

2015

## PERCEIVED LIFE SATISFACTION OF EXPATRIATE STUDENTS ATTENDING INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

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**PERCEIVED LIFE SATISFACTION OF EXPATRIATE STUDENTS  
ATTENDING INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS**

**BY**

**BRYNHELD MARTINEZ ZAVRAS**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT**

**OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**IN**

**SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY**

**UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND**

**2015**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION  
OF  
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2015

## **Abstract**

The primary goal of the present study was to investigate overall and domain-based life satisfaction of expatriate students attending international schools compared to students who attend international schools in their home country. The present study included 114 students from eleven international schools located across nine European countries. Participants completed measures concerning demographic information and the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS). Statistical analyses revealed levels of life satisfaction to be in the positive range for all students. Results indicated that domain-based and overall life satisfaction, as measured by the MSLSS, was similar for males and females. No significant differences were found between expatriate students and local students in overall life satisfaction. Family was the only MSLSS domain in which expatriate youth reported to be less satisfied compared to their local peers. The relationship between expatriate youth's international relocation experiences and current life satisfaction was also explored. Expatriate students' number of relocations was negatively related to both age of first relocation and years in the host country, and positively related to years away from their home country. Findings revealed that years away from home country was negatively related to age of first relocation. Overall life satisfaction, however, as measured by the MSLSS, was not significantly related to any of the predictor variables. Future directions for research are discussed in light of the study's limitations and implications.

## **Acknowledgements**

First, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my major professor, Dr. Lisa Weyandt, for her guidance, wisdom and support throughout this process. I would also like to thank my core committee members, Dr. Jasmine Mena and Dr. Susan Brand, for their invaluable feedback and help. I am also grateful to Dr. Susan Loftus-Rattan and Dr. Annemarie Vaccaro for their time and willingness to serve as chairs to my committee.

Further, I would like to acknowledge the participants of this study for their time and contribution to this research.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support, care and optimism. I am also appreciative of my fellow students in the graduate program for their friendship and encouragement. I am incredibly grateful to my parents and brothers, whose love, kindness and humor have motivated me during the most challenging times. My deepest appreciation goes to my husband, Yianni, who has always believed in me. Thank you for your unconditional love during this journey.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is in manuscript format.

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## **Publication Status**

*This manuscript will be submitted for publication in School Psychology International.*

## **Perceived Life Satisfaction of Expatriate Students Attending International Schools**

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## **Introduction**

Life satisfaction, defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of his or her quality of life, is considered to be a critical component of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Huebner, Suldo, Smith, & McKnight, 2004; Pavot & Diener, 2008). This construct has been associated with several positive and negative social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes, particularly for children and adolescents (Huebner, 1991a; Huebner, Hills, Siddall & Gilman, 2014; Huebner, Suldo & Gilman, 2006; McCabe, Bray, Kehle, Theodore, & Gelbar, 2011; Proctor, Lindley, & Maltby, 2009a). Additionally, lower youth life satisfaction has been related to several internalizing disorders such as depression and anxiety (Huebner, 2001; Huebner et al., 2004) as well externalizing problems such as aggression and hostility (Pavot & Diener, 2008; Suldo & Huebner, 2004). Current literature strongly suggests that youth life satisfaction can serve as both a mediator and moderator between one's behavior and surroundings (Proctor et al., 2009a), and have a considerable influence on overall psychological well-being (Huebner et al., 2004; Huebner et al., 2014).

While the research on children and adolescents' life satisfaction is scant relative to studies focusing on adults, the interest in youth life satisfaction has increasingly grown during the past two decades (Huebner et al., 2014; Proctor et al., 2009a). The available research, however, has primarily been conducted with American youth and information on cross-cultural populations is lacking (Proctor et al., 2009a; Proctor, Lindley, & Maltby, 2009b). To date, researchers have studied demographic and personality variables, in addition to the role of interpersonal relationships and environmental factors on life satisfaction among children and adolescents (Huebner, 2004; Proctor et al., 2009a).

The environmental change of geographical relocations, in particular, has been found to influence life satisfaction of children and adolescents (Brown & Orthner, 1990; Simpson & Fowler, 1994). Preliminary studies suggest children and adolescents who experience several relocations throughout childhood and adolescence, known as expatriate youth, are more vulnerable to suffer from emotional, behavioral, and academic difficulties, and lower overall life satisfaction compared to those who do not relocate (Ezra, 2003; Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Hansson, Clausson, & Janlöv, 2011; Jones, 2000). Nevertheless, minimal research has been directed toward the relationship of life satisfaction and relocation over the course of development in expatriate youth, most commonly defined as boys and girls who relocate one or more times outside their home country during their childhood due to parental professional obligations (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Useem & Downie, 1976). Meanwhile, the number of families relocating internationally has been increasing with greater globalization and the development of international economies (Cockburn, 2002; Hansson et al., 2011; McDonald, 2010). For example, according to a recent testimony on global relocation trends by Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2014), organization respondents reported an increase and continuing growth in the number of expatriates from 2011. Furthermore, it is estimated that at least half of these individuals are likely to be accompanied by their families (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008), thereby contributing to increasing numbers of expatriate youth. Given this increasing trend in the global relocation of families and children, research is sorely needed to investigate this population's life satisfaction.

Expatriate youth may be at greater risk for negative social and emotional outcomes due to repeated transitions, yet very little is actually known about their overall

life satisfaction and associated domains. Therefore, it is critical that researchers assess variables unique to expatriate children and adolescents that may contribute to their life satisfaction. Parents, educators, and clinicians can better support expatriate youth with a greater understanding of such factors to improve this population's subjective quality of life. Ultimately, this research may lead to better assessment and crucial psychological and educational assistance for the specific needs of expatriate youth.

### **Expatriate Children and Adolescents**

Despite the lack of a universally accepted definition of *expatriate* in the literature, it has been commonly described as an individual who is temporarily residing in a foreign country due to occupational obligations (Hansson et al., 2011; Jones, 2000). Expatriate children and adolescents differ from immigrants and refugees due to their repeated shifts from their home and host cultures for parental professional obligations rather than for political or economic reasons (Cockburn, 2002). With greater globalization and communicative technological advancement, consultancies (e.g., Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2014; Mercer Human Resource Consulting, 2006) have reported a steady increase in the number of companies sending employees and their families overseas to various countries located in but not limited to Europe and Asia. Expatriate families have been identified since the 1920's (Hayden, 2006; Hayden & Thompson, 2008) and the number of such families has steadily multiplied.

Other terms have been associated with the expatriate population in the literature include *internationally mobile youth* (Gerner, Perry, Moselle, & Archbold, 1992), *global nomad* (McCaig, 1996), *transcultural* (McDonald, 2010; Willis, Enloe, & Minoura, 1994), and *third culture kid* (TCK; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). For the present study,

an expatriate youth was defined as a child who has lived some part of their developmental years in one or more countries outside his or her home country due to parental professional obligations.

Expatriate children are commonly categorized according to their parents' occupation or sponsoring organization. The following categories have been identified in the literature: (a) missionary, (b) military, (c) corporate, (d) diplomatic corps, and (e) international non-government organization (NGO) (Brown & Lauder, 2011; Hayden, 2006; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Useem & Downie, 1976). Although these groups may differ in countries of origin, levels of acculturation overseas, and social economic status, most of these children and their families will face cross-cultural transitions and high mobility for extended periods of time while possibly maintaining ties to their respective home countries (Fail et al., 2004; Hayden, 2006; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

### **Adjustment of Expatriate Youth**

Although a brief stay abroad may have lasting effects on psychological development (Cockburn, 2002; Dixon & Hayden, 2008; Hansson et al., 2011), Simpson and Fowler (1994) found that children who relocated three or more times from first to twelfth grade were at an even greater risk for emotional, social, and academic problems compared to those who have never experienced geographic mobility. Expatriate children and adolescents who are internationally mobile frequently face several global transitions throughout their childhood (Gerner et al., 1992; Hansson et al., 2011), and can be considered to be especially vulnerable to negative psychological outcomes. An international relocation, in particular, may require greater changes than a domestic one because of the adaptation to new cultural norms (Nathanson & Marcenko, 1995). The

current literature indicates that most children and adolescents who globally relocate may struggle with high mobility, sense of self and belonging, relationship development and maintenance, and multiple losses (Cockburn, 2002; Fail et al., 2004; Hayden, 2006; Limberg & Lambie, 2011; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

High mobility is characterized by a series of relocations and can be a difficult, even traumatic, experience (Hansson et al., 2011; Simpson & Fowler, 1994). Mobility patterns can vary amongst this population, but it is a defining quality of their lifestyle (Fail et al., 2004; Limberg & Lambie, 2011; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) that considerably impacts multiple aspects of life. Hansson, Clausson, and Janlöv (2011) found that expatriate children in international schools have problems of emotional distress, homesickness, and alienation related to transitioning to a new country and neighborhood, in addition to general health needs and concerns (e.g., childhood illnesses).

During childhood, developing an interpersonal identity can be complex and overwhelming in new environments (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Limberg & Lambie, 2011). Identity development and maintenance may pose some concerns for internationally mobile youth as to how to negotiate and/or maintain their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds (Ezra, 2003; Fail et al., 2004; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Nathanson & Marcenko, 1995). In other words, transferring from one culture to another may be challenging, and cause struggles with identifying where one emotionally and physically belongs. In a multiple case study conducted by Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004), several participants reported feelings of “marginality” (p. 323) due to a lack of belonging. Moreover, participants who did not feel prepared for a transition noted

that they faced complications with identifying with the host country, as well as their home country. Yet, some participants reported that they were able to feel at home in various places and were comfortable being raised in transient lifestyles. Clearly more research is needed to understand the factors that affect belonging.

Research has found that expatriate families have to adapt to changes in geographical location, as well as social networks (Limberg & Lambie, 2011). While families are usually the only stable support system during transitions, these family relationships may also become vulnerable (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). For example, expatriate youth have been found to lash out parents and siblings due to frustration, anger or lack of control (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Research also suggests expatriate youth may choose not to form meaningful relationships to avoid distress (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). In fact, Werkman, Farley, Butler, and Quayhager (1981) found that American adolescents who were internationally mobile (i.e., lived overseas for at least two years) reported being less likely to be emotionally invested in developing relationships compared to their non-mobile American counterparts. Similarly, Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009) found that female expatriate youth reported reluctance to develop friendships. In general, adolescents who are globally mobile may have decreased competence or motivation to engage in intimate relationships, yet research is needed to further explore this hypothesis (Werkman, Farley, Butler, & Quayhager, 1981).

Frequent relocation and transient surroundings expose expatriate boys and girls who are internationally mobile to many potential losses. Dixon and Hayden (2008) conducted a study focusing on the perspectives of elementary students at an international school on the transition experience. They found that children defined loss as missing



family and friends and frequently worrying about leaving friends behind. In another study by McLachlan (2007), parents of expatriate children reported that their children's grief was also acute when friends moved elsewhere. Unresolved grief due to unforeseen cycles of separation and loss, as well as the lack of time to process and cope with a loss can be prevalent in this group of children and adolescents. These findings suggest that the repeated incidents of loss become more of a concern rather than simply the amount or intensity of loss (McLachlan, 2007).

Only a few studies (e.g., Gerner et al., 1992; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Nathanson & Marcenko, 1995; Werkman et al., 1981) have been conducted to investigate the developmental experiences of globally mobile children. Importantly, the combination of frequent mobility and struggles with identity and interpersonal relationships increases the risk for negative social and emotional outcomes for expatriate youth. Thus, the examination of expatriate students' life satisfaction may illuminate the unique mental health needs and challenges that would ultimately enhance life satisfaction on an affective, cognitive, psychological and interpersonal level.

### **International Schools Attended by Expatriate Students**

International schools originated within expatriate communities to provide education for local children and for children who accompanied their parents during foreign assignments. Research indicates that expatriates choose to enroll their children in international schools mainly due to unfamiliar local curricula and educational expectations, language barriers, and educational continuity for students who relocate frequently (Hayden & Thompson, 2008). English is also often the primary language of instruction (Hayden, 2006; Hill, 2006; Wylie, 2011), frequently integrated with various

foreign language options. Further, these schools allow for educational continuity for students who relocate frequently. International schools are often based on the educational model of the school's country of origin (e.g., American, British, French) or in combination with an international curriculum (e.g., International Baccalaureate).

### **Children and Adolescents' Life Satisfaction**

Life satisfaction has been defined by Shin and Johnson (1978) as "a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his chosen criteria" (p.478), and a critical component of subjective well-being (Huebner, 1991a; Huebner et al., 2004; Pavot & Diener, 2008). Subjective well-being has been defined as one's self-evaluation of his or her happiness and overall satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984; Pavot & Diener, 2008), and is a construct considered to be composed of the emotional components of positive and negative affect such as joy and sadness, and the cognitive component of global and domain specific life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Life satisfaction, however, is not thought to be influenced primarily by immediate emotions or recent events, but is considered by many as a more stable indicator of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999; Gilman & Huebner, 2003).

While life satisfaction is a key component of well-being, relatively few studies regarding youth's judgment of their life satisfaction as associated with personal and environmental variables have been conducted. Generally, research indicates that children and adolescents report relatively positive levels of overall life satisfaction and across domains of life satisfaction (Huebner, Drane, & Valois, 2000). Findings have also revealed that there is little to no relation between life satisfaction and the demographic

variables of age, grade, gender, parental marital status, and parental occupation (e.g., Huebner, 1991b, 1994; Huebner, Laughlin, Ash, & Gilman, 1998).

Researchers have found moderate relationships between youth life satisfaction and minor and major life experiences. For example, McCullough, Huebner, and Laughlin (2000) found a significant positive relationship between positive daily events and adolescents' reported life satisfaction. Similarly, Ash and Huebner (2001) found positive life events to be positively related to life satisfaction, with the reverse for negative life events. Chronic life circumstances (e.g., residing in a poverty-stricken area) have also been found to have modest negative impacts on life satisfaction, specifically for adolescents (McCullough, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000).

Research has also suggested that children's living environments are a better predictor of life satisfaction (Homel & Burns, 1989), wherein those who live in dangerous and poorly maintained neighborhoods reported lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction. Community connectedness, however, has been found to be positively related to life satisfaction (Gilman & Huebner, 2006), in which adolescents who participated in a structured community reported higher life satisfaction.

### **Relocation and Youth Life Satisfaction**

Relocation often introduces considerable change in children and adolescents' lives (Cockburn, 2002; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Specifically, Brown and Orthner (1990) studied the association of recent moves and high number of moves and life satisfaction and found a negative relationship, but only for early adolescent girls. Brown and Orthner also found life satisfaction to be positively associated to a child's length of time living in a location. Similarly, Sam (1998) explored the life satisfaction of

immigrant adolescents in Norway and found that those who lived in a fairly homogenous ethnic community or neighborhood provided more positive ratings of life satisfaction than those living in ethnically diverse areas. In a related study, Neto (2000) investigated immigrant adolescents in Portugal and found that adolescents living in ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods reported higher levels of life satisfaction.

### **Measuring Youth Life Satisfaction**

Various measures have been developed to assess children and adolescents' life satisfaction, including objective (e.g., checklist of stressful life events, family income) and subjective indicators (e.g., personal judgment). Presently, self-report scales are the most common instrument for the evaluation of youth life satisfaction (Gilman & Huebner, 2003). Proctor, Lindley, and Maltby (2009b) reported that these measures may use a unidimensional framework, obtaining one overall score to reflect general (e.g., Student's Life Satisfaction Scale, Huebner, 1991b) or global life satisfaction (e.g., Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale, Seligson, Huebner, & Valois, 2003). Alternatively, through a multidimensional model, individual scores are calculated across domains of life satisfaction such as the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS; Huebner, 1994; Huebner et al., 1998).

Several factors should be considered before choosing an assessment instrument to evaluate life satisfaction, including psychometric properties, theoretical model of measurement, dimensional framework and normative samples (Proctor et al., 2009b). Huebner (2001) recommended that if one's goals are focused on diagnosis, prevention, or intervention, assessments that distinguish domains of life satisfaction may present the most useful information for providing individualized intervention and coping strategies.

## **The Present Study**

The current study aimed to extend previous literature on youth life satisfaction and adjustment of expatriate students attending international schools. Research indicates that expatriate youth are often confronted with moving between countries, negotiating aspects of their identity, and integrating into transient communities (Gerner et al., 1992; Hayden & Thompson, 2008). These youth often have to adapt to changes in geographical location, as well as their social networks (Limberg & Lambie, 2011; McDonald, 2010). It is therefore plausible that expatriate boys' and girls' may be at greater risk for facing significant adjustment issues that may in turn influence their perceptions of life satisfaction.

A definition of a specific period of time living overseas ascribed to expatriate youth is lacking in the literature. However, residing for at least one year outside one's home culture before the age of 18 has been regarded as having considerable influence on an individual's development (Cockburn, 2002; Hansson et al., 2011; Simpson & Fowler, 1994), and has been the defining criteria used in previous studies of this population (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999). Although research findings (e.g., Fail et al., 2004; Gerner et al., 1992; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008) that provide insight to the experiences of globally mobile children and adolescents are useful, they do not address expatriate youth's satisfaction with their way of life. Specifically, studies are needed to explore expatriate students' life satisfaction and its relationship to specific features concerning their global transitions. Ultimately research in this area may lead to appropriate prevention, detection, and interventions for this understudied population.

The primary goal of the present study was to investigate global life satisfaction and domains of life satisfaction of expatriate students attending international schools compared to students who attend international schools in their home country.

Specifically, the aims and hypotheses of this investigation were to:

1. Explore levels of overall life satisfaction and specific domains of life satisfaction by grade and by gender of expatriate youth attending international schools as measured by the MSLSS.
2. Investigate the association between students' expatriate status and youth self-report of life satisfaction as measured by the MSLSS. It was hypothesized that children who have internationally relocated compared to children who have not relocated would report lower levels of life satisfaction as measured by the MSLSS.
3. Examine the relationship between expatriate children and adolescents' international relocation experiences and current self-report of life satisfaction as measured by the MSLSS. Specifically, it was hypothesized that students' age of first international relocation, number of international relocations, years lived outside of their home country, and years spent in the host country would be predictive of life satisfaction as measured by the MSLSS.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were recruited from eleven schools located across nine countries in Europe: Greece, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Austria, Italy, Czech Republic and Switzerland. Schools included in this study were educational institutions meeting the following criteria of international schools located in Europe (Hayden, 2006; Hill, 2006; Wylie, 2011): (a) international accreditation by the Council of International Schools, (b) provided instruction across elementary, middle, and high school student populations, (c) English as the primary language of instruction, (d) promotion of an international curriculum, and (e) caters to globally mobile population.

A total of 114 students (61 males, 53 females) in grades 6 through 12 attending private international schools in located in Europe participated in this study. English was identified to be the first language of 50.9% of respondents compared to 49.1% that identified other languages. A majority of participants (41.2%) were identified by their parents as European. For the remaining students, 20.2% were identified as North American, 4.4% as South American, .9% as African, .9% as Asian, 10.5% as Multiethnic, and 21.1% preferred not to respond.

The sample included 7 males and 13 females in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade with a mean age of 11.45 years ( $SD = .60$ ), 12 males and 10 females girls in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade with a mean age of 12.14 years ( $SD = .56$ ), 10 males and 8 females in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade with a mean age of 13.22 years ( $SD = .55$ ), 8 males and 7 females in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade with a mean age of 14.47 years ( $SD = .74$ ), 7 males and 5 females in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade with a mean age of 15.08 years ( $SD = .51$ ), 8 males and 4 females in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade with a mean age of 16.25 years ( $SD = .45$ ),

and 9 males and 6 females in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade with a mean age of 17.13 years ( $SD = .74$ ). Additional demographic information pertaining to residency status of participants is provided in Table 1.

Descriptive analyses on expatriate students' international relocation data revealed that the mean number of international relocations was 2.36 ( $SD = 1.54$ ). This sample's mean age of first relocation occurs in early childhood, approximately at 6 years of age ( $M = 6.16$ ,  $SD = 4.61$ ). The mean number of years lived outside of one's home country was found to be 6.48 ( $SD = 4.45$ ), and the mean number of years residing in the host country was revealed to be 2.90 36 ( $SD = 2.62$ ). These figures are presented in Table 2.

### **Procedure**

A total of 35 international school administrators were contacted to request their assistance in participant recruitment of students enrolled in grades six through twelve. School administrators of eleven international schools volunteered to partake in this study and provided permission for the researcher to contact parents. Emails explaining the research study were sent to a designated contact person at each school, who was asked to send an email to all parents with children enrolled in sixth to twelfth grade in an effort to obtain a sample of participants representative of the sex and ethnic demographics of the students attending international schools (see Appendix A for a statement on diversity in research).

Information in the email directed parents to enter a SurveyMonkey website, where the online questionnaire was made accessible. Once parents entered the site, they were instructed to read a consent form for both their participation and their children's participation (see Appendix B), and confirm they understood the content by clicking on a



statement of endorsement. To participate in this study, parental consent was required for students under twenty-one (21) years of age. Although parental consent was necessary for student participation, parental participation was not mandatory. Parents who provided consent were presented with an electronic version of a demographic questionnaire.

Students whose parents provided consent to participate were sent individual emails, which directed them to enter the SurveyMonkey website. Once students accessed the electronic site, they were instructed to read and complete an assent form (see Appendix C). Participants confirmed that they had read and understood the assent form prior to beginning the questionnaires. The assent form included an explanation of the proposed study, the purpose of the research, and confidentiality, using language appropriate for the child's age, status and condition. To encourage participation, students were offered to register for a raffle, by providing their school email address, where they had a chance of winning one of three \$25 gift cards. Participating students, who confirmed they understood the contents by clicking on a statement of endorsement, were presented with the student demographic questionnaire and the MSLSS. After completing all the measures, parents and students were provided with a debriefing of the study online (see Appendix D), containing detailed information about the study and how to contact the researcher should they have any questions and/or concerns about their participation. Data collection was completed from April 2013 through April 2014.

## **Measures**

**Demographic Questionnaires.** Parents were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that included items referring to experiences of international mobility (see Appendix E), including their home country (i.e., parents' geographical affiliation and

country in which parents call home), occupation, and information relevant to their child's international relocation experience. Students were also asked to complete a separate brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F) regarding their gender, age, grade, and home countries.

**Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale.** Students were asked to complete the 40-item Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS; Huebner, 1994), used to evaluate their life satisfaction across five domains (see Appendix G): (a) Family (e.g., My family is better than most), (b) Friends (e.g., My friends treat me well), (c) School (e.g., I like being in school), (d) Living Environment (e.g., I like where I live), and (e) Self (e.g., Most people like me). For each statement, participants used a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1= *Strongly disagree* to 6 = *Strongly agree* to measure participants' perceptions. The MSLSS has demonstrated acceptable reliability with internal consistency coefficients exceeding 0.75 for all subscales and .90 for the total score (Gilman, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000; Huebner, 1994; Huebner et al., 1998). Validity studies including exploratory factor analyses (Huebner, 1994) and confirmatory factor analyses (Huebner et al., 1998) have supported the five domains of the MSLSS, as well as the high-order factor of general life satisfaction. As presented in Table 3, internal consistency for all scales had Cronbach's *alphas* of .77 or higher.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants Pertaining to Residency Status*

	Expatriate		Local		All Students	
	(n = 79)		(n = 35)		(N = 114)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	39	49.4	22	62.9	61	53.5
Female	40	50.6	13	37.1	53	46.5
<b>Grade</b>						
6 <sup>th</sup>	14	17.7	6	17.1	20	17.5
7 <sup>th</sup>	16	20.3	6	17.1	22	19.3
8 <sup>th</sup>	13	16.5	5	14.3	18	15.8
9 <sup>th</sup>	8	10.1	7	20.0	15	13.2
10 <sup>th</sup>	9	11.4	3	8.6	12	10.5
11 <sup>th</sup>	10	12.7	2	5.7	12	10.5
12 <sup>th</sup>	9	11.4	6	17.1	15	13.2
<b>First Language</b>						
English	47	59.5	11	31.4	58	50.9
Other	32	40.5	24	68.6	56	49.1
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
Europe	37	46.8	10	28.6	47	41.2
North America	12	15.2	11	31.4	23	20.2
South America	2	2.5	3	8.6	5	4.4
Africa	-	-	1	2.9	1	.9
Asia	1	1.3	-	-	1	.9
Australia	1	1.3	-	-	1	.9
Multiethnic	8	10.1	4	11.4	12	10.5
Prefer not to say	18	22.8	6	17.1	24	21.1

Table 2

*Demographic Characteristics of Expatriate Students*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Number of Relocations	2.36	1.54	1.00	7.00
Age of First Relocation	6.16	4.61	.20	17.00
Years Away from Home Country	6.48	4.45	.08	17.00
Years in Host Country	2.90	2.62	.08	12.00

Table 3

*Internal Consistency of the MSLSS*

	Expatriate ( <i>n</i> = 79)	Local ( <i>n</i> = 35)	All Students ( <i>N</i> = 114)
Family	.86	.85	.87
Friends	.89	.86	.88
School	.87	.80	.85
Living Environment	.83	.77	.81
Self	.81	.82	.82
Total	.92	.91	.92

## **Results**

A total of six different analyses were performed. First, the internal consistency of the MSLSS was examined to explore the measure's reliability in the present sample. Next, correlation analyses were completed to assess the relationships among the different subscales of the MSLSS. Descriptive analyses were then conducted for participants' MSLSS responses. The final three analyses related to the main goals of the study and included: a) group comparison analyses of the MSLSS domain and overall scores by gender and by grade, b) group comparison analyses of the MSLSS domain and overall scores by expatriate status, and c) multiple regression analyses to predict overall life satisfaction, as measured by the MSLSS, with expatriate students' age of first international relocation, number of international relocations, years lived outside of home country, and years spent in host country as the independent variables and responses on the MSLSS as the dependent variable(s).

### **Internal Consistency of the MSLSS**

To assess some of the psychometric characteristics of the MSLSS in the present sample, internal consistency analyses were conducted, both for the entire scale as well as each of the five subscales. Coefficient alphas of .92, .92 and .91 were found for the MSLSS total score for the overall sample, expatriate students, and local students, respectively. Similarly, acceptable internal consistency estimates for the MSLSS domains were found across the three groups. For the overall sample, domain coefficient alphas ranged from .81 (Living Environment) to .88 (Friends). Among the students who had internationally relocated, all internal consistency estimates were acceptable, ranging from .81 (Self) to .89 (Friends). Comparably, for students who had not internationally

relocated, high internal consistency coefficients were found for each of the MSLSS domains, ranging from .77 (Living Environment) to .86 (Friends). Overall, these results suggest good overall internal consistency for all five subscales of the MSLSS as well as the total MSLSS score. Table 3 reports the alpha coefficients for these analyses.

### **Correlations Among Domains of the MSLSS**

To assess the association between the five MSLSS domains, Pearson correlations among the five MSLSS domains were obtained. Correlations among the five MSLSS domains for the entire sample are provided in Table 4. Correlations ranged from .23 to .47 with median correlation of .39. Correlations among the five MSLSS domains for expatriate students and local students are provided in Tables 5 and 6, respectively. For participants who experienced one or more international relocations, correlations ranged from .18 to .48, with a median correlation of .39. Concerning local students, correlations ranged from .24 to .60, with a median correlation of .39. The modest to moderate correlations indicate that for both groups of students, the MSLSS domains are related, yet distinct components of life satisfaction.

### **Descriptive Analyses**

Mean item ratings were calculated for each domain of the MSLSS, as well as overall life satisfaction as measured by total MSLSS item ratings, by summing item responses and dividing by the number of items in the respective domain. Mean item ratings indicate participants' levels of life satisfaction. A rating of six indicates the highest satisfaction and a rating of one indicates the lowest satisfaction. Scores of four and higher correspond to positive ratings of life satisfaction. The mean total and domain item ratings for the total sample and each group are presented in Table 7. The mean total

item rating of Life Satisfaction on the MSLSS for the overall sample was 4.78 ( $SD = .57$ ), revealing a moderately high degree of global life satisfaction among the participants, as measured by mean item ratings. Local students' mean item rating of life satisfaction was 4.87 ( $SD = .56$ ) compared to expatriate students' mean item rating of life satisfaction of 4.74 ( $SD = .58$ ). Across life domains, participants endorsed the highest satisfaction based on mean item rating in the Friends domain (Total sample:  $M = 5.40$ ,  $SD = .65$ ; Local students:  $M = 5.41$ ,  $SD = .64$ ; Expatriate students:  $M = 5.39$ ,  $SD = .65$ ). The lowest endorsed domain was School for the overall sample ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) and expatriate students ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = .92$ ). Local students endorsed the lowest in the Living Environment domain ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = .88$ ). Additional descriptive statistics for each MSLSS subscale and the total item ratings were conducted and are included in Tables 8 and 9.

### **Gender, Grade, and Life Satisfaction**

To investigate the relationship between the demographics and participants' MSLSS responses, two separate one-way multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were conducted. In the first MANOVA, the independent variable was gender and the dependent variables were the MSLSS domain scores of Family, Friends, School, Living Environment, and Self. The MANOVA yielded non-significant results,  $F(5, 108) = 1.066$ , Pillai's trace = .047,  $p = .38$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ . For the second MANOVA, the independent variable was grade and the dependent variables were the MSLSS domain scores of Family, Friends, School, Living Environment, and Self. Results of the MANOVA were non-significant,  $F(30, 535) = .931$ , Pillai's trace = .37,  $p = .07$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ .



To determine if students differed in reports of total life satisfaction by gender and by grade, the groups were compared using two separate one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA). In the first ANOVA, the independent variable was gender and the dependent variable was the MSLSS total score. Results revealed that the effect of gender was not significant,  $F(1, 112) = 3.31, p = .07$ . In the second ANOVA, the independent variable was grade and the dependent variable was the MSLSS total score. This analysis revealed a significant effect of grade,  $F(6,107) = 2.47, p = .03$ . A Tukey post-hoc test further indicated that the MSLSS total score of students in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade ( $M = 4.40, SD = .66$ ) was significantly lower than students in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade ( $M = 5.00, SD = .60$ ). The trend of scores for students in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade revealed that they rated their life satisfaction lower across most domains compared to the other grades (see Table 9). No other significant post-hoc results were found.

### **Residency Status and Life Satisfaction**

A one-way MANOVA was conducted to investigate the hypothesis that participants who relocated internationally would report lower levels of life satisfaction as measured by the MSLSS. The independent variable was participants' residency status, wherein students who had located internationally (i.e., expatriate students) were compared to students who had not relocated internationally (i.e., local students). The MSLSS domain scores of Family, Friends, School, Living Environment, and Self served as the dependent variables. The MANOVA yielded non-significant results,  $F(5, 108) = .990, \text{ Pillai's trace} = .044, p = .43, \text{ partial } \eta^2 = .04$ . Hence, the results did not support the hypothesis.

Given that the domains of life satisfaction, as measured by the MSLSS, are

distinct components of life satisfaction, univariate analyses of variance were also considered appropriate for post-hoc analyses in addition to the aforementioned MANOVA. In this ANOVA, residency status was the independent variable and different domain scores served as the dependent variable. A one-way ANOVA yielded significant results for the Family domain,  $F(1, 112) = 3.97, p = .049$ . Results showed that compared to local students ( $M = 5.01, SD = .78$ ), expatriate students' ( $M = 4.67, SD = .13$ ) reported significantly lower satisfaction with their family. The ANOVA yielded non-significant results for the subscales of Friends [ $F(1, 112) = .03, p = .86$ ], School [ $F(1, 112) = .45, p = .50$ ], Living environment [ $F(1, 112) = .01, p = .91$ ], and Self [ $F(1, 112) = 1.93, p = .17$ ].

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of residency status on the MSLSS total score. This analysis showed that there was no significant difference between expatriate students and local students on the MSLSS total score,  $F(1, 112) = 1.21, p = .27$ . These findings did not support the hypothesis that students who have experienced global relocation would report lower levels of total life satisfaction compared to students who have not relocated internationally.

### **Predictors of Life Satisfaction**

The hypothesis that independent variables of participants': (a) age of first international relocation, (b) number of international relocations, (c) years lived outside of home country, and (d) years spent in host country would be predictive of overall life satisfaction as measured by the MSLSS was tested by a standard multiple regression. As displayed in Table 10, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables. Results revealed three significant associations among the four hypothesized predictors. Participants' number of

relocations was negatively related to both age of first relocation ( $r = -.62, n = 79, p = .000$ ) and years in host country ( $r = -.26, n = 79, p = .019$ ), yet was positively related to years away from home country ( $r = .63, n = 79, p = .000$ ). On the other hand, years away from home country was negatively related to age of first relocation ( $r = -.66, n = 79, p = .000$ ). Lastly, participants' mean MSLSS total score was not significantly related to any of the predictor variables.

A standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate how well age of first international relocation, number of international relocations, years lived outside of home country, and years spent in host country predicted overall life satisfaction. The linear combination of the four variables related to expatriate students' international relocation was not significantly related to overall life satisfaction,  $F(7,74) = .55, p = .70, R^2 = .03, R^2_{Adjusted} = -.02$ . These findings did not support the hypothesis that variables pertaining to participants' developmental history of international relocations would predict total life satisfaction.

Table 4

*Correlations Among Domains of the MSLSS for Total Sample*

	Family	Friends	School	Living Environment	Self	Total
Family	-	.23*	.37**	.37**	.47**	.66**
Friends		-	.40**	.47**	.44**	.69**
School			-	.42**	.37**	.73**
Living Environment				-	.37**	.78**
Self					-	.69**
Total						-

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 5

*Correlations Among Domains of the MSLSS for Expatriate Students*

	Family	Friends	School	Living Environment	Self	Total
Family	-	.18	.37**	.37**	.36**	.63**
Friends		-	.43**	.45**	.42**	.69**
School			-	.48**	.41**	.78**
Living Environment				-	.27*	.79**
Self					-	.63**
Total						-

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 6

*Correlations Among Domains of the MSLSS for Local Students*

	Family	Friends	School	Living Environment	Self	Total
Family	-	.36*	.37*	.41*	.60**	.73**
Friends		-	.31	.44**	.49**	.71**
School			-	.24	.27	.61**
Living Environment				-	.58**	.77**
Self					-	.80**
Total						-

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 7

*Descriptive Statistics of the MSLSS by Residency Status*

MSLSS Variables	Expatriate ( <i>n</i> = 79)		Local ( <i>n</i> = 35)		All Students ( <i>N</i> = 114)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Family	4.67	.87	5.01	.78	4.77	.85
Friends	5.39	.65	5.41	.64	5.40	.65
School	4.39	.92	4.51	.81	4.43	.88
Living Environment	4.47	.96	4.49	.88	4.47	.93
Self	4.73	.66	4.92	.76	4.79	.70
Total	4.74	.58	4.87	.56	4.78	.57

Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics of the MSLSS by Gender*

MSLSS Variables	Male ( <i>n</i> = 61)		Female ( <i>n</i> = 53)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Family	4.71	.76	4.85	.95
Friends	5.32	.72	5.48	.55
School	4.26	.77	4.62	.97
Living Environment	4.38	.89	4.58	.97
Self	4.75	.72	4.83	.67
Total	4.69	.52	4.88	.62



Table 9

*Descriptive Statistics of the MSLSS by Grade*

MSLSS Variables	Grade													
	6 <sup>th</sup> (n = 20)		7 <sup>th</sup> (n = 22)		8 <sup>th</sup> (n = 18)		9 <sup>th</sup> (n = 15)		10 <sup>th</sup> (n = 12)		11 <sup>th</sup> (n = 12)		12 <sup>th</sup> (n = 15)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Family	5.14	.75	5.11	.58	4.69	.81	4.95	.65	4.95	.65	4.19	.80	4.57	.88
Friends	5.47	.55	5.55	.58	5.07	.92	5.47	.52	5.41	.50	5.35	.53	5.42	.73
School	4.72	.66	4.59	.94	4.43	.87	4.47	.80	4.32	.89	3.61	.92	4.48	.89
Living Environment	4.66	.98	4.77	1.05	4.36	.94	4.43	.81	4.32	.54	4.13	1.06	4.37	.92
Self	4.93	.69	4.97	.62	4.69	.81	4.95	.65	4.28	1.21	4.19	.80	4.57	.88
Total	4.99	.51	5.00	.59	4.60	.62	4.83	.47	4.63	.39	4.40	.66	4.78	.57

Table 10

*Correlations Among Domains of the MSLSS for Expatriate Students*

	Number of Relocations	Age of First Relocation	Years Away from Home Country	Years in Host Country	MSLSS Total Score
Number of Relocations	-	-.62**	.63**	-.26*	-.06
Age of First Relocation		-	-.66**	-.12	-.01
Years Away from Home Country			-	.09	.01
Years in Host Country				-	.17
MSLSS Total Score					-

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

Life satisfaction is an important construct of positive psychology that has been related to both positive well-being and maladaptive outcomes (Huebner, 1991a; Huebner et al., 2014; Pavot & Diener, 2008). Lower youth life satisfaction, in particular, has been associated with reduced happiness and emotional competence, as well as an increased risk for psychopathology (Huebner et al., 2004; McCabe et al., 2011; Suldo & Huebner, 2004; Proctor et al., 2009a). Expatriate children and adolescents are characterized in the literature as a population that experiences high degrees of international mobility and may be at risk for lower levels of life satisfaction (Cockburn, 2002; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Useem & Downie, 1976). The present study was the first to exclusively investigate life satisfaction of expatriate students compared to local students enrolled in international schools. Overall, results indicated that self-reported life satisfaction was similar for males and females. Students in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade rated their overall satisfaction to be lower compared to other grades. Findings also revealed domain-based and overall life satisfaction to be generally positive for the sample. However, in contrast to what was hypothesized, expatriate students did not significantly differ in reports of overall quality of life compared to their local peers. Nevertheless, self-reported satisfaction with family was found to be significantly lower for expatriate students. Contrary to expectations, variables of international relocation history did not predict overall life satisfaction.

Consistent with previous research (Huebner, 1991a, 1994; Huebner et al., 1998; Brantley, Huebner, & Nagle, 2002), gender differences were not found across ratings of domain-based or overall quality of life. Moreover, no significant relationship was found between grade and the five domains of life satisfaction. Results of the present study,

however, revealed a significant relationship between grade and overall life satisfaction, as measured by the MSLSS total score. In fact, students in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade reported significantly lower overall life satisfaction, specifically compared to students enrolled in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Other studies have shown life satisfaction to be lower during adolescence (Huebner et al., 1998; Huebner, Valois, Paxton, & Drane, 2005; Proctor et al., 2009a; Zappulla, Pace, Cascio, Guzzo & Huebner, 2014). The lower ratings of life satisfaction in the present study may be attributed to difficulties and concerns experienced during the developmental phase of adolescence, particularly with the challenges of increased independence and individuation from family and peers (Updegraff & Obeidallah, 1999; Zappulla et al., 2014). It is likely, therefore, that intervention programs addressing students' well-being will be more effective if directed at adolescents (Baskin et al., 2010). Overall, these results are consistent with previous studies indicating that demographic variables played a relatively minor role in children and adolescents' report of life satisfaction (Huebner, 1991b, 1994; Huebner et al., 2014; McCabe et al., 2011; Proctor et al., 2009a).

Comparisons of overall and domain-based life satisfaction revealed that participants largely reported positive levels of life satisfaction across gender, grades, and residency status. Similar to studies of school age children across the United States and in several countries (Antaramian, Huebner, & Valois, 2008; Hatami, Motamed, & Ashrafzadeh, 2010; Huebner, 1991a, 1991b; Jovanovic & Zuljevic, 2013), this finding shows that students are generally satisfied with their lives, including those attending international schools. There is evidence to support that high levels of life satisfaction may function as a protective factor for children and adolescents, enhancing overall mental

health outcomes (Huebner et al., 2014). Moreover, high levels of overall life satisfaction have been related to significantly lower rates of externalizing behavior (Suldo & Huebner, 2004).

Another important finding from this study emerged regarding expatriate students. Specifically, that expatriate students and local students reported similar levels of overall life satisfaction. Therefore, the hypothesis that students who have internationally relocated compared to students who have not relocated would report lower levels of life satisfaction as measured by the MSLSS was not supported. Furthermore, both groups rated their life satisfaction to be generally positive. Various factors may have contributed to the insignificant differences in reported life satisfaction between the groups in the present sample. For example, the current sample consisted disproportionately of expatriate students compared to local students (i.e., the number of expatriate participants was more than twice that of local participants). The unequal group sizes may have decreased the statistical power of the study, such that it did not detect “true” group differences. Additionally, the average number of international relocations reported by expatriate students in this sample was found to be approximately two relocations during childhood. Given that previous research has demonstrated that three or more relocations during childhood and adolescence are related to emotional, social, and academic problems (Simpson & Fowler, 1994), the sample’s number of relocations may be too low to result in meaningful differences in life satisfaction.

The view that relocation frequency might be a contributing factor in resilient behavioral development of expatriate children and adolescents has not been adequately addressed in the literature. Other research (Weber & Weber, 2005), however, has

suggested that relocations not only contribute to the development of resiliency, but may also be related to positive reports of life satisfaction. Although the focus of previous examinations has primarily been on deleterious effects of international relocations (Dixon & Hayden, 2008; Hansson et al., 2011; Werkman et al., 1981), this study supports that this population rated their life satisfaction as generally positive across a range of domains. In fact, based on self report, it appears that expatriate children and adolescents function unexpectedly well under environmental conditions judged to be adverse and stressful due to increased resilience from exposed the repeated stress of international relocations (McLeod, Heriot, & Hunt, 2008). Positive experiences, whether frequent or high in intensity, may also play a larger role in perceived life satisfaction than negative or stressful life experiences (Huebner et al., 2004; McCabe et al., 2011). Collectively, findings are equivocal, however, regarding whether the number of international relocations has a positive or negative effect on life satisfaction.

The importance of family in expatriate students' perceptions of life satisfaction was underscored in this study. Family was the only MSLSS domain in which expatriate students reported to be less satisfied compared to local students. Transitions for expatriate children and adolescents are less likely to be successful when they perceive themselves as having minimal control or involvement in the relocation process (Medway, 2002), especially when they feel that they are not contributing family members to planning. Family conflict may also arise due to frustration and resentment (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Being active in the decision-making process related to relocation has been identified as one of the most helpful factors both children and adolescents (Raviv, Keinan, Abazon & Raviv, 1990). Possibly, the absence of open communication with

parents and the lack of a sense of importance within the family (Joronen & Astedt-Kurki, 2005), particularly during a transition, may contribute to expatriate students' reports of lower satisfaction with their family compared to their local peers.

The present findings revealed significant relationships between overall life satisfaction, as measured by the total score of the MSLSS, and expatriate students' age of first international relocation, number of international relocations, years lived outside of home country, and years spent in host country. Significant negative correlations were found between expatriate students' number of relocations and age of first relocation, as well as expatriate students' number of relocations and years living in host country. Therefore, these results suggest that the more international transitions a student has experienced, the younger he or she was during the first global relocation and resided in these countries for fewer years. In addition, a significant positive correlation was found between number of relocations and expatriate students' years away from their home country. This relationship suggests that the more international relocations a child has experienced, the longer he or she has been away from his or her country of origin. However, a significant negative correlation was also found between expatriate students' years away from their home country and age of their first relocation. This relationship suggests that the more years a child has spent away from their home country, the younger they would have been when they first relocated. These relationships were found to range between moderate and strong correlations, yet none of these variables contributed to meaningful relationships with one's perception of life satisfaction. Furthermore, even though these observed relationships may not be causal in nature, these relationships have not previously been investigated.

Although variables pertaining to participants' international relocation profile failed to show any significant association with overall life satisfaction as measured by the MSLSS, the present study did not collect an exhaustive record of other factors that may be predictive. The identified variables did not significantly predict expatriate students' overall life satisfaction. It is plausible, however, that several unidentified variables contributing to expatriate children and adolescents' perceptions of life satisfaction exist. Therefore, future studies should focus on uncovering variables that contribute to domain-based and overall life satisfaction in the population of expatriate children and adolescents.

### **Limitations**

The findings of the present study have important implications for expatriate youth and students enrolled in international schools. However, there are a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the sample consisted disproportionately of students with expatriate status. Data were also collected from international schools located only in Europe. Furthermore, the majority of the participants identified as European and North American. Due to the fairly homogenous sample, the results may not apply to children and adolescents of other ethnic backgrounds, as well as those enrolled in international schools in other geographic locations.

This study demonstrates that the MSLSS may be used with expatriate children and adolescents for research purposes, but several considerations should be taken into account. Specifically, self-report measures were used to obtain subjective ratings of participants' perceived life satisfaction and may be vulnerable to response bias. For example, some students may have described aspects of their life in a more positive light



for a more favorable view by others. Further, students completed the questionnaire at their own convenience and varied in time periods of data collection. Consequently, the context of daily events (e.g., talking or sharing feelings with friends) may have influenced their perceptions of life satisfaction (Huebner et al., 2004; McCabe et al., 2011; McCullough et al., 2000).

Participant recruitment was challenging for this population due to its global nature, which resulted in a relatively small sample size, hence, the power of the study may have been limited. The lack of students in the sample with parents from military and missionary backgrounds did not allow for meaningful analyses regarding the relative impact of parents' occupational categories. Lastly, data concerning participants' personality attributes were not collected. Studies have shown that individual attributes such as temperament, extroversion, and self-esteem (e.g., Huebner, 1991) are associated with perceived life satisfaction. Despite these limitations, the current study provides preliminary findings of the well-being of expatriate youth and students in the international community.

### **Implications**

Although the number of families relocating internationally increases due to globalization and economic development (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2014; Hansson et al., 2011; McDonald, 2010), expatriate youth continue to be an overlooked population by researchers compared to their local peers. Therefore, results from the present study offer important implications for the international education community, as well as families and students.

In general, results of this study contribute to the assessment, prevention, and

intervention related to the well-being of students attending international schools. The MSLSS has been found to be a reliable and valid measurement across various cultural groups (e.g., Jovanovic & Zuljevic, 2013; Hatami et al., 2010; Park, Huebner, Laughlin, Valois, & Gilman, 2004; Zappulla et al., 2014) and similar results were found for this sample of expatriate students. Therefore, the MSLSS may be a valuable tool for studying expatriate students' subjective well-being and contributes to context-specific intervention efforts across school, home, and community settings. Additionally, the MSLSS may be used in screening students who are at risk for life dissatisfaction and benefit from programs targeted at enhancing well-being.

The results of the study suggest that expatriate students may experience lower satisfaction with their family compared to their local peers. Hence, this has implications for families who relocate with children and adolescents. Sharabi and colleagues (2012) suggest that the enhancement of closeness and mutual social support within the family unit may act as a protective factor for youth during a transition. Therefore, these findings indicate that intervention programs should be focused on supporting parents and guardians in preparing and facilitating their children's international relocation. In addition, developing intervention strategies that promote enhanced family relationships, as well as heightened self-expression and coping skills among youth are important (Medway, 2002; Raviv et al., 1990). These competencies, in turn, can be applied to subsequent relocations to achieve positive outcomes.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The present study is among the first to explore variables related to the life satisfaction of expatriate and local students attending international schools. Future

examinations should strive to include more ethnically diverse populations from international schools located in geographically diverse areas. Moreover, the inclusion of other expatriate subtypes (e.g., missionary, military) would allow for more comprehensive analyses of group differences of life satisfaction. Overall, larger samples would likely strengthen research findings, increase power, and enhance the generalizability of findings.

Although the present study supports the use of the MSLSS for international school students, replication studies are needed for stronger evidence of its reliability and validity with this population. Longitudinal analyses of life satisfaction prior to, during, and following international relocation are needed to shed greater light on the experiences of expatriate youth and how their life satisfaction changes over time. Given that the current study did not uncover any significant predictors of life satisfaction among expatriate youth, researchers should attempt to identify other variables that are predictive of both global and domain-based life satisfaction among expatriate youth in order to determine the factors that serve important functions in their well-being. Finally, research concerning the theoretical basis of how resilience relates to expatriate students' life satisfaction, with an emphasis on influential protective factors would be beneficial. It is imperative to continue resilience research in expatriate children and adolescents and to better understand how these children thrive and even succeed during global transitions.

## **Conclusion**

The present study attempted to address the paucity of research exploring youth life satisfaction by investigating international school students' perceptions of domain-based and overall life satisfaction. Contrary to expectations, overall life satisfaction was

found to be similar between children and adolescents who experienced international relocation compared to those who had not had such experiences in childhood. Consistent with previous studies, demographic variables of gender and grade were found to play a minor role in perceptions of life satisfaction. Expatriate and local students of the international community were found to report generally positive levels of overall life satisfaction, in addition to the MSLSS domains of Family, Friends, School, Living Environment, and Self.

Family relations play an important role in expatriate students' perceptions of life satisfaction. Expatriate students' age of first international relocation, number of international relocations, years lived outside of their home country, and years spent in the host country were not significantly associated with total life satisfaction as measured by the MSLSS. Another important aspect of the current study is the demonstration of the MSLSS as a reliable instrument for measuring perceptions of life satisfaction of this population. Therefore, the MSLSS may potentially be used as a means of identifying and intervening with expatriate students' domains of dissatisfaction. To further validate the findings, future studies are needed with larger samples, various subgroups, and other global educational institutions.

Importantly, the present findings indicate that the relocation experience may not necessarily be detrimental to the development of expatriate youth. With every move, boys and girls may become more resilient and develop more effective coping skills to manage stress (McLeod et al., 2008; Weber & Weber, 2005). Therefore, the positive effects of frequent relocations must not be neglected in models of expatriate youth adjustment.

In conclusion, this study draws attention to the life satisfaction of a sample of

students attending international schools. Contrary to expectations, results revealed that students were very satisfied with their lives despite the numerous challenges associated with global relocations. The results also underscore the critical contribution of family relationships to expatriate youth's life satisfaction. Overall, the current findings have important implications for identifying students' strengths and fostering them as protective factors against the development of psychopathological problems. Continued research and applied work focusing on youth life satisfaction may provide crucial knowledge for more comprehensive assessment and program development aimed at enhancing the quality of life of children and adolescents attending international schools.

## Appendix A

### Statement on Diversity in Research

The proposed study included the recruitment of participants from various cultural backgrounds and both sexes to ensure that the findings were equally beneficial and representative of the target population, which included expatriate students attending international schools.

International schools are highly diverse, attracting children and adolescents from over 120 nationalities (Bates, 2011; Hill, 2006). Approximately 300,000 students are enrolled in the 550 international schools located in nearly 153 countries (Hayden & Thompson, 2008). In a survey conducted by the *Council for Advancement and Support of Education* (CASE; 2012), the median number of nationalities represented in international schools is 49. Demographics indicate that the typical student population in these schools is comprised of host country nationals, and expatriates representing government, military, religious and private sectors (Brown & Lauder, 2011; Hayden, 2006; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Useem & Downie, 1976). The median percentage of students who are citizens of the host country is 19%, while the median percentage of students whose parents are expatriates is 80% (CASE, 2012).

## Appendix B

### Consent Form for Research

The University of Rhode Island  
Department of Psychology  
10 Chafee Road  
Kingston, RI 02881

*Perceived Life Satisfaction of Expatriate Students Attending International Schools*

#### **PLEASE PRINT AND KEEP A COPY FOR YOURSELF**

You and your child are invited to participate in a research project described below. The purpose of this project is to investigate the life satisfaction of students attending international schools. If you have more questions about this study later, please contact Ms. Bryn Martinez, M.A., the person responsible for this study at (401) 316-8480 or [bmartinez@my.uri.edu](mailto:bmartinez@my.uri.edu), or her major professor, Dr. Lisa Weyandt, Ph.D., at (401) 874-2087 or [lisaweyandt@uri.edu](mailto:lisaweyandt@uri.edu).

**Description of the project:** This research project involves responding to a series of questions about experiences and life satisfaction of students attending international schools. The purpose is to identify variables that may contribute to life satisfaction of students attending international schools.

**Exclusion Criteria:** You are not eligible to participate if your child has any of the following conditions: (a) a psychiatric diagnosis of depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia, (b) autism spectrum disorders, or (c) severe intellectual disability.

**What will be done:** If you agree to be in this research project, you will be asked to complete a demographic information form about your family's relocation experiences. This form will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. If you agree to your child's participation in this project, your child's school email will be provided to the investigator by the appropriate school staff and/or faculty. Subsequently, your child will then be emailed a description of the study and a link to fill out an electronic version of the 40-item questionnaire, entitled *Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS)*, which will require less than 20 minutes to complete.

Only students in sixth through twelfth grades, who have parental permission, and who themselves agree to participate, will be invited to participate in the study.

**Risks or discomfort:** The investigator does not anticipate any risks from your participation in this study. Although highly unlikely, you or your child may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. Both you and your children may decide to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Benefits of this study:** Although there will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in

this study, the information gathered will be useful in helping parents, teachers, and school faculty to know what factors may or may not influence life satisfaction of students attending international schools.

**Confidentiality:** You and your child’s participation in this study are confidential and will only be seen by Brynheld Martinez, her major professor, Dr. Lisa Weyandt, and possibly research assistants at the University of Rhode Island. Participation in this project is completely confidential. You and your child’s information will not be shared with any organization. The project’s results will be presented in a doctoral dissertation research paper and may be published in a scientific journal.

**Decision to quit at any time:** If you decide to take part in the study, you and/or your child may quit at any time.

**Rights and Complaints:** This study has been reviewed and has received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at University of Rhode Island. In addition, it has been approved by the respective principal or dean of your child’s school. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Ms. Bryn Martinez, (401) 316-8480 or at bmartinez@my.uri.edu or her major professor, Dr. Lisa Weyandt, (401) 874-2987 or at lisaweyandt@uri.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Vice President for Research, 70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI at (401) 874-4328, Ms. Bryn Martinez at (401) 316-8480, or at bmartinez@my.uri.edu, or Dr. Lisa Weyandt, at (401) 874-2087, or at lisaweyandt@uri.edu, and they will discuss the issue with you.

**Giving of Consent:** I have read this consent form and I understand fully what is being requested of me and my child as participants in this project. I certify that I am at least 21 years of age. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Name of Parent: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check the appropriate statement and send this form back to school with your child:

\_\_\_\_ I agree to **both** myself and my child participating in this study.

\_\_\_\_ I agree to **only** my child participating in this study.

\_\_\_\_ I do **not** agree to myself and my child participating in this study.



## Appendix C

### Assent Form for Research

The University of Rhode Island  
Department of Psychology  
10 Chafee Road  
Kingston, RI 02881  
Perceived Life Satisfaction of Expatriate Students Attending International Schools

My name is Ms. Bryn Martinez. We are inviting you to take part in a research study because we are trying to learn more about the life satisfaction of students attending international schools. Your parent or legal guardian is aware of this project. We will explain the project to you in detail. If you have more questions about this study, please call Ms. Bryn Martinez, M.A., the person responsible for this study at (401) 316-8480 or [bmartinez@my.uri.edu](mailto:bmartinez@my.uri.edu), or her major professor Dr. Lisa Weyandt, Ph.D., at (401) 874-2087 or [lisaweyandt@uri.edu](mailto:lisaweyandt@uri.edu).

**Description of the project:** This research project involves responding to a series of questions about experiences and life satisfaction of students attending international schools. The purpose is to identify what contributes to life satisfaction of students attending international schools.

**What will be done:** If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a student demographic questionnaire and the 40-item questionnaire, entitled *Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS)*. Both will require less than 20 minutes to complete.

**Risks or discomfort:** The investigator does not anticipate any risks from your participation in this study. Although highly unlikely, you may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. If so, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

**Benefits of this study:** Although there will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study, the information gathered will be useful in helping parents, teachers, and school faculty to know what factors may or may not influence life satisfaction of students attending international schools.

**Confidentiality:** Your participation in this study is confidential. Your answers are confidential and will only be seen by Bryn Martinez, her major professor, Dr. Lisa Weyandt, and possibly research assistants at the University of Rhode Island. Participation in this project is completely confidential.

**Decision to quit or not participate at any time:** You might want to talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to be in this study. The decision to be part of this research is up to you. You do not have to participate. We will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study, but even if your parents say "yes", you can still decide not to do this. If you do decide to participate, you can

always drop out of the study at any time. Whatever you decide will not be held against you in any way. No one will be upset if you do not want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop.

Remember, you can ask any questions you may have about this study. If you have a question later that you did not think of now, you can call me at (401) 316-8480 or email me at [bmartinez@my.uri.edu](mailto:bmartinez@my.uri.edu).

You will be entered into a raffle for an Amazon.com or iTunes gift certificate valued at \$25. The drawing will be conducted by the University of Rhode Island, Department of Psychology. The winner(s) will be notified immediately by email and provided with information necessary to redeem the prize.

Beginning the survey means you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

## Appendix D

### Participant Debriefing

Thank you for participating in this study. This study was confidential, which means that this information will only be seen by the student investigator, Ms. Bryn Martinez, and her major professor, Dr. Lisa Weyandt. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in this study, please contact:

- Bryn Martinez, M.A.  
Student Investigator  
Psychology Department  
University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI 02881  
[bmartinez@my.uri.edu](mailto:bmartinez@my.uri.edu)  
(401) 316-8480
- Lisa Weyandt, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Psychology Department  
University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI 02881  
[lisaweyandt@uri.edu](mailto:lisaweyandt@uri.edu)  
(401) 874-2087
- Vice President for Research  
70 Lower College Road, Suite 2  
University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI 02881  
(401) 874-4328

## Appendix E

### Parent Demographic Questionnaire

**1. Preferred email address for notification:**

---

**2. First Language:**

A. English

B. Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Relation to child:**

C. Father

D. Mother

E. Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Sex:**

---

**5. Highest degree or level of school you have completed**

A. Some high school

B. High school graduate

C. Some college or university

D. Associate degree

E. Bachelor's degree

F. Master's degree

G. Professional degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)

H. Doctorate degree (e.g., PhD, EdD)

I. Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**6. National and/or ethnic group:**

---

**7. Home country/ies** (i.e., geographical affiliation and country one considers to be home):

---

**8. Residency status in current country:**

A. Citizen/Permanent Resident

B. Temporary Resident/Expatriate

C. Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Years family has spent in current country:**

---

**10. Employed in one of the following categories:**

A. Religious

- B. Education
- C. Military
- D. Government
- E. Business
- F. Non-governmental organization (NGO)
- G. Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Years working and/or living abroad (if applicable):**

\_\_\_\_\_

*Please provide the following information about your child*

**12. Child's sex:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**13. Child's age and grade:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**14. Child's home country/ies (i.e., geographical affiliation and country child considers to be home):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**15. Has your child relocated internationally prior to the age of 18?**

- A. Yes
- B. No

**16. If yes to question #14, please list the country/ies lived in prior to the age of 18 in chronological order:**

- |       |       |
|-------|-------|
| a.    | e.    |
| _____ | _____ |
| b.    | f.    |
| _____ | _____ |
| c.    | g.    |
| _____ | _____ |
| d.    | h.    |
| _____ | _____ |

**17. If you answered question #15, please indicate how old your child was when he or she moved to the country/ies listed above and how long they lived in each country:**

- |       |       |
|-------|-------|
| a.    | e.    |
| _____ | _____ |

b.	f.
_____	_____
c.	g.
_____	_____
d.	h.
_____	_____

**18. How frequently does your child visit his or her home country:**

- A. Never
- B. Once every two years
- C. Once a year
- D. Twice a year
- E. Other (please specify):

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix F**

**Student Demographic Questionnaire**

**1. First Language:**

A. English

B. Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Gender:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Age:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**4. Grade:**

A. 6<sup>th</sup>

B. 7<sup>th</sup>

C. 8<sup>th</sup>

D. 9<sup>th</sup>

E. 10<sup>th</sup>

F. 11<sup>th</sup>

G. 12<sup>th</sup>

**5. What country or countries do you consider to be home?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**6. Why do you consider this country or these countries to be home?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS)

We would like to know what thoughts about life you've had during the past several weeks. Think about how you spend each day and night and then think about how your life has been during most of this time. Here are some questions that ask you to indicate your satisfaction with life. Circle the number (from 1 to 6) next to each statement that indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. It is important to know what you **REALLY** think, so please answer the question the way you really feel, not how you think you should. This is **NOT** a test. There are **NO** right or wrong answers. Your answers will **NOT** affect your grades, and no one will be told your answers.

- Circle **1** if you **STONGLY DISAGREE** with the sentence
- Circle **2** if you **MODERATELY DISAGREE** with the sentence
- Circle **3** if you **MILDLY DISAGREE** with the sentence
- Circle **4** if you **MILDLY AGREE** with the sentence
- Circle **5** if you **MODERATELY AGREE** with the sentence
- Circle **6** if you **STRONGLY AGREE** with the sentence

1. My friends are nice to me	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I am fun to be around	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I feel bad at school	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I have a bad time with my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. There are lots of things I can do well	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I learn a lot at school	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I like spending time with my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. My family is better than most	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. There are many things about school I don't like	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I think I am good looking	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. My friends are great	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. My friends will help me if I need it	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. I wish I didn't have to go to school	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I like myself	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. There are lots of fun things to do where I live	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. My friends treat me well	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Most people like me	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. I enjoy being at home with my family	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. My family gets along well together	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. I look forward to going to school	1	2	3	4	5	6



Circle **1** if you **STONGLY DISAGREE** with the sentence  
 Circle **2** if you **MODERATELY DISAGREE** with the sentence  
 Circle **3** if you **MILDLY DISAGREE** with the sentence  
 Circle **4** if you **MILDLY AGREE** with the sentence  
 Circle **5** if you **MODERATELY AGREE** with the sentence  
 Circle **6** if you **STRONGLY AGREE** with the sentence

21. My parents treat me fairly	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. I like being in school	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. My friends are mean to me	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. I wish I had different friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. School is interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. I enjoy school activities	1	2	3	4	5	6
27. I wish I lived in a different house	1	2	3	4	5	6
28. Members of my family talk nicely to one another	1	2	3	4	5	6
29. I have a lot of fun with my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
30. My parents and I do fun things together	1	2	3	4	5	6
31. I like my neighborhood	1	2	3	4	5	6
32. I wish I lived somewhere else	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. I am a nice person	1	2	3	4	5	6
34. This town is filled with mean people	1	2	3	4	5	6
35. I like to try new things	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. My family's house is nice	1	2	3	4	5	6
37. I like my neighbors	1	2	3	4	5	6
38. I have enough friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
39. I wish there were different people in my neighborhood	1	2	3	4	5	6
40. I like where I live	1	2	3	4	5	6

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