

Research Article

The Effect of Stress on the Academic Performance of School-Going Adolescents in Central Monrovia, Liberia

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Abstract

The current study aimed to examine the effect of stress on the academic performance of school-going adolescents. For this study, a sample of 60 adolescents ranging in the age group of 12 to 19 years were randomly selected from five secondary schools (J. J. Roberts United Methodist School, Monrovia College, William V. S. Tubman High School, St. Peter Lutheran High School and College of West Africa) in Central Monrovia. The research instrument used by the researcher was a questionnaire. The questionnaire combines both quantitative (closed-ended questions and qualitative (open-ended questions) data. The instrument used to generate data was the questionnaire titled: The effect of stress on the academic performance of school going adolescents (ESAPSGA). Data obtained as responses were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for quantitative data and Nvivo for the qualitative data. The findings of this study show that stress has a big effect on how well students in Central Monrovia, Liberia do in school. Results showed that the sources of academic stress include schoolwork (exams, assignments, and grades), bullying from friends, family problems, and money issues. It affects students negatively through depression, distraction, and panic attacks, which leads to poor academic performances as they responded in the questionnaires administered. Results also showed that the majority of school-going adolescent manage stress by listening to music, followed by talking to a friend/ family or parent about the problem. Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations are made: 1. School managements should organize stress reduction programs such as sport clubs and activities for students. 2. School managements should have a school counsellor so that students can get access to counseling services that include music therapy. 3. School management should create a nurturing and empathetic school environment.

Keywords

Academic, Adolescent, Effect, Performance, Stress

1. Introduction

The term "stress" traces its origins back to the Latin word "stringere," which signifies drawing tight, and was introduced in the seventeenth century to describe hardship and affliction.

Imagine being a student in today's world – dealing with lots of schoolwork, expectations from others, and your own

goals. This can create a feeling of stress, which means pressure and tension. Stress can be good in small amounts, but too much can be a problem. It can make you feel bad physically and mentally, harm your self-esteem, and even affect how well you do in school [1].

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Received: 22 March 2024; **Accepted:** 12 June 2024; **Published:** 15 August 2024



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For students, things like interacting with friends and facing challenges can affect how well they do in school [2]. But stress can make things harder. Stress is not just one thing – it is a mix of feelings and how your body reacts to them. Sometimes, stress can be helpful, like when it gives you energy to do your best. But too much stress can be a problem [3].

Stress is not just a problem for students. People in different jobs also face stress and its effects on their mental and physical health [4].

Stress can make you feel anxious, sad, and even burnt out. It is like a puzzle of emotions, thoughts, and physical reactions that happen when things get tough. Stress comes from situations that mess up your daily life and make you feel unsafe [5]. Stress can be helpful sometimes, but too much can hurt how well you do in school [6].

Other researchers have talked about how stress can hurt students' mental health and grades. They found that when students are pushed too hard, they can feel sad and even get sick [7-9]. This is important, especially in a place like Central Monrovia, Liberia, where students might face unique challenges.

This study will explore how stress affects students' school performance in Central Monrovia, Liberia. By understanding this, ways to help students manage stress better and do well in school can be developed. This study will add to what we already know and help students in Liberia have a better school experience.

Statement of the problem

In Central Monrovia, Liberia, adolescents who go to school deal with many things that affect their education. Some of these things are hard, like feeling stressed, and they can make it harder for them to do well in school.

Being an adolescent is an important time when they have to study, grow as a person, and learn new things. Therefore, it is important to understand and help them manage the stress they might feel because it can affect how well they do in school.

Previous research found that stress was leading to depression among secondary school students and is linked with the effect on academic achievement [8]. Introduction to preventive measures, teaching life skills and other therapeutic techniques should be taken into serious consideration.

Due to this situation, the researcher aims to uncover and assess the effects of stress on the academic performance of school-going adolescents in Central Monrovia, Liberia.

Research Question

1. What causes stress among school-going adolescents?
2. How does stress affect the academic performance of school-going adolescents?
3. How can school-going adolescents be supported in managing stress?

1.1. Causes of Stress Among School-Going Adolescents

The reasons behind stress among school-going adolescents

are multi-faceted and have been illuminated by various researchers. One critical factor contributing to stress is the heightened expectations placed upon adolescents by their parents, particularly concerning academic performance. This often results in mounting pressure on young individuals, giving rise to a range of both physical and mental challenges [7]. Stressors are situations that disrupt a person's daily functioning, compelling them to adapt [5]. Stress can be defined as the perception of a mismatch between the demands of the environment (stressors) and an individual's capability to meet those demands [10]. Stressors can emanate from academic structures, excessive homework load, and the competitive atmosphere prevalent in certain private schools [9]. Notably, it has been observed that girls might be particularly vulnerable to stress due to the weight of academic pressures, which can adversely affect their mental well-being [7].

1.2. Effect of Stress on Academic Performance

The effect of stress on academic performance is a pivotal concern, as underscored by various scholars. Academic stress has a profound correlation with mental health issues among students [9]. It is evident that stress can lead to a downward spiral, manifesting as diminished self-esteem, physical and psychological health problems, and ultimately, lower academic achievements [1]. Academic stress often stems from a multitude of stressors, including the pressure of excessive coursework, intense competition, and the looming specter of assessment deadlines [11, 12]. Scholarly studies suggest that students grappling with heightened stress levels may not only grapple with emotional disturbances but also contemplate thoughts of self-harm or suicide [13, 14].

1.3. Strategies for Supporting Adolescents in Managing Stress

In response to the challenges posed by stress, numerous strategies have been proposed to aid adolescents in effectively managing it. The key lies in maintaining an optimal level of stress that serves to enhance performance rather than hinder it [3]. Addressing the well-being of students involves the implementation of stress management techniques, education on life skills, and therapeutic interventions [8]. Furthermore, academic institutions should actively engage in initiatives such as providing guidance, alleviating unnecessary pressures, and fostering a nurturing environment that bolsters students' coping mechanisms [9]. These measures collectively endeavor to alleviate the negative effects of stress and promote a healthier academic journey for adolescents.

2. Methodology

Mixed-method research was used in the researcher's efforts to get a full understanding of the effects of stress on the

academic performance of school going adolescents in Central Monrovia, Liberia and improve their well-being gathering both numerical and narrative responses.

A mixed-method design, therefore, offers the best chance of answering research questions by combining two sets of strengths while compensating at the same time for the weaknesses of each method [15].

The population of the study comprised of school going adolescents in five secondary schools (J. J Roberts United Methodist School, Monrovia College, William V. S. Tubman High School, St. Peter Lutheran and College of West Africa) in Central Monrovia, Liberia. The random sampling technique was used to select 60 respondents for the study. Enon (2002) recommended that a minimum number of the samples for research should be 30. The study used a sample population of sixty (60) respondents for the questionnaire because it would be sufficient in giving data required as some respondents could give the information already given. The research instrument used by the researcher was questionnaire. The questionnaire combines both quantitative (closed-ended questions and qualitative (open-ended questions) data. The instrument used to generate data was the questionnaire titled: The effect of stress on the academic performance of school going adolescents (ESAPSGA). Data obtained as responses were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for quantitative data and Nvivo for the qualitative data.

3. Presentation of Result

In this study, the researcher looked into three main questions:

What are the factors that lead to stress among adolescents attending school?

The researcher wanted to know what exactly is making teenagers who go to school feel stressed. What are the reasons or things that are causing stress for them?

How does stress influence the academic performance of these school-going adolescents?

The researcher also checked if feeling stressed has any effect on how well these teenagers are doing in school. Does being stressed affect their grades and how they perform in their studies?

In what ways can effective support systems be established to help school-going adolescents manage their stress more effectively?

Lastly, the researcher explored ways to support these school-going teenagers in dealing with their stress. The researcher wanted to find out different methods that might help them handle their stress better.

To do this, the researcher made a questionnaire with questions related to these research questions.

Table 1. *Distribution of Respondents by Age.*

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
12	8	13.3	13.3	13.3
13	7	11.7	11.7	25.0
14	4	6.7	6.7	31.7
15	10	16.7	16.7	48.3
16	9	15.0	15.0	63.3
17	10	16.7	16.7	80.0
18	12	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Table above showed the 60 respondents' ages. 8 respondents representing (13.3%) were 12years old, 7 respondents representing (11.7%) were 13years old, 4 respondents representing (6.7%) were 14 years old, 10 respondents representing (16.7%) were 15 years old, 9 respondents representing

(15.0%) were 16years old, 10 respondents representing (16.7%) were 17 years old, and 12 respondents representing (20.0%) were 18 years old. This shows that majority of the respondents were 18 years old.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Grade Level.

Grade	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
7 th	7	11.7	11.7	11.7
8 th	3	5.0	5.0	16.7
9 th	5	8.3	8.3	25.0
Valid 10 th	10	16.7	16.7	41.7
11 th	10	16.7	16.7	58.3
12 th	25	41.7	41.7	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Table above showed the 60 respondents' grades. 7 respondents representing (11.7%) were in grade 7, 3 respondents representing (5.0%) were in grade 8, 5 respondents representing (8.3%) were in grade 9, 10 respondents represent-

ing (16.7%) were in grade 10, 10 respondents representing (16.7%) were in grade 11, 25 respondents representing (41.7%) were in grade 12. This shows that majority of the respondents were in grade 12.

Table 3. Self-Rated Academic Performance Under Stress.

How would you rate your current academic performance?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Poor	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
Below Average	3	5.0	5.0	6.7
Average	31	51.7	51.7	58.3
Above Average	17	28.3	28.3	86.7
Excellent	8	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Table above showed the 60 respondents' academic performances. 1 respondent representing (1.7%) academic performance is very poor due to stress, 3 respondents representing (5.0%) academic performance is below average due to stress, 31 respondents representing (51.7%) academic per-

formance is average due to stress, 17 respondents representing (28.3%) academic performance is above average due to stress, 8 respondents representing (13.3%) academic performance is very poor due to stress. Therefore, majority of the respondents' academic performance is average due to stress.

Table 4. Stress Levels Related to Schoolwork (Exams, Assignments, Grades).

When it comes to schoolwork (exams, assignments, grades), how stressed do you feel?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Not at all stressed	10	16.7	16.7	16.7
A little stressed	23	38.3	38.3	55.0

When it comes to schoolwork (exams, assignments, grades), how stressed do you feel?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Kind of stressed	15	25.0	25.0	80.0
Very stressed	11	18.3	18.3	98.3
Extremely stressed	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The table above showed: 10 respondents representing (16.7%) is not at all stressed when it comes to schoolwork. 23 respondents representing (38.3%) is a little stressed when it comes to schoolwork. 15 respondents representing (25.0%) is kind of stressed when it comes to schoolwork. 11 respond-

ents representing (18.3%) is very stressed when it comes to schoolwork and 1 respondent representing (1.7%) is extremely stressed when it comes to schoolwork. Therefore, majority of the respondents are a little stressed when it comes to schoolwork.

Table 5. *Stress Levels Associated with Peer Relationships and Bullying.*

Do you feel stressed because of your friends or when you're bullied?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all stressed	31	51.7	51.7	51.7
A little stressed	13	21.7	21.7	73.3
Kind of stressed	9	15.0	15.0	88.3
Very stressed	3	5.0	5.0	93.3
Extremely stressed	4	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The table above showed: 31 respondents representing (51.7%) is not at all stressed because of friends or when bullied. 13 respondents representing (21.7%) is a little stressed because of friends or when bullied. 9 respondents representing (15.0%) is kind of stressed because of friends or when

bullied. 3 respondents representing (5.0%) is very stressed because of friends or when bullied, and 4 respondent representing (6.7%) is extremely stressed because of friends or when bullied. Therefore, majority of the respondents are not at all stressed because of friends or when bullied.

Table 6. *Stress Levels Related to Home Environment Factors.*

Does stress come from things happening at home (like family problems or money issues)?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all stressed	39	65.0	65.0	65.0
A little stressed	7	11.7	11.7	76.7
Kind of stressed	7	11.7	11.7	88.3
Very stressed	3	5.0	5.0	93.3

Does stress come from things happening at home (like family problems or money issues)?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely stressed	4	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The table above showed: 39 respondents representing (65.0%) is not at all stressed from things happening at home (like family problems or money issues). 7 respondents representing (11.7%) is a little stressed from things happening at home (like family problems or money issues). 7 respondents representing (11.7%) is kind of stressed from things happening at home (like family problems or money issues). 3 re-

spondents representing (5.0%) is very stressed from things happening at home (like family problems or money issues) and 4 respondent representing (6.7%) is extremely stressed from things happening at home (like family problems or money issues). Therefore, majority of the respondents are not at all stressed from things happening at home (like family problems or money issues).

Table 7. Frequency of Seeking Support from Friends or Family When Feeling Stressed.

Do you talk to your friends or family for support when you feel stressed?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	10	16.7	16.7	16.7
Rarely	11	18.3	18.3	35.0
Sometimes	23	38.3	38.3	73.3
Often	2	3.3	3.3	76.7
Always	14	23.3	23.3	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The table above showed: 10 respondents representing (16.7%) Never talk to friends or family when stressed. 11 respondents representing (18.3%) rarely talk to friends or family when stressed. 23 respondents representing (38.3%) sometimes talk to friends or family when stressed. 2 re-

spondents representing (3.3%) often talk to friends or family when stressed. 14 respondents representing (23.3%) always talk to friends or family when stressed. Therefore, majority of the respondents sometimes talk to friends or family when stressed.

Table 8. Frequency of Using Relaxation Techniques to Calm Down When Stressed.

Do you use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	7	11.7	11.7	11.7
Rarely	2	3.3	3.3	15.0
Sometimes	16	26.7	26.7	41.7
Often	10	16.7	16.7	58.3
Always	25	41.7	41.7	100.0

Do you use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The table above showed: 7 respondents representing (11.7%) Never use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed. 2 respondents representing (3.3%) rarely use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed. 16 respondents representing (26.7%) sometimes use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed. 10 respondents representing (16.7%) often use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed. 25 respondents representing (23.3%) always use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed. Therefore, majority of the respondents use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed.

ents representing (16.7%) often use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed. 25 respondents representing (23.3%) always use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed. Therefore, majority of the respondents use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed.

Table 9. Frequency of Physical Activities or Exercises to Manage Stress.

Do you do physical activities or exercises to feel better when stressed?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	16	26.7	26.7	26.7
	Rarely	10	16.7	16.7	43.3
	Sometimes	18	30.0	30.0	73.3
	Often	3	5.0	5.0	78.3
	Always	13	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The table above showed: 16 respondents representing (26.7%) never do physical activities or exercises to feel better when stressed. 10 respondents representing (16.7%) rarely do physical activities or exercises to feel better when stressed. 18 respondents representing (30.0%) sometimes do physical activities or exercises to feel better when stressed. 3 respondents representing (5.0%) often do physical activities

or exercises to feel better when stressed. 13 respondents representing (21.7%) always do physical activities or exercises to feel better when stressed. Therefore, majority of the respondents sometimes do physical activities or exercises to feel better when stressed.

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4. Codes

Table 10. Responses on Stress Management and its Effect on School Performance.

Name	Description	Files	References
How Stress Can Be Managed	This code provides responses from respondents on effective ways they manage stress. It provides their opinions and suggestions for dealing with stress as adolescents.	1	60

Name	Description	Files	References
A counsellor		1	4
Being alone		1	2
Better Learning Environment		1	4
Drinking juices and playing with phone		1	2
Free time		1	5
having friend and my mom around		1	9
Less class activities		1	1
Money		1	4
Music		1	10
Playing Sports		1	5
Reading		1	3
Relaxation		1	5
Set Goals		1	1
Sleeping		1	3
Watching Comedy		1	2
How Stress Effect School Performance	This code provides responses from respondents on how stress effect their school performance. It includes their opinions and suggestions.	1	60
I don't feel stress		1	8
I perform poorly in my exams		1	20
it distracts me		1	18
it makes me scared		1	4
Not too much		1	5
Yes! I get depressed when I'm stressed which leads to poor performance.		1	5

The above responses were related to how stress can be managed and how stress effect school performance.

Sixty responses were collected for “how stress can be managed” and another Sixty responses were collected for “how stress effect school performance.”

The most frequently pointed out stress management measure used by the respondents is to listen to music, followed by talking to a friend/ family or parent about the problem.

The most frequently pointed out effect of stress on school performance by the respondents is that it causes poor performance on exams followed by distraction- it causes distraction for the respondents.

5. Conclusion

In all, data were collected from male and female students ranging in the age group of 12 to 19 years randomly selected

from 5 secondary schools regarding the effect of stress on the academic performance of school going adolescents in Central Monrovia, Liberia.

The findings of this study show that stress has a big effect on how well students in Central Monrovia, Liberia do in school. Results showed that the sources of academic stress include Schoolwork (exams, assignments, grades), bullying from friends, family problems and money issues. It affects students negatively through depression, distraction, and panic attacks, which leads to poor academic performances as they responded in the questionnaires administered.

Results also showed that majority of school going adolescent manage stress by listening to music, followed by talking to a friend/ family or parent about the problem.

To address this issue, it is crucial for schools and communities to implement strategies and support systems that help students manage stress effectively.

6. Implications of the Study

Findings of the study will help school managements, teachers, and parents to understand the effect of stress on the academic performance of school going adolescents in Central Monrovia, Liberia. Awareness about the findings will facilitate in reducing the stress level of school going adolescents. The findings will enrich academia and benefit the society by reducing the stress level of school going adolescents and enhancing their academic achievements.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations are made:

1. School managements should organize stress reduction programs such as sport clubs and activities for students.
2. School managements should have a school counsellor so that students can get access to counseling services that include music therapy.
3. School management should create a nurturing and empathetic school environment.

By implementing these recommendations, schools and communities can create a more supportive and conducive environment for adolescents to thrive academically and emotionally despite the challenges of stress.

Abbreviations

ESAPSGA	The Effect of Stress on the Academic Performance of School Going Adolescents
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Appendix

The Effect of Stress on the Academic Performance of School-Going Adolescents: Questionnaire

Section 1: About You

Let's start by knowing a little about you.

1. Gender:
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
2. Age:
 - a) 12-15 years old
 - b) 16-19 years old
3. Grade level:
 - a) 7th grade
 - b) 8th grade
 - c) 9th grade
 - d) 10th grade
 - e) 11th grade
 - f) 12th grade

Section 2: How You're Doing in School Tell us how you're

doing in school right now.

4. Overall Average:

- a) Below 70%
- b) 70% - 74%
- c) 75% - 79%
- d) 80% - 84%
- e) 85% - 100%

Section 3: How Stress Affects You

We want to know how stress affects you as a student. Please rate the following questions from 1 to 5, where 1 means "Not at all stressed" and 5 means "Extremely stressed."

5. When it comes to schoolwork (exams, assignments, grades), how stressed do you feel?
 - a) 1 (Not at all stressed)
 - b) 2 (A little stressed)
 - c) 3 (Kind of stressed)
 - d) 4 (Very stressed)
 - e) 5 (Extremely stressed)
6. Do you feel stressed because of your friends or when you're bullied?
 - a) 1 (Not at all stressed)
 - b) 2 (A little stressed)
 - c) 3 (Kind of stressed)
 - d) 4 (Very stressed)
 - e) 5 (Extremely stressed)
7. Does stress come from things happening at home (like family problems or money issues)?
 - a) 1 (Not at all stressed)
 - b) 2 (A little stressed)
 - c) 3 (Kind of stressed)
 - d) 4 (Very stressed)
 - e) 5 (Extremely stressed)

Section 4: How You Handle Stress

We would love to know how you handle stress.

Please tell us how often you do these things when you feel stressed. Rate them from 1 to 5, where 1 means "Never" and 5 means "Always."

8. Do you talk to your friends or family for support when you feel stressed?
 - a) 1 (Never)
 - b) 2 (Rarely)
 - c) 3 (Sometimes)
 - d) 4 (Often)
 - e) 5 (Always)
9. Do you do physical activities or exercises to feel better when stressed?
 - a) 1 (Never)
 - b) 2 (Rarely)
 - c) 3 (Sometimes)
 - d) 4 (Often)
 - e) 5 (Always)
10. Do you use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, taking a walk, or journaling to calm down when stressed?

Please select one of the following options:

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Often
- e) Always

Section 5: Your Thoughts

We want to hear from you! Use your own words to answer these questions.

- 11. Can you tell us how stress affects your school performance?
- 12. What do you think would help you manage stress better at school?

Author Contributions

Anthony Ntem is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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