

Perceived stress in a sample of G. C. E. (A/L) students in Sri Lankan schools

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The objective of this paper is to describe the nature of perceived stress, sources of stress and coping strategies used by GCE (A/L) students in Sri Lanka. The fact that this group of students is in the transitional stage of school to work or school to tertiary education makes them vulnerable to psychological stress. Some of them experience the additional burden of managing the family due to loss of one or both parents in the prolonged war in the North and East of the country. Another considerable number of them face extra burden due to economic hardships and resultant migration of parents seeking foreign employment. Studies done on the nature of stress experienced by the students at this level in Sri Lanka are limited in number. Therefore the present study measured the perceived stress using Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10 item scale) and a representative sample of girls and boys in the GCE (A/ L) classes in two education zones in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. Difference in perceived stress, sources of stress and coping strategies were analyzed according to gender, socio-economic status and the subject stream of students using the data collected through interviews and questionnaires. It was revealed that prominent sources of stress were related to school, family, examination and interpersonal relationships. Support from peers, family and, teachers were reported to be useful in coping with stress. However, it was evident that mechanisms and services provided by the schools to help students to effectively cope with stressful incidents in daily life and major life events were inadequate and in some cases non-existent. Therefore, school-based intervention such as providing training on relaxation, problem solving and positive thinking are recommended as possible solution to the problem. Revision of curricula areas of physical and health education, aesthetic subjects, language arts, science and social studies to offer practical opportunities to promote stress management is also recommended.

Key words: Psychological stress; Migration; Stress management; General education;