Title: ACADEMIC STRESS AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE CENTRAL OF VIET NAM

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ABSTRACT

Background: In Vietnam, it is strong believed that the better people perform academically the better life they will have. Therefore, pressure to succeed in learning is increasing especially when academic environment recently becomes more competitive. Academic stress is considered as mental distress related to frustration associated with academic failure, anticipation of future academic failure or an awareness of the possibility of failure (Verma and Gupta -1990). This is a subjective psychological state associated with an individual’s perception of possible future outcomes or consequences related to academic performance. Recently, many surveys showed a strong relationship between academic stress and mental health problems among the youth over the world. This study firstly conducted in the central of Vietnam using the ESSA scale in order to explore academic pressure among students and several factors influencing this problem in this region.

Objectives: This study aims to 1) identify the prevalence among students of some secondary schools in Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam and 2) explore some factors influencing academic stress among secondary school students.

Methodology: This research comprised of a school-based cross-sectional study conducted in Thua Thien Hue province in May 2012 (data collection time). A sample of 400 students at 7th grade and 9th grade classes in four secondary schools was randomly recruited and asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire including information of demographic characteristics, family environment, school environment. The Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA) developed by Sun, Dunne, Hou and Xu (2010) were employed to investigate academic stress of the students. In addition, parental bonding instrument (PBI – developed by Parker, Tupling and Brown - 1979) and school connectedness scale (adapted from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health by Resnick and colleagues - 1997)
were also used to measure the status of parental bonding and school connectedness of these students. In-depth interviews and group discussions among students, parents and principal teachers were also conducted. Data were entered and processed by the SPSS 11.5. Participation in this research was confidential and students joining in the study were completely voluntary and had signed in a consent form. The study was received approval from the Scientific Committee of Hue University of Medicine and Pharmacy.

**Results:** Out of 400 participants of the study, 43.8% were female and 55.5% were in the 7th grade class. The students who live in the urban area occupied 75.5% of the total. About 65% of participants reported sometimes or often conflict with parents and nearly 30% of the students had conflict with teacher at schools. 17.0% of students had good GPA, nearly 60% spent more than three hours extra studying after school and over 90% reported attending to added class or having home tutorial. The mean of ESSA of the students was 49.99 ± 9.636, the study also found that 51.3% students had high and medium academic stress while these percentage for low average was 48.8%. Regarding five dimensions of educational stress including pressure from study, worry about grade, despondency, self expectation and workload, prevalence of students who got high stress on those dimensions were 41.7%, 45.7%, 49.0%, 41.2% and 37.8% respectively. Several factors found to be significantly associated with academic stress (ESSA scale) among secondary school students included area of living, conflict with family, care of mothers, care of fathers, school connectedness, conflict with teachers at school and conflict with friends.

**Conclusions and recommendations:** The present study showed high frequencies of academic stress among students of some secondary schools in central of Vietnam; of which despondency was the most important element that cause the stress for students. Additionally, the study found many similar related factors of academic stress to other studies (within family and school environments). However, limitations of the study made it hard to evaluated other factors of the problem among students, basically on recall bias from the information collection relying upon the self-administered questionnaire. Moreover, the ESSA with 5 concerned dimensions might not enclose all facets of the academic stress. Therefore, more further studies overcoming these basic limitations should be conducted to examine more and in-deep relationships with academic stress, helping to reduce the problem in the community.

**Key words:** Academic stress/educational stress, secondary school students, parental bonding, school connectedness.