

To Move or Not to Move: School Reopening During COVID-19

Yijun Lin¹, Erin C. Westgate¹, Young Ju Ryu², Sarah Michner¹

¹ University of Florida, ² New York University

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic propelled the world into unprecedented times. During almost a year full of social distancing, facial masks, and self-quarantine, many universities across the nation converted their fall semesters to a primarily online format with minimal in-person classes. College students faced a daunting decision “**Should I move back to school?**”. So, we investigated **what influenced students’ decision to move back to school or stay home**, specifically investigating the role of **social needs**. Moreover, we compared students’ **preventive health behavior** and **emotions** in their move/stay decision. Lastly, we analyzed a crucial factor regarding their decision, their ability to **correctly predict** their preventive health behavior and emotions for the fall semester.

Methods

Participants:

Baseline:

- 146 American college students (93 females, $M_{age} = 19.38$, $SD_{age} = 1.26$)

Follow-up:

- 28 American college students (20 females, $M_{age} = 19.74$, $SD_{age} = 1.35$)

Procedure:

Baseline: [August 2020]

The baseline survey includes questions for actual (summer) and predicted (fall) preventive health behaviors and emotions, as well as social needs, COVID-related measures, and demographics.

Follow-up: [October 2020]

Participants were recontacted by email and were compensated \$10. The follow-up survey includes actual (fall) preventive health behavior and emotions.

Measures

- Social needs were measured by The Need for Relatedness at College Questionnaire (Guiffreda et al., 2008) and Fear of Missing Out Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013).
- Emotions were measured by one-item questions like “How bored do you feel because of the COVID-19 outbreak?” in the present and future tense.
- Preventive Health Behavior was adapted from [Preventative Practices \(Okten, Gollwitzer, & Oettingen, 2020\)](#) and the guidance on preventing getting COVID-19 on the [CDC website](#). It has 6 sub-categories: self-isolating, avoiding gatherings, social-distancing, self-quarantine, washing hands, and wearing masks.
- Move/stay decision was measured by the question “Where do you plan to live for the fall semester?”

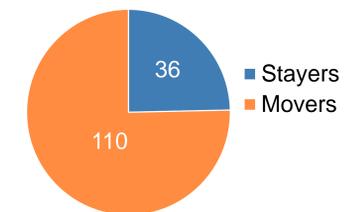
Conclusions

- Students claimed to move back to school mainly to **study better**.
- Movers practiced **fewer preventive health behaviors** compared to stayers. Both showed no improvement in the fall, which didn’t align with their predictions.
- Vigilance against the pandemic was **overestimated** in both movers and stayers. Even though both groups predicted they would feel more worried about COVID-19 and act more safely in the fall, they did not.
- Movers predicted **less boredom and loneliness** for the fall semester, while stayers predicted **more** of them. Both correctly predicted how bored they would feel during the fall semester, but it’s not the case for loneliness.

Results

To Move or To Stay?

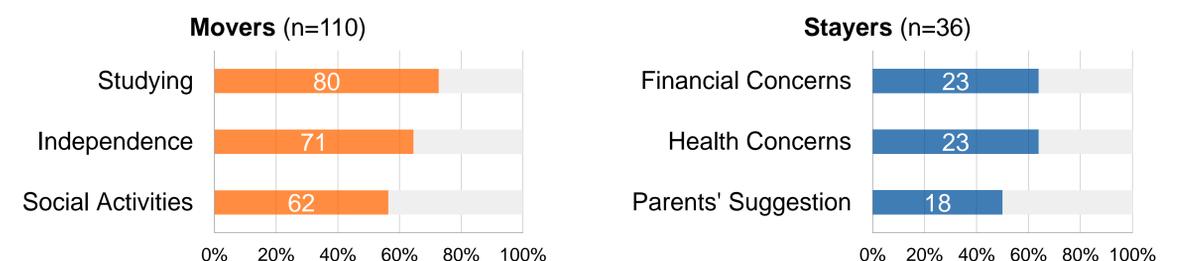
110 students (**75.3%**) decided to **move back to school**; the remaining **36** students (**24.7%**) chose to **stay home**.



Why Move & Why Stay?

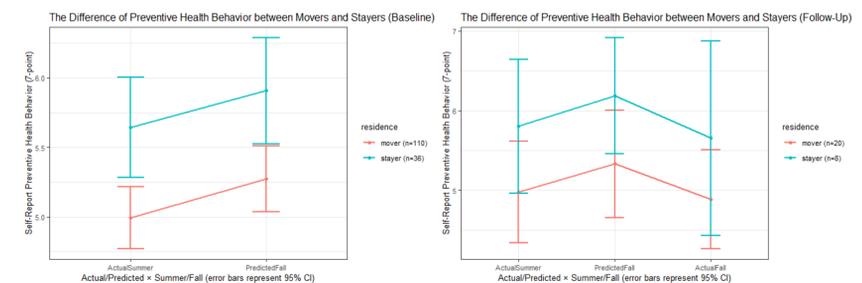
Movers cited **studying, independence, and social activities** as reasons for their choice; while stayers cited **financial and health concerns**.

But social reasons (need for relatedness, fear of missing out) were **unrelated** to student’s decision to move or stay ($r = -.027$, $p > .05$; $r = .1$, $p > .05$).



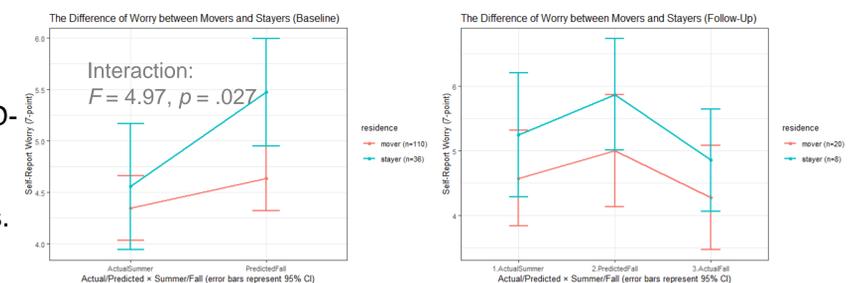
Preventive Health Behavior

Movers performed worse than stayers in preventive health behavior ($F = 4.24$, $p = .042$) during the summer. Although both groups predicted better preventive health behavior in the fall ($F = 4.22$, $p = .042$), their actual levels mirrored those in the summer.



Worry

Although movers and stayers worried the same about COVID-19 in the summer, stayers predicted more increase in worries for the fall than movers. In fact, both groups didn’t experience heightened worry.



Boredom and Loneliness

Movers predicted less boredom and loneliness for the fall semester while stayers predicted more. Both correctly predicted their boredom in the fall semester, but their loneliness was higher than their prediction.

