

ABSTRACT

Psychosocial Correlates of Stress and Achievement
among Jamaican Adolescents

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This exploratory investigation set out to construct reliable instruments for the measurement of stress factors affecting a sample of 616 fifth form Jamaican adolescents. Additionally, the study sought to investigate relationships existing between the stress factors and achievement. The influence of selected personality and socio-demographic variables on the experience of stress and achievement was also examined, as were differences related to gender, school location, school arrangement and school type on the stress factors and achievement measures. Achievement was assessed using performance on the Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary level examinations (O-level) and the Caribbean Examinations Council General Proficiency Examinations (CXC).

Four separate stress factors were identified by orthogonal factor analysis and these defined the following constructs. Stress 1: Academic Demands, Stress 2: Family Dysfunction, Stress 3: Economic Adversity, and Stress 4: School and Parental Pressures.

Stepwise Multiple Regression analysis revealed that certain variables were consistently related to the separate stress factors. Self-Esteem was the best predictor for Stress 1: Academic

Demands and Stress 2: Family Dysfunction, while Socio-economic Status and Test Anxiety exhibited similar predictability for Stress 3: Economic Adversity and Stress 4: School and Parental Pressures. Academic Self-Concept was the best predictor variable for the criterion measure Achievement. The composite stress measure was not a significant contributor to Achievement for the samples under review, although individual stress measures related significantly to the criterion measure.

Group differences for Gender, School Location and School Arrangement were identified using Student's 't' tests. The only gender difference was with Stress 4: School and Parental Pressures which females found to be significantly more stressful than males. For School Location, Stress 1: Academic Demands and Stress 3: Economic Adversity were found to be significantly more stressful for students attending schools outside of the metropolitan area of Kingston and St. Andrew than for their counterparts attending schools in the metropolitan area. Students attending schools that were not on the shift system found Stress 3: Economic Adversity to generate significantly more stress for them but performed significantly better than their peers on the shift system.

One-Way Analysis of Variance followed by Scheffé's post-hoc procedure confirmed significant differences among School Type on the variable Stress 3: Economic Adversity for which students in co-educational schools reported that they experienced significantly more stress than their counterparts in girls', but not in boys' schools.

The implications of these findings for alleviating stress factors and improving academic performance were identified, and recommendations, largely concerned with assisting students in the development of coping mechanisms for stress, as well as enhancing those qualities which seem related to an improvement of academic achievement were offered.

Future directions for, and improvement in research on stress were also specified.

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