

The Effect of Major Life Stressors and Minor Daily Hassles on the Physical and Emotional Health of Teenagers.

Whether in the form of major life changes (e.g., a death in the family) or small daily hassles, (e.g., being late for class), we all face stressors in our lives. Teenagers, in particular, as part of their development from adolescence to adulthood, face an enormous amount of stress. By researching and correlating the relationship between stress and both mental and physical health, it may be possible to determine the extent to which certain events, both major stressors and minor hassles, are related to a teenager's mental and physical health.

An individual's health can be measured in several areas, two of which are 1) physical health and 2) emotional health. In terms of physical health, it has been found that stress is negatively correlated with physical health. In other words, higher levels of stress are associated with lower levels of physical health (Johnson, as cited in Garton and Pratt, 1995). A particular study, performed at Gettysburg College, supported the hypothesis that, "high levels of dependency coupled with high levels of interpersonal stress place an individual at substantially increased risk for personal illness," (Bornstein, 1995, p. 221).

Previous experiments have primarily gathered information from adult subjects. For example, DeLongis, Lazarus, and Folkman (1988) examined the impact of daily stress on health and mood on a random sample of 75 married couples. The study's questionnaire focused on the daily stresses a married person would face. As predicted, they found that daily stressors were positively correlated with physical illness. Furthermore, Garton and Pratt's (1995) study, (which focused on the

relationship between stress and self-concept in ten-to fifteen-year-old school students) found a “small negative relationship between overall self-concept and the frequency of stressful events, suggesting that as stress increases there is a decrease in self-concept.” (p. 22).

Our study was designed to increase the knowledge base with respect to the relationship between stress and health by studying an adolescent population at Rowland Hall St. Marks School. We defined stress as “the process by which we appraise and cope with environmental threats and challenges” (Myers, 2004). Our study focused on daily hassles, as well as major life stressors, in teenagers at the school.

Daily hassles were measured using a variation of *The Hassles and Uplifts Scale* (Garton & Pratt, 1995), and major life stressors were measured using a revised version of the *College Life Stress Inventory* (Renner & Macking’s 1998). We used both questionnaires in order to correlate major and minor stressors with emotional and physical health in teenagers. Based on past research, we hypothesized that minor stressors would correlate more strongly with poor physical health than with poor emotional health. We also hypothesized that major stressors would correlate more strongly with poor emotional health than with poor physical health.