

Stress, Coping and Protective Factors in 'O' Level Students

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to establish an understanding of the needs of students undertaking the GCE 'O' levels in terms of their sources of stress, signs of stress, coping styles and, protective factors that mitigate stress. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was employed. 1606 students from twelve north-eastern neighbourhood secondary schools participated in the survey. To triangulate the survey findings, two focus group discussions, involving 16 respondents were held. A total of 46 emails and 258 SMS Buddy Support were also included in the qualitative analysis.

Results revealed that the highest cause of anxiety came from the students' academic performance, followed by stressors from within the family. The lowest source of stress came from boy-girl relationships. Results also indicated that, whilst under stress, respondents would display emotional signs, followed by, in descending order, physical, behavioural, negative and suicidal signs. With regard to coping strategies, respondents utilised active coping methods most often by focusing on the problem followed by seeking instrumental social support. Lastly, with regard to resilience factors, the strongest came from bonding to the school followed by individual characteristics, peers and family members. The focus group discussions also pointed out how a resilience factor could ironically be another source of stress for students.

In conclusion, findings suggested the importance of recognising the presence of stress in its multiple forms, and a crucial window period where additional social support from adult figures and programmes could benefit students. In addition, by understanding that students are most stressed over academic performance, useful academic help and tips can be offered to them.

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