduation. This includes developing welcoming programs for new students to ensure each child and family feels welcomed and engaged by the intake school. Along with this, providing referrals to community support such as counseling, are needed if these services cannot be offered within the schools themselves.

School-based health centers allow for counseling and medical attention to be provided in the school setting (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2017), thus reducing the amount of time a child requires off campus to meet these needs. School-based health centers service student regardless of insurance and also create an opportunity for children to receive these supportive services when they may not otherwise have the option due to finances or transportation challenges (Brindis et al., 2003). The implementation of school-based health centers would mean an increase in mental health support for students, as well as less time away from school due to difficulty in scheduling appointments for vaccinations and physicals as required by schools. Therefore, more children would be in school with a minimized disruption due to the midyear school transition.

### **Conclusion**

This study was developed based on the previous literature which indicated that Navy spouses experience more stress and mental health concerns than civilian counterparts or wives of members of the Marine Corps (Senecal, 2019). Navy families relocate more frequently than other populations and therefore their children often attend many schools throughout their academic career (Seigel, 2018), possibly as many as nine or more by the end of high school (Ruff & Keim, 2014). It has been discussed by

researchers that school mobility is an indicator of school dropout and the two events have been correlated multiple times in previous research (Bradshaw, 2010; Russo & Fallon, 2014). Due to a lack of research exploring the midyear school transition and noted need for more research in this area (Bradshaw, 2010) this was the specific event which was used to learn about the experiences of resilience which occur for wives of members of the U.S. Navy.

There is a need to improve the process for transitioning students from one school to another midyear. This study revealed specific difficulties encountered by the women who were interviewed, and though the number of participants was a small and thus not generalizable to the greater population, it is important to note the struggles and successes these women experienced. By recognizing the areas of improvement better systems can be developed to minimize these struggles related to midyear school transitions. Through engaging the Navy spouse community to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences in midyear transitions a light is shed on the supports in place to ease this challenging experience. It is important to improve upon the existing programs as well as establish new ones to better support the many school transitions the entire military population must endure all too frequently.

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## Appendix: Interview Questions

1. What is your current age?
2. Are you currently married to an active duty member of the U.S. Navy?
3. What is the rate/rank of your spouse?
4. Have you ever moved a child from one school to another school once the school year had already started?
5. How long ago did this move occur?
6. What is your relationship to the child who was moved to a new school?
7. How old was the child when he/she changed schools midyear?
8. How old is the child now?
9. In which grade was your child when he/she changed schools once the school year had already started?
10. What does the word “resilience” mean to you?
11. How would you describe the experience of moving your child from one school to another midyear?
12. How did you experience resiliency during the school transitions of this child midyear?