
Research Article**Assessing Stress Factors and Coping Strategies among Primary Schools Adolescents in Moshi District, Tanzania****Edith Mwananzila, Muteti Catherine Mueni**

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of the study was to determine factors attributed to primary schools adolescents' stress and common stress coping strategies they use. Four research questions guided this study. The study employed mixed research approach. Descriptive cross-sectional design was used. Participants were 225 primary schools' adolescents and 15 primary class teachers and five primary heads of schools. Data were collected through structured questionnaire, semi structured interviews and focus group discussion. Data were analysed using both content and thematic analysis. The findings of the study reveal that, most of adolescents had experienced stress even though some of them were not sure whether they were stressed or not due to lack of knowledge regarding stress and the sources of stress. Furthermore, the study found that two thirds of primary school adolescents often experienced symptoms of stress implying that they had high stress levels. Similarly, the study found that majority of the pupils often employed positive coping strategies. The study concludes that primary school adolescents in Moshi municipality were subjected to high levels of stress which affects their psychological wellbeing although they had not been able to address the sources of stress. Adolescents lacked the awareness of signs and symptoms of stress which increased the level of stress among them. Moreover, the pupils reported nervousness, anger, anxiety, sickness and lack of concentration during class hours. Primary schools adolescents were not able to device relevant coping strategies against stress. The Ministry of Education should put more emphasis on the issue of stress and coping strategies in primary schools by introducing well-structured formal support systems. The family should learn to support and be helpful for adolescents faced with stress, no matter how they are adapting to the stress. Moreover, schools should pay attention to students' trouble with learning and apply appropriate strategies to enhance their learning effectiveness.

Key words: Stress Factors, Coping Strategies**Introduction**

According to **Baron and Branscombe (2012)** stress is unpleasant emotional and physical reaction that people experience as they strive to achieve their expectations. Erikson (1972) as cited by Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup (2008) argues that the stage of identity versus role confusion of psychosocial development is characterized by the construction of identity which forms the major nuclear social conflict to resolve during adolescence. Similarly, failure to resolve the need for personal identity results into role confusion which tends to threaten individual's psychological wellbeing (Woolfolk et al, 2008; Nurmi, 2004). Stress, in this regard, can be considered as resulting from threats that individuals face as they strive to know who they really are.

Lahey, (2004) views stress as resulting from the perceived discrepancy between the demand of a situation on an individual and their ability to respond or to cope with it. Recent studies, in contrast, view stress as anything that results from a situation where demands exceed individual's coping abilities of which in end poses a threat to an individual's mental and physical health (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2012 as sited in Bulo & Sanchez, 2014).

Stress affects people from all walks of life regardless of age, gender, civil status, political affiliation, religious belief,

economic status and profession. It affects decision-makers such as politicians, managers, religious class, employees, housewives, students', out-of school- youths, and even the jobless to mention but a few. Stress is found everywhere, that is, at home, with friends, in the office, in school, in the classroom among other places, thus, we cannot avoid it. The causes and levels of stress may vary from one person to the other. No person is free from stress, regardless of how privileged, reasonable, clever, and intelligent he might be (Mazo, 2015). Thus, primary school adolescents are not exceptional. They equally are affected by stress.

Basic Education is of important because a pupil from primary level goes to secondary education level after passing the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). In the secondary level, the National Examination is administered at the end of each level. Pupils who succeed join Technical or Higher Education Level leading to various occupations. Therefore, all stressful situations which may affect pupils learning should be minimized to ensure good pupils learning.

Coping strategies on the other hand, refer to methods used to increase an individual's adaptation to stress by either removing the stress or limiting its effects (Compas, 2001). Coping strategies are vital adaptive methods to address stress. Frydenburg and Lewis (2004) argue that stressful experiences

prepare adolescents on how to respond to stress from multiple factors and may help them to have less stress in their future. Coping is a set of cognitive and affective actions which arise in response to a particular concern. They represent an attempt to restore the equilibrium or remove the turbulence for the individual. This may be done by solving the problem (that is, removing the stimulus) or accommodating or the concern without bringing a solution (Frydenberg et al., 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Stress among primary school adolescents is a problem which can lead to early pregnancies, truancy and finally school dropout. Many children have been involving themselves in various activities which deny them opportunity to education. For instance, primary school going pupils have involving themselves in the transport sector as touts and conductors. The owners of public transport vehicles have been taking advantage over their innocence. Moreover, school going children have been in the streets of major town in the country selling nuts, ice cream among others items. Others have translated to street children as a result.

Several studies addressing the issue of stress in have been conducted in Tanzania and other parts of the world. For example, a study by Mlaki (2007) shows that learning cannot take place well if the learners are stressed and are occupied with the confusion and frustrating events. Also Mazo (2015) found out that there is significant relationship between student performance in examination and the student's level of stress. Bulu and Sanchez (2014) assessed sources of stress among college students at Cagayan Valley Computer and Information Technology College in Penang, Malaysia. The findings showed that, there is a need to create a stress management program in higher education institution.

However, most of the reviewed studies dealt with assessing stress factors and coping strategies among secondary schools, colleges and Universities students only. Thus, stress factors and coping strategies among Adolescents in primary school has not been adequately addressed. This study made an attempt to investigate causes of stress and ways of managing stress among primary school adolescents.

Research Questions

The study sought was guided by the following research questions:-

1. What are the sources of stress among primary school adolescents?
2. What are the symptoms/signs of stress among primary school adolescents?
3. What strategies do primary school adolescents use to cope with stress?

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the "Theory of Stress and Coping Strategy" developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The theory explains about sources of stress and how people cope with stressful conditions. According to the theory, stress is based on individual's "perception" specifically to what extent

an individual perceives a situation as stressful around him or her. According to this theory, a situation is considered to be stressful if it is potentially harmful and if the individual perceives that his or her internal and external coping resources, which are available, are insufficient to confront the impact of stress.

The theory views stress as a transaction between individuals and their environments. Lazarus and Folkman emphasized that when confronted with environmental demands, individuals tend to evaluate whether the demands have a potential threat and whether he or she has a sufficient coping or help resources to deal with the problem. If they find the environmental demands more threatening, however, they have adequate coping resources, then the system returns to normal, then no stress, but if they find the environmental demands are threatening, at the same time view their coping resources as inadequate, they perceive themselves to be under stress.

Therefore, in order to develop an effective Stress Management Program, there must be first identification of the factors that are important to a person controlling his or her stress, and identifying the methods which target these factors. This indicates that not all coping strategies should be viewed as being appropriate to every individual. Usefulness of coping strategies differs from one person to another where by strategies that may be helpful for someone may not be helpful to others (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Therefore, after discovering that a person is under stress, and factors/stressors have already identified together with methods that target those factors, he or she has to be assisted in order to avoid chronic stress with number of its effects.

This can be directly applied to an adolescent when facing stress. Adolescent coping processes are different from those of adults due to the extreme changes they undergo as they mature into adulthood. To adolescents developmental factors must be considered in the stress and coping framework, as coping strategies change with maturation and personal experience (Seiffge, 2009)

The theory is helpful since it had lead the researcher to investigate whether the internal and external coping resources which are available at primary schools are sufficient or not, and their effects on managing stress and its impacts in reaching schools expectation that is, achieving good performance in examinations. On one hand, internal coping resources consist of the personality traits, abilities and skills which enable people to cope with the stress. Personality characteristics may either decrease or increase individuals' ability to reach out for help (Stroebe, 2000) as cited by Onditi (2014). On the other hand, external coping resources are resources external to an individual which are potentially helpful in alleviating stress. External coping resources can either be formal coping resources such as counselling and guidance units at schools or informal coping resources such as fellow students (Onditi, 2014). Assessing the internal and external coping resources to see whether they are sufficient or not in managing stress helped to identify the barrier and success of the stress managing program, hence to find the solution about the problem in the program, to refine and or

accept and continue with it.

The theory of Stress and Coping Strategy was regarded relevant to this study because, it was anticipated that, the theory would guide the researcher to assess the causes of stress and coping strategies as the theory explains about sources of stress and how people cope with stressful conditions, and that stress based on individuals perception about situation as stressful around him or her. Therefore this guided the researcher to investigate on what cause stress to the adolescents and how adolescents cope with stressful conditions.

Literature Review

Bulo and Sanchez (2014) assessed sources of stress among college students at Cagayan Valley Computer and Information Technology College in Penang, Malaysia. A questionnaire on Student-Life Stress Inventory was adopted to gather the needed data from 150 college students. The findings showed that, College students are exposed to many problems from family, financial, peers, and school environment. All these make the students to be under a stressful situation .Due to this therefore; there is a need to create a stress management program for higher education institution to consider implementation. The researcher used only one category of sample to gather information, using only students could not ensure the validity of the information. The researcher could have used teacher or tutors in the study because are the ones who know well the character and behaviour of their students. The results of this study showed that, there is a need to create a stress management programs for education institutions to consider the implementation. The study reveals the need for establishing stress management programs in primary schools in order to consider implementation.

Mazo (2015) carried out the study which sought to determine the causes of stress, the effects of stress, and the stress coping mechanisms of Political Science students in the Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City in Philippines. The study tested some assumptions using the descriptive survey method with 51 respondents. The study found out that school requirements/projects were the most common cause of stress. Sleepless nights were the common effect of stress. It was observed that the causes and effects of stress between the male and female respondents were not different. Listening to music was the common stress coping mechanism. Also it was observed that there is significant relationship between student performance in examination and the student's level of stress.

Gardner (2011) investigated sources of teaching practice related stress and coping strategies among Queensland University primary school student teachers in Australia. The study employed quantitative and qualitative research approach using questionnaire and focus group discussions and involved 105 participants. The study found that student-teachers psychological distress was not specific to the teaching practice because some of the student teachers were already depressed and stressed before the teaching practice. Furthermore, the study found that majority of the students had teaching related stress such that their performance in the teaching practice was

affected. Examples of such stresses were fear of the future employment. Copping strategies identified were such as approaching mentor teachers for support and relying on social supports. While the study informs the present study regarding research approach, research designs, research instruments, acceptable sample size, the study cannot be generalized to the wider pupils' population since it was done in Australia to the student-teachers.

Omar (2015) investigated the causes and effects of teacher stress among pre-service teachers at Taibah University in Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah in Saudi Arabia. Specifically the study sought to find out causes of pre-service teacher stress related to teaching concerns such as students' behaviour, motivation, and performance. The adopted descriptive and analytic research designs with the sample of 41 female pre-service teachers attending the Educational Diploma Program in Taibah University. The study used questionnaire measuring the degree of teacher stress among pre-service teachers. The study found that the most stressful causes contributing to pre-service teacher stress are teaching concerns, students' performance, students' behaviour and lastly students' motivation. Furthermore, the study found that teacher stress affects the physiological and psychological health of pre-service teachers, as well as their occupational performance. The study used relevant subjects, that is, student teachers and identified causes of stress. Furthermore, the study does not inform the present study with regard to coping strategies used by student teachers to address stress. Thus, it is important now to explore causes of stress and ways to deal with stress among adolescents in primary school.

Likewise, Antoniou, Ploumpi and Ntalla (2013) investigated the levels of occupational stress and professional burnout of teachers of primary and secondary education and coping strategies that they adopt, and the relationship between them. The study employed survey involving 388 teachers who teach in public schools in Greece. Two standardized instruments were administrated to teachers: The findings showed that teachers of Primary Education experience higher levels of stress compared to the teachers of Secondary Education. Female teachers experience more stress and lower sense of personal fulfilment than men. The study provides insights regarding the use of survey design in investigating stress related topic and the acceptable sample size. However, the study findings are hardly generalizable due to cultural difference existing between Greek culture and African culture and level difference between teachers and adolescents in primary schools.

Naidoo, Botha and Bisschoff (2013) conducted a study on Causes of Stress in Public Schools and its Impact on Work Performance of Educators in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This study reports on educator stress in public schools. In doing so, the study sets the objectives of identifying the causes of stress in public schools of educators in KwaZulu-Natal. The researcher used a stratified random sampling to obtain sample of the study. Cross-sectional survey design was used. A total of 368 questionnaires (of which 350 were usable) were received from 1500 distributed questionnaires. The findings

showed that causes (factors) of educator stress were organizational support, workload, Remuneration, Control, Job insecurity, Relationship opportunities and Growth opportunities.

The sample used in this study was unrepresentative, because 1500 questionnaires were distributed but only 350 questionnaires were usable. Therefore, the researcher could not get enough information because the intended sample was not reached. This means that the problem cannot be solved. Also because the study was focusing to educator’s causes of stress the researcher could not address the problems of the adolescents. This study therefore assessed the causes of stress among adolescents in primary schools in Tanzania and the researcher made sure that the intended sample was reached so as to get enough information.

Onditi, (2014) conducted a study to explore undergraduate student teachers experiences on psychosocial stressors, how they resolve the stressors, and the level of utilization of college help or support resources in Dar es salaam University College of Education (DUCE), in Tanzania. A self-report questionnaire was administered to a total of 187 first year, second year and third year student teachers from Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE), Tanzania. Regardless of gender, student teachers reported to have had high level of stressful experiences to the extent of needing assistance. The findings showed that there is a low utilization of formal college help services such as counselling compared to the informal sources of help like fellow students. And a lack of awareness, ethical concerns, and cultural factors emerged as the major barriers to help-seeking from the formal college sources of help. The researcher in this study used only one instrument of data collection that is questionnaire; thus difficult to triangulate. It could not produce enough answer or information so that they can be used to address the problem. The results of this study provide insight for developing a comprehensive and holistic intervention programs that could buffer students from stress and its associated maladies.

Similarly, Seif, (2011) conducted a study on stress causes, symptoms and its effects to undergraduates students at the University of Dar-es-Salaam main campus (UDSM). The sample used was 156 undergraduate students. The researcher used in-depth interview he revealed that about 53% of university and college Students who were interviewed reported to have experienced stress. This rate shows that college and university students from both developed and developing countries are vulnerable to stressors. The researcher of this study employed only one tool (instrument) that is in depth interview method of data collection, this could

not make him to get enough information on what he wants to asses because the respondents might be shy in responding while interviewing. The argument above leads the researcher of this study to decide to conduct a study on stress factors and coping strategies by using more than one instrument that is Questionnaires, Focused Group Discussion Guide, semi – structured interview guide and Documentary Analysis Schedule so as to get enough information on the problem for its resolution.

Methodology

The study employed mixed method research approach. In particular, the study Cross-sectional survey design and Phenomenology design. Simple random sampling procedure was used to sample 5 public primary schools; while, stratified sampling method was used to select 15 class teachers. Class six and seven pupils made part of the study sample whereby stratified sampling technic was use to 225 pupils. All the 5 heads of the selected schools were included in the study. The instruments for data collection included; structured questionnaire for pupils, semi- structured interview guide for class teachers and for the heads of school and focused group discussion guide for adolescents. The credibility of qualitative data was ascertained by iterative questioning; this included the use of probes to elicit detailed data and paraphrasing questions where the respondents didn’t understand them. In order to ensure reliability, the tools were pre-tested in the pilot study using 12 pupils, 4 class teachers and 2 heads of schools from 2 primary schools in Moshi District to modify the questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion Guide and interview guide. Similarly, translation of tools into Swahili simplified and facilitated communication with participants. Quality of translation increased clarity and consistence of the response. In order to ensure the reliability of questionnaire, split-half method was used for rating scale questions.

Research Results

The study sought to identify major sources of stress among adolescents in primary schools. Data were collected through questionnaires which were administered to the pupils. The items were rated in the Likert scale with values 1 - 5. The maximum score was five and the lowest score was one where 1= strongly disagreed, 2=Disagreed, 3= Undecided, 4=Agreed, 5= Strongly Agreed. Qualitative data were collected through focus group discussion guide with pupils. Also semi structured interview guide was used to collect qualitative data from class teachers and heads of schools

Pupils’ Responses on Common Sources of Stress

The researcher sought the information on common causes of stress from pupils. Table 1 summarizes the findings.

Table 1: Pupils’ Responses on Common Sources of Stress

Statement	Frequency (percentages)					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	M

District, Tanzania

	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Distance from home to school	39	17.3	39	17.3	24	10.7	61	27.1	62	27.6	3.3	
High expectation from parents	35	15.6	31	13.8	25	11.1	61	27.1	73	32.4	3.5	
Parental conflicts	41	18.2	32	14.2	24	10.7	61	27.1	67	29.8	2.8	
Poor relationship with classmates	72	32	46	20.4	36	16	39	17.3	32	14.2	2.7	
Getting along with opposite sex	60	26.7	47	20.8	43	19.1	39	17.3	36	16	2.8	
Academic performance	39	17.3	39	17.3	24	10.7	61	27.1	62	27.6	3.6	
Body changes during maturation	59	26.2	33	14.7	39	17.3	47	20.9	47	20.9	2.9	
Financial difficulties at home	35	15.6	32	14.2	31	13.8	61	27.1	66	29.3	3.4	
Overcrowding in the class	44	19.6	41	18.2	36	16.0	45	20.0	59	26.2	3.2	
During exams or test	31	13.8	30	13.3	31	13.8	50	22.2	83	36.9	3.6	
Overall Score	48.1	21.4	38	16.9	32.1	14.3	50.7	22.2	56.1	24.9	3.2	

Distance from Home to School

Table 1 indicates general common sources of stress among primary school adolescents. From the findings, 54.7% of the pupils who participated in the study agreed that distance from home to school was the major source of stress; while 34.6% of the pupils disagreed that distance from home to school was a common source of stress to them. The findings reveal that distance pupils walk from home to school was a real challenge. The age of pupils at this level is between 10 – 15 years, they need not to walk a long distance to get to the school. Since at this age, children need to enjoy some comfort at home. This situation makes them very stressed because they get to school when they are tired and hence low concentration in the learning process. This can therefore, affect the pupils' performance and school attendance. However, 10.7% of the pupils were not sure whether distance from school was the cause of stress to them or not.

During group discussion, one adolescent reported that; "I have to walk long distances to come to school and sometimes I arrived late and punished as late comers. This affects my attention in class after finishing the punishment. I become so tired and sleepy in class because of waking up early to get to school early." [Date 22/5/2016]

Similar results were obtained during one on one interview with class teachers. Teachers underscored distance from home to school as a source of stress to pupils. One class teacher said: "They (pupils) have to walk long distances to come to school and sometimes get so tired and sleepy in class because of walking a long distance and waking up early to get to school." [Date 22/5/2016]

Generally, the responses from the pupils and teachers concurred that walking long distance from home to school was a source of stress. During one on one discussion one teacher shared a personal experience he had as a pupil that:

"Walking long distance from home to school was the problem even during when I was a pupil. I remember I had to walk about 12 km to and from daily. The other days I had to lie to my parents that I am sick so that I cannot go to school. Therefore, I am supporting the pupil's argument that long distance from home to school is the strong reason to stress"

[Date 22/5/2016].

However, other teachers when responding to the same statement on the causes of stress seemed to contradict the pupils' opinion. Some teachers thought that long distance from home to school was not a cause of stress among pupils. One head of school said;

"Walking long distance to school is not stressing, is one among exercise that they (adolescents) should do. When they run in the morning, it helps to make their body and brain active even during class time. The teacher continued on saying during my time I had to walk 16 km to and from daily, and still I managed. The pupils of today are lazy". [Date 26/5/2016]

This shows that some teachers considered long distance from home to school as an exercise for the pupils. Children enrol to standard one at the age of 6 to 7. For this young people to walk a distance of 5 km to school is very stressful.

High Expectation from Parents

Findings in table 1 reveal that 59.5% of the pupils who participated in the study agreed that high expectation from parents was the major source of stress; while 29.4% of the pupils disagreed that high expectation from parents was a common source of stress to them. However, 11.1% of the pupils were not sure whether this was the cause of stress to them or not. This means that pressure from the parents towards academic performance may cause stress to many of the adolescents. Most of the adolescents were afraid of the reaction of their parents. Moreover, it is very true that academic failure at school tends to lower good relationship to most of pupils and their parents by creating lots of tension at home. Hurreman (1992) pointed out that poor academic performance may result to more stress that can hinder good relationship between pupils and their parents.

During the focus group discussion with the pupils, the same source of stress was identified. Although many sources were discussed, however, high expectation from parents was the major source of stress. For example, one pupil in FGD during said:

“My parents are very angry whenever I failed to get high marks in test and exams; they are blaming me all the time and remind me to work very hard in order to get a position in the best secondary school. This is giving me a lot of stresses” [Date 24/5/2016].

Adolescents become much frustrated when parents put the higher marks to be attained by their children. This makes the children to be very stressed fearing to be punished by their parents if they do not reach the target set by their parents.

Contrary to pupils’ opinion, some teachers thought that high expectation from parents were not a cause of stress as reported by pupils. They identified that, parental involvement in academic performance of pupils is one of the parental responsibilities to the child. As one head of school suggested; “We need to cooperate with the parents in the issue of academic, responsible parents are those who are concerned with the academic performance of their children. Therefore, parents to remind his or her child on working hard, it should be understood as one of the parental responsibility and not a stressor”. [Date 26/5/2016]

The findings connotes that pupils find school high expectations from their parents burdensome and give them stress. When the targets set by parents are high, it becomes burden and stress for adolescents. This concurred with the study by Suma and Gupta (1990) who points out that parents expectation is very high for most of the students as the results it become a burden and stress for adolescents.

Parental Conflict

Findings reveal that 56.9% of the pupils agreed that parental conflict was the major source of stress; while 32.4% of the pupils disagreed that parental conflict was a common source of stress to them. 10.7% of the pupils who participated in the study were not sure whether this was the cause of stress to them or not. Parental conflict is more often associated with divorce outcome. When adolescents are exposed to such affects their learning at school. This is in line with the study by Foster (2009) which revealed that an exposure to violence in the family and the community produces stress to children and adolescents. Repeated exposure to violence increases the risk of aggression and these parenting problems in turn can contribute to a child behaviour problem.

Similarly, during focused group discussion with the pupils, the same aspect was discussed and agreed by the most of pupils. One pupil pointed out that;

“My parents are getting a divorce, and I cannot stop thinking about what is going to happen to my family. I don’t like staying with my friends any more. Whenever they try to talk to me I just tell them to leave me alone’ [Date 24/5/2016].

These conflicts tend to bring about anger to the pupils since it is out of their control and most of the time adolescents tend to perform poorly in academic and develop undesirable behaviour such as aggressiveness and staying alone.

During interviews with the teachers one teacher seemed to contradict pupil’s views that parental conflict caused stress to adolescents. The teacher explained that;

“Adolescents are not concerned with their parental conflicts,

so I don’t see the reasons of being stressed during their parents are conflicting. They (adolescents) need to concentrate on their stuffs that is studying very hard and passing exams and not otherwise.”[Date 26/5/2016]

However, even if parental conflicts are none of pupil’s business, they contribute a lot in creating stress to pupils. This is because when parents are constant conflicting, they don’t have time with and for their children, hence pupils feel lonely. This is supported by the study by Liu (1994) who asserts that, families with regular conflicts tend to lack proper communication between parents and their children.

Financial difficult at home

Findings reveal that 56.4% of the pupils who participated in the study agreed that financial difficulty at home was the major source of stress; while 29.8% of the pupils disagreed that financial difficulty was a common source of stress to them. Moreover, 13.8% of the pupils were not sure whether this was the cause of stress to them or not. Financial difficulty at home becomes a stressor to most of pupils. Pupils who often worry about the family’s financial condition more frequently report sufferings from various complaints, including stomach-aches. They lack concentration because of hunger. Financial difficulty of the parents creates problems in children such as frustration due to stress, poor academic performance and other psychological problems. Preliminary studies have found that children from low socioeconomic status report lower life happiness than children from high income families (Ash et al., 2001).

During one on one interview with heads of schools, one head of school said that:

“Financial difficulty of the parents creates different problems in adolescents and children such as stress. This is because they can’t buy some stuff like other fellow pupils for example ice cream and grand nuts, so they feel very disappointed with that situation when they see their friends have money.”[Date 24/5/2016]

This appears to suggest that pupils from lower economic status families are more likely to perform poorly on an achievement test, because they frequently or constantly worry about their families’ finances.

During test or examination and academic performance

Findings reveal that 59.1% of the pupils who participated in the study agreed test or examination and academic performance were the major sources of stress; while 27.1% of the disagreed that, test or examination and academic performance were common sources of stress to them. However, 13.8% of the pupils who participated in the study were not sure whether these were the causes of stress to them or not. Most of the adolescents in the study responded that during test or examination is the exact time when they become much stressed. In this study pupils were worried about the exams because the exam results were used for placement in secondary schools. These findings concur with the study by Nimara (2000) points out that alarming rates of adolescent stress have been recorded associated with approaching

examinations.

Likewise, during focused group discussion with adolescents, one pupil reported that:

“I always have much worried about the exam results because getting a chance at a better secondary school depends on the academic performance in the primary school. Therefore, this makes me very stressed because I always think of examination results instead of examination.” [Date 26/5/2016]

Existing education system in Tanzania may possibly contribute to the pupils’ stress during examination period. The system normally focuses on rote learning, hence, students face academic stress due to inability to recall learned materials. In such scenario pupils find examination session very stressful.

In relation to the “Theory of Stress and Coping Strategy” developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984).The theory explains about sources of stress and how people cope with stressful conditions. According to this theory, when confronted with environmental demands, individuals tend to evaluate whether the demands have a potential threat and whether he or she has a sufficient internal or/and external

coping or help resources to deal with the problem. If they find the environmental demands more threatening, however, they have adequate internal or/and external coping resources, then the system returns to normal, then no stress, but if they find the environmental demands are threatening, at the same time view their internal or/and external coping resources as inadequate, they perceive themselves to be under stress.

Therefore, in the current study, pupils were confronted with environmental demands such as distance from home to school among others and evaluate those demands as more threatening to them at the same time viewed their internal or/and external coping resources as inadequate, as a result they found themselves fall under stress.

Symptoms of Stress among Primary School Adolescents

Pupils were required to respond to items which sought information on signs/symptoms of which revealed that a pupil is undergoing stress. The class teachers and heads of schools were interviewed to mention the symptoms /signs that they were mostly revealed by pupils.

Pupils’ Responses on Symptoms/Signs of Stress among Primary School Adolescents

The researcher sought the information on symptoms/signs of stress from pupils. Table 2 summarizes the finding.

Table 2: Pupils’ Responses on Symptoms of Stress

Statement	Never		Sometimes		Often		Very often		M
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Fast heart beat	79	35.1	45	20.0	44	19.6	57	25.3	3.23
Constant worrying	89	39.5	25	11.1	46	20.4	65	28.9	3.27
Difficulty in making decisions	23	10.2	93	41.3	44	19.6	65	28.9	3.39
Bad temper	101	44.8	23	10.2	51	22.7	50	22.2	3.20
Shyness	25	11.1	93	41.3	48	21.3	59	26.2	3.34
Feeling sad and crying	23	10.2	83	36.8	56	24.9	63	28.0	3.25
Head ache	36	16.0	23	10.2	46	20.4	120	53.3	3.31
Tiredness	25	11.1	44	19.6	51	22.7	105	46.6	3.25
Hunger	97	43.1	23	10.2	55	24.4	50	22.2	3.16
Forgetting things	25	11.1	84	37.3	43	19.1	73	32.4	3.32

Findings in Table 2 show that pupils undergoing stress experienced headache as indicated by 53.3% of pupils; while 46.6% of the pupils identified tiredness as the symptom of stress. Headache and tiredness symptoms could be associated with waking up early in the morning and walking a long distance from home to school.

During focus group discussion, pupils confirmed that they were stressed. The discussion revealed a lot of signs but the major ones were tiredness and headache. One pupil said that:

“I live far away from school; therefore this makes me to wake up early in the morning so that I can count number at school. Sometimes I have to run so as to avoid being punished as a late comer. This makes me tired every day and feeling headache when am in the class because of sleepy.”[Date 22/5/2016]

Apart from pupils responses, teachers and heads of schools were interviewed on the symptoms which were mostly revealed by the pupils when undergoing stress. During one to

one interview class teachers concurred with the pupils on symptoms of stress. Some of the identified sign were sleeping in the classroom due to tiredness. One class teacher said:

“It is true that I don’t know what the problem with these children is, most of them when you are teaching are sleeping, but I think it is because of tiredness because they live far from school. We teachers need to talk to these children friendly so as to open up their stories instead of beating them without giving them chance to be heard.”[Date 24/5/2016]

Similarly, 41.3% of the pupils identified making decisions, bad temper and shyness as a sign of stress respectively. 37.3% identified forgetting things easily as a sign of stress; while 36.8% felt sad and cried easily when stressed.

Similarly, during one on one interview with the pupils, many same signs were discussed such as feeling sad and crying easily, bad temper and shyness but the three symptoms that is feeling sad and crying easily, shyness and forgetting things were reported to occur sometimes.

One of the pupils explained that;

“I just heard that someone at school has been talking bad about me by telling stories that are not true this is real making me sad and gives me more stress”. [Date 26/5/2016]

Other pupil added that:

“I hate walking home from school every day. I get harassed and called names by men in our neighbourhood. I feel so shy and embarrassed most of the time” [Date 26/5/2016]

Other pupils also commented that:

“Actually when I get so many things, I always fail to decide what to do, and because I remain in a dilemma, I find myself forgetting my studies given that I still thinking my stuffs that bothering me.” [Date 24/5/2016]

The teachers when responding to the interview on the symptoms of stress that happen sometimes to the pupils when they are undergoing stress they commented that, apart from headache and tiredness symptoms of stress that were revealed very often; other symptoms were sometimes revealed by the pupils when they undergoing stress. During interview with class teachers, they reported other signs of stresses that were in agreement to pupils’ report. Identified signs were such as feeling sad and crying easily and bad tempered while in class. For example, one class teacher elaborated. She said:

“I know them very easy. Most of them are full of anger and may be unreasonably harsh to everyone. They have unfriendly look. When you talk to them, they start crying. You simply know there is something bothering them.” [Date 24/5/2016]

According to the pupils’ and teachers responses, the symptoms/signs which were very often revealed by the pupils when undergoing stress were headache and tiredness. Symptoms/signs such as forgetting things, difficulty in making decision, feeling sad and crying easily and shyness were revealed by the pupils when undergoing stress. Nevertheless, symptoms/signs such as constant worrying, bad tempered, hunger and fast heart beat were identified not to be revealed as the signs of stress to pupils.

The results show that pupils revealed Physiological stress symptoms which consists of “tiredness”, “head ache”, “fast heartbeat” and “hunger”. Thus, students who experience such

symptoms face difficulties in their studying some of them sleep during the lesson ended up with poor academic performance. This is corresponding to the statement made by Lan (2003) that some physiological symptoms such as headache, were signals of a mental overload and since their persistence are not easily managed, these symptoms results into severe stress of the adolescents. This supports the study by Skybo and Buck (2007) who found that headache and hunger were the most frequent physiological symptoms of stress among primary school children.

Moreover, the study disclosed emotional symptoms of stress like feeling sad and crying easily and shyness as common symptoms of stress among pupils in primary school. It is very obvious that, adolescents who are sad most of the time are not happy with school and learning process in general as a result, they lose concentration on studies. Feeling unhappy at school causes students a lot of stress. They also react so when feel not capable to handle stressors. Where an adolescent find that he or she is not capable, may be, to handle the school demands, you may find him/her becomes so sad.

On the other hand, this study revealed cognitive symptoms of stress like “forgetful” and difficulty in making decision as also experienced by primary school adolescents. This implies that those who reveal these cognitive symptoms fail to decide on what to do about their dilemma situation. Because of so many things in the head, they find themselves forget things and mostly learned material during their studies.

Generally the findings reveal that pupils at primary schools have several signs and symptoms of stress. Such as tiredness, feeling sad and crying easily, bad temper, and lack of concentration during class hours due to sleeping in the class.

Coping Strategies Primary School Adolescents use to Manage Stress

Pupils responded to questionnaire items which required them to indicate how often they employed a certain stress coping mechanism when undergoing stress. Class teachers and heads of schools were also interviewed in order to establish stress coping strategies that were mostly used by pupils.

Pupils’ Responses on Stress Coping Strategies among Primary School Adolescents

The researchers sought the information on Stress Coping Strategies from pupils. Table 3 summarizes the findings.

Table 3: Pupils’ Responses on Stress Coping Strategies

Statement	Never		Sometimes		Often		Very often		M
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Talk to someone about the situation.	24	10.7	32	14.2	61	27.1	108	48.0	3.50
Went on as if nothing happen	95	42.2	45	20.0	40	17.8	45	20.2	2.84
Trying to keep my feelings by my self	61	27.1	65	28.8	56	24.9	43	19.1	2.98
Apologizing	95	42.2	47	20.9	24	10.7	59	26.2	2.98
Hopping the miracle will happen	46	20.4	70	31.1	47	20.9	62	27.6	3.24
Avoiding being with people	59	26.2	63	28.0	57	25.3	46	20.4	3.06
Using my past experiences	25	11.1	63	28.0	60	26.7	77	34.2	3.58
Praying.	23	10.2	25	11.1	45	20.0	132	58.6	3.79
Watching TV, listening to the radio.	25	11.1	27	12.2	62	27.6	111	49.3	3.67
Fighting with others,	31	13.8	91	40.4	57	25.3	46	20.4	3.12

The findings indicate common stress coping strategy which was frequently employed by pupils when undergoing stress was praying 58.6%. Other most frequent stress coping mechanism used by pupils were; watching TV and listening to the radio, talking to someone about the situation and using my past experiences to handle similar stressful experiences as

reported by 49.3%, 48.0% and 34.2% respectively.

During focus group discussion with pupils, similar stress coping strategies were reported.

For example, one pupil said;

“Whenever am stressed, I usually go to my friends. Sometimes we shared lots of things together and that discussion with them really helped me out to deal with lots of stress and telling to some of teachers who are friend to students” [Date 26/5/2016]

Having someone to talk to about certain problems may save in different ways. It may help adolescents express their feelings about the problem. It may also help them find out how to adjust their feeling. It may assist them to decide what they can do about stress events. The findings echoed the study of Wadsworth and Cornpass (2002) who found out that assistance from friends predicts fewer depressive symptoms.

Another pupil that:

“I pray to my God since am taught to pray to him if I have difficulties. I believe my father in heaven will help me.” [Date 24/5/2016]

Active engagement in religion and spirituality appeared to help pupils handle their psychological discomfort believing that the challenges they face are handled by faith. Therefore, they believed that the only solution to their problems is praying to God. The results above concurs with one of Latha and Reddy (2006) in their study to assess the nature of stress, social support system and coping style among adolescents concluded that most of the adolescents use prayer as the major coping strategies.

Another pupil reported that:

“Whenever I got something bothering me, either caused by school or home, I always watching television the cartoon program. After sometime I find myself feeling good because the cartoons are so fun.” [Date 22/5/2016]

Pupils tend to use relaxation ways like listening to music and watching TV. It is normally accepted that relaxations tends to help adolescents to cope with stress, since mentally, stress tends to be lowered when adolescents are trying to forget the whole things by watching or listening to the radio.

Similarly, during one on one interview with heads of schools, stress was found to be a limiting factor to pupils’ academic progress. Poor academic performance of pupils was attributed to lack of social interaction with some teachers. From the interviews, schools appeared to use a variety of strategies to help pupils which included, counselling and emphasis on sports and games.

One head of school elaborated how the school attempts to help pupils cope with stress by counselling. The head teacher said:

“We always counsel pupils with problems. The challenge is we don’t have professional counsellor here. Sometimes

counselling services are offered by teachers who are willing to help. We are trying to do something but we need to restructure what we are doing. We still have a lot to be done”. [Date 22/5/2016]

Another head of school said:

“Here at my school, it is normal thing and it is a school time table that on every Tuesday, pupils must go at the playground. Although it is a school time table, am sure that other pupils manage their stress though these sports and games.” [Date 22/5/2016]

It appears that, schools have fairly established counselling services to help pupils deal with their academic and social challenges.

Moreover, pupils indicated hopping a miracle will happen 31.1%, avoiding being with people 28.0%, fighting with others 40.4%, and trying to keep my feelings by myself 28.8% as strategies they used to cope with stress.

One of the pupils explained that:

“When I am frustrated [stressed], I spend more time alone. Even at school, I stay alone there at the playing ground. I don’t want anybody’s disturbance. Again when am at home, after completing my stuffs, I go to my bedroom.” [Date 26/5/2016]

Other pupil added that;

“I always keep my secret by myself. Whenever I have a problem, I don’t want other people to know my thing. I can’t tell even my parents at home. Even if I feel bad with such situation, nobody will understand what the problem with me is. I just keep my feelings alone”. [Date 26/5/2016]

One pupil added on this by saying;

“It is better keeping your feelings to yourself, because when you disclose to other people, you will find everyone knows you are problems. You just wait God’s miracle to happen to you. There is a day when everything will be alright” [Date 26/5/2016]

Another pupil justified that;

“Anger is the main sign of my stress. Therefore, when am stressed, I always become very aggressive to others. Anybody who touches me, I must fight with. Even if that person is not the one who causes the problem. I can say fighting with others is my best way of feeling somehow good when stressed.” [Date 22/5/2016]

Generally, findings reveal that stress coping strategies employed by primary school adolescents mostly were categorized into Positive Stress Coping Strategies and Negative Stress Coping Strategies. On the other hand, negative stress coping strategies identified by the study were such as fighting with others, avoiding being with people, expressing anger to the person who causes the problem and trying to their feelings to themselves.

The study identified common positive stress coping strategies such as praying, watching television, using past experience, talking to someone about the situation and apologizing. It is evident that, positive coping strategies were the most preferable by the adolescent in this study. Skills used including praying, talk to someone about situation and watching television. Pupils who use these coping skills were

in a good position to reduce or cope with stress successfully. In the same line Winnie (2004) conducted a study to investigate stress and stressors in early adolescents in Hong Kong confirmed that, the most successful coping strategies were positive reappraisal followed by distancing and seeking social support again.

Conclusions

Following the findings on stress and coping strategies among primary school adolescents, it is clear that, primary school adolescents undergoing stress. This is manifested through various scenarios such as their involvement in small business, engaging in juvenile cases, not going to school and so on. Most of the sources of their stress originated from school and family. Different symptoms of stress have been revealed by the study namely; physiological, emotional and cognitive symptoms. From the findings such symptoms were manifested through headache, constant worry and feeling sad. Schools, however, has not been able to address these common sources of stress which affect adolescents' wellbeing.

The study further concludes that schools adolescents were not able to determine major sources of stress due to lack of knowledge, many of them showed signs and symptoms of stress. It appears that lack of awareness of signs and symptoms of stress may have a share in increased level of stress among primary adolescents. However, adolescents seemed to use different positive stress coping strategies while sometimes they employed negative coping strategies in presumed efforts to deal with their stress. This means adolescents were not able to device efficient coping strategies against stress. This may be explained as a result of inadequate knowledge they needed to deal with stressing environment. All these have direct challenges to schools' administrators and teachers on dealing with their responsibilities to pupils who encountered into stressful conditions. Unless the purposeful measures are taken to train adolescents with proper coping strategies to deal with this situation, the problem of failure to cope with stress among primary school adolescents will continue to increase as well as its negative impacts mostly in their academic performance.

Recommendations

The stress free situation among primary school adolescents can be maintained if the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) should put more emphasize on the issue of stress and coping strategies in primary schools by introducing well-structured formal support systems. This will ensure that all children became well equipped with skills and knowledge of stress, its causes, symptoms, impacts and coping at the very early years of adolescence period. The findings outlined that parental conflict, financial difficulty at home, are among the stressors to pupils. The family should learn to support and be helpful for adolescents faced with stress, no matter how they are adapting to the stress. Parents and other family members should try to support and be open to them concerning the family income situation. Understanding adolescent's interests and abilities so as to avoid having too high academic expectations from them which had contributions to their stress.

Parents should try to solve their conflicts in such a way that it will not cause any effects to adolescents in terms of stress. Schools should pay attention to pupils' problems in learning and apply appropriate strategies to enhance their learning effectiveness. Schools should teach adolescents how to relax themselves along with stress management skills emphasizing on participating in religious groups also teaching them effective studying skills.

Since some adolescent are afraid to share their stress with teachers and parents even their fellow students, readings can help them to make a reference to their stress and cope effectively. In view of this, students are encouraged to master and adopt effective coping strategies when they experience stressful life event strategies like playing sports, plan full problem-solving, positive reappraisal and seeking social support. These coping strategies should be introduced and reinforced while continuing to teach the unhealthy consequences of using negative coping strategies. Teaching students to handle their problems with better coping strategies will help students solve the problems and in turn, alleviate the stress.

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