

**Stress and coping strategies among school going adolescents aged 15 to 19 years in the Gampaha District**

**MD (Community Medicine) - 2006**

**D 1772**

This cross sectional comparative study attempts to develop and validate the self administered questionnaire as a screening instrument to use in schools in the Gampaha district to assess stress, stressful life events, associated factors and coping strategies among a cohort of 15 to 19 years old school going adolescents. A sample of 406 students was used for the scoring of life event scale and validation of the study instrument was carried out among 127 students. A sample of 845 students were selected for the prevalence study using cluster sampling technique and clusters were identified according to the probability proportionate to the size of the sample (PPS). A comparison was made among a sample of 424 students with and without stress who had been identified from the prevalence study to detect associated factors and coping strategies. The study period was twelve months. Reliable and valid study instruments were developed; namely, Adolescents Life event Scale (ALES) and Stress Sensation Inventory (SSI), to assess' stressful life events and prevalence of stress among students respectively and Coping Strategy Check List (CSCL) and perceived Self-efficacy Assessment Questionnaire (PSAQ) to detect coping strategies and perceived self efficacy of students. The prevalence of stress among O' Level and A' Level students was 41 percent and 38 percent respectively. Prevalence of stress among boys was 42 percent and they were more stressed than girls (38 percent ). A higher prevalence of stress was identified among O' Level boys (42 percent ) compared to girls (40 percent ). Similarly among A' Level students 41 percent of boys and 35 percent girls were stressed. However, these differences were statistically not significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Except students who perceived religion as very valuable, majority of others were stressed and the difference was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). If a student was an only child, his or her stress was less. In contrast there was a statistically significant difference between stress levels and number of siblings in the family ( $p < 0.05$ ). A higher prevalence of stress was seen among students who were not living with both parents. The difference of stress and living conditions was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Association between stress levels and family relationship was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Majority of students who were in the middle social class were not stressed compared to other social classes and the difference was statistically not significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, among the students who perceived that their wealth was average, the majority was not stressed. This study concludes that stress is a foremost public health problem among the students aged 15 to 19 years in the Gampaha district. Despite its limitation of subjectivity and bias towards measuring stress, it is recommended that Adolescents Life Event Scale (ALES) and Stress Sensation Inventory (SSI) should be used in school among students in the above age category. Furthermore, it is recommended to initiate and strengthen support services including effective counseling services at school level and to intervene for the major issues identified by the current study